

# Myanmar

The current political map of Asia was drawn up in the 1980s at a time when popular movements made progress in the Philippines, South Korea and Taiwan but were roughly suppressed in Myanmar (Burma) and China. Nevertheless, Myanmar's progress in turning the political tide can be traced back to the events of August 1988 when an estimated 3,000 Burmese were assassinated by the military government. More than those who perished in the Tiananmen Square protests in Beijing, Myanmar's military government succeeded in hiding the murderous oppression. The victims simply disappeared – their deaths unrecorded, the whole event benefiting from the 'slack' news climate that tends to prevail in August. There was one exception, however: the US weekly news magazine *Newsweek* obtained a photograph of a Burmese doctor tending a blood covered child, which it featured on its front cover. That the 25th anniversary of this sad this event could, in August 2013, be celebrated in Rangoon was a significant sign of the changing times in Myanmar.

## Reform concerns

Myanmar has experienced whirlwind reforms in recent years. With that has come heightened anxiety over incendiary and xenophobic remarks enflaming ethnic and religious tensions. In addition, democratic forces look set to marginalise the military's proxy party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), at the elections scheduled for 2015. It is unclear whether former President Than Shwe anticipated the speed of change when he handed over to Thein Sein in 2011. The possibility of a military change of heart still exists, but in mid-2013 appeared to be receding.

As is often the case, Myanmar's military – for decades entrenched in power and enjoying its perquisites – regard themselves as the country's guardians, responsible (under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi's father) for independence and thwarting communism. Subsequently, however, the military had the country to themselves. Quite why the military rulers did not come under pressure to restore democracy for so long is a matter of debate.

Civilian governments were eliminated, international sanctions were imposed, and something of a stalemate ensued as Myanmar's population, reluctantly accepting the so-called 'Burmese Way', became poorer and poorer. Myanmar's levels of poverty were such that come the twenty-first century, the military rulers, known as the *Tatmadaw*, began to realise that limits were being reached. There would be no increase in their wealth without investment, and that investment would have to come from outside Myanmar. The Seven-Step Roadmap that was announced in August 2003, was initially dismissed as unrealistic. But it did contain the germs of some kind of democracy and, perhaps surprisingly, it ushered in a gradual easing of sanctions.

## In from the cold

The international response to the Myanmar government also began to be reassessed by countries that had for a long time turned their official backs on Myanmar. One symbolic step was that of the Australian government which decided to adopt the use of 'Myanmar' instead of 'Burma'. Tentatively other governments followed suit, initially suspending economic sanctions, later taking even more proactive steps. Ministerial visits became the norm, and rapprochements reached a peak in November 2012 with the arrival of US President Obama, the first American president to visit Myanmar, with a six hour visit in which he sought to heap praise on the Myanmar government's progress in ending military rule, while at the same time expressing the US' concern that Myanmar complete the process of democratic reform. Mr Obama met President Thein Sein, the former junta member who had initiated the reforms since taking office in March 2011. President Obama, like other dignitaries before him, had the inevitable meeting and photo-call with Nobel Laureate and opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. Again symbolically, Obama referred to Myanmar rather than Burma, although the latter was still the official designation used by the State Department. In 1988 the US had downgraded the status of its embassy, with no ambassador. Thus the US, which had

## KEY FACTS

**Official name:** Myanmar  
Naingngandaw (The Union of Myanmar)

**Head of State:** President Thein Sein  
(from 4 Feb 2011)

**Head of government:** President Thein Sein

**Ruling party:** Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) (from 7 Nov 2010)

**Area:** 676,552 square km

**Population:** 63.67 million (2012)\*

**Capital:** Naypyidaw (Abode of Kings) (from 2005)

**Official language:** Myanmar  
(Burmese)

**Currency:** Kyat (Kt) = 100 pyas;  
from 2 April 2012 the kyat became a managed floating currency starting at K818 per US dollar.

**Exchange rate:** Kt852.00 per US\$  
(Jan 2013)

**GDP per capita:** US\$835 (2012)\*

**GDP real growth:** 6.30% (2012)\*

**GDP:** US\$53.14 billion (2012)\*

**Unemployment:** 4.02% (2012)\*

**Inflation:** 6.10% (2012)\*

**Natural gas production:** 12.70 billion cum (2012)

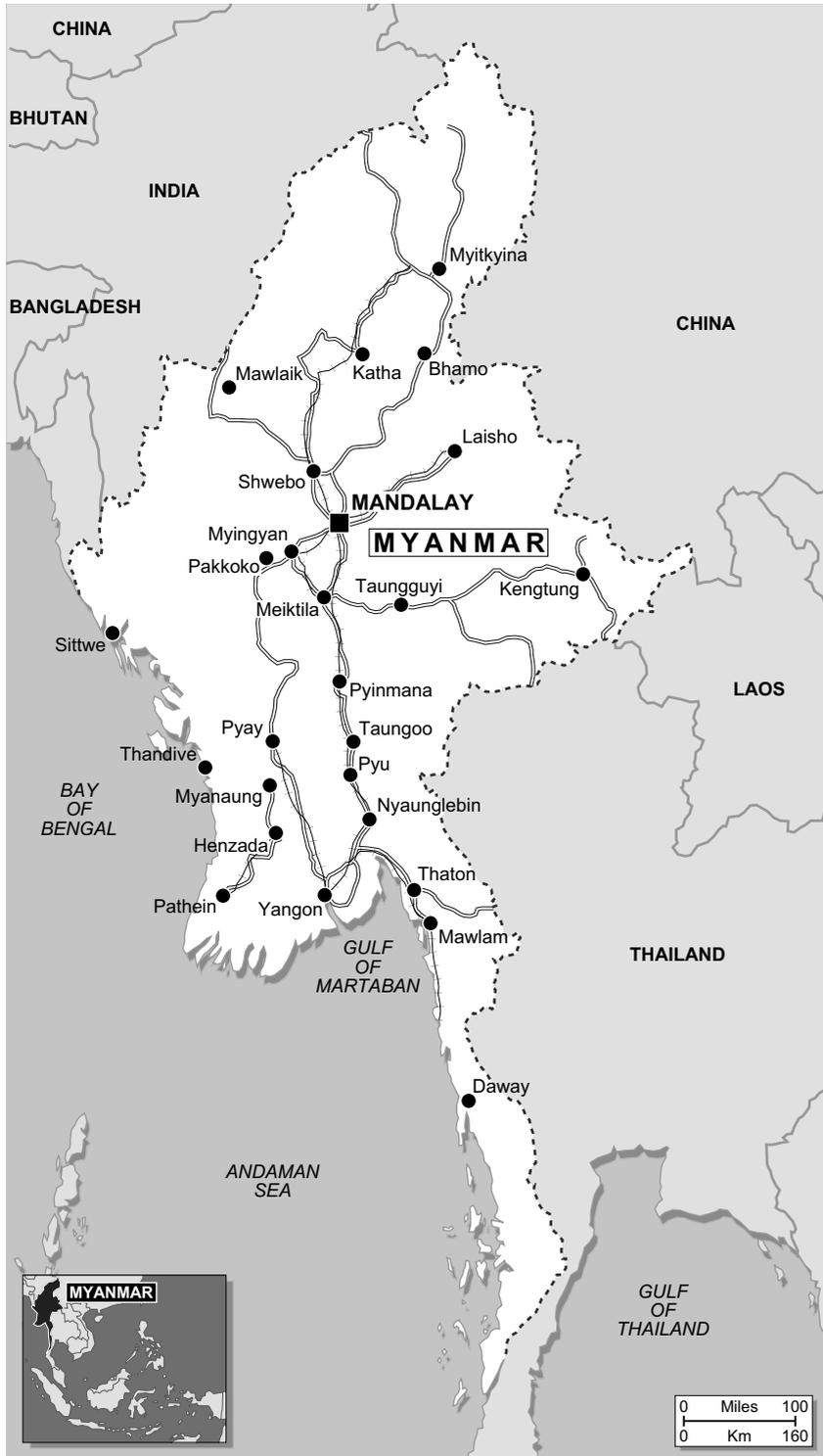
**Balance of trade:** -US\$2.25 billion (2011)

**Annual FDI:** US\$1.00 billion (2011)

\* estimated figure

## Nota

Myanmar's official national accounts data are available only on an annual basis with a two-year lag and they show considerably higher rates of GDP growth that are inconsistent with correlates of growth such as energy use..



hardly distinguished itself in restoring civilian rule in Myanmar, was not slow to take the credit for pushing the Burmese generals to enact changes that have unfolded with surprising speed over the past year. Aung San Suu Kyi thanked Obama for supporting the political reform process. But added that the Burmese had 'to be very

careful that we are not lured by a mirage of success and that we are working towards genuine success for our people.'

