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Chapter 1

Country Overview

Country Overview

BURMA (MYANMAR)

The military authorities ruling this country have changed the historic name - Burma - to Union of Myanmar or Myanmar. Although the new name is used in conventional practice today, it was never endorsed by a sitting legislature. CountryWatch references this country by both the historic and conventional names in its materials, however, the lack of legitimization in regard to the conventional usage should be duly noted.

Britain conquered Burma in 1824 and annexed it into its Indian Empire towards the end of the 19th century. Located in Southeastern Asia between Bangladesh and Thailand, Burma gained its independence from Britain in 1948. Following a period of stability under a democratic, parliamentary government, constitutional disputes and persistent division among political and ethnic groups contributed to the government's weak hold on power.

A coup in 1962 abolished the constitution and established a military government with socialist policies. Since then, Burma has been under military rule. Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won a landslide victory in the country's elections of 1990 but was never allowed to take power, and Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1991, spent most of the last decade under house arrest for her political efforts. (See Note below). Elections in 2010 were intended to return the country to good standing in the global community although Burma's record on this front remains mixed.

Burma is endowed with fertile soil and has important offshore oil and gas deposits. It is also the world's largest exporter of teak and a principal source of jade, pearls, rubies and sapphires. However, long-term economic mismanagement under military rule has prevented the economy from developing in line with its potential. The country suffers from pervasive government controls, inefficient economic policies, and widespread poverty.

Editor's Note:

Born in 1945, Aung San Suu Kyi was the daughter of Burma's independence hero, General Aung San, who was assassinated in 1947. Suu Kyi was educated at Oxford University in the United Kingdom. In the 1980s, when she returned to Burma (also known as Myanmar), she became embroiled in popular unrest against the ruling dictator of the time, Ne Win. In 1989, as the military junta declared martial law, Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest. Nevertheless, Suu Kyi's

National League for Democracy won a landslide victory in the country's elections a year later in 1990. She was never allowed to take power and the military junta -- which controlled Myanmar (Burma) for decades -- refused to transition the country to civilian democratic rule.

Once known as State Law and Order Restoration Council, or SLORC, the leadership body of the ruling military junta changed its name to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 1997. Although landmark elections were held in 2010, they were boycotted by Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy and condemned by the international community for being a sham, aimed only at reinforcing the power of the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party. Nevertheless, the military authorities of Burma (Myanmar) have insisted that the elections were emblematic of Burma's (Myanmar's) transition from military rule to a civilian democracy.

For her part, Aung San Suu Kyi has spent most of the last decade under house arrest for her political efforts, which were aimed at pressing the ruling forces on the return to legitimate and transparent democracy. Although she was released for a short period of time in the mid-1990s with limited freedom, by the year 2000, Suu Kyi was subjected to almost continuous detention until her release in November 2010. Even after her arrest, she was not allowed to contest the 2010 elections.

In 2013, there has been a thrust for change and reform in Burma (Myanmar), largely attributable to emerging engagement with the Obama administration in the United States. One consequence of that path toward more meaningful political reform has been the inclusion of Aung San Suu Kyi in the political process. In addition to the re-registering her National League for Democracy as a legitimate political party was the fact that Suu Kyi would contest the 2012 parliamentary by-elections. By the start of April 2012, Suu Kyi re-entered the realm of elected politics having won a seat in the country's parliament.

For her steadfast efforts to advance legitimate and transparent democracy in Burma (Myanmar), Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991.

Key Data

Key Data	
Region:	Asia
Population:	56320208
Climate:	Tropical monsoon; cloudy, rainy, hot, humid summers (southwest monsoon, June to Sept.); less cloudy, scant rainfall, mild temperatures, lower humidity during winter (northeast monsoon, Dec. to April)
Languages:	Burmese
Currency:	1 kyat (K) = 100 pyas
Holiday:	Independence Day is 4 January (1948), Martyr's Day is 19 July
Area Total:	678500
Area Land:	657740
Coast Line:	1930

Burma (Myanmar)

Country Map



Asia

Regional Map



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Chapter 2

Political Overview

History

Editor's Note:

The military authorities ruling this country have changed the historic name - Burma - to Union of Myanmar or Myanmar. Although the new name is used in conventional practice today, it was never endorsed by a sitting legislature. CountryWatch references this country by both the historic and conventional names in its materials, however, the lack of legitimization in regard to the conventional usage should be duly noted.

Early History

Between the first century before the common era (B.C.E.) and the ninth century of the common era (C.E.), speakers of Tibeto-Burman languages known as the Pyu were establishing city-kingdoms in Burma (now known as Myanmar). To the south of the Pyu lived the Mon who founded the ancient city of Thaton, and they became dominant in southern Burma during this period.

