The limits of reform in Myanmar - Bertil Lintner

Bangkok - The release of more than 200 political prisoners and a tentative ceasefire with the rebel Karen National Union represent the latest of steps taken by Myanmar president Thein Sein's government to improve its international image and assuage its many critics at home and abroad.

The cosmetic change in the traditionally military-run country is unmistakable. In recent months, it has become easier for ordinary citizens to access the Internet and local magazines and journals are able to publish articles on topics that would have been unthinkable only a year ago. Pictures of pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi, who spent 15 of the past 21 years under house arrest, are now for sale in markets not only in the former capital Yangon but also in small upcountry towns.

The United States government, for more than two decades the fiercest critic of successive military-dominated regimes in Myanmar, promised enhanced engagement in exchange for "further reforms" immediately after Friday's prison release. As a first step, the US is going to send an ambassador to its embassy in Yangon, which has been headed by a charge d'affaires since Washington decided to downgrade relations with Myanmar in 1990 in response to a brutal crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators.

Many Myanmar citizens undoubtedly welcome the easing of the extreme authoritarian pressure they have lived under as long as they can remember. But critics maintain the loosening is not tantamount to a "reform process", which would require changes in the country's fundamental power structure, and that the US may have other diplomatic objectives in mind over concerns for human rights and democracy.

Meanwhile, some Myanmar dissidents are beginning to ask, albeit in hushed tones, the hitherto unthinkable: is Suu Kyi being used by the Thein Sein's military-backed, civilianized government as a pawn in its efforts to break the country's long isolation from the West? And, has she come under pressure from the US and possibly other Western powers with a stake in Myanmar's future geopolitical role to strike a deal with her former military adversaries?

Less than a year ago, Suu Kyi was known to have said to visiting foreign diplomats that she was apprehensive about talking to the new government that assumed office after a blatantly rigged November 2010 election. At the time, she reportedly said that the main problem was the new constitution, which was adopted after an equally fraudulent referendum in May 2008 and guarantees the military 25% of the seats in parliament.

For instance, the charter's Chapter 12 lays out the complicated rules for constitutional amendments, which effectively give the military veto power over any proposed changes. The upper house currently consists of 168 elected representatives with a quarter, or 56 delegates, directly representing the defense services; the lower house is made up of 330 elected MPs and 110 appointed to represent the military. The ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), meanwhile, is widely viewed as a vehicle for the military's political interests.

Minor constitutional changes may be considered by the bicameral parliament if 20% of MPs submit a bill. However, a tangle of 104 clauses mean that major charter changes can not be made without the prior approval of more than 75% of all MPs, after which a nationwide referendum must be held where more than half of all eligible voters cast ballots.

This complicated procedure, coupled with Myanmar's record of holding bogus referendums - the first in 1973 for the 1974 constitution was as lacking in credibility as the one held in 2008 - make is virtually impossible to change those clauses, which in various ways and means legally safeguard the military's now indirect hold on power.

For instance, one of the first sections of the constitution guarantees the military's "national political leadership role of the State" and, in case of an "emergency", the "Commander-in-Chief of the Defense Services has the right to take over and exercise State sovereign power" after consulting the president. "No legal action" can be taken against the military for what it does while exercising such emergency powers, according to the constitution.

Another clause bars anyone whose parents, spouse or children who "owe allegiance to a foreign power" from becoming president. Suu Kyi's late husband, Michael Aris, was a British citizen, as are their two sons. The military's right to appoint a quarter of all seats in what is otherwise an elected parliament is also guaranteed, as is military control of one-third of all seats in local assemblies.

In 2008, Myanmar's generals got the constitution they wanted and through rigged elections now controls a solid majority of all seats in the parliament. Consequently, they can now afford to make some minor political concessions in response to international pressure. Allowing MPs from Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) to take part in a by-election on April 1 for 40 seats in the lower house and six in the upper chamber left vacant by the appointment of ministers, will not affect Myanmar's fundamental power structure with the military at its apex.

Reversible reform

The semblance of reform, however, has improved Myanmar's standing in the international community, as are other steps expected to be taken by Thein Sein's government, including new laws allowing for limited public protests and the creation of labor unions.

Since the constitution bars Suu Kyi from becoming president, some observers speculate that if she wins a seat in parliament she will be appointed minister of health or education, two positions which she would consider important but will not give her substantial political power and certainly no influence over the military.

"She would be an excellent choice for a person to be sent abroad to solicit aid for health and education programs and to attend international AIDS conferences and the like," says a veteran Myanmar politician who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Few would doubt that Suu Kyi remains Myanmar's most popular politician - and for many the country's main hope for a better future. But for the first time critical voices of her role are also being heard. In an unusually candid interview with The Australian on January 6, Win Tin, one of the original founders of the NLD in 1988 who was imprisoned for 19 years for his beliefs, said that the "reforms" taking place in Myanmar "are a ploy by the country's dictatorship to seduce foreign governments and neutralize Aung San Suu Kyi".