### Ethnic stresses

In the first half of 2012 sectarian violence between majority Buddhists and the Rohingya Muslim minority in Myanmar's

western state of Rakhine had seen around 167 people die. Many Burmese considered the Rohingya Muslims to be illegal immigrants from neighbouring Bangladesh. This is a view supported by the government, which does not recognise them as citizens. An investigation by Reuters into the sectarian assaults painted a picture of organised attacks against the Muslim community. While in Myanmar, President Obama had not held back, saying in a speech at Yangon University that: 'For too long, the people of this state, including ethnic Rakhine, have faced crushing poverty and persecution. But there's no excuse for violence against innocent people.' Obama went on to say that 'The Rohingya... hold within themselves the same dignity as you do, and I do. National reconciliation will take time, but for the sake of our common humanity, and for the sake of this country's future, it's necessary to stop incitement and to stop violence.'

The Rohingya problem is not the only conflict facing the government. In the north of the country, government forces are in a stand-off with the so-called Kachin Independence Army. The Kachins demand autonomy and a greater say in the revenues derived from their region's mineral resources, which are substantial. Responding to the increasing condemnation of his government's treatment of the Rohingya Muslims, President Thein Sein, in a letter to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon promised to tackle the causes of the problem. Obama announced the resumption of US aid programmes in Myanmar during his visit. An administration official said the USAID programme would include assistance of US\$170 million in total for fiscal 2012 and 2013, but this would be dependent on further reforms. In a move clearly timed to show goodwill, the authorities began to release dozens more political detainees on 19 November 2012, including Myint Aye, arguably the most prominent dissident left in its gulag.

### The economy

According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB) gross domestic product (GDP) growth quickened to an estimated 6.3 per cent in the 2012 fiscal year (FY) (ended 31 March 2013) compared with an average of 5 per cent in the previous 5 years. The pickup reflected business optimism buoyed by the government's steps since 2011 to liberalise the economy and prospects for further reform. A modest slowdown in agricultural growth in 2012,

partly reflecting the floods in August 2012, was more than offset by increases in industrial output and services.

The number of foreign firms granted investment approval, as indicated by the ADB, rose to 62 in the period April–December 2012, well above the total for the three previous fiscal years. A sharp increase in approvals for manufacturing indicated a welcome diversification from the past focus on energy and mining. Investor optimism was also signalled by an almost 14-fold surge from 2011 in the number of new foreign company registrations in the 10 months to January 2013, albeit from a low base and partly reflecting some domestic companies reclassified as foreign. New domestic company registrations rose in the previous two years

Inflation subsided after 2008, when it exceeded 20 per cent. This followed the reduced monetisation of the fiscal deficit and a stronger kyat exchange rate on the unofficial market. The consumer price index fell in early 2012 with declining food prices. By December 2012, though, food prices were rising and inflation was 6.0 per cent year on year.

The consolidated fiscal deficit of the central government and state economic enterprises narrowed to an estimated 5.4 per cent of GDP in 2012 from 6.0 per cent a year earlier. Revenue benefited from the government’s realignment in April 2012 of the fixed official exchange rate of the kyat, bringing it closer to the unofficial market exchange rate. As state enterprises are net exporters, the exchange rate realignment boosted budget receipts, including export tax income and customs duties. Higher revenue enabled the government to increase spending on health, education, and capital investment.

The ADB noted that the current account deficit widened to an estimated 4 per cent of GDP, with the trade balance in deficit mainly due to a gradual liberalisation of imports and higher investment. Customs data showed a 3.6 per cent decline in exports in April–December 2012 from a year earlier, probably caused by subdued demand in Thailand, China and India, as well as weaker international commodity prices.

ADB figures suggested that exports of natural gas, which comprise 38 per cent of total exports, were flat, and agricultural exports for the most part declined in April–December. Garment exports rose by 18 per cent year on year, benefiting from greater access to global markets and low domestic wages. The general weakness in total exports underscored the

importance of sharpening competitiveness with higher investment, new technologies, and improved access to finance, as well as an appropriate exchange rate.

Tourist arrivals and earnings from tourism have climbed as the country opens up after decades of isolation. Net foreign direct investment (FDI) flows and renewed official development assistance supported an overall balance of payments surplus and increase in foreign exchange reserves to an estimated US\$5.1 billion in FY 2012, equal to about four months of imports of goods and services. Myanmar’s arrears to the ADB and the World Bank were cleared in January 2013, allowing both banks to renew lending to the country. The Paris Club of creditors also reached an agreement to cancel or re-schedule arrears.

The ADB forecast Myanmar’s economic growth to rise gradually to 6.7 per cent in 2014. Projections assumed that the government would maintain momentum on policy reform over the medium term. Growth was likely to get a lift from the European Union’s (EU) proposed reinstatement of preferential access for Myanmar’s exports under the Generalised System of Preferences and the United States’ suspension of its ban on imports from Myanmar. Two large gas fields, Shwe and Zawtika, were expected to come online in 2013, more than doubling gas production and raising exports to China and Thailand. Higher gas exports, greater access to international markets, and faster economic growth in key

markets such as China should support growth in exports. Visitor arrivals were also likely to show further large gains.

Movement toward unifying multiple exchange rates and a managed float of the currency, along with licensing private banks to engage in international banking and to offer foreign exchange services, should shift more foreign exchange from informal to formal markets, increase liquidity, and facilitate the Central Bank of Myanmar’s management of the exchange rate. The government is establishing a formal interbank market and plans to develop a secondary treasury securities market. A law to modernise and grant operational autonomy to the central bank has been submitted to the legislature.

Myanmar’s proposed fiscal reforms include simplifying the tax system, broadening the tax base, and eventually moving to a value-added tax to ease dependence on natural resources, which provide 23 per cent of public revenue.

Steps taken in 2011 to give state enterprises more financial autonomy and demand more accountability have begun to facilitate their corporatisation and potential privatisation. Coupled with higher net export receipts, primarily from gas, these fiscal measures allow the government to increase spending on health, education, and infrastructure while reining in the fiscal deficit in 2013. Inflation is forecast to average 5.1 per cent in 2013 and 2014. A lower fiscal deficit and reduced credit to the government from the central bank should dampen inflation over the medium term.

KEY INDICATORS		Myanmar				
	Unit	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Population	m	*58.80	*59.98	*53.40	*62.42	*63.67
Gross domestic product (GDP)	US\$bn	28.20	27.60	43.00	51.90	*53.14
GDP per capita	US\$	479	459	702	832	*835
GDP real growth	%	3.6	4.8	5.3	5.5	*6.3
Inflation	%	22.5	7.9	7.3	4.2	*6.1
Unemployment	%	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	*4.0
Natural gas output	bn cum	12.4	11.5	12.1	12.4	12.7
Exports (fob) (goods)	US\$m	2,653.3	2,147.2	2,333.3	3,118.3	–
Imports (fob) (goods)	US\$m	3,643.4	3,422.0	3,512.4	5,367.6	–
Balance of trade	US\$m	-990.2	-1,274.8	-1,179.2	-2,249.3	–
Current account	US\$m	-1,193.4	-1,246.0	-590.0	-1,331.0	*-2,232.0
Total reserves minus gold	US\$m	–	–	–	–	*9,694.0
Foreign exchange	US\$m	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	*6,963.5
Exchange rate	per US\$	5.38	6.41	5.58	852.00	850.25
* estimated figure						

Inflows of FDI, including from the award of new telecommunications licenses in 2013 and higher official development assistance, will likely keep the balance of payments in surplus.

The government's ambitious reform agenda is commensurate with the catching up necessary to align policies with current international practice after Myanmar's long period of isolation. These reforms are outlined in the Framework for Economic and Social Reform, which sets out policy priorities until 2016 and guiding principles for longer-term development plans. The goal is higher, inclusive, and sustainable growth and reduced poverty – some 26 per cent of the country's 60 million people live in poverty.

Implementing important new laws on land ownership, labour, and foreign investment, as well as measures to simplify business registration, will improve the business environment. Relatively quick improvements to infrastructure include rehabilitating roads, upgrading power systems to reduce transmission and distribution losses, and developing a sound regulatory framework for independent power producers and public/private partnerships.

Tourism has substantial potential to spur employment and inclusive growth, especially with simpler visa requirements. In agriculture, which contributes 36 per cent of GDP and the majority of employment, near-term measures to improve access to finance and inputs, implement small irrigation projects, and expand agricultural production will shore up inclusive growth and food security.

