

Monks seize troops in Burma town

BBC News

Buddhist monks have taken about 20 members of the security forces hostage in central Burma, a day after clashes at a protest rally.

On Wednesday the security forces fired shots into the air to disperse some 400 monks demonstrating in Pakokku town.

When officials came to the monastery on Thursday, the monks locked them inside and set their vehicles on fire.

A series of anti-government protests have been held since the military junta doubled fuel prices last month.

'Tyrannical behaviour'

The officials had reportedly come to apologise for the clashes at Wednesday's demonstration.

But the monks burned four of the vehicles they came in and locked them inside the monastery.

Hundreds of people gathered outside the gates to applaud the monks.

"The security forces outside the monastery are too afraid to go near the crowd," one resident told the French news agency AFP. "They won't even show their walkie-talkies."

The government doubled the price of petrol and diesel on 15 August. The price of compressed natural gas - used for buses - increased five-fold.

The move was not announced ahead of time and the reasons behind it remain unclear, but it has hit people hard.

Since the price rise, there have been a series of protests, both in the main city, Rangoon, and in other towns around the country.

The demonstrations have continued despite the arrests of many of Burma's most prominent activists.

Dozens of people are now thought to be in detention.

On Wednesday, US President George W Bush condemned the crackdown by the Burmese authorities.

"It's inexcusable that we've got this kind of tyrannical behaviour in Asia," he said.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6981218.stm>