

# Restraint urged after killings

04/1988/11A/001

BURMA'S coup leaders have ordered the people's army to remain disciplined and avoid abuses as it mops up civilian opposition to military rule.

Western ambassadors contacted by telephone in Rangoon yesterday estimated the army has killed up to 500 civilians in a nationwide crackdown on demonstrators and strikers since Sunday's military takeover.

Diplomats have witnessed killings of unarmed demonstrators.

State radio last night issued a "code of conduct for the people's defence forces" telling them to observe discipline, avoid untoward financial dealings, indecency, abuse of women and abuse of power. It was signed by military ruler General Saw Maung.

"They must uphold the

prestige of the defence forces by displaying good manners when ... dealing with government service personnel and with other organizations," it said.

The army-run radio, monitored here, said the army was ordered to "communicate patiently with the people."

The state radio, widely distrusted by Burmese, has reported that troops killed about 120 "destructive elements", looters and armed "robed persons" — Buddhist monks.

Some soldiers and police have been killed by citizens taking revenge or seeking arms to defend themselves. Attackers included Buddhist monks in a few cases.

One envoy said Saw Maung, who is also army chief, defence minister and foreign minister, had sent word to opposition leaders that he did not

believe troops had killed any children.

But a spokesman at Rangoon General Hospital said yesterday that among 30 gunshot victims in the hospital morgue was a 10-year old boy shot between the eyes.

One Western ambassador told *Reuters* he had confirmed that troops fired at close range into a crowd of schoolgirl demonstrators, aged no more than 13 or 14, on Monday, killing or wounding a number of them.

Once respected for its discipline, the army risked alienating itself from society by brutal tactics in trying to suppress a six-week-old national uprising for an end to 26 years of militarist-socialist rule, Rangoon residents said.

Until Sunday opposition leaders had kept their

supporters committed to non-violent mass demonstrations and strikes.

But yesterday student union leader Min Ko Naing issued a statement urging a last-ditch fight against the military leadership. It said: "We ... warn the group that calls itself the government to seek their last meal," according to a diplomat.

"Rangoon is like a city occupied by a foreign army," said one ambassador. "There are troops on every corner with bayonets and rifles ready."

Another ambassador said soldiers in Rangoon have orders to shoot on sight at groups engaged in various types of activity, including peaceful demonstrations.

Foreign visitors heard heavy gunfire in downtown Rangoon for the third night in a row after

curfew yesterday.

"It is so shameful what is happening, I have no words for it," said the ambassador who investigated the shootings of schoolgirls.

"It's just a small group of people who want to consolidate their power and are willing to shoot down school children and unarmed demonstrators to do so."

Burmese said the leadership risked splitting the army and a prospect of civil war if soldiers broke ranks over the killing of civilians.

The exact death toll from the crackdown will probably never be known. Doctors said the army has taken away bodies for secret disposal, as in past clashes with civilians, and communication with towns outside Rangoon is difficult. — *Reuter*

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