To outsiders, such priorities may strike a strange note. But for those charged with running a country such as Myanmar, with its history of multiple invasions, such thinking is probably inevitable. There was a time when Burmese military leaders saw an invasion as feasible, not only in the light of successive invasions by British, Japanese and Chinese forces, but following the demonstration of the United States' military capabilities in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. These fears have subsequently abated and increased openness appears less threatening. That openness is made easier knowing that the *Tatmadaw* retain a commanding and constitutionally mandated control over the country's political future through their 25 per cent minimum hold on power in the nation's parliament – as set out in the 2008 Constitution.

As the economy frees up, Myanmar's new found political openness has begun to

create ethnic friction and considerable social tensions. None the less, the economic plans seem to be falling in to place. Investment has begun to pour in and the Chinese oil and gas pipelines from Kyaukpyu to Yunnan have started to flow, generating healthy revenues for the state. That means the government is in an unprecedentedly favourable position: the economic pie is certainly growing, despite the security challenges posed in the Rakhine State and in Shan State, where China has seen fit to lend help to the Wa rebels. All of which adds up to the prospect of democracy holding up, balanced by the military's confidence in its overall scheme of things holding up tolerably well. In principle, the constitution retains provisions to allow the military to wind back democratic liberalisation. But with so much working in favour of both the military and the wider electorate, in 2013 that seemed a remote prospect.

### Risk assessment

Politics	Fair
Economy	Fair
Regional stability	Fair

### COUNTRY PROFILE

#### Historical profile

Burma was annexed to British India in the nineteenth century.

1824–26 Burma ceded the Arakan coastal strip (Chittagong to Cape Negrais) to the British at the end of the first Anglo-Burmese war.

1852 At the end of the second Anglo-Burmese war Britain annexed lower Burma, including Rangoon.

1885–86 Britain captured Mandalay after a brief battle; Burma became a province of British India.

1937 Burma became a separate British dependency, with limited self-government.

1942 Japan invaded and occupied the country. The Burma Independence Army sided with the Japanese although it later transformed itself into the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) and fought against the invaders. A Provisional Administration was set up led by Dr Ba Maw.

1945 The AFPFL nationalists, led by Aung San, helped Allied forces to re-occupy the country.

1947 Aung San and six members of his interim government were assassinated. U Nu, foreign minister in Ba Maw's government, was asked to head the AFPFL and the government.

1948 The Union of Burma became independent outside the Commonwealth, with U Nu as the first prime minister.

1960 The ruling AFPFL party split and a caretaker government was formed, led by army Chief of Staff General Ne Win.

1962 U Nu was overthrown in a coup led by Ne Win. The Revolutionary Council suspended the constitution and instituted authoritarian control through the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). Under the 'Burmese Way to Socialism' the economy was nationalised, the BSPP became the single political party and independent newspapers were banned.

1964 Political parties were outlawed.

1973 A new constitution was approved. BSPP became the only authorised political party and the country's name was changed to the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma.

1974 The revolutionary council was dissolved and Ne Win was elected president by the state council. Secretary General of the UN, U Thant died and was buried in Rangoon without official state recognition.

1978 An election gave Ne Win the mandate for four more years in power.

1988 A military government, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), took power in September, ending months of unrest. It took over the function of the former ruling party, the BSPP, and the parliament (Pyithu Hluttaw).

1989 Burma was renamed Myanmar. 1990 The government fulfilled its promise to hold multi-party elections, but said a new constitution must be brought into effect before power could be transferred to the victorious National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi (daughter of Aung San, who had led the AFPFL).

1992 General Than Shwe became SLORC chairman, prime minister and defence minister, replacing Saw Maung.

1996 The law and order situation deteriorated and open conflict erupted. SLORC closed the universities and detained protesters.

1997 Bomb attacks were aimed at leading SLORC figures. Several thousand Karen National Union (KNU) ethnic minority refugees were forced across the Thai border leading to international protests when refugees were killed by SLORC forces.

The US imposed economic sanctions, banning investments by US companies.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) admitted Myanmar as a full member of the Association. A governing military *junta*, formed by the top four SLORC leaders, was named the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

1998 The SPDC detained some 110 leading members of the NLD.

1999 Madame Aung San Suu Kyi was put under house arrest and isolated from the world. The authorities refused her dying husband a visa to come and visit her for

the last time. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) banned Myanmar from its activities until it ceased using forced labour.

2001 The military *junta* approached Aung San Suu Kyi to arrange talks – the first contact in five years. President Jiang Zemin of China visited – the first Chinese head of state to visit since the military *junta* seized power in 1988.

2002 Aung San Suu Kyi (NLD) was released from house arrest. Former president, military leader and BSPP chairman, Ne Win died. He was considered to have had *sub rosa* influence on national political machinations for decades.

2003 Aung San Suu Kyi was re-arrested and Japan suspended aid in protest. General Khin Nyunt was appointed prime minister.

2004 The government and the Karen National Union, the most significant ethnic insurgency group, agreed to end hostilities. A constitutional convention began, despite a boycott by the NLD. General Khin Nyunt resigned and was replaced by Lt General Soe Win. An earthquake off the island of Sumatra caused a *tsunami* that damaged coastal areas, particularly in the Irrawaddy Delta. The final official estimate for Myanmar's dead was 90 and 5,000 displaced. However others estimated the death toll was up to 600 and 30,000 displaced.

2006 The military *junta* renewed Aung San Suu Kyi's detention order. Her plight was the first case submitted to the newly established UN Human Rights Council. Thousands of ethnic Karens fled to Thailand in the face of the construction of the new capital, Naypyidaw, which had forced them from their homes.

2007 Russia agreed to provide the technology and train technicians to build and operate a 10MW light-water nuclear reactor to power Pyinmana. The International Committee of the Red Cross formally accused the government of abusing the rights of its citizens. A major civil rights protest developed, led by Buddhist monks, calling for a return to democratic rule. The protest was sparked by an increase in the price of domestic fuel. As demonstrations grew the government retaliated by arresting hundreds of monks and firing on protesters; internet and mobile telephone connections were cut by the authorities to prevent pictures and details of the demonstrations being sent to media outlets overseas. Scores of monks were forced to flee from Yangon as thousands of civilians including three prominent activists were arrested. A UN special envoy met General Than Shwe in an effort to stem the repression. Prime Minister Soe Win died and was succeeded by Thein Sein. The government began to

release detained protesters at the end of the year, as monks again marched, although in fewer numbers.

2008 Cyclone Nargis struck the southern region of the Irrawaddy Delta; relief efforts were hampered by the seeming indifference and obstruction of authorities to accept and distribute the huge international aid on offer to Myanmar. Despite disruption from the national disaster the constitutional referendum was held and within five days the government claimed 92 per cent of voters had approved the constitutional changes. Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest was extended for another year. An official estimate put 84,500 deaths following Cyclone Nargis with hundreds of thousands of people at risk from disease, homelessness, lack of food and clean water. UN President Ban Ki-moon criticised President General Than Shwe, who had refused to meet him to discuss the crisis. It was estimated by the UN and Asean that relief and reconstruction work following Cyclone Nargis would cost over US\$1 billion, for food, agricultural and housing needs. They also estimated that as many as 134,000 had died during the cyclone.

2009 The UN stated that international and domestic law was being flouted by the military regime in the continued detention of Aung San Suu Kyi. She was formally arrested again for 'violating the terms of her house arrest', following an incident when an uninvited US citizen swam across a lake to her residence. Suu Kyi was convicted and sentenced to a further 18 month's house arrest; as a result she was unable to campaign in the 2010 elections. Despite the ruling, Suu Kyi had diplomatic meetings with representatives of the UK, Australia and the US, focussing on sanctions imposed by Western nations on Myanmar. The government removed a ban on the use of mobile telephones in the capital, Naypyidaw. At the Asean summit, Prime Minister Thein Sein was quoted as saying Aung San Suu Kyi could contribute to an unspecified 'process of national reconciliation'. The supreme court agreed that it would hear an appeal into Suu Kyi's sentence of a further 18 month's house arrest.

2010 Tin Oo, vice president of the NLD opposition party led by Suu Kyi was released, after serving six years under house arrest. New election laws introduced banning candidates with criminal records from standing in elections; the law drew international condemnation. Suu Kyi's political party (NLD) announced it would not expel Suu Kyi as leader nor register for the parliamentary elections, declaring the law 'unjust'. The NLD was disbanded after the election registration deadline expired. The *junta* carried out a military reshuffle

ahead of the elections. 37 political parties took part in elections for the two houses of parliament, plus 14 regional state assembly elections. However, due to the boycott by, and deregistration of, the NLD, plus the high fee for entering the contest, virtually all parties taking part were proxy parties for the ruling military *junta*, in particular the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), which contested all 1,157 seats nationally, and the National Unity Party (NUP), which contested 990. The National Democratic Force (a splinter of NLD) contested 163. As predicted the USDP won an overwhelming majority in both houses of parliament. The government released Aung San Suu Kyi. The UN human rights committee condemned the elections as being neither free nor fair.

