

The evolution of State Terrorism in Myanmar

A Lakehead University researcher's investigation into state terrorism in Myanmar (formerly Burma) helped bring an end to military rule in the Asian country in 2010.

"The military came to power in 1962," says Dr. Syed Serajul Islam, professor and chair of Political Science. "Until 2010, this country was completely closed.

"Outsiders were limited from visiting this country and the state enforced a reign of terror on the people. In 2010, the military had to open up and hold elections," Islam says.

"It is not yet a fully democratic country, but it is in transition. The leader of the opposition, Aung San Suu Kyi, is now free and active in politics."

Suu Kyi was held under house arrest for about 15 years between 1989 and 2010. In 2012, she was elected to the Pyithu Hluttaw, the lower house of the Burmese parliament, and since then she announced plans to run for the presidency in 2015.

Islam conducted extensive research on the issue from 2004 to 2008 and several of his articles have been published in international journals.

In 2009, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution condemning the ongoing systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Myanmar.

The UN also called for the military rulers to take urgent measures to put an end to violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

"You cannot imagine the kind of torture people went through," Islam says.

"For 50 years, they experienced terrorism. I looked at terrorism committed by the state, and it was so difficult, but I think our research has worked. The state persecution is still there, but it has improved a lot."

Islam's research found a variety of state terrorism tactics were imposed on the country by the military rulers, including unfair trials, torture, extrajudicial execution, intimidation and fear, forced labor, and information control.

There is still persecution against the Rohingyas ethnic minority. Over the past



few months, Islam's research has been reflected in news reports of thousands of Rohingya migrants landing on the shores of Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia.

"Seven Nobel Peace Laureates recently described this persecution as genocide. They made an urgent appeal to the international community to stop all kinds of aid and investments to Myanmar," Islam says.

He says there has been a huge expansion of development in the country by multinational companies since 2010.

Islam received Lakehead's Distinguished Researcher Award in 2008 for his research record. He was nominated as a witness member to the Canadian government's Standing Committee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2004 to study Canada's foreign policy relating to the Muslim world.

A past recipient of the Fulbright Fellowship, Islam has received research grants from many sources. He has written nine books and more than 80 refereed articles in international journals.

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