Between the first and fourth centuries C.E., the overland trade route between China and India passed through Burma's borders, and as a result, Thaton's prosperity and importance increased. While the Indian merchants brought with them precious cargoes, they also brought to Burma their religious, political and legal ideas. This influx of foreign influence, however, did not change Burma. Given its geographic isolation-surrounded by mountains on three sides and the sea on a fourth-Burma was able to withstand assimilation and keep its culture largely intact.

In mid-11th century, Anawrhta came to the throne in northern Burma and the core of modern-day Burma had been united into a single kingdom centered at Pagan. Late in the 13th century, the Pagan kingdom was divided and in 1486 the Ava dynasty was firmly established. The Ava dynasty put its priority on unifying the Burmese, Shan and Mon peoples of the region, but internal disunity left this goal unrealized.

By the end of the 16th century, the Ava dynasty was resurrected, which led to the unification of

Burma in the 17th century. Meanwhile, the British and the Dutch came to Burma vying with the Portuguese and the French for dominance of the region. During the next century, Burma was at war with all these European powers and with Siam (now Thailand) and China as well.

In the 19th century, there were three Anglo-Burmese wars with the British invading Burma for its wealth. In the 1819 war, the British obtained some Burmese territory, and in 1852 the British controlled the lower Burma.

In 1885, Burma was finally annexed to the British Empire and became a province of India, a colony of the British itself. The British colonization of Burma decimated Burmese society. The British sent Thibaw, the last Burmese king, into exile, and eliminated the Burmese monarchy. Initiation of the British political system in Burma put an end to the distinct traditional social system of the country.

The Push for Independence

Refusing to accept the British victory as final, many Burmese joined guerrilla wars led by former officers of the Burmese royal army against the British colonial rule. By 1890, the military fight was over with the British as victors.

In 1906, the Burmese who attended new schools founded the Young Men's Buddhist Association, also known as the YMBA. In 1920, when it was found that Burma was excluded from new constitutional reforms introduced in India, the leaders of the YMBA led the Burmese people in a nationwide protest fighting for independence.

The constitutional reforms were finally granted to Burma in 1923, but the leaders of the independence movement were split because of different views. A radical student group of the University of Rangoon began organizing protests known as the "Thakin Movement." Late in 1930s, the Burmese peasants also rose in rebellion.

In 1936, the university students led by Thakin Nu and Aung San (father of present-day National Democracy League general secretary, Aung San Suu Kyi) went on strike again and they later joined the Thakin Movement. Consequently, the British government separated Burma from India and granted it a constitution, thus providing some measure of self-government in 1937.

During World War II, the Burmese leaders at first relied on Japan for its independence. When the Japanese troops reached Thailand in December 1941, they promised independence for Burma, but instead of implementing their promise, the Japanese occupied Burma by the end of 1942.

In March 1945, Aung San and his army joined the British side. In the meantime, Aung San and the Thakins formed a coalition of political parties called the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League, or AFPEL.

After the Japanese were defeated in Burma in May 1945, the British military administration and members of the pre-war government who returned from exile demanded that Aung San be tried as a traitor. In regard of Aung San's popular support, the Allied Commander in Southeast Asia, Lord Mountbatten, appointed the more conciliatory Sir Hubert Rance to head the administration.

When the war ended, the military administration withdrew and the former civilian governor who formed a cabinet consisting of older and more conservative politicians replaced Rance. The new administration arrested Aung San and charged him with treason. To calm down the popular anger and possible rebellion for Aung San's arrest, the British government replaced the governor with Rance again. Rance formed a new cabinet including Aung San, and they began discussion for a peaceful transfer of power as well as Burma's independence.

In June 1947, the British agreed to Burma's independence and its departure from the Commonwealth. However, these agreements met with opposition from the communists and conservatives in the AFPEL. The communists went underground. In July, gunmen sent by the former Prime Minister U Saw assassinated Aung San and most members of his cabinet. Thakin Nu became new leader of the AFPEL and he formed a new cabinet.

On Jan. 4, 1948, Burma finally became a sovereign, independent republic. In 1950, Nu, along with Prime Minister Nehru of India, President Sukarno of Indonesia, President Tito of Yugoslavia and President Nasser of Egypt, co-founded the Movement of Non-Aligned States. Despite desperate need for peace after independence, Burma was not to see peace in its new republic.

Recent History

Although the AFPEL consolidated its control of the government, uprisings by the communists, ethnic minorities and members of the former government continued. There were also disagreements within the AFPEL itself, and as a result, the AFPEL split in 1958. Amid the rumor of a military takeover, U Nu (called Thakin Nu in the past) invited Ne Win, the army chief of staff, to be the premier.

In 1960, U Nu returned to office with an absolute majority in the general elections. Conflict was, however, brewing as U Nu's policies were at odds with the military, most especially in regard to democratic rule and the Buddhist religion.