2011 In January, following an Asean meeting of foreign ministers, a call was made to drop all international sanctions against the military regime in Myanmar. This was in line with a similar declaration from five of the ethnic minority groups within Myanmar, urging an end to sanctions, which they said disadvantaged their people disproportionately. The first legislative session to be held since 1988 was opened in January, in the newly built parliament in Naypyidaw. A presidential election was held in February, with three nominated candidates, all drawn from the military-backed political party; President General Than Shwe did not stand for the post. Former prime minister, Thein Sein, was elected as Myanmar's first civilian president (albeit a retired military officer) by parliament with 408 votes (out of 659). In March the military government was officially dissolved after the new president of a civilian-led parliament was sworn in, the first civilian government since 1962. Than Shwe retired, having ruled Myanmar since 1992. The ethnic Kachin Independence Army (KIA) attacked the area close to the site of a hydroelectric power plant being built by the Chinese in northern Myanmar in June. The government responded by mounting a military offensive against the rebels. A truce, which had been in place before the attack, had been broken when the KIA refused to become state border guards. In August, President Thein Sein invited home Myanmar's diaspora that fled after the 2008 uprising. However following the speech, he was also quoted saying that those who had 'committed a crime' during the demonstrations would still be punished. The government issued an invitation to Aung San Suu Kyi to visit Naypyidaw, where she met President Thein Sein in August. The government set up a National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in September, to investigate reported abuses within the country. In

October, the government unexpectedly suspended further construction of the Chinese-funded hydroelectric power plant on the Irrawaddy River; no reason was given. In October, 200 political prisoners were freed as part of a government sanctioned general amnesty. Two prominent detainees, the Buddhist monk who had led the 2007 civil unrest and a popular comedian and dissident called Zarganar, plus other monks, minority ethnic group activists and journalists were among the released. In November the NLD, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, agreed to register and contest the upcoming parliamentary by-elections. The NLD had boycotted all electoral processes since 1990 when, although it had won the elections, it was denied power by the military.

2012 The government signed a ceasefire with the Karen National Union on 12 January; bringing to an end six decades of insurgency by the ethnic rebel group. In January, Aung San Suu Kyi began campaigning for the upcoming parliamentary by-elections. As thousands turned out to see her, a major rally on 3–4 February, in Mandalay, had to be postponed when the venue was judged too small. On 1 April by-elections were held in 45 constituencies – 43 were won by candidates of the NLD, including Aung San Suu Kyi. On 2 April, the central bank adopted a managed float of the currency (kyat) and dropped the fixed exchange rate that had been in operation since 1977. The daily rate of 818 kyat per US dollar on 2 April (close to the black market rate), which replaced the 6.2 kyat per US dollar of 1 April. The UK's prime minister, David Cameron, visited Myanmar on 13 April and met President Thein Sein in Naypyidaw and Aung San Suu Kyi in Yangon. Cameron stated that in recognition of the improved political situation in Myanmar sanctions against the regime should be suspended. The US, EU, and Australia, among others, later announced that most sanctions would be lifted, although with the proviso that democratic improvements continue. On 30 April, following a meeting with President Thein Sein, the UN chief, Ban Ki-moon urged other nations to ease sanctions against Myanmar to encourage reforms. Aung San Suu Kyi and other members of the NLD were sworn in as members of parliament on 2 May. The NLD had originally refused to take the oath, which called on them to 'protect the constitution'. They finally accepted the oath, so that they could participate in parliament. Indian Prime Minister Singh visited Myanmar in May, the first Indian prime minister to do so since 1987. He had meetings with both President Thein Sein and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. A state of emergency

was declared in the western province of Rakhine, following a week of violence between Buddhists and Muslims, over attacks on members of their communities. The Press Scrutiny and Registration Department (PSRD) announced that from 20 August journalistic material would no longer be censored before publication. On 6 September, parliament voted to impeach the entire bench of the Constitutional Tribunal of Myanmar (CTM) (nine in total) and force them from office. However in a pre-emptive move, the justices all resigned. A political row between the government and parliament over political reforms had begun in March when the CTM had issued an order limiting the powers of parliamentary committees and commissions, denying them the rights, among other things, to summon government ministers for questioning. On 28 October, an estimated 22,000 people had been displaced by communal violence between the majority ethnic Rakhine Buddhists and the minority Muslim Rohingya, in Rakhine State (western coast). A UN report, published on 31 October, reported that opium production had increased year-on-year since 2006, despite eradication efforts. Some 51,000 hectares of land are given over to cultivation. Myanmar is the world's second largest opium producer, after Afghanistan. 2013 The European Union lifted the last of its trade, economic and individual sanctions on 22 April; they had been temporarily lifted in 2012. This was despite the continuing violence being committed against the Muslims by Buddhists, including monks. In May UNHCR reported that there were more than 1.2 million stateless people nationwide. Human rights groups have been calling for a review of Myanmar's citizenship law to help alleviate the problem. President Thein Sein visited the US in May, the first state visit since 1966. The government and rebels from the ethnic Wa guerrilla group reached a peace deal in July, reported state media. The agreement comes as the government reaches out to ethnic groups, with the 30,000 strong United Wa State Army (UWSA) estimated to be the largest guerrilla group in the country. On his first visit to Britain, in July, President Sein announced that all 'prisoners of conscience' would be released 'by the end of the year'. Public commemorations took place on 8 August to mark the 25th anniversary of the uprisings which launched the country's pro-democracy movement. Five Muslims were killed during a visit by President Thein Sein to Rakhine state, where Buddhists have been attacking Muslims. On 10 October, after three days of talks, a preliminary peace agreement with ethnic Kachin rebels in the north was signed.

An exposition in the prestigious Traders Hotel in Rangoon on 15 October injured one guest; it was thought to have been a bomb and was the latest in a series of blasts across the country in the previous three days.

### Political structure

#### Constitution

Since 1997, the principal organs of power are the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), headed by a chairman, and the 40-strong military-dominated cabinet.

Politically, Myanmar is spread over seven divisions where the ethnic Burmans are in the majority, and seven states where the non-Burmans, the ethnic minority groups, are in the majority.

A constitutional referendum was held on 10 May 2008 in advance of multi-party elections scheduled for 2010. Among the articles to change were: the military commander in chief will assume full executive, legislative and judicial powers in the event of a state of emergency, including the power to suspend the constitution if they see fit; a guarantee of 25 per cent of parliamentary seats for the military; the military would be fully in control of the Ministry of Home Affairs; Myanmar citizens married to foreigners will be barred from the presidency; the military to be immune from prosecution for past crimes. According to the military junta which drew up the amended constitution it will ensure the creation of a 'discipline-flourishing democracy'.

#### Independence date

4 January 1948

#### National legislature

The bicameral national legislature, was constituted in 2010, consisting of the Amyotha Hluttaw (Nationalities Assembly (upper house)) with 224 members (of which 56 are reserved for military officers as members) and the Pyithu Hluttaw (People's Assembly (lower house)) with 440 members (of which 110 are reserved for military officers).

#### Last elections

7 November 2010 (parliamentary); 10 May 2008 (referendum on constitution); 4 February 2011 (president, indirect)

**Results:** Parliamentary (Upper house): Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) won 129 seats (out of 168), Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNNDP) seven, National Unity Party (NUP) five, Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDDP) three; two other political parties failed to win any seats.

Lower house: USDP 259 seats (out of 330), SNDDP 18, NUP 12, RNNDP nine; two other political parties failed to win any seats.

Referendum on constitution: government announcement declared 92 per cent of voters had approved the changes to introduce a bicameral parliament.

President: Thein Sein won 408 votes (out of 659), Tin Aung Myint Oo 171, Sai Mauk Kham 75 (four votes unaccounted).

**Next elections**

Not known

**Political parties**

**Ruling party**

Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) (from 7 Nov 2010)

**Main opposition party**

National League for Democracy (NLD)

**Population**

63.67 million (2012)\*

**Last census:** March 1983: 35,307,913

**Population density:** 89 inhabitants per square km (2010). Urban population 34 per cent (2010 Unicef).

**Annual growth rate:** 1.0 per cent, 1990–2010 (Unicef).

**Internally Displaced Persons (IDP)**

600,000–1.0 million (UNHCR 2004)

**Ethnic make-up**

The indigenous population is Mongoloid. More than two-thirds are Burmans, racially akin to the Tibetans and the Chinese. There are also several indigenous minorities with their own language and culture – the Karen, Shan, Mon, Chin and Kachin; each group has its own state. The population includes immigrant minorities from India and China.