Other dissidents - former political prisoners and leaders of local civil society groups - complain that Suu Kyi meets readily with one foreign visitor after another but has no time to see them. "One comment I hear frequently is, 'what was the NLD fighting for if Daw Suu [Aung San Suu Kyi] will run for the by-elections and by that accepting the 2008 constitution'?" lamented one non-governmental organization worker in Yangon.

Ongoing fighting between ethnic rebels and government forces are another point of division. "In particular the Kachin are disillusioned that there is no compassionate speech or letter [from Suu Kyi] to their community, although some of the Catholic Bishops have explicitly asked Daw Suu to send such a message," said one civil society activist. Since June last year, heavy fighting has been raging between government troops and the rebel Kachin Independence Army in the country's far north.

Tens of thousands of civilians have fled the fighting to the Chinese border, or taken refuge in churches and community halls in towns in the predominantly Christian state of the Union. Farmers have been forced to abandon their crops and most refugees are living as destitutes in border areas under constant threat of being pushed back by unsympathetic Chinese authorities.

Some critics argue that Suu Kyi has grown old and tired - she will turn 67 this year - and the present, slight opening, however flawed, may be her last chance to achieve her vision of a more democratic Myanmar. But it is equally plausible that Myanmar's close relationship with China, and, more menacingly, its military partnership with North Korea, have prompted Western powers to push her into accepting some kind of accommodation with Thein Sein's government. Without her engagement with the new regime, it would be hard for the US and European Union to justify a dramatic change in policy towards Myanmar.

When US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met Thein Sein during her historic visit to Myanmar last December - the first by such a high-ranking US official in half a century - China was tellingly high on her diplomatic agenda. The first agenda item raised by Thein Sein during the meeting was the importance of Myanmar's relationship with China, which Clinton apparently did not object to. However, she emphasized that relations with the US would "if reforms maintain momentum" - thus leaving the door open for Myanmar to diversify its foreign relations.

After Washington decided in mid-January to establish full diplomatic ties with Myanmar, Clinton said the US "will further embrace" Myanmar if "the government releases all remaining political prisoners, ends violence against minorities and cuts military ties with North Korea". After her December visit, she said that the US would agree to and support assessment missions to Myanmar by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, a first step toward renewed multilateral lending for badly needed infrastructure.

Myanmar's staunchly nationalistic military may be willing to lessen its dependence on China, and even cut its ties with North Korea, provided the US and its allies can offer something substantial in return, including an eventual removal of economic sanctions. However, if one reads the 2008 constitution carefully, Myanmar will not become a genuine democracy any time soon, but rather a thinly disguised authoritarian state that the US and the West can cynically live with to counterbalance China's influence.

That is not what many pro-democracy activists, both at home and in exile, have been fighting for since the bloody, nationwide uprising against military-dominated rule in 1988, when thousands of protesters were mowed down by the military, and when they overwhelmingly voted for the NLD in the 1990 election, a democratic result that the military refused to honor. In the case of any future "emergency", the limited new freedoms that Myanmar's people are now enjoying can also be curtailed, perhaps next time by constitutional means rather than the barrel of a gun.

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Burma: The war that won't stop

Posted By Min Zin Tuesday, January 24, 2012 - 2:58 PM Share

As I write this, Burmese government troops are still staging attacks on the Kachin ethnic rebel group - even as the two sides have been trying to conduct negotiations in the Chinese city of Ruili, just over the border. The new Burmese president Thein Sein, an ex-general, has publicly ordered the army to stop its offensive twice (once in mid-December, and more recently last week). But the army has kept fighting.

Khin Yi, the minister of immigration and population in the government, was recently forced to confess that the president's orders had not "reached the grassroots level."

In 1994, the Burmese army and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) agreed on a ceasefire. It held for 16 years. Then, in June 2010, the ceasefire broke down. The war that has gone on since then has caused over 60,000 people to flee the fighting.

The KIA, which has 10,000 armed troops (see photo above) and operates in northeastern Burma along the border with China, questions the government's sincerity. Yesterday I managed to call Gen. Sumlut Gun Maw, the vice chief of staff of the KIA and one of its most influential leaders, who spoke to me from his headquarters in the city of Laiza. "The new government tells the international community that it is all for peace, peace, and peace," the general said. "But right now there are still 48,000 soldiers, or 120 battalions, attacking us and trying to encircle us."

Since 2009, the Burmese military has pressured no less than 17 armed ethnic groups to lay down their arms and accept a new status as "border guard forces" under the military's direct control. But some of the big rebel groups -- including the KIA's political wing, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) -- refused to give in to the junta.