In March 1962, Ne Win led a coup d'etat and arrested U Nu. He suspended the 1947 constitution

and organized a Revolutionary Council consisting of senior military officers. With its purpose of making Burma a truly socialist state, Burma Socialist Program Party, or BSPP, the one-party system was established.

In April 1972, Ne Win and other members of the Revolutionary Council retired from the army, but they still retained positions in the BSPP. In January 1974 the new constitution was promulgated and the new government took office in March with U Ne Win (as he was called after leaving the army) as president.

U Ne Win retired as president and chairman of the Council of State in November 1981 but remained in power until July 1988, when he resigned as chairman of the BSPP amid violent protests in the country. Throughout the 1980s, because of the failing socialist policies, student and worker unrest erupted periodically.

In September 1988, amid the intensified protests, the armed forces led by General Saw Maung seized control of the government. Demonstrations were suppressed by the military, and thousands of unarmed protesters were killed. Martial law was imposed over most of the country, and a new government organization, the State Law and Order Restoration Council, or SLORC, was established with Saw Maung as the chairman and prime minister.

In May 1990, the first multiparty elections were held in Burma, and the opposition party called the National League for Democracy (NLD) won with a landslide victory. The NLD was led by Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of the slain Aung San. Despite the NLD's overwhelming victory, the SLORC prevented the democratically elected government from taking office since. Over a decade later, Burma remains under military rule.

Note on History: In certain entries, open source content from the State Department Background Notes and Country Guides have been used. A full listing of sources is available in the Bibliography.

Political Conditions

Editor's Note:

The former military authorities that ruled this country changed the historic name - Burma - to Union of Myanmar or Myanmar. Although the new name is used in conventional practice today, it was never endorsed by a sitting legislature. CountryWatch references this country by both the

historic and conventional names in its materials, however, the lack of legitimization in regard to the conventional usage should be duly noted.

Late 1980s to early 1990s

Present day political conditions or disharmony in Burma (also known as Myanmar) find its epicenter in 1988. In that year, as a result of an unsuccessful socialist policy, civil unrest reverberated throughout the country.

On Sept. 18, 1988, a coup d'etat initiated by the military and the State Law and Order Restoration Council, or SLORC, was formed, resulting in all state organs, including the legislature, judiciary and cabinet, being abolished. Demonstrations were banned, a curfew was imposed, and the country was placed under martial law.

Despite these measures, opposition movements protested, and a bloody massacre involving the deaths of thousands of protestors ensued.

Once some stability had been recovered, the regime military pledged to hold multi-party elections when law and order was established, and in the interim, it allowed the formation of new political parties. Two principal parties emerged. One was the National Unity Party, or NUP, which was essentially a renamed and refurbished version of the one party-system that emerged in 1962 -- Burma Socialist Program Party or BSPP. The other was the National League for Democracy or NLD.

In 1989, the name of the country was changed by the military authorities to the "Union of Myanmar" (Myanma Naing-ngan) on the grounds that the previous title conveyed the impression that the population consisted solely of ethnic Burmese. The name change, however, was never legitimized by the country's assembly in any equivalent of a parliamentary procedure.

As well, the SLORC formed a nine-member government, with Saw Maung as the leader. Although the SLORC announced its intention to act as an interim body until the democratic election of a permanent government, it prevented public gatherings, and placed a number of political activists under house arrest, including NLD leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. The SLORC based the rationale for these arrests upon the "endangerment of the State."

Nevertheless, multi-party elections were held a year later, in 1990. The results showed that the NLD had won a clear victory with almost 60 percent of the votes cast, and the acquisition of 396 of the 485 seats being contested.

The NLD then demanded that the process toward popular rule be initiated. The SLORC, however,

refused to relinquish control. It claimed that the election was not intended to provide a legislature, but a constituent assembly. This constituent assembly was to draft a constitution establishing "strong government," which would then have to be approved by the SLORC before the transfer of power could take place.

Further protests followed and resulted in the death of four protestors, including two Buddhist monks. By early 1991, a number of opposition groups and parties were banned and the vice-chairman of the SLORC, Than Shwe, officially announced that the military regime would not transfer power to the constituent assembly, as the political activists and parties involved were "subversive" and "unfit to rule." Over the next while, more than 80 elected representatives of the constituent assembly had been killed, imprisoned or forced in to exile, by the SLORC.

In the latter part of 1991, despite her party having won the election the year before, Aung San Suu Kyi remained under house arrest. In November, she won the Noble Peace Prize for her relentless effort to democratize Burma (or Myanmar). She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize "in absentia," and the presentation of the award in Norway symbolized de facto recognition of the democratically elected representatives of the country, in the eyes of the international community.

Spurred by this international recognition, another student demonstration ensued, in protest of Aung San Suu Kyi's continued detention. Thousands of people were then sent to re-education camps and Amnesty International announced that a total of 1,500 persons had been detained by the SLORC.