**Religions**

Theravada Buddhism (88 per cent), Christianity (7 per cent), Islam (3 per cent), Hinduism (0.5 per cent).

**Education**

Schooling begins in kindergarten for one year, then on to junior school for four years.

Secondary education is not compulsory and is divided into two phases: middle school, for four years, where all students undertake a general programme of learning; then upper secondary school where they elect to undertake either an academic course leading to higher education, or technical school, each lasting for two years. Technical education prepares students for admission to the government technical institutes or trade schools, or advancement on to university engineering courses.

All universities and colleges are financed by the state, although a nominal fee is charged for studies.

**Literacy rate:** 85 per cent adult rate; 91 per cent youth rate (15–24) (Unesco 2005).

**Compulsory years:** Five to 10.

**Enrolment rate:** 121 per cent gross primary enrolment of the relevant age group

(including repetition rates); 30 per cent gross secondary enrolment (World Bank).

**Pupils per teacher:** 46 in primary schools.

**Health**

Each year an estimated 150,000 children aged less than five die of malaria, acute respiratory infections and diarrhoea.

Access to clean drinking water is available to over 68 per cent of the population.

Malaria and Tuberculosis are widespread.

**HIV/Aids**

Stories of emigrant Burmese labour in Thailand uniformly infected with hepatitis and/or HIV/Aids are commonplace. Foreign estimates place some 2 per cent of the population as HIV positive. The proportion is many times higher in the army and areas crossed by the 'needle trail' of heroin exports into Manipur, India, and Yunnan, China, among others. This is a clear legacy of neglect of basic human development under the *junta*, in favour of internal and external security expenditures, and will be a dangerous and pressing cost to the Burmese economy over the long term, possibly on a sub-Saharan African level.

Without official statistics published, it can only be estimated by aid workers that there are over 660,000 people with HIV/Aids, making Myanmar the centre of one of south-east Asia's worst epidemics. In August 2005 the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria announced that it was withdrawing from its US\$98 million health programme due to government restrictions on health workers in the country. The HIV/Aids epidemic is one of the worst in Asia.

**HIV prevalence:** 1.2 per cent aged 15–49 in 2003 (World Bank)

**Life expectancy:** 59 years, 2004 (WHO 2006)

**Fertility rate/Maternal mortality rate:** 2.0 births per woman, 2010 (Unicef); maternal mortality 230 per 100,000 live births (World Bank).

**Birth rate/Death rate:** 10 deaths to 26 births per 1,000 people (World Bank).

**Child (under 5 years) mortality rate (per 1,000):** 52 per 1,000 live births (WHO 2012)

**Head of population per physician:** 0.36 physicians per 1,000 people, 2004 (WHO 2006)

**Welfare**

The department of social welfare (DSW) under the ministry of social welfare, relief and resettlement implements social welfare services in eight different areas of social needs by both direct and indirect means covering the aged, children, youths and women welfare services. There is provision for the rehabilitation of ex-drug addicts and the disabled. It provides

grants-in-aids to voluntary organisations. In Myanmar, all government servants retire at the age of 60, and are entitled to gratuity and pension.

There are approximately 45 homes for the aged throughout the country, which provide food, clothing, shelter and healthcare services to the aged. The traditional family structures also provide ample care for the aged. Several religious organisations donate large sums of money towards social welfare.

**Main cities**

Naypyidaw (new official capital, estimated population 925,000 in 2009). Yangon (formerly Rangoon) (former capital, estimated population 4.9 million in 2012), Mandalay (1.6 million), Mawla Myaing (formerly Moulmein, 542,017), Bago (278,622), Patheingyi (formerly Bassein, 277,382), Meiktila (244,768), Sittwe (formerly Akyab, 205,059).

**Languages spoken**

English is used in business circles.

**Official language/s**

Myanmar (Burmese)

**Media**

In 2008, Freedom House, the US human rights watchdog, assessed Myanmar as not free and has the most tightly restricted media environment in the world. The government is the only broadcaster allowed and owns all daily newspapers. Private weekly and monthly printed material is subject to censorship. Self-censorship by journalists is widespread.

The Press Scrutiny and Registration Department (PSRD) announced that from 20 August 2012 journalistic material would no longer be censored before publication.

**Press**

In Burmese, with online editions in English, official publications include the daily *Kyehmon* (*The Mirror*) ([www.myanmar.gov.mm](http://www.myanmar.gov.mm)), *Myanmar Alin* ([www.mrtv3.net.mm](http://www.mrtv3.net.mm)), *The New Light of Myanmar* ([www.myanmar.com/nim](http://www.myanmar.com/nim)) is government owned and reports officially sanctioned news, *Pyaw Pyaw Shwin Shwin* is a humorous magazine and, in English, the *Myanmar Times* ([www.myanmar.com/myanmartimes](http://www.myanmar.com/myanmartimes)) is a weekly.

**Dailies:** In Yangon, *The New Light of Myanmar*, the multi-language official daily newspaper of the military junta was previously called *The Working People's Daily*. Other newspapers in Myanmar include *Burma Daily*, *Loktha Pyithu Nesin*, *Kyemon* (*The Mirror*), *Myotaw* (evening tabloid) and *Yadanabon* (Mandalay).

**Periodicals:** *Burma Focus* is a bi-monthly newsletter.

### Broadcasting

Broadcasting is strictly controlled by the government. Due to the high level of illiteracy and the poor circulation of newspapers, radio and television are the main medium of mass communication and sources of news and information for most of the population. Listeners to foreign radio and television stations are subject to arrest.

**Radio:** The state-run stations include Radio Myanmar and City FM, which offers entertainment.

Popular, broadcasts that provide independent news include the Voice of America, Radio Free Asia and, from Norway, The Democratic Voice of Burma (<http://english.dvb.no>) which is run by Burmese exiles who provide unfettered and objective news, plus a platform for public opinion and political debate.

**Television:** TV Myanmar broadcasts in nine local languages plus English.

MRTV-3 ([www.mrtv3.net.mm](http://www.mrtv3.net.mm)) is the state-owned international service.

Myawady TV is a military network and TV5 is the first, pay-to-view TV service in a joint state-private venture.

**Other news agencies:** Mizzima News (by Burmese exiles): [www.mizzima.com](http://www.mizzima.com)

### Economy

In 2011, Myanmar adopted a democratic government and reforms to its economy, which have yet to be reflected in its balance sheets. Myanmar has rich natural resources including forestry, minerals and fresh water and marine reserves; however trade with international partners had been subject to sanctions, which in 2012 were just being removed. Some prohibitions are still in operation or in abeyance.

One of the major reforms instituted is scrapping of the multiple exchange rate (MER) system that had been in operation for decades. The kyat will be allowed to float against other currencies and the process, begun on 1 April 2012, is expected to be completed by 2015.

Proven natural gas reserves were 200 billion cubic metres (cum) at the end of 2011, with annual production of 12.4 billion cum, of which 8.6 billion cum was exported to Thailand. Foreign exchange reserves were at an all-time high of US\$3.6 billion in 2008 due to the record production of natural gas (12.5 billion cubic metres (cum)), earning US\$2 billion in sales to Thailand alone. However, sales fell by around 50 per cent in 2009 as world prices for gas fell. Capital inflows have until recently been limited to direct foreign investment in the gas and energy sectors only.

Agriculture typically provides 45 per cent of GDP, but following the disastrous 2007 cyclone that killed around 135,000

people, much of the southern rice growing area was destroyed along with equipment and livestock, leaving already indebted farming families unable to replace their loss. The price of exported beans to India also fell, along with domestic prices so that many farmers have been unable to recover the full cost of production. Analysts predict a significant drop in rice planting as farmers attempt to reduce costs.

In 2011, the UN Human Development Index (HDI) ranked Myanmar 149 (out of 187) for national development in health, education and income. Since 2000, Myanmar's progress has strengthened but has not matched the improvement of other countries in East Asia and the Pacific. In 2010, 48.3 per cent of the population experienced at least one indicator of poverty, while the headcount poverty rate was 31.8 per cent of the population (2000–10).