After the military succeeded in cracking down on the Kokang ethnic group's bases along the China-Burma border in mid-2009, the generals were emboldened and launched a major offensive against the Kachin in 2010.

Gun Maw told me that the Kachin regard the ceasefire offers they're now getting from the government as a warmed-up version of an earlier truce deal that existed before the border guard plan. The new government, which came into power last year, abandoned that plan after it met with massive resistance from the ethnic armies. Gun Maw says that the government is merely attempting to undo the damage it did to the ethnic groups in 2009-2011. He believes the generals simply want to hold the minority groups at bay for a time as they try to improve their international image.

In early January, the Burmese government reached a preliminary ceasefire agreement with another big ethnic rebel force, the Karen National Union, which is based in southeastern Burma near the border with Thailand.

The Burmese government is clearly desperate to give the impression that the country is at peace before it assumes the chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and hosts the group's summit in 2014. The government is also well aware that ending the violence in the ethnic areas is one of the conditions the U.S. administration has set for removing its sanctions against Burma. And when the head of the Burmese military visited Beijing recently, the Chinese also pressured him to find a solution to the continuing instability along the border between the two countries. The Chinese have not been happy with the flow of refugees over the border. They are also worried about the potential disruptions of Chinese economic and strategic interests, including the Sino-Burma gas and oil pipelines that pass through the Kachin state.

The talks between the KIO and the government ended Thursday without a ceasefire being reached.

"The major hurdle in the way of a ceasefire deal was that the Burmese negotiating team did not have a mandate to promise the withdrawal of troops," said Gun Maw. He told me that an enormous number of Burmese troops have pushed into the Kachin region since the start of the offensive in 2010. The Kachin see little point in negotiating unless the government is prepared to reduce that presence.

A brief statement jointly issued by both sides said that negotiations will continue. Still, the general told me, "Kachin resentment against the Burma military is very high because they have committed many abuses against the local population." He said that many Kachin villagers are criticizing their political leaders for entering talks with the Burmese army.

Given the geopolitical pressures and the incentives offered by the West, it seems likely that both sides will eventually be forced to come to terms. But a lasting peace will never take hold unless the government can find a way to respect the autonomy of the ethnic groups in this multi-ethnic country. And the cycle of conflict will drag on and on.

**With Suu Kyi On Board, Is Burma Finally Moving Toward Real Change?**

By ASIA SENTINEL Friday, February 3, 2012

On a state visit to Singapore with a delegation of ministers and businesspeople earlier this week, Burmese President Thein Sein made his most explicit commitment to democratic reform and an overhaul of the country’s moribund economy and government infrastructure.

“We want democracy to thrive. I wish to assure you that I shall endeavor to establish a healthy democracy in Myanmar,” he said, referring to the country by its alternate name. “We want a brighter future for our people.” He asked the international community to support Burma’s reform path, noting that the transition is fraught with challenges.

Singapore, whose government-linked companies as well as private ones have invested heavily for years in Burma, obviously intends to play a major role in the country’s development. Thein Sein was in the island republic to sign a Singapore-Burma Technical Cooperation Agreement to cover technical assistance and training for the legal, banking, finance, trade, tourism and urban planning sectors.

Singapore will also provide English-language, technical and vocational education in an effort to help Burma emerge from decades of isolation and under-investment in manpower.

All through 2011, Burma took measures to release political prisoners, legalize its main opposition party and relax controls on media. These are all part of a package of reforms known as the “road map to democracy.” Skeptics are beginning to hope that this time it is real.

A top Burmese Information Ministry official recently said that he was enthusiastic about the pace of reform, saying that the country’s overhaul of human rights and the democratic process could well leave the rest of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) behind. The official cited Singapore and Malaysia as questioning—half in jest—why the country was in such a hurry.

As has been widely reported, Aung San Suu Kyi has re-registered her National League for Democracy (NLD). The NLD expects to contest April 1 by-elections for 48 seats that fell vacant when lawmakers were elevated to ministerial positions. Of the 48, 40 are for the 420-strong lower house, six for the upper house and two for regional assemblies.

While the number of constituencies the NLD is contesting seems small, it does set an important marker for representative democracy.

When queried about the wisdom of participating in a political framework defined by the military and stacked with regime proxies, the 66-year old Nobel Peace Price laureate was amazingly upbeat.

“Elements in the government genuinely desire reform ... if we wait only for solid guarantees, we can never proceed,” she told reporters. “We have to take risks. We need the courage to face a future that is really not known to us.”

Even if the NLD wins all the 40 lower house seats it contests in April, it would still barely wield 9.5 percent of the influence in Parliament. Suu Kyi’s sharp challenge to the recently cobbled Constitution may seem quixotic, but she carries disproportionate moral authority within the country and internationally. If and when she gets into Parliament, she would be the voice of the people despite the tiny share of the seats that is projected. Some say the president may offer her a senior government role.