In 1992, Than Shwe replaced Saw Maung and became the new leader of the SLORC. The SLORC continued to refuse the convention of the elected government, keeping Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest. Than Shwe also announced that he would be meeting with her personally to discuss her future. A meeting with opposition representatives took place that year on the matter of the new constitution. For their part, the opposition parties described the meeting as "a lecture" laden with heavy recriminations for daring to criticize the SLORC.

By early 1993, the SLORC responded negatively to what it perceived as continued "opposition intransigence" and suspended all further conciliatory measures. Another round of summary arrests followed.

In 1994, further guidelines for the constitution were adopted. Significantly, the constitution initiated reforms, which would make it impossible for Aung San Suu Kyi to take power, stipulating the inclusion of representatives of the military within all branches of government, and granting legitimacy to future military takeovers.

Later that year, after a series of official visits from members of the United States Congress and mediation between the SLORC and a senior Buddhist monk, it was announced that Aung San Suu Kyi would be released following the completion of the new constitution.

In early 1995, the SLORC held talks with an envoy of the United Nations secretary-general. Following this event, 31 political prisoners were released, and Aung San Suu Kyi was finally discharged from house arrest. It was widely believed that her release was enacted in order to placate international opinion and to attract foreign investment.

Mid-1990s to Late 1990s

Following her release, Suu Kyi made a conciliatory speech urging a spirit of compromise between democracy activists and the military dictatorship; however, she cautioned the international community against any hasty rapprochement with the SLORC.

Then, the United Nations published a report claiming that the SLORC was using forced labor for infrastructure projects. The SLORC denied the accusation stating that it was a Buddhist tradition to donate one's labor.

In 1996, the United Nations issued a further report claiming that forced labor, as well as arbitrary executions, torture and rape by the military, was widespread in Burma (also known as Myanmar). Further charges were also directed against the military dictatorship over the persecution of ethnic minorities.

In 1998, an investigation by the United Nation's International Labor Organization, or ILO, concluded with the condemnation of the government of Burma (also known as Myanmar) to treat the civilian population as an unlimited pool of unpaid forced laborers and servants. The ILO banned the country from participating in its activities and receiving assistance in 1999.

In view of its continuing violation of human rights by using forced labor, in March 2000, the ILO decided to take drastic measures against Burma (also known as Myanmar) under the ILO constitution. The Myanmar government again denied the charge saying that the ILO's action was politically motivated, unjust, and that it ignored the positive steps taken by the country regarding labor affairs.

For their part, the SLORC continued to marginalize Aung San Suu Kyi, and refused to open talks with the NLD and other opposition parties. In addition, the SLORC methodically eliminated all opposition groups, and in 1996, it arrested several hundred members of the NLD to prevent them from convening in private. Other measures included the disconnection of Aung San Suu Kyi's telephone line, in order to prevent her from delivering her weekly speech, and the establishment of a roadblock, with the purpose of preventing other forms of public access to her speeches.

Late in 1996, the largest pro-democracy movement took place since the massacre in 1988.

Although the crowd dispersed peacefully, in early 1997, 14 people, including five members of the NLD, were convicted of involvement in the unrest. They were sentenced to imprisonment for seven years. In 1997, the military presence of the government forced tens of thousands of people to flee the country, and Aung San Suu Kyi's freedom of movement and association were once again restricted. Another bout of arrests followed with harsh sentences being imposed on more NLD members.

Later that year, however, under pressure from the United States and the European Union, the SLORC allowed a meeting of up to 700 NLD members to take place. On Nov. 15, 1997, the SLORC was dissolved, and an immediate replacement was created called the State Peace and Development Council, or SPDC. Despite the inclusion of some younger military personnel in the SPDC, most senior officials of the former SLORC retained their positions. Than Shwe continued to act as the leader of the new "advisory council." In December 1997 the SPDC announced a further cabinet reshuffle.

The name change and cabinet reorganization were perceived as efforts to gain international approval. Similarly, in 1998, the day before the anniversary of the bloody massacre, the government invited Aung San Suu Kyi for talks with the home affairs minister. It was speculated that the invitation was due to international pressure, particularly by an eight-nation appeal to begin dialogue with the pro-democracy movement.

In June 1998, the NLD demanded the government convene the parliament that had been democratically elected in the election, setting a deadline of 60 days. This demand was ignored by the military government. In September 1998, the NLD unilaterally formed the 10-member Committee Representing the People's Parliament, or CRPP, and set up the "People's Parliament."