Remittances from migrant workers amounted to US\$116 million (0.1 per cent of GDP) in 2010 and was estimated to have reached US\$119 billion in 2011. By the second quarter of 2011, foreign direct investment (FDI) was a record US\$20 billion, which vastly exceeded the last highest level of US\$302 million in 2010 and the US\$16 billion for the combined total 1990–2009. China was the biggest investor of US\$8.27 billion in energy projects, followed by Hong Kong (US\$5.39 billion) and Thailand (US\$2.94 billion). In February 2012, the finance ministry revealed that Myanmar's foreign debt was over US\$11 billion. Between 1962–88, when the debt grew to US\$6.4 billion, Japan was Myanmar's biggest creditor, followed by the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and Germany; since 1988 China has lent Myanmar US\$2.13 billion. By February 2012, Myanmar had begun negotiations with creditor countries to reduce its financial burden.

### External trade

Myanmar belongs to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) Free Trade Area (Afta) and maintains a list of goods that have preferential import duties between members. A programme of tariff reductions is due to be introduced in the next few years.

There are a number of international trade sanctions, led by the United Nations, the US and EU, although trade continues with China, India and Thailand

Most imports and exports originate with trade corporations and state boards.

Trade is handled by the Myanmar Export Import Services using the Myanmar Five Star Line for shipping. The picture of external trade presented by official statistics does not reflect the considerable amount

of smuggling and black market trading. Myanmar is a major centre for the production of illegal heroin, estimated at around 2,000 tonnes annually, and amphetamines. Heroin is by far the largest export commodity.

### Imports

Principal imports textiles, crude oil and petroleum products, plastics, machinery, transport equipment, construction materials and foodstuffs.

**Main sources:** China (39.2 per cent of total in 2011), Thailand (22.9 per cent), Singapore (9.8 per cent).

### Exports

Principal exports are natural gas, timber, jade and precious stones, garments and agricultural produce including pulses, beans, fish and rice.

**Main destinations:** Thailand (37.1 per cent of total in 2011), China (19 per cent), India (12.3 per cent).

### Agriculture

Agriculture accounts for around 60 per cent of GDP and provides around 56 per cent of employment. About 15 per cent of the total land area is cultivated.

Myanmar is usually self-sufficient in rice, although adverse weather conditions and an uninvested farming sector can cause shortages. Other main crops are sugar cane, wheat, maize, jute, cotton, beans, wheat and vegetables. Cattle, pigs, buffaloes, sheep, goats and poultry are raised for domestic consumption. Oil palm and rubber plantations are replacing forest in some areas.

Around 50 per cent of the land area is forest, containing about 75 per cent of world teak resources. Heavy logging is carried out, mostly of export hardwoods, bamboo and fuel, leading to fears of rapid deforestation.

### Industry and manufacturing

The industrial sector accounts for around 7 per cent of GDP and employs around 9 per cent of the workforce.

Small enterprises predominate.

Manufacturing industries include food processing (sugar, tobacco, palm oil, rice), cement, textiles, beverages, cigarettes, aluminium products, paper and nails, steel, cotton yarn, soap, pharmaceuticals and fertilisers. Textile and jute production is being expanded.

There are 20 industrial zones. Foreign direct investment (FDI) is weak.

### Tourism

After years of neglect by the government and with tourists discouraged, the tourism sector was in the doldrums until early 2011. The beauties of Myanmar, its wealth of Buddhist temples, former royal palaces and spectacular landscape, including the culturally important Irrawaddy

River ('the road to Mandalay') are, however, becoming more accessible. According to government statistics the number of foreign visitors doubled in 2011, to over 3.8 million, of which the largest number were from Thailand (495,110), followed by China (228,710) and then South Korea (134,610). The number in 2012 fell to 1.6 million but the distribution remained the same.

Although Myanmar has no sites currently listed on Unesco's World Heritage List there are a number being considered, including bio diverse natural sites of conservation, the ancient cities of the Mon (the first known people to inhabit Myanmar) and the archaeological remains of the lost Pyu people (later inhabitants, with a language closely related to the current Burmese and who were living when Buddhism was introduced into the region). The Irrawaddy River traverses Myanmar and offers an alternative means of seeing the country, as river cruisers are available to visitors. The north of Myanmar has had problems with rebel groups and many Western governments advise their citizens to avoid the area.

Travel and tourism typically accounted for 3.5 per cent of GDP over 2007–11, and provides around 640,000 jobs (3 per cent of total employment). As the sector is set to grow the importance of the industry will provide an incentive to improve the infrastructure and amenities for tourist and tourism.

### Mining

Mining accounts for around 4 per cent of GDP and employs around 3 per cent of the workforce.

Minerals mined include ores of zinc, lead, tin and copper, silver, gypsum, limestone and gems such as rubies, sapphires and jade.

In 2006 international sales of precious gems earned around US\$300 million in foreign exchange. However the military crackdown of democracy demonstrations of 2007 prompted not only the French firm Cartier, US's Tiffany and Italy's Bulgari jewellers, but other Western jewellers as well, to halt purchases of rubies (prized for their rich red), jade and other gemstones. Myanmar supplies around 90 per cent of the world's rubies and 98 per cent of jade.

### Hydrocarbons

Proven oil reserves were 1.4 million barrels in 2011, with production at 20,790 barrels per day (bpd). However, with consumption at 40,620bpd imports were required to cover the difference. The Chinese state-owned oil company began construction of a large oil port in Kyaukpyu City (Rakhine State) for importing oil from the Middle East to be

transported by a new 771 km pipeline across Myanmar to China. The new port will have a storage capacity of 600,000 cubic metres and the pipeline, when fully operational, will carry 84 million barrels per year of oil.

Proven gas reserves were 200 billion cubic metres (cum) in 2011 with production at 12.4 billion cum. Export of natural gas was 8.6 billion cum with the remainder consumed domestically.

Coal production is typically around 1.5 million tonnes, used in energy and industrial production.

### Energy

Total generating capacity was 1,616MW in 2007, producing 5.96 billion kilowatt hours (kWh). Myanmar is seeking to develop its considerable hydroelectric generating potential, but is constrained by the cost factor. Electricity services are not available for much of the population, who rely on traditional methods of cooking, lighting and power.

### Financial markets

#### Stock exchange

The Myanmar Securities Exchange Centre opened in 1996.

### Banking and insurance

Since 1995, the government has allowed foreign banks to operate in Myanmar which have opened representative offices, to set up joint ventures with private local banks.

Myanmar is on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Financial Action Task Force (FATF) list of non-co-operative countries on money laundering.

In early 2003, there was trouble in the financial sector with the collapse of some private finance companies, which had taken deposits from the public. The problem spread to some private banks and large amounts of cash were withdrawn by depositors. A stronger regulatory framework for the banking system and a strategy to identify and resolve the problem banks are necessary to restore confidence in the sector.

### Central bank

Central Bank of Myanmar

### Time

GMT plus 6.5 hours

### Geography

Myanmar lies in the north-west region of south-east Asia between the Tibetan plateau and the Malay peninsula. It is bordered by Bangladesh and India to the north-west, the People's Republic of China and Laos to the north-east and by Thailand to the south-east.

Myanmar covers an area of 676,552 square km. It is dominated by mountains,

rivers and forests. The Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy) river, which rises in Tibet, flows southwards through the country, dividing it in two, and opening out into a vast delta region. The system is extremely fertile. Other important rivers are the Chindwin and Sittaung. There are several high mountain ranges ringing the country and providing almost impassable barriers against neighbouring countries. These and other interior mountains make land travel difficult within Myanmar. The highest point in the country and in south-east Asia is Mount Hkakabo Razi, which reaches 5,881m. Much of the country is covered in thick, tropical forests.

### Hemisphere

Northern

### Climate

There are three seasons: the rainy season May/June–October with high humidity and monsoon rains; the hot season February/March–May with likely temperatures of 37 degrees Celsius (C) (coastal and delta areas) to 40 degrees C (central region); and the cool, dry season November–February with temperatures of 16 degrees C (central region) to 21 degrees C (coastal and delta areas). Average rainfall varies from 5,000mm (northern hills and coastal areas) to 2,500mm (delta areas) to 750mm (central region).

### Dress codes

Revealing or sloppy clothing is not advisable on any occasion. There are no strict rules regarding business attire.

### Entry requirements

#### Passports

Required by all, valid for six months beyond date of departure.

#### Visa

Required by all. Tourist and business visas, applied for well in advance of arrival, are valid for 28 days; they may be extended. For a business visa a letter of introduction and an invitation are required, with a full itinerary.

### Currency advice/regulations

The import and export of local currency is not allowed. There are no restrictions on the import of foreign currency, subject to declaration; export is restricted to the amount declared on arrival. Exchange controls are strictly enforced and all foreign exchange receipts should be safeguarded.

