

BURMA (MYANMAR)**ISSUE**

In Burma, which has one of the worst records in Asia on human rights and democratic development, the political situation continues to deteriorate and there is a danger of serious confrontation.

BACKGROUND

Burma's military regime, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), has increased its harassment and intimidation of Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) which won the 1990 elections with an overwhelming majority. Since the release of Aung San Suu Kyi in 1995 from six years of house arrest, the SLORC has pursued a policy of marginalizing her while continuing with its plans for a constitution entrenching the role of the military.

Violations of human rights continue on a wide scale including extrajudicial and arbitrary executions, killing of civilians, torture, arbitrary arrests and detention, deaths in custody, absence of due process of law, severe restrictions on freedoms of opinion, expression, assembly and association, violations of freedom of movement, forced relocation and forced labour.

A renewed crackdown on the pro-democracy movement began on 27 September when Burmese police briefly detained NLD politicians and blocked all roads leading to Aung San Suu Kyi's house to stop the NLD from holding a party congress. Since then, Aung San Suu Kyi has spent much of the time under virtual house arrest. Tensions were fuelled by a violent attack on Aung San Suu Kyi in November and by student demonstrations in December (the largest since 1988). Although the SLORC has succeeded in negotiating fragile cease-fire agreements with fifteen ethnic groups that have long been fighting the central government for greater autonomy, pressure is mounting for a more comprehensive political settlement. Opium production in the ethnic areas continues to expand with increasing signs of SLORC complicity. Burma remains the largest source of illegal heroin entering North America.

In 1996, both the General Assembly and UN Commission on Human Rights again passed unopposed resolutions calling on SLORC to respect human rights and proceed with democratic reform. The USA and the EU have imposed visa restrictions on senior members of the SLORC and their families who are viewed as impeding the country's transition to democracy. In July 1995, the International Committee of the Red Cross/Red Crescent (ICRC) pulled out of Burma, claiming SLORC was impeding its work and denying access to political prisoners. The SLORC is refusing to allow visits by the UNCHR Special Rapporteur on Burma and the Secretary General's Special Representative on Burma.

Burma continues to encourage foreign investment and to develop its relations with Asian countries, particularly the members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN). The ASEAN Heads of Government meeting in Jakarta in November 1996 decided to confirm Burma's eventual admission to ASEAN but have postponed a decision