

12. Freedom of Movement

12.1. Background

All Burmese citizens are required to inform the authorities of their movements within the country. The names of overnight guests must be reported to and registered with the local authorities. Furthermore, only citizens carrying identity cards are free to travel within the country, which precludes movement by those unable to meet the restrictive provisions of the “citizenship law.” For example, it is virtually impossible for Muslims to move within Arakan State or to other parts of Burma from Arakan State. Rohingyas (Bengali-speaking Muslims) who would like to travel outside their villages must apply to the local LORC, which passes the request on to the nearest administrative base. The Immigration and Manpower Department, police, riot police, military intelligence, and customs departments all have to agree to the individual request. In most cases, passes are only granted for a twelve-hour period; only on a rare occasion are Muslims permitted to stay outside their villages overnight. To travel further -- for instance to the township capitals at Maungdaw or Buthidaung or the state capital at Sittwe -- is virtually impossible.

Leaving the country (legally) requires the possession of specific government authorization, which it is extremely difficult to obtain. The SLORC carefully scrutinizes all prospective travel abroad and rampant corruption results in many applicants having to pay bribes to obtain a passport -- a document to which they are legally entitled. The application for exit visas and passports requires certificates of nationality and security clearance, which many citizens either do not possess or cannot obtain. All college graduates (except for certain government employees) are required to pay a special education clearance fee to the SLORC government in order to obtain a passport. Passport applications are reviewed by a board and -- based on a series of denials -- decisions appear to depend on political considerations. In January 1996, the SLORC began restricting the issuance of passports to young, single, female applicants seeking work abroad. The new procedures are reportedly intended to prevent young women from being enticed into the commercial sex industry abroad. Each time Burmese citizens come back to the country, they are required to return their passports to the authorities; a passport application must be submitted each time they want to travel outside the country.

In anticipation of the SLORC’s “Visit Myanmar Year 1996,” restrictions on foreign travelers entering Burma were lifted. Burmese embassies now issue tourist visas, valid for one month, within 24 hours of application. However, selected categories of applicants, such as some human rights advocates and political figures, continue to be

denied entry visas unless traveling under the aegis of a sponsor acceptable to the SLORC. Although some areas of the country remain off-limits to foreigners for security reasons, the authorities allow travel to most destinations. In some areas, tourists are allowed only to travel by plane or train and in some places, prior permission is required.

12.2. Restriction on the Movement of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

Since her release from house arrest in 1995, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's ability to travel within Burma has been repeatedly barred or severely restricted. Indeed, during 1996, the most severe restrictions on Daw Suu's movement have occurred since her six-year house arrest was set in place. The SLORC has repeatedly refused her permission to leave her compound. She has been effectively confined to her house for long periods. In March 1996, when some NLD leaders, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, attempted to travel to Mandalay to give testimony at the trial of NLD members, the authorities found a way to squelch their efforts. They were told just before they arrived at the train station in Rangoon that their railway carriage was having mechanical difficulties. The coach was detached from the rest of the train, which proceeded on schedule. In December 1996, Aung San Suu Kyi was prevented by the authorities from attending a Karen New Year celebration in the Karen ethnic community area of Rangoon; three Karen NLD members from Insein township and another Karen were detained by SLORC for 12 days for inviting Daw Suu to the ceremony.

Since September 1996, SLORC guards posted at Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's house have been discouraging and sometimes even preventing her from leaving her compound. According to a statement made on December 31, 1996, by Lieutenant-General Khin Nyunt at a press conference, "the main reason why a request had been made to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi not to leave her residence was a precautionary measure to prevent untoward incidents because of the current situation. It had been discovered that anti-Government underground elements were actively trying to stir up and foment trouble in Yangon [Rangoon]. So to prevent further disorder the Government had simply requested Daw Aung San Suu Kyi not leave her compound for the time being."

The state-controlled media has made increasingly strident personal attacks against Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD. Independent foreign reporters have been denied access to interview NLD members and the telephone line to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's home was cut several times.

12.3. Restriction on Movement of NLD Members

Since November 1995, when the National League for Democracy party withdrew from the National Convention, SLORC authorities, including armed forces personnel and local officials, have increasingly harassed, intimidated, and arrested NLD members. SLORC has created new restrictions on NLD local party members. SLORC has issued both written and oral orders that prohibit NLD members from traveling beyond their respective township boundaries without express permission from authorities; these new orders prevent NLD members from almost any travel including attending party meetings. NLD members are accused of “opposing the State” are punished arbitrarily when they attempt to defy even SLORC’s oral orders. The NLD’s Vice-chairmen U Tin Oo and U Kyi Maung are under constant surveillance and routinely are harassed by the SLORC.

When NLD members are permitted to travel outside of their residential areas, they are required to report to the local SLORC authorities at their destination. NLD travel destinations are carefully searched and the owners of the homes entertaining NLD members interrogated. SLORC authorities often intimidate the owner of the home; if the owner is a member the civil services, he is strongly advised not to allow members of the NLD to stay at his house.