In July 1999, the Myanmar government called for cooperation from the NLD by retracting its 10-member CRPP. The government said that the committee's declaration it would act as an interim parliament would not lead to a stable democracy, but to institutional confusion, social chaos and genuine political crisis. The government stressed that it had been in the process of exchanging views with a number of NLD members since September 1998. But in the eyes of the NLD, the biggest difference for the dialogue issue between the government and the NLD was the NLD insisting on the inclusion in dialogue of Aung San Suu Kyi and the government sticking to the exclusion of her.

In 1999, the NLD showed signs of internal dispute when several hundred members of the NLD resigned reportedly due to pressure from the SPDC. In January, the NLD filed a lawsuit against the military intelligence for forcing its members to resign. In March, another 145 members of the NLD were detained and pressured to resign. The British Broadcasting Corporation reported in May 1999 that there was a split in the party when 25 members called for dialogue with the military leadership and criticized the leadership of the NLD and its policies. The NLD leaders accused the dissidents

of being "lackeys" for the military government.

Throughout 1998 and early 1999, the SPDC continued to suppress pro-democracy demonstrators as well as ethnic minorities engaged in rebel activity. The Spanish news agency, *EFE*, reported that in 1998, over 3000 people were killed in conflicts during pro-democracy demonstrations. In February 1999, 300 pro-democracy activists, including more than 200 students, received harsh jail sentences of seven and 14 years.

It was also reported that from May 1998 more than 400 Shan villagers had died from the poisoning of the Pawn River by SPDC soldiers. The Shan are one of several ethnic minority groups, such as the Mo, Karen and the Kareni, that have been engaged in rebel activity against the SPDC. Over the course of 1998 and 1999, it had been reported that members of the ethnic rebel groups had been surrendering to the SPDC, including 150 of the Mong Tai Army in October and December 1998. In January, several thousand Myanmarese soldiers began an offensive against these groups near the western border of Thailand.

Developments in 2000

In early 2000, there were reports of anti-government ethnic armed groups surrendering to the SPDC. In January 2000, 42 members of the three anti-government armed groups in Burma or Myanmar surrendered to the SPDC. These three groups were the Shan-State United Revolutionary Army, or SURA, All Burma Students' Democratic Front, or ABSDF, and Kayin National Union, or KNU.

In early February 2000, 74 remnant members of the Mong Tai Army, also known as MTA, surrendered to the government. Up to now, a total of 17 anti-government ethnic armed groups as well as the MTA, led by former drug warlord Khun Sa, have reached cease-fire agreements with the Myanmar government.

The death of Aung San Suu Kyi's British husband, Michael Aris, brought additional attention to the situation in Burma or Myanmar. He was dying of prostate cancer but was denied a visa to visit Aung San Suu Kyi, whom he had not seen in three years. The SPDC received considerable international pressure to grant the visa but claimed that they believed him to be too ill to travel. The SPDC offered Aung San Suu Kyi a visa to travel to the United Kingdom to visit her husband but she refused on the grounds that she believed that she would not be allowed to re-enter the country.

Michael Aris had died on March 27, 1999. In April and May 1999, Suu Kyi's two sons, Kim Htein Lin Aris and Alexander Aris came to Burma or Myanmar from the United Kingdom to meet their mother after their father died. The government kept their visits as low-key as possible to avoid political complications. Both of Aung San Suu Kyi's sons had been stripped of their passports by

the military junta and had been traveling on British documents. As for Aung San Suu Kyi, although not under house arrest, her movements had been strictly controlled by the government.

In the year 2000, conflicts between the government and the NLD saw no signs of diminishing. In March 2000, the NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi issued her challenge in response to a speech made by Gen. Than Shwe. The military leader had threatened to eliminate the opposition. In the speech Gen. Than Shwe said, "those that disturb stability and damage the development of the nation should be eliminated as if they were common enemies."

Aung San Suu Kyi called on the opposition to persevere in the struggle to restore democracy. The NLD said the government still refused to implement the result of the 1990 multi-party general election, and warned that the only way out to tackle Burma's (Myanmar's) present overall crisis was to follow the people's desire and transfer back the state power to the people's representatives.

On Aug. 24, 2000, the NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi and 14 members of the NLD tried to meet supporters and the party's youth wing outside Rangoon, the capital, but were stopped and barred by the police from traveling further. After nine days of roadside confrontation with the military authorities, Suu Kyi was forced to return to Rangoon. This was her first attempt in two years to leave the capital. After she was brought back to Rangoon on Sept. 2, Aung San Suu Kyi was confined to her home for 12 days.

Again on Sept. 21, 2000, Suu Kyi and several of her supporters were blocked from leaving Rangoon at the train station. Suu Kyi and other leaders of the NLD were put under house arrest on September 27, the day they had planned to celebrate the party's 12th anniversary. Since then, they have been confined to their homes under house arrest.