### Customs

Personal effects are allowed duty-free, but customs regulations are restrictive and it is best to travel light. Jewellery, cameras and electric goods must be declared on entry. Video cameras are not allowed into the country.

## Health (for visitors)

### Mandatory precautions

Yellow fever certificate if arriving from infected area.

### Advisable precautions

It is advisable to be in date for polio (within 10 years), tetanus (within 10 years), hepatitis A and B, rabies (within one to three years, depending on exposure to risk), Japanese B encephalitis (within three years if travelling June to September), tuberculosis (children should be immunised at any age, although it is less important for adults), diphtheria (within 10 years). Dengue fever occurs intermittently, especially in the northern Mandalay division.

If travelling through the country it is advisable to be vaccinated against cholera. Only Yangon (Rangoon) city and areas above 1,000m are malaria free; if in doubt, take malaria prophylaxis.

It is advisable to carry a pack of sterilised needles, and to take any medicines required – they can be in short supply. Water should be boiled and filtered before drinking. It is advisable to drink bottled water.

There is a rabies risk.

## Hotels

Accommodation has been described as 'decrepit almost to the extent of charm'. There is no official rating system. Main Yangon (Rangoon) hotels can arrange an interpreter or translation services if necessary. Some Yangon hotels require payment in foreign currency. A 10 per cent service charge and a 10 per cent government tax are included in the bill.

## Credit cards

American Express, Diners Club, Master, Visa, JCB are accepted at airlines, major hotels and supermarkets.

## Public holidays (national)

### Fixed dates

4 Jan (Independence Day), 12 Feb (Union Day), 2 Mar (Peasants' Day), 27 Mar (Armed Forces Day), 13–16 Apr (Maha Thingyan/Water Festival), 17 Apr (Myanmar New Year), 1 May (May Day), 19 Jul (Martyrs' Day), 25 Dec (Christmas Day).

### Variable dates

Eid al Adha, Full Moon of Tabaung (Feb/Mar), Full Moon of Kasone (Apr/May), Full Moon of Waso/Beginning of Buddhist Lent (Jul/Aug), Full Moon of Thadingyut/End of Buddhist Lent (Oct), Diwali/Deepavali (Oct/Nov), Tazaungdaing Full Moon Day (Nov), National Day (Dec), Kayin New Year (Dec). In general, Hindu and Buddhist festivals are declared according to local astronomical observations.

## Working hours

### Banking

Mon–Fri: 1000–1400.

### Business

Mon–Fri: 0930–1630.

### Government

Mon–Fri: 0930–1630.

### Shops

Mon–Sun: 0600–2200.

## Telecommunications

### Mobile/cell phones

In 2012 only some 9 per cent of the population had mobile phones. The government announced on 26 June 2013 that it had awarded mobile licences to Telenor (Norway) and Ooredoo (Qatar).

## Electricity supply

230V AC, 50 cycles single-phase; five or 15 amp plugs with three round pins for power.

## Weights and measures

Imperial system (the metric system and local units are also in use).

## Social customs/useful tips

Shoes and socks must be removed before entering any religious building, and visitors should not wear shorts.

The title 'U' (pronounced 'oo') is the equivalent of 'Mr' in English. When addressing people always use the appropriate prefix and family name. Many people do not have a first name.

The head is considered the temple of the body and should not be touched by other people. It is also considered the ultimate in bad manners to put one's feet on the table or cross one's legs so that the sole of the shoe points at someone. This is because the feet are considered to be the least clean part of the body.

The code of standard behaviour is referred to as *bamahsan chin*. According to this mode of conduct, people are expected to respect elders, exhibit discretion in dealing with the opposite sex, be aware of Buddhist sayings and have an ability to recite some Buddhist verses. Additionally, one should maintain a reserved and indirect approach to another person and not be direct at all. This can lead to misunderstandings, especially in business dealings.

## Getting there

### Air

**National airline:** Myanmar Airways International.

**International airport/s:** Yangon International (RGN), 19km from city centre; duty-free shop, bar, restaurant, buffet, bank, post office and hotel reservations. Mandalay International (MDL), 25km from city; post office, bank, duty-free shop, car rental.

**Airport tax:** US\$10, payable in Foreign Exchange Certificates (FEC).

## Surface

**Road:** There are overland entry points on the borders with China and Thailand. A border pass is required for entry.

**Water:** Cruise vessels stop at Yangon.

**Main port/s:** Yangon.

## Getting about

Not all parts of the country are open to visitors, and some are subject to guerrilla or bandit activity.

## National transport

Tourists are required to keep to officially designated tourist areas and all arrangements for internal travel must be made well in advance via Myanmar Travel and Tours. Travel outside Yangon (Rangoon) is difficult to arrange. No attempt should be made to travel to restricted areas.

**Air:** Flying is the best and generally only permitted method of traversing the country and visiting tourist destinations. Flight schedules are restricted and subject to change without warning.

**Road:** There is a large network of roads all over the country, which are being upgraded, and new roads are being built.

**Buses:** There are a number of privately-owned bus companies which operate air-conditioned coaches between main centres. The main routes are from Yangon to Meiktila, Pyay, Mandalay and Taunggyi.

**Rail:** There is an extensive rail network. Myanmar Railways operates services to main centres. The Yangon-Mandalay express service runs four trains daily, with a branch line to Shwenyaung and Taunggyi. A service from Yangon to Bagan runs every other day. There are services from Mandalay to Lashio, Monywa and Bagan. Standards of equipment, service and safety are not high.

**Water:** There is extensive river and coastal traffic. Trips can only be made as part of an organised tour.

## City transport

**Taxis:** In Yangon the government operates blue taxis with standard fares; otherwise, fares are by negotiation. Taxis can be shared or hired on a time basis.

**Buses, trams & metro:** There are antiquated and overcrowded bus services in all cities; they are not recommended for visitors. Yangon has a circular rail system.

## Car hire

Tourists are not permitted to drive. Cars are hired with driver.

## BUSINESS DIRECTORY

The addresses listed below are a selection only. While World of Information makes every endeavour to check these addresses, we cannot guarantee that changes have not been made, especially to telephone numbers and area codes. We would welcome any corrections.

**Telephone area codes**

The international direct dialling (IDD) code for Myanmar is +95 followed by area code:

Bassein	42	Moulmein	32
Mandalay	2	Prome	53
Monywa	71	Yangon (Rangoon)	1

**Useful telephone numbers**

Ambulance: 192, 71-111  
 Red Cross: 295-133  
 Police (emergency): 199  
 (headquarters): 282-541, 284-764  
 Telephone enquiries: 100  
 Booking (inland): 101  
 Booking (overseas): 130, 131, 667-444, 667-555, 667-601/2  
 Airport Security: 662-677  
 Customs: 284-533  
 Immigration: 286-434

**Chambers of Commerce**

Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce & Industry, 504 Merchant Street, Kyauktada Township, Yangon (tel: 243-150; fax: 248-177; e-mail: ird@umfcci.com.mm).

**Banking**

Asia Wealth Bank, Ahlone, River View Housing Project, Olympic Tower II, Yangon (tel: 212-701; fax: 212-704).  
 First Private Bank Ltd, 619-621 Merchant Street, Pabedan T/S, Yangon (tel: 251-748; fax: 242-320).  
 Innwa Bank Ltd; 554-556 Corner of Merchant Street & 35th Street, Yangon (tel: 254-641, 254-647; fax: 254-431).  
 Kanbawza Bank Ltd; 1st Floor, Lanmadaw Condo Centre, No. 02/06, 02/07 Lanmadaw Street, Latha T/S, Yangon (tel: 212-780; fax: 212-778).  
 Myanmar Agricultural Development Bank, No. 1/7 Corner of Latha St & Kanna Rd, Latha T/S, Yangon (tel: 253-180, 250-569; fax: 245-119).  
 Myanmar Economic Bank, 1-19 Sule Pagoda Rd, Pabedan T/S, Yangon (tel: 289-329; fax: 283-679).  
 Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank, PO Box 203, 80-86 Maha Bandoola Garden Street, Kyauktada T/S, Yangon (tel: 284-911; fax: 289-585, 254-585).  
 Myanmar Industrial Development Bank Ltd, 26/42 Pansodan Street, Kyauktada T/S, Yangon (tel: 249-536; fax: 249-529).  
 Myanmar Investment and Commercial Bank, 170/176 Bo Aung Kyaw Street, Botataung Township, Yangon (tel: 250-509; fax: 281-775).  
 Myanmar Livestock & Fisheries Development Bank Ltd, 654-666 Corner of Merchant Street & Shwe Bon Tha Street,

