

12. Freedom of Movement

12.1. Background

Citizens could travel freely within the country except for limitations in areas of ethnic armed activities, but have to notify local authorities of their whereabouts. All citizens are required to inform the authorities of their movement within the country. The authorities closely monitor the travel and activities of many citizens, particularly those known to be politically active. The names of overnight guests must be reported to and registered with the local authorities. Authorities sometimes enter homes during night hours to check registration documents of occupants as a form of monitoring personal movements.

Leaving the country (legally) requires the possession of specific government authorization, which it is extremely difficult to obtain. The SLORC/SPDC carefully scrutinizes prospective travel abroad. This produces rampant corruption as many applicants are forced to pay large bribes to obtain passports to which they are otherwise entitled. The official board that reviews passport applications denies in some cases apparently on political ground. All college and higher education graduates who obtain passport (except for certain government employees) are required to pay a special education clearance fee to reimburse the Government. The authorities on occasion restrict the issuance of passports to young female applicants seeking work abroad, reportedly to prevent young women from being enticed to travel abroad for jobs that are in fact in the commercial sex industry. 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.

Restrictions on foreign travelers have been eased as part of an effort to promote tourism. Burmese embassies issue tourist visas, valid for one month, within 24 hours of application. However, select categories of applicants, such as foreign human rights advocates, journalists and political figures, continue to be denied entry visas unless traveling under the aegis of a sponsor acceptable to the SLORC/SPDC, and for purpose approved by the authorities. Although some areas of the country remain closed to foreigners for security reasons, the authorities permit travel to most other destinations. Rangoon-based diplomats generally must apply ten days in advance

for travel outside the capital.

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

Since late 1996, the authorities have prohibited the weekend gatherings in front of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's residence at which she and other NLD leaders formerly responded to letters from the public and delivered speeches. Military barricades set up in late 1996 on the road leading to her house maintained until May 1997. After that army checkpoints remains in place near her house, and at a times of high tension the barricades reappear. Her freedom to leave her compound or to receive visitors is severely restricted. For most of the year, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi remains under virtual house arrest, having to ask for permission to leave her home in order to meet local and international media.

In 1997, NLD was allowed to hold some celebratory gatherings, but with harassment to the participants by the security personnel. On January 4, some 1,000 NLD party members and guest marked the forty-ninth anniversary of Burma's Independence. On February 12, the NLD held Union Day celebrations at Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's house, although a military barricade prevented at least half of the guests from attending. On the next day, some NLD members who played a prominent role at the celebrations were arrested. In April, the NLD held New Year celebrations attended by some 600 supporters. All of whom had to register at the military checkpoint outside of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's house.

On May 27, NLD attempted to hold a party congress as an anniversary of the May 1990 election victory. Some 316 NLD members were prevented from attending the gathering, though few were actually detained. Those few were held in government guest houses for up to two weeks, while others were placed under temporary house arrest or otherwise warned not to go to Rangoon.

On September 28, the NLD was permitted to hold a ceremony marking the ninth anniversary of the founding of the party. While the SLORC/SPDC gave express permission to allow 300 members to attend, some 700 were reported to have arrived at Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's house. All those attending had to give their personal details to military intelligence officers at the house, and some thirty NLD activists were denied permission to attend and were removed from the area.

On October 21, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, accompanied by NLD Chairman U Tin Oo, Central Executive Committee member U Soe Myint and some elected NLD

representatives, went to Thakata Township to organize the NLD Youth wing. This was her first trip outside the capital since being released from her house arrest.

Her second organizing trip on October 28 was disturbed by the authorities. On the morning of October 28, the NLD attempted to hold a meeting at its Mayangone township office on the outskirts of Rangoon. However, the security forces set up barricades and blocked Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's supporters from meeting with her. This meeting had been planned in order to reorganize the Mayangon township's NLD youth wing. A number of them were rounded up and trucked several miles away where they were then released. Riot police scuffled with a dozen of NLD supporters and prevented them from meeting with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was barred by the authorities from leaving her residence to attend the planned party meeting in Tamwe township NLD office on November 5. In the statement of the SLORC, it said "In order to prevent any unnecessary incidents from taking place the NLD Tamwe Township representatives have been informed by the relevant authorities to refrain from holding unauthorized outdoor political rallies in the township on November 5. It is also learnt that Daw Su Kyi's effort to attend the Tamwe Township NLD rally has been prevented from realization."

Riot police put up barbed wire and spikes outside the Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's home to stop her from going to an NLD meeting in Hlaing township, Rangoon on November 13. Witnesses and party members said senior NLD members were also not allowed to pass through the barbed wire -- put up by traffic police -- to enter Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's home.

NLD protested strongly to SLORC for barring her way. But SLORC said in a statement that it stopped her from leaving her residence because the NLD intended to damage peace and stability by driving around in procession in downtown Rangoon. "Close and careful observation of the movement's activities clearly revealed the underlying ulterior motive and plan to proceed with a huge crowd in a convoy of cars to disrupt the peace and tranquillity of the city," the SLORC said. "Such a situation cannot be tolerated or condoned. Thus to prevent further aggravation of the problem, University Avenue had been sealed off and Daw Suu Kyi requested not to proceed to the NLD office," it added.

12.3. Restriction on the Movement of Rohingya

It is virtually impossible for Muslims to move within Arakan State or to other parts of Burma from Arakan State. Rohingya (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 department 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.

The SLORC has issued a new restrictive rules for the Muslims. According to a new travel regulation enforced since September 15, 1997, a Muslim traveler must obtain -- 1) a travel recommendation from concerned village chairman citing the reason of his travel; 2) a residency certificate on that document signed by the local immigration official; 3) an additional recommendation to be obtained from the township LORC and finally 4) a travel permit from the district LORC chairman who would issue it after examining whether No.1,2,3 have been properly followed.

A Muslim has to spend 1,500 *kyats* as lubricant to obtain a travel pass. Besides Border Police at the Buthidaung jetty takes 250 *kyats* as unofficial embarkation fee while the immigration at Akyab jetty demand 200 *kyats* per head as disembarkation fee. Due to the enforcement of the new rule, the number of Muslim passengers from Arakan north has drastically fallen. (*Source: RSO*)