Earlier, in December 1996, all colleges and universities in Burma or Myanmar had been closed by the military government who saw the campuses as breeding grounds for dissent. In July 2000, thousands of college students returned to their classes for the first time in three years after the ban was quietly lifted. The returning students and their parents had to sign declarations that they would not become involved in political activity. Student unions were banned. During the three-year closure, some students traveled abroad to study, but others were unable to do so.

To break the 10-year deadlock between the country's military leaders and the pro-democracy opposition led by Aung San Suu Kyi, the United Nations has been involved in trying to bring the two sides to dialogue. However, successive envoys to Burma (also known as Myanmar) had made little progress until late 2000 when the two sides began talks.

Developments in 2001

The year 2001 saw some signs of changes by the military government of Burma or Myanmar. Since October 2000, sponsored by the United Nations through its special envoy Razali Ismail, the NLD leader Suu Kyi had held secret talks with the military government. Although the talks appeared to be progressing slowly, there were signs of improvement. Since January 2001, the military government has released more than 300 political prisoners, including several senior NLD leaders, and the NLD has been given permission to reopen 18 of its offices. Significantly, these events all happened after Aung San Suu Kyi and the military government started secret talks.

Still, according to human rights groups, there were about 1,500 political prisoners who remain in jail. Some diplomats in Burma or Myanmar believe that the military government's goal in releasing political prisoners was merely to deflect international criticism of their human rights record, and to lessen their international isolation.

Developments in 2002

On May 6, 2002, the MLD leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, was granted unconditional release after 20 months of continuous confinement. On the day of her release, she left her house for the first time since 2000 and went to the headquarters of the National League for Democracy. She was greeted by cheering crowds in the streets of the capital city, Rangoon.

Aung San Suu Kyi's release came on the heels of a visit from United Nations envoy, Razali Ismail (noted above), who, during a recent visit to Burma or Myanmar, insinuated that her confinement might soon come to an end. The actualization of her release was hailed by the international community as a significant indicator that the military regime might truly be ready to make some tentative steps in the direction of democratization.

As reported by the *Associated Press*, the members of the government stated they would recommit themselves to allowing all of the country's citizens to participate freely in the political process. Aung San Suu Kyi herself called for a "new dawn" in the country.

While the release of Aung San Suu Kyi was applauded by the international community, it did not singlehandedly result in the desired effect of attracting the much-needed Western capital to stave off a looming economic crisis. The United States, European Union and other Western countries remained deeply troubled by the poor human rights situation and the extremely slow pace of democratization in Burma, also known as Myanmar.

The country's image was further tainted by reports from the International Labor Organization (ILO) that forced labor was still rampant in the country. Until that issue and other human rights concerns were domestically addressed, it remained unlikely that foreign companies would want to

tarnish their image in the global economy.

Aside from political reconciliation, Burma or Myanmar was also facing growing unemployment, a major AIDS epidemic and drug trafficking.

Developments in 2003

In terms of government, General Than Shwe -- the chairman of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), which in 1997 became the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) -- continued in the role as head of the ruling body of Myanmar or Burma in 2003. He was succeeded by Khin Nyunt as prime minister.

In other political developments, following clashes between supporters of the National League for Democracy (NLD) party and the military government, the NLD's leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, was detained and once again taken into "protective custody." She was held at a military guesthouse in the capital city of Rangoon.

Up to 200 people, including pro-democracy activists and members of the National League for Democracy, were arrested, while an estimated 70 people were reported to have been killed in violent altercations with the military. (The actual number of dead, however, remained unconfirmed and according to *Reuters*, the government claims that neither U Tin Oo nor Aung San Suu Kyi were hurt). In addition, the National League for Democracy office was shut down and telephone lines were severed. Fearing arrest and other consequences for political activism, many supporters of the National League for Democracy went into hiding.

Since Aung San Suu Kyi's arrest, the United Nation's envoy to Myanmar (Burma), Razali Ismail, met with the country's military leadership regarding the situation. He expressed the hope that she would soon be released; subsequently, reports emerged suggesting that her release would not be immediate.

The international community summarily condemned Myanmar (Burma) for its arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi. Notably, the European Union installed harsher sanctions against Myanmar's regime, while members of the South East Asian regional forum (ASEAN) issued a rare criticism of Myanmar (Burma), which is one of its member states.

As noted above, Aung San Suu Kyi had been released from house arrest in 2002 and it was hoped that her discharge would signify the start of democratic reforms. No such political changes actually ensued, thus spurring criticism by pro-democracy factions. These criticisms, coupled with intensified public protests, presumably threatened the military government's grip on power and resulted in the crackdown. Indeed, reports have registered a considerable increase for Aung San

Sui Kyi's support base and for the pro-democracy movement. In particular, there was a surge of support from student activists and Buddhist monks. For its part, the military leadership of the country said that the opposition party provoked both the confrontation and the latest acts of repression.

