

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE WEEKLY REVIEW

RESTLESSNESS IN SOUTH KOREA

South Korean security forces have been alerted in case there is a new upsurge of public disorder on the anniversary of the overthrow last April of the Rhee regime. Dissatisfaction over the failure of the Chang Myon administration to meet the high political and economic expectations of the revolution is widespread, particularly in urban areas. Chang has put through a number of limited political and economic reforms, but he has not displayed the dynamic leadership necessary to win broad public confidence.

Public apathy and the lack of an emotional issue minimize the prospect for a massive move that could bring down the government but incidents of violence, which seem likely, could lead to a serious clash between demonstrators and the police. The authorities have scheduled events by government supporters in order to deny the use of public places to anti-government demonstrations on the anniversary of the student uprising which led to Rhee's overthrow.

This and other recent actions indicate a tendency by the government to revert to the repressive tactics of the Rhee regime in order to silence criticism. Early in March the authorities made an inept attempt to suppress by administrative fiat the country's new and only leftist-oriented newspaper, Minjok Ilbo.

The administration also is seeking more stringent security legislation to combat public disorder and subversion. The pending Demonstration-Control Bill would limit public demonstrations to a half-hour at any location and would prohibit demonstrators from blocking public buildings, using loudspeakers, or assembling in front of embassies and private homes. A proposed amendment to the National Security Law is so loosely drawn that the conservative opposition fears it may be used to silence legitimate criticism. Even administration legislators are divided on support for the measure.

At the same time, leftist groups appear to be taking a more prominent role in stirring up public unrest. Recently leftists, presumably Communists, have been identified attempting to organize the students. A hard core of subversives is thought to have been responsible for the appearance of pro-Communist and anti-American slogans during clashes between police and demonstrators on 22 March.

The capabilities of the police have gradually improved, and their recent training and performance indicate that they probably can control moderate disturbances. However, a gradual swing of public support toward the left seems inevitable in the absence of a more vigorous reform program.

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