12.3.1. List of Recent Incidents

- On January 17, 1996, in Minkin township, Sagaing Division, the Secretary of the NLD township organizing committee was summoned by the local LORC. The Secretary was told that no NLD organizing activities were permitted within the township; he was forced to sign a statement of acknowledgment. (*Source: NLD*)
- On March 15, 1996, the Secretary and Treasurer of the Irrawaddy Division Organizing Committee for the NLD were summoned by the Bassein West Commission (the local LORC authorities). The NLD leaders were told that not more than five persons were allowed to gather during their organizing trip within the division. (*Source: NLD*)
- On December 30, 1996, Ko Than Htut, NLD-Youth Leader, Danubyu township Organizing Committee, Irrawaddy Division, was prohibited from leaving his township for a period of one year under the *1961 Restriction and Bond Act*. (*Source: NLD*)
- On January 26, 1997, at approximately 1 a.m., local LORC authorities from

Myaungmya township marched into the “Tawwin Guesthouse” where two NLD leaders were staying. U Hla Pe, a member of the NLD Central Executive Committee and Chairman of the NLD Divisional Organizing Committee, Irrawaddy Division, and U Zeya, Chairman of the NLD Township Organizing Committee, Myaungmya, were searched and manhandled by the LORC authorities. The authorities confiscated their citizen identity cards and official NLD letters and documents. The next day, the two NLD leaders were summoned by the Chairman of the township LORC and accused of trying to agitate unrest in the township. The two NLD members tried to explain rationally that the NLD was a legal political organization functioning in accordance with the law and regulations. They further explained that the purpose of their trip was merely to meet with members of the NLD organizing committee of Wakhema township who were summoned to appear before a local court on January 28, 1997. However, the Chairman refused to accept their reasons. At that point, the two were allowed to return to the guesthouse but they were threatened that they could be summoned at any time. Indeed, at 5 p.m. the same afternoon, the LORC Chairman summoned them again. They were told that there had been no summons issued by Wakhema township for NLD to appear on January 28. They were ordered to return to Rangoon immediately and forced to sign a letter promising to do so. The LORC officials watched as the two members boarded a ship and left the harbor. (*Source: NLD*)

12.4. Harassment of Foreign Visitors

A group of 12 cyclists from America and Britain were mercilessly harassed by Burmese intelligence, police, and security personnel during their trip to Burma in January 1996. The group from “Cycle Southeast Asia” had traveled to Burma upon the invitation and endorsement of the Myanmar Cycle Federation. Heavy security surveillance haunted them during their trip and the cyclists became used to seeing SLORC forces guarding the hotel in which they spent the night. Just three days after starting their tour, the group discovered in Prome that Burmese authorities had broken into their rooms, cut off their bicycle padlocks, and transported all their belongings to Prome for their forced trip back to Rangoon. Five of the cyclists abandoned the tour and flew to Thailand after the group was forcibly escorted back to Rangoon, where they were told they could not proceed with their already-approved itinerary. The rest of the group continued by train to Mandalay, but were told that their cycling was restricted to within the city limits. After tough negotiations, the cyclists were permitted to take their prearranged boat ride to Pagan, but only under escort by 15 security guards. In Mandalay, one of the members of the team, who was followed by security guards during their bike ride to Mandalay Palace, had US \$800 in traveler’s

checks, 20,000 kyats and US \$500 in gemstones, stolen from his bicycle pack. The group was followed everywhere in Mandalay and five officers watched them around the clock at their hotel “as if we were under house arrest,” the team leader said. They were later refused permission to take the train from Thazi to Rangoon and were forced to return to Rangoon by air from Pagan. A team member was later shown a law passed on April 8, 1995, that forbids independent tourists from traveling in the country and requires all travel arrangements to be done through the Myanmar Travel and Tourism Association.

Twelve Italian tourists were escorted out of a northern hill-tribe village and sent back to Rangoon, according to a statement issued by an official from the Italian Embassy on February 1996. In their letter to the embassy, the group reported being awakened at 1 a.m. on a morning in January in the Kachin village of Nam Khan, by soldiers who said they did not have permission to be there. The travelers believed permission had been previously obtained by their tour operator. They said they were loaded on to an old, open-backed military truck in temperatures of 0 degrees C (32 degrees F) and driven to city of Putao. During the journey, the truck nearly careened off of a bridge, they said. In Putao, they were forced to board a plane for Rangoon.

12.5. Foreign Travel Restricted Areas

Area	Permitted Means of Travel	Remark
Kachin State: Myitkyina: Ho Pin, Moe Hnyin	plane or train train	Prior permission required for land travel
Moe Kaung Ain Taw Gyi	train car	Prior permission required for land travel
Pu-ta-O Pa Kant area	plane n/a	No foreign travelers permitted
Shan State: Keng Teng Tachilek	plane plane	

Area	Permitted Means of Travel	Remark
Tenasserim Division: Mergui, Tavoy Kawthaung Lanpi island Zadat island	plane or ship only plane and ship only plane and ship	No foreign travelers allowed
Mandalay Division:	Limitations on travel to Moe Goke township	
Sagaing Division:	No foreign travelers allowed outside of Kanni No foreign travelers allowed outside of Homalin Foreign travelers allowed within four miles of Kalay Municipality	
Kayeh State:	No foreign travelers allowed in the whole state	
Chin State:	No foreign travelers allowed in the whole state	
Arakan State:	No foreign travelers allowed in Ann and Kyauktaw townships	