In September 2003, Aung San Sui Kyi remained under house arrest and was conducting a hunger strike. Human rights activists and the United Nations envoy continued to work toward her release.

In November 2003, following a six-day visit to Myanmar (Burma), United Nations Human Rights Envoy Paulo Pinheiro (who was later killed during the war in Iraq) said that Aung San Suu Kyi was still in her home, which was without telephone service but surrounded by security forces. A declaration by the government that she was not being held by law had no effect on her circumstances because Aung San Suu Kyi said she would not accept privileges until her supporters were also released from detention. At that time, close to 30 individuals had been imprisoned since May when violent clashes between the pro-democracy movement and the government forces led to their arrests (as discussed above).

Developments in 2004

In May 2004, pro-democracy parties and ethnic minority groups boycotted the government's convention on a new constitution. The new constitution would act as the foundation for the restoration of democracy. Although the national convention was, in principle, supposed to include varied political factions and religious groups, critics said that participants had been selected by the ruling military government. As a measure of protest, the National League for Democracy (NLD) -- which won the last democratic elections -- refused to participate in the convention unless its leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, was released from detention. Political experts said that without the participation of the country's democratically-elected leader and other key opposition voices, the constitutional convention was unlikely to be viewed with credibility.

The military government brought the national convention to a close in July 2004. A month later in August 2004, United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan echoed the calls of the NLD by demanding that Aung San Suu Kyi be freed from house arrest. In this regard, he noted that the military government's reform program would be viewed as a farce without the participation of both the NLD and its leader. In his statement, Annan said, "Unless and until the views of the National League for Democracy and other political parties are sought and considered, the national convention and the roadmap process will be incomplete, lacking in credibility, and therefore unable to gain the full support of the international community, including the countries of the region." The Secretary General also said that the military government should allow the United Nations Special Envoy, Razali Ismail, to return to Burma (Myanmar) for the purpose of helping with the movement toward democracy. (Ismail's visa application was rejected earlier in 2004.)

Later in 2004, Khin Nyunt was ousted from the leadership of the military dictatorship ruling the country. In addition to holding the post of prime minister, Khin Nyunt also once functioned as the head of military intelligence and was considered one of the top three leaders in the country's military dictatorship. His removal from high office ensued after presumably losing a power struggle within the ruling military. Philosophical differences with the rest of the leadership may have contributed to his fall from exalted status since he reportedly sponsored the "roadmap" for democracy. He was also one of the power brokers behind the release of democracy activist Aung San Suu Kyi.

Developments in 2005

In April 2005, as Burma (Myanmar) prepared to assume its forthcoming chairmanship of a regional grouping, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), international criticism was on the rise. In particular, the United States and the European Union said they would boycott the ASEAN summit if Burma (Myanmar) was allowed to chair the meeting. This threat was issued in protest of the military dictatorship that was ruling the country and also because of the ongoing detainment of democratic activists. For its part, the leadership of Burma (Myanmar) said it intended to honor its commitment to chair the regional grouping despite the perspective held by many countries of the West.

On May 7, 2005, bombs exploded within minutes of one another at various sites in Burma's (Myanmar's) capital city of Rangoon. At least a dozen people were thought to have been killed and more than 150 were injured as a result of the bombs, which exploded at two busy supermarkets and at a Thai trade fair. The ruling military junta blamed some of the country's ethnic groups, as well as the pro-democracy political group, which won the country's last democratic elections. Yet, for their part, the Karen and Shan ethnic groups denied any such involvement, while Aung San Suu Kyi's political party condemned the violent attacks. Such bombings have not been normal fare in a country which, although plagued by political strife, has generally not been the venue of acts of terrorism in recent years.

In late July 2005, a special tribunal gave Burma's (Myanmar's) ousted Prime Minister Khin Nyunt a suspended jail sentence after he was convicted on charges which included including corruption and bribery. Khin Nyunt's sons and thirty-eight intelligence officers were also convicted. As noted above, he was ousted in October 2004.

In the latter part of 2005, the government moved the capital from Rangoon to Pyinmana. The new capital had been under construction for some time, however, there had been little indication that the capital would be moved quite so soon.

In late November 2005, Burmese pro-democracy activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi, was subject to a 12-month extension of her ongoing house arrest. The announcement came from sources within the country's military government after officials visited her home. The decision was anticipated since a similar 12-month order was issued in November 2004.

Meanwhile, political observers noted that neither the policies by the United States and the United Kingdom to isolate Burma (Myanmar), nor the economic engagement by other south east Asian countries, have served to stimulate any meaningful political reform in the country.

Developments in 2006

On May 27, 2006, Myanmar's (Burma's) military leadership extended the detention of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who had been held under house arrest since 2003. Aung San Suu Kyi has spent substantial periods of her life in detention -- indeed, in 2006, 10 of the last 16 years had been under house arrest.

