

January 1996

## HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN BURMA (MYANMAR)

### ISSUE

Burma continues to have one of the worst records in Asia on human rights.

### BACKGROUND

Despite the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and the negotiation of cease-fires with the ethnic insurgent groups, there has been no improvement in Burma's human rights record. Arbitrary detention, torture, extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions of civilians, rape and abuse of women, and forced labour occur on a wide scale. Aung San Suu Kyi's decision to take her party out of the Constitutional Convention has heightened political tensions and raised the possibility of some form of confrontation with the country's military rulers, the State Law and Order Restoration Committee (SLORC).

After civil unrest in 1988, caused by 26 years of the Burma Socialist Program Party rule of General Ne Win, the military re-established control over the country, creating the SLORC as the new ruling body. Despite the house arrest of its leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, the National League for Democracy (NLD) won the elections in 1990 with an overwhelming majority. The SLORC, however, refused to allow parliament to convene and claimed that a new constitution must be passed before they could hand over power.

The release of Aung San Suu Kyi on 10 July, 1995 after six years of house arrest suggested that the SLORC was confident of its ability to control Burma. Although released "unconditionally", it is now clear that the SLORC intends to marginalize her. There is no indication that the regime is considering meaningful reforms.

On 29 November, Burma's main opposition party, the NLD, led by Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, walked out of the SLORC-sponsored Constitutional Convention. The Convention had reopened the day before after a seven-month recess. The NLD had previously participated in the Convention, viewing it as the only available means of communication with the SLORC. The Constitutional Convention was set up to draft a new constitution aimed at entrenching the army's domination of Burmese politics. The NLD decision to walk out is the result of concerns that the SLORC is using the Convention to convince international investors that political reform is underway. Aung San Suu Kyi has called on the international community to put pressure on the SLORC in the hope that a freeze on foreign investment and diplomatic isolation will convince them to engage in meaningful talks with the opposition.

Almost all of the Burmese ethnic groups that have been fighting the central government for greater autonomy or independence have now negotiated cease-fire agreements with the SLORC. This has led to heightened tension along the Burma-Thai border. Despite the

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