

Burma (Myanmar)

Response to Information Request Number:	MMR01002.ZLA
Date:	July 12, 2001
Subject:	Burma: Information on Exit and Return
From:	INS Resource Information Center
Keywords:	Arrest / Discrimination based on citizenship / Discrimination based on ethnic origin / Discrimination based on political opinion / Freedom of movement / Political asylum / Right to a passport / Right to leave and return to one's country / Travel documents

Query:

Please provide information on exit and return to Burma.

Response:

According to a representative of the US Committee for Refugees (USCR), large numbers of Burmese exit and return to Burma via common borders with Bangladesh, Thailand, and China. Each returnee is documented and taxed. In some cases, documentation is confiscated and handed over to local surveillance authorities. These individuals generally return home without further incident (20 June 2001).

Travel to and from the U.S. (and other destinations) is common for the traveling elite and the better-off business class in Burma who obtain passports through proper channels. Those who have fewer connections or who have ambiguous reasons for travel must often resort to bribery to obtain a passport. All but a privileged few must relinquish their passports at the airport upon return to Burma, although the passport may be kept in cases where a traveler has satisfactory documentation indicating further travel within 6 months. Those who must turn in their passports upon return to Burma must reapply for the same passport for future travel. Burmese Customs officers x-ray all incoming luggage, generally searching for taxable goods and contraband, but books and tapes will also draw their attention (USCR 20 June 2001).

Those who hold passports yet abscond from Burma will probably be unable to renew their passports if they return to Burma (presuming no other outstanding matter except the previous flight from the country). The situation is generally the same for family members of such individuals (USCR 20 June 2001).

Travel to unauthorized destinations, e.g., obtaining a passport for travel to Singapore or Bangkok and then going to several other places, does not generally raise scrutiny upon one's return to Burma. On the other hand, those who seek to emigrate illegally to the U.S. likely will be jailed upon return to Burma. Also, those who return to Burma with an expired passport, and those who have "caused embarrassment" to the government, e.g., applied for asylum abroad, could be immediately jailed upon return to the country [if the Burmese government becomes aware of the embarrassment to the regime] (USCR 20 June 2001).

According to the US Department of State:

"The [Burmese] Government carefully scrutinizes prospective travel abroad. This facilitates rampant corruption, as many applicants are forced to pay large bribes (sometimes as high

as \$3,000, about 1.2 million Kyat; the equivalent of 10 years' salary for the average citizen) to obtain passports. The official board that reviews passport applications has denied passports on political grounds. All college graduates who obtained a passport (except for certain government employees) are required to pay a special education clearance fee to reimburse the Government for the cost of their education. In February the Government issued new regulations on overseas employment passports that ultimately made it harder for citizens to travel overseas. Citizens who had emigrated legally generally were allowed to return to visit relatives. Some who had lived abroad illegally and had acquired foreign citizenship also were able to return. Those residents unable to meet the restrictive provisions of the citizenship law, such as ethnic Chinese, Arakanese, Muslims, and others, must obtain prior permission to travel. Since the mid-1990's, the Government also has restricted the issuance of passports to female citizens" (Feb. 2001).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

References:

Representative, US Committee for Refugees (USCR). 20 June 2001. Email to the INS Resource Information Center.

US Department of State. February 2001. "Burma." COUNTRY REPORTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES. [Internet] URL: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/eap/index.cfm?docid=678> (Accessed on 12 July 2001).

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