On her first campaign tour to the coastal region of Tavoy (also known as Dawei), 615 km south of Rangoon last Sunday, Suu Kyi called for changes to the Constitution, which was put together to ensure the power of the military. The document reserves 25 percent of seats for the military, allows it to appoint cabinet ministers, to unilaterally declare a state of emergency and run many critical government functions.

Tavoy is where environmental activists protested successfully against the construction of a 4,000 megawatt coal-fired power plant that the president surprisingly canceled. Another 400 megawatt power plant is still on the drawing board as the region has been designated for major industrial projects including a deep-sea port, steel mill and petrochemical plant. Infrastructure of railways and highways are also planned to connect to Thailand.

“There are certain laws that are obstacles to the freedom of the people. We will strive to abolish these laws within the framework of parliament,” Suu Kyi told reporters. She has also called for transparency and accountability of government and wants an end to the military harassment of ethnic minorities.

The internal warring in Burma since 1948 has drained government finances, diverting budgets to military spending without resolution.

It has also led to abuses in the field and increasing disaffection among minorities. The alienation has allowed warlords in the provinces to build their own private armies to resist government forces and give cover for smuggling of timber, gemstones and heroin.

As the provinces are rich in natural resources, there is great economic incentive for the central government to seek access and control. Until there is an agreed platform to share benefits, resources will remain unharvested for development while all sides waste time on armed skirmishes. The people are caught in the middle.

The Lady, as Suu Kyi is affectionately known, has been consistent in not seeking the overthrow of the regime that disenfranchised her party. She advocates meaningful dialogue but insists on the continuation of economic sanctions by Western governments and international bodies like the United Nations.

Her insistence on blocking Western aid and trade has upset many local NGOs starved of funding for much-needed basic medical, rural agriculture and education programs. The sanctions have also delayed vital investment in infrastructure, hitting ordinary people the most.

She must be aware of the daily hardships suffered by Burma citizens but is keenly conscious that allowing premature withdrawal of economic sanctions will not push the democracy agenda forward but only prolong military rule. She opted to focus on democratic reform and getting the military back to barracks.

Suu Kyi’s unwavering stand may finally have convinced the junta that rehabilitating her could unlock desperately needed foreign investment, expertise, technology, aid and trade.

Thein Sein surprised citizens and political observers when he invited her to his official residence for a meeting on Aug. 19. He discussed the 7-point road map to democracy with her and pledged “step-by-step” progress, suggesting positive cooperation as the way forward.

Suu Kyi was then invited to the government-sponsored conference on macro-economic reforms where she was accorded VVIP status. The change of attitude was evident in the welcoming smiles of the generals and bureaucrats—many jostling for photo ops with her.

Another 600 NLD and other opposition members have been released from prisons. The government says there are no more “political prisoners” in detention, but many dissidents have been charged with “criminal activity” as defined by the military.

Suu Kyi’s meeting with the president was reported on front pages with pictures. The routine vitriolic commentary against her and her party has disappeared from the state press. Her portraits are openly displayed and sold on the streets along with T-shirts and NLD flags.

The Lady has taken the generals at their word. She has placed her trust in the “road map to democracy” at enormous risk to herself and her supporters. Asean’s strategy of “constructive engagement” seems to be finally yielding positive results, while the West’s sanctions add urgency.

Burma is due to assume the chairmanship of Asean in 2014. The world hopes to welcome the country as a responsible member of the international community before then.

**Q & A**

**1. How many political prisoners were released 13th January?**

299 political prisoners were released 13th January. At least 477 political prisoners have been released during the Burmese news government has taken office.

SOURCES: Amnesty International Press Release, 13 January 2012: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/myanmar-political-prisoner-release-major-step-gates-must-open-even-wider-20>

<http://www.aappb.org/Released%20299%20PPs%20on%20Jan%2013,%202012%20(update%20on%2019%20Jan).pdf>

**2. How many political prisoners still remain in prison?**

1547 political prisoners (Updated on January 12, 2011)

SOURCE: <http://www.aappb.org/prisoners6.html>

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) in Thailand has said as many as 1,000 political detainees might still be behind bars.

SOURCE: <http://www.mizzima.com/news/prisoner-watch/6417-how-many-political-prisoners-remain-in-jail.html>

**3. How many prisoners were used as human shields in conflict area in 2011?**

Altogether 1200 prisoners from approximately 12 prisons were used as human shields in conflict area by the government military.