Pabedan T/S, Yangon (tel: 249-620; fax: 243-240).  
 Myanmar Citizens Bank Ltd, 383 Maha Bandoola St, Kyauktada T/S, Yangon (tel: 283-209, 283-719; fax: 245-932).  
 Myanmar May Flower Bank Ltd, Yadana Housing Project, 9 Mile, Pyay Rd, Mayangon T/S, Yangon (tel: 661-261; fax: 661-262).  
 Myanmar Oriental Bank Ltd, 166-168 Pansodan Street, Yangon (tel: 246-596; fax: 251-831).  
 Myanmar Universal Bank Ltd, 81 Theinbyu Rd, Botataung T/S, Yangon (tel: 297-337; fax: 245-449).  
 Yoma Bank Ltd, 1 Kun Gyan Road, Mingalar Taung Nyunt Township, Yangon (tel: 703-493; fax: 246-548).  
**Central bank**  
 Central Bank of Myanmar, PO Box 184, 26(A) Sethmin Road, Yankin Tsp, Yangon (tel: 543-751; fax: 543-621; e-mail: cbm.ygn@mptmail.net.mm).  
**Stock exchange**  
 The Myanmar Securities Exchange Centre opened in 1996.  
**Travel information**  
 Myanmar Airways International, Sakura Toer, 339 Bogyoke Aung San Road, Yangon (tel: 255-260; fax: 255-305; e-mail: management@maiir.com).  
 Myanmar Tourism Promotion Board, Traders Hotel, 223 Sule Pagoda Road, Yangon (tel: 242-828; fax: 242-800; e-mail: mtpb@mptmail.net.mm).  
**Ministry of tourism**  
 Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, 77-91 Sule Pagoda Road, Kyauktada Tsp, Yangon (tel: 285-689; fax: 289-588; e-mail: mtt.mht@mptmail.net).  
**National tourist organisation offices**  
 Myanmar Travels and Tours, 77-91 Sule Pagoda Road, PO Box 559, Yangon (tel: 382-243; fax: 254-417; e-mail: mtt.mht@mptmail.net.mm).  
**Ministries**  
 Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, Thiri Mingala Lane, Kaba Aye Pagoda Road, Yankin Tsp, Yangon (tel: 665-587; fax: 664-493).  
 Ministry of Commerce, 228-240 Strand Road, Pabedan Tsp, Yangon (tel: 289-660; fax: 289-578).  
 Ministry of Communications, Post and Telecommunications, 80 Corner of Merchant St & Theinbyu Street, Botahtaung Tsp, Yangon (tel: 292-019).  
 Ministry of Construction, 39 Nawaday Street, Botahtaung Tsp, Yangon (tel: 283-938).

Ministry of Co-operatives, 259-263 Bogyoke Aung San Street, Kyauktada Tsp, Yangon (tel: 277-096, 280-280; fax: 287-919).  
 Ministry of Culture, 26-42 Pansodan Street, Kyauktada Tsp, Yangon (tel: 243-235).  
 Ministry of Defence, Ahlanpya Phaya Street, Yangon (tel: 281-611).  
 Ministry of Education, Theinbyu Street, Botahtaung Tsp, Yangon (tel: 285-588).  
 Ministry of Energy, 23 Pyay Road, Yangon (tel: 221-060; fax: 222-964).  
 Ministry of Finance and Revenue, 26 Setmu Road, Kyauktada Tsp, Yangon (tel: 284-763).  
 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pyay Road, Dagon Tsp, Yangon (tel: 222-844; fax: 222-950).  
 Ministry of Forestry, Thirimingala Lane, Kaba Aye Pagoda Road, Mayangon Tsp, Yangon (tel: 289-184; fax: 664-459).  
 Ministry of Health, Theinbyu Street, Botahtaung Tsp, Yangon (tel: 277-334; fax: 282-834).  
 Ministry of Home Affairs, Corner of Saya San Street & No 1 Industrial Street, Yankin Tsp, Yangon (tel: 549-208).  
 Ministry of Immigration & Population, Theinbyu Street, Botahtaung Tsp, Yangon (tel: 249-215).  
 Ministry of Industry (I), 192 Kaba Aye Pagoda Road Yangon (tel: 566-066).  
 Ministry of Industry (II), 56 Kaba Aye Pagoda Road, Yangon (tel: 661-140; fax: 667-156).  
 Ministry of Information, 365-367 Bo Aung Kyaw Street, Kyauktada Tsp, Yangon (tel: 245-631; fax: 289-274).  
 Ministry of Labour, Theinbyu Street, Botahtaung Tsp, Yangon (tel: 278-320; fax: 256-185).  
 Ministry of Livestock Breeding and Fisheries, Theinbyu Street, Botahtaung Tsp, Yangon (tel: 280-398; fax: 289-711).  
 Ministry of Mines, 90 Kanbe Road, Yankin Tsp, Yangon (tel: 577-316).  
 Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, Theinbyu Street, Botahtaung Tsp, Yangon (tel: 280-816; fax: 282-101).  
 Ministry of Development of Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs, Theinbyu Street, Botahtaung Tsp, Yangon (tel: 280-032; fax: 285-257).  
 Ministry of Rail Transport, 88 Theinbyu Street, Botahtaung Tsp, Yangon (tel: 292-769).  
 Ministry of Religious Affairs, Kaba Aye Pagoda Precinct, Mayangon Tsp, Yangon (tel: 665-620; fax: 665-728).

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Ministry of Science and Technology, 6 Kaba Aye Pagoda Road, Yangon (tel: 665-686).

Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief & Resettlement, Theinbyu Street, Botahtaung Tsp, Yangon (tel: 282-610).

Ministry of Sports, Office of the Ministers, Yangon (tel: 553-958).

Ministry of Transport, 363/421 Merchant Street, Yangon (tel: 296-815; fax: 296-824).

Office of the Prime Minister, Minister's Office, Yangon (tel: 283-742).

### Other useful addresses

ASEAN Investment Promotion Agency, 653/691 Merchant Street, Pabedan, Yangon (tel: 372-855; fax: 254-660; e-mail: dica.nped@mptmail.net.mm).

British Embassy, Commercial Section, 80 Strand Road, Box No 638, Yangon (tel: 281-700; fax: 289-566).

Central Statistical Organisation, New Secretariat, Yangon (tel: 270-578; e-mail: cso.stat@mptmail.net.mm).

Livestock Foodstuff & Milk Products Enterprise, Pyay Road, 10th Mile, Mayangon

Tsp, Yangon (tel: 664-244; fax: 240-109).

Myanmar Embassy (US), 2300 S Street, NW, Washington DC 20008 (tel: (+1-202)-332-9044; fax: (+1-202)-332-9046; e-mail: thuriya@aol.com).

Myanmar Export and Import Services, 622-624 Merchant Street, Yangon (tel: 280-260; fax: 289-587).

Myanmar Fisheries Enterprise, 654 Merchant Street, Latha Tsp, Yangon (tel: 20-710; fax: 222-951).

Myanmar General Industries, 192 Kaba Aye Pagoda Road, Yankin Tsp, Yangon (tel: 660-521; fax: 56-066).

Myanmar Investment Commission, 653/691 Merchant Road, Yangon (tel: 272-912; fax: 282-101).

Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise, 604 Merchant Street, Pabedan Tsp, Yangon (tel: 282-121; fax: 222-964).

Myanmar Petrochemical Enterprise, 23 Pyay Road, Lanmadaw Tsp, Yangon (tel: 222-816; fax: 222-960).

Myanmar Ports Authority, 10 Pansodan Street, Yangon (tel: 283-122).

Myanmar Post & Telecommunications, 43 Bo Aung Gyaw Street, Kyauktada Tsp, Yangon (tel: 285-840; fax: 290-429).

Myanmar Railways, Bogyoke Aung San Street, Pabedan Tsp, Yangon (tel: 274-027; fax: 282-267).

Myanmar Textile Industries, 192 Kaba Aye Pagoda Road, Yankin Tsp, Yangon (tel: 566-320; fax: 566-053).

Post & Telecommunications Department, 125 Pansodan Street, Kyauktada Tsp, Yangon (tel: 283-737; fax: 286-365).

US Embassy, 581 Merchant Street, Yangon (tel: 282-055; fax: 280-409).

**Other news agencies:** Mizzima News (by Burmese exiles): [www.mizzima.com](http://www.mizzima.com)

### Internet sites

Myanmar Resources:  
<http://www.myanmars.net>

Official Website of Myanmar:  
<http://www.myanmar.com>

Myanmar Business Information:  
<http://www.myanmarpyi.com>

Radio Free Myanmar: <http://users.imagiware.com/wtongue/dvb2.html>