SOURCE: report “Dead Men Walking”, page5-6, Human Rights Watch, July-2011 <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2011/07/12/dead-men-walking-0>

**4. How many female political prisoners are in Burma?**

177 (info for 2010)

SOURCE: <http://www.aappb.org/release164_eng.html>

145 (info for 2011)

SOURCE: <http://democracyforburma.wordpress.com/2011/07/13/nobel-aye-prominent-female-political-prisoner-in-burmadenied-visit-for-sending-letter/>

106 (info for 2010)

SOURCE: <http://www.freewebs.com/maisoong/FreeMySisterNOW.pdf>

**5. What is the maternal mortality rate of Burma? (maternal mortality is the death of a woman during or shortly after pregnancy)**

260 in 2003 (Maternal mortality rate means 260 death cases per 100 000 cases)

380 in 2008

SOURCE: <http://www.unicef.org/about/execboard/files/2010-CRR-Myanmar.pdf>

219 in 2008

SOURCE: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2010/apr/12/maternal-mortality-rates-millennium-development-goals>

240 in 2008

SOURCES: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2223.html>

<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.STA.MMRT>

**6. How many housewives have faced (domestic) violence?**

Around the world, at least one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused during her lifetime. Most often, the abuser is a member of her own family.

SOURCE: <http://domesticviolencestatistics.org/domestic-violence-statistics/>

Violence against women and girls is a problem of pandemic proportions. Based on country data available, up to 70 per cent of women experience physical or sexual violence from men in their lifetime the majority by husbands, intimate partners or someone they know.

SOURCE: <http://saynotoviolence.org/issue/facts-and-figures>

90% of Palaung women suffer from domestic violence

SOURCE: <http://www.nd-burma.org/hr-reports/member-report/item/83-voices-for-change.html>

**7. How many women were raped by Burmese soldiers in Kachin state during conflict started in Jun 9, 2011?**

37 were raped and 13 killed.

SOURCE: <http://www.kachinwomen.com/images/stories/publication/repor_%20book.pdf>

**8. How many children and women from Burma are trafficked per year?**

25000 - 30000 in 2010

SOURCE: UNCIEF

**9. How many women representatives are in the Burmese parliament**?

20 which is 3%

SOURCE: <http://www.mizzima.com/edop/interview/4953-women-in-parliament.html>

**10. How many women were elected in 2010 election?**

45 (3.8%) female were elected in the 2010 election.

SOURCE: ALTSEN:<http://www.altsean.org/Docs/PDF%20Format/Issues%20and%20Concerns/Issues%20and%20Concerns%20Vol%206.pdf>, p. 13.

**11. What percent of women reach a secondary or higher level of education?**

18% of adult Myanmar women reached a secondary or higher level of education compared to 17.6% of their male counterparts.

SOURCE: UNDP report

**12. What percent of women participate in labor market?**

Female participation in labor market is 63.1% compared to 85.1% for men.

SOURCE: UNDP report and <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/myanmar/labor-participation-rate-female-percent-of-female-population-ages-15-plus--wb-data.html>

**13. How many new IDPs have been displaced in Southern and Eastern Burma since the new Gov took office?**

112,000 new IDPs have been displaced.

SOURCES: http://www.tbbc.org/resources/resources.htm#idps

http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/KRCMR-2011-11-red.pdf

**14. How many IDPs are there in Eastern and Southern Burma in total?**

450,000 IDPs in total

SOURCES: http://www.tbbc.org/resources/resources.htm#idps

http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/KRCMR-2011-11-red.pdf

**15. How many refugees and IDPs are in Kachin State?**

About 60,000 refugees in Kachin State

SOURCE: Kachin Independent Organization (Jan 17, 2012)

**16. What is the general population of refugees living in camps (Umphiem, Mae La, Noe Poe, Mae La Oon, Mae Ra Moe, Htam Hina and Don Yang) along the Thai-Burma border?**

142,201 refugees who live in 7 refugee camps

SOURCES: http://www.tbbc.org/resources/resources.htm#idps

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/KRCMR-2011-11-red.pdf>

**17. How many Burmese refugee camps are on the Thai-Burma border?**

10 camps:

Ban Mai Nai Soi

Wieng Hang

Ban Mae Surin

Mae La Oon

Ma Ra Ma Luang

Mae La

Nu Po

Ban Don Yang

Tham Hin

Umpiem Mai

SOURCE: <http://www.tbbc.org/>

**18. How many villages have been destroyed since the new Gov has taken office?**

103 villages in Southern and Eastern part of Burma

SOURCES: http://www.tbbc.org/resources/resources.htm#idps

http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/KRCMR-2011-11-red.pdf

**19. How many migrant workers are in neighboring countries (Malaysia and Thailand)?**

Over 2 million in Thailand

500,000 in Malaysia

SOURCES: <http://burmacampaignmalay.blogspot.com/2011/01/migrant-rights-no.html>

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/05/17/flawed-math-behind-burmese-democracy>

**20. How many military battalions (Infantry battalion, Light Infantry Battalion, Artillery Battalion and Border Guard Force) are at present in Southern and Eastern part of Burma?**

250 military battalions including Infantry battalion, Light Infantry Battalion, Artillery Battalion and Border Guard Force present in Eastern and Southern part of Burma.

SOURCES: http://www.tbbc.org/resources/resources.htm#idps

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/KRCMR-2011-11-red.pdf>

**21. How many Burmese organizations base at Thai border?**

The Burmese exile community in Thailand is estimated to consist of more than 200 affiliated organizations.

SOURCE: <http://www.wikileaks.ch/cable/2008/05/08BANGKOK1348.html> (<http://hlaoo1980.blogspot.com/2011/09/burmese-exiles-in-thailand.html>)

**22. How many Burmese migrant workers are in Mae Sot?**

An estimated 120,000 migrant workers live in the Thai border town of Mae Sot. Most work in garment factories, seen as the best of a few bad choices. Others have to take dirty and dangerous jobs processing fish or spraying crops, where abuses, including beating and enslavement, are reportedly most common. Garment-workers say they typically take home about 70 baht ($2) a day, less than half the legal minimum wage. They dispute employers’ claims that the discrepancy reflects the cost of food and lodging.

SOURCE: <http://www.economist.com/node/13334070>

**23. How many Burmese migrant schools are in Tak provision, Thailand?**

There are 62 migrant schools in the Tak provision, Thailand. (year 2008)

<http://www.vso.org.uk/Images/migrant-schools-a-human-rights-perspective_tcm79-23048.pdf>

**24. What is the population of Burma?**

53 999 804 = 54 millions (July 2011 est.)

SOURCE: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

**25. How many divisions and military force have the government used in defensive war to Kachin state?**

They used 8 divisions such as (22), (33), (44), (55), (66), (77), (88), (99). There have been used 35, 000 troops and they use over 1/3 of the whole military force.

SOURCE: http://photayokeking.org/hot-news/847-shanglawtshiga

**26. How many soldiers are in the Burmese army?**

The Myanmar Army has strength over 400 000

SOURCES: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1666978,00.html>

<http://www.dvb.no/news/war-office-sets-out-ambitious-army-plan/16661>

**27. How many child soldiers are in Burma?**

About 70,000 child soldiers under the age of 18 are in Burmese army. The ethnic armies also use child soldiers (estimation between 2 000 – 20 000).

SOURCE: <http://www.hrw.org/news/2002/10/15/burma-worlds-highest-number-child-soldiers> (2002)

<http://uscampaignforburma.org/learn-about-burma/attacks-eastern-burma/child-soldiers/>

**28. What percent of Burmese citizens live under the poverty line?**

32,7 % (year 2007)

SOURCE: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

**29. What percent of Burmese people live with HIV?**

0 .61% / 238,000 people are living with HIV in Myanmar in 2009

SOURCE: Union of Myanmar report to UNGASS 2010

<http://www.unaids.org/en/dataanalysis/monitoringcountryprogress/2010progressreportssubmittedbycountries/myanmar_2010_country_progress_report_en.pdf>

**30. Which ethnic groups have the biggest populations in Burma, and how big are these populations in terms of percentages of the country’s entire population?**

Population of approximately 57 million made up of over 100 ethnic groups. The most predominant are the Burman (68 %), Shan (9%), Karen (7 %), Rahkine (4%), Chinese (3%), Mon and Indian (2%).

SOURCE: Open Society Institute, “Burma, Country in Crisis,” October 2005, [http://www3.soros.org](http://www3.soros.org/)

**31. What percent of the budget does the government spend annually on health care, education and the military?**

Education 4,1 % = 314 billion kyat ($349 million)

Health care 1,3 %

Military defense is 19.48 %

SOURCES: <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/03/29/burma-disastrous>

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2011/03/01/myanmar-allocates-14-new-budget-military.html>

http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art\_id=20901&page=2

**32. What is the official exchange rate of kyat set by government? And what is the rate at black market?**

Government set the exchange rate: 1 dollar = 6 kyats (black market is 1 dollar = 700 to 1000 kyats)

[SOURCE: //www.bur.irrawaddy.org/index.php/news/6923-2011-07-26-11-02-32](http://www.bur.irrawaddy.org/index.php/news/6923-2011-07-26-11-02-32)

<http://www.atimes.com/atimes/southeast_asia/mi01ae02.html>

**33. Who said: “Concepts such as truth, justice and compassion cannot be dismissed as trite when these are often the only bulwarks which stand against ruthless power.”?**

Daw Aung San Su Kyi

SOURCE: http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Aung\_San\_Suu\_Kyi

**34. How much were the foreign investments in Myanmar in 2011?**

In November 2011 foreign investment in Myanmar hit 40.424 billion U.S. dollars since 1988. It is in 456 projects (62 projects is Chinese).

SOURCE: Xinhua <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2011-12/23/c_131324128.htm>

**35. What countries are the biggest investors in Myanmar?**

There are 31 countries investing in Myanmar, China led with 13.947 billion U.S. dollars accounting for 34.5 percent, followed by Thailand with 9.568 billion U.S. dollars, China's Hong Kong with 6.308 billion U.S. dollars, South Korea with 2.938 billion U.S. dollars, Britain with 2.659 billion U.S. dollars and Singapore with 1.818 billion U.S. dollars.

SOURCE: Xinhua <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2011-12/23/c_131324128.htm>

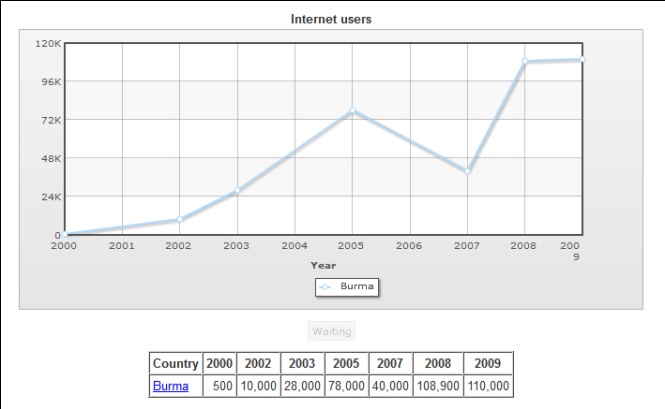
**36. How many industrial zones is the new government going to build for persuading the foreign investment?**

For intending to persuade the foreign investment, the five new industrial zones are about to be built in Kayin state's Hpa-an, Mon state's Phaya Thongzu, Shan state's Namphaka and Muse, and Rakhine state's Ponnagyun.

SOURCE: <http://euro-burma.eu/doc/2011_News_-_12_-_December.pdf>

**37. How many people or what percentage of the population of Myanmar were using the internet in 2011?**

There are 400,000 Internet users (0.8% of the population) in Myanmar, 2010.

SOURCE:<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_in_Burma#cite_note-bw-13>

**38. How many broadcasting media is in Burma? And what is the situation of international media access in Myanmar?**

Government controls all domestic broadcast media; 2 state-controlled television stations with 1 of the stations controlled by the armed forces; a third TV channel, a pay-TV station, is a joint state-private venture; access to satellite TV is limited; 1 state-controlled domestic radio station and 6 FM stations that are joint state-private ventures; transmissions of several international broadcasters are available in parts of Burma; the opposition-backed station Democratic Voice of Burma broadcasts into Burma via shortwave.

SOURCE: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

**39. How many land line telephone and mobile cellular phone users are in Myanmar?**

There are 604,700 land lines in used and 594,000 mobile cellular phone user in 2010. SOURCE: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

**40. How many megawatts would produce the Dawei Project of Italian-Thai company?**

The project would be 4000 megawatt coal-fired power plant.

SOURCE: <http://www.mizzima.com/news/inside-burma/6379-coal-power-plant-in-dawei-cancelled.html>

**41. How many constituencies are limited for by-election? And in which constituencies will the NLD compete?**

48 constituencies (means 48 seats) are limited for by election and the NLD will compete in all of these constituencies for all 48 seats.

SOURCE: <http://burma.irrawaddy.org/archives/4714>

**42. How many seats are available in by-election 2012?**

48 seats, 40 in lower house, 6 in upper house and 2 in regional assemblies

SOURCE: <http://www.eurasiareview.com/13012012-burma-by-elections-and-the-national-league-for-democracy-nld-analysis/>

**43. How many seats are in the Burmese parliament?**

664 seats - 440 seats in House of Representatives and 224 in House of Nationalities and 657 seats in Regional Assembly

SOURCE: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pyidaungsu_Hluttaw>

**44. How many political parties are there in Myanmar which competed in 2010 election?**

37 political parties (47 were registered)

SOURCE: <http://www.altsean.org/Docs/PDF%20Format/Issues%20and%20Concerns/Issues%20and%20Concerns%20Vol%206.pdf>

**45. How many seats in parliament will be elected by people according the Constitution?**

The Nationalities Parliament (Amyotha Hluttaw) is composed of 224 seats, but only 168 seats will be elected by the people, withy 56 seats making up military appointments.

The People's Parliament (Pyithu Hluttaw) is composed of 440 seats, but only 330 seats will be elected by the people in 330 constituencies, which are defined in accord with the 330 townships of the country. The rest of the seats will be for military.

SOURCE: “Consitutience at the National, State and Division Levels,” Wednesday, March 24 2010 http://election.irrawaddy.org/population-data/184-burma-population-data.html

**46. Who were the signatories of Panglong Agreement?**

**Burmese Government:**  
Aung San

**Kachin Committee:**  
Sinwa Naw, Myitkyina  
Zaurip, Myitkyina  
Dinra Tang, Myitkyina  
Zau La, Bhamo  
Zau Lawn, Bhamo  
Labang Grong, Bhamo

**Chin Committee:**  
Pu Hlur Hmung, Falam  
Pu Thawng Za Khup, Tiddim  
Pu Kio Mang, Haka

**Shan Committee:**  
Saohpalong of Tawngpeng State.  
Saohpalong of Yawnghwe State.  
Saohpalong of North Hsenwi State.  
Saohpalong of Laihka State.  
Saohpalong of Mong Pawn State.  
Saohpalong of Hsamonghkam State  
Representative of Hsahtung Saohpalong. Hkun Pung  
U Tin E  
U Htun Myint  
U Kya Bu  
Hkun Saw  
Sao Yape Hpa  
Hkun Htee

SOURCE: “Panglong Agreement,” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panglong_Agreement#SIGNATORIES>

**47. Which laws or acts are necessary to increase foreign direct investment and the development of Myanmar economy?**

**First priority**

Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (1947)

Myanmar Central Bank Law (1990)

Myanmar Financial Institution Law (1990)

**Second priority (Investment Sector)**

Union of Myanmar Foreign Investment Law (1988)

State-owned Enterprises Law (1989)

Myanmar Citizen Investment Law (1990)

**Third Priority (Trade Sector)**

Control of Import and Export Temporary Act (1947)

Essential Supply and Service Act (1947)

SOURCE: “Propose Foreign Currency and Investment Laws priority to Repeal,” The Voice Weekly, December 19-25, 2011, p.24

**48. How many townships are in Burma?**

Burma was formed with 325 townships, but the construction of the new capital in Naypyidaw created five new townships in Mandalay Division (so now 330)

SOURCE: “Consitutience at the National, State and Division Levels,” Wednesday, March 24 2010 <http://election.irrawaddy.org/population-data/184-burma-population-data.html>

**49. With how many countries does Myanmar have diplomatic relations?**

Bosnia and Herzegovina has become the 104th country with which Myanmar has established diplomatic relation

SOURCE: <http://www.myanmar.com/newspaper/nlm/Sep01_12.html>

**50. How long will the Shwe-gas** **gas-pipeline be?**

2,800 kilometer long  
SOURCE: <http://www.shwe.org/campaign-update/shwe-gas-movement-press-release-irrawady-dam-suspended-shwe-gas-project-should-be-next/>

**51. How many dollars will the Burmese government earn from the Shwe-gas pipeline project within 30 years?**

$ 29 billion   
SOURCE: <http://www.shwe.org/campaign-update/shwe-gas-movement-press-release-irrawady-dam-suspended-shwe-gas-project-should-be-next/> 

**52. How much land area is used to grow poppies in Burma?**

Myanmar now grows about 26,800 hectares of poppies. Total land area of Myanmar is 67.65 million hectares (261200 sq miles). 16.89 million hectares were suitable for cultivation in 2009, as reported by the World Bank.

SOURCE: <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011npc/2011-03/10/content_12146210.htm>

**53. How many years (on average) do people older than 15 years study in Burma? (What is the average of schooling of adult population?)**

2.8 (in the year 2000)

(DEFINITION: “[Average years of schooling of adults](http://www.nationmaster.com/graph-T/edu_ave_yea_of_sch_of_adu)” is the years of formal schooling received, on average, by adults over age 15.)

SOURCE: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTEDUCATION/EXTDATASTATISTICS/EXTEDSTATS/0,,contentMDK:21218180~menuPK:4324130~pagePK:64168445~piPK:64168309~theSitePK:3232764,00.html>

**54. How many children are out of the primary school in Burma?**

487,384 (year 2005)

(DEFINITION: Children out of school are the number of primary-school-age children not enrolled in primary or secondary school.)

SOURCE: <http://www.nationmaster.com/time.php?stat=edu_chi_out_of_sch_pri&country=bm>

**55. What percentage of school-aged girls are out of schools in Burma?**

29%

SOURCE: UNESCO Institute for Statistics <http://www.nationmaster.com/country/bm-burma/edu-education>

**56. How many years does primary education take in Burma?**

5 years

(DEFINITION: Duration of primary [education](http://www.nationmaster.com/cat/Education) is the number of grades (or years) in primary [education](http://www.nationmaster.com/cat/Education).)

SOURCE: UNESCO <http://www.nationmaster.com/country/bm-burma/edu-education>

**57. What is the percentage of illiteracy in Burma?**

10,1 % (above 15 years) (2006 est.)

SOURCE: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

**58. What percent of children complete primary education in Burma?**

Less than 60 percent of children complete the full cycle of primary education. According to some international figures, 45 percent of children in Burma initially enrolled in school failed to complete fourth grade, while 19 percent drop out at the end of the first grade.

SOURCE: <http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=20954>