The day before her latest period of detention was due to expire, United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan called on the head of Myanmar's (Burma's) ruling military junta to free Aung San Suu Kyi. To this end, he said, "I am relying on you, General Than Shwe, to do the right thing." His call, however, went unheeded as it was soon announced that her detention would be extended. There was no timeframe given as to how long the extension would last. Just prior to the announcement, the security detail around her home in the capital city of Rangoon was increased.

Nyan Win, a spokesman Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, which won a landslide victory exactly 16 years earlier but had never been allowed to take power, said that the news of the detention extension was a major disappointment. He also warned that the decision by the SLORC would likely serve as a "setback to national reconciliation." Other countries also expressed their disappointment regarding the fate of Aung San Suu Kyi. Notably, Thai Foreign Minister Kantathi Suphamongkhon said, "We would like to see Myanmar back in the realm of the international community, so progress in national reconciliation is something of importance."

In July 2006, Malaysia's Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar criticized the military government of Burma (Myanmar) for being an obstacle to regional reform. His comments came just prior to a scheduled ASEAN conference, where Malaysia currently holds the chairman's position. The harsh criticism also signaled a notable shift since, in the past, Malaysia had been a strong defender of Burma (Myanmar). But Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar said that his country could no longer defend Burma (Myanmar) since it was not moving toward any kind of democratic reform. As such, the Malaysian cabinet minister said that Burma's (Myanmar's) lack of progress would, by extension, affect the rest of the region, which wanted to forge better ties with the West. It was

unlikely that the remarks of the Malaysian foreign minister were made without some tacit consent from other South East Asian governments. As such, there was some speculation that Burma was at risk of being suspended from ASEAN for failing to move toward democracy.

Earlier, during a trip to Burma (Myanmar), Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar was barred from meeting with the country's pro-democracy opposition leader, whose house arrest had recently been extended.

Developments in 2007

In May 2007, Burma's (Myanmar's) military junta extended pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest by yet another year. The latest period of detention was set to end in 2007. The extension of the detention for a year meant that in 2007, Aung San Suu Kyi has spent 11 of the last 18 years under house arrest. That said, she was allowed to exit her house for an hour in late 2006 for the purpose of meeting with United Nations envoy Ibrahim Gambari.

The United States and other countries condemned the latest move to keep the pro-democracy leader under house arrest. Previously, close to 60 world leaders issued letters to the military government of Burma, urging her release. Clearly, the mass appeal went unheeded.

August 2007 saw a rare display of mass protests in Rangoon, the capital of Burma (Myanmar). The demonstrators were protesting the rise of fuel prices, which left many people unable to pay for transportation to their workplaces. In response, one of the organizers of the protests, Htin Kyaw, was arrested and beaten following a manhunt that took place in the region of Yangon. Kyaw has been no stranger to such arrests, having been detained several times before for protesting against harsh living standards. Other activists were also arrested - some of them among the country's most well-known dissidents, such as Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi. All the people arrested were faced with up to 20 years in jail for their actions. United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon called on the government to treat those in custody in a humanitarian manner.

The third week of September 2007 saw Buddhist monks and nuns lead the largest anti-government protest in Burma (also known as Myanmar) in 20 years. The protestors numbered up to 20,000 in total and took to the streets of the former capital of Rangoon. The demonstrations began as a way to decry the price of fuel, however, they carried on for successive days and evolved into larger political rallies with participants calling for an end to the country's dictatorship.

On one occasion, the group led by monks and nuns, was prevented by the police from walking on the road leading to the home of the country's democratically elected leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. But on September 22, 2007, they were allowed to travel on the road. Suu Kyi, who has been

under house arrest for several years, was also able to pray with some of the monks. While the road was again blocked a day later, the protestors openly expressed their anti-government views and made clear their demands, which included the release of political prisoners and the reduction of fuel prices.

There was no immediate reprisal from security forces as has often been the case in previous rallies of this sort. Still, it was unknown if the military dictatorship would eventually take action against the protestors.

By September 25, 2007, the country's ruling junta cracked down on protestors calling for democracy by prohibiting assemblies of more than five people and instituting curfews in the largest urban centers of Rangoon and Mandalay. This crackdown occurred after Buddhist monks, nuns and other protestors ignored the authorities' warning that the monks not insert themselves into the political realm. There was also a clampdown on the media, however, some activists were using the Internet and mobile phones to get word out about the political developments that were transpiring.

A day later on September 26, 2007, police in Burma opened fire on the protesting monks marching from the Shwedagon Pagoda to the Sule Pagoda in Rangoon's city center. Police also used tear gas to disperse large crowds of anti-government demonstrators. The precise death toll was unknown at the time, however, monks were among the casualties. Some were said to have killed as a result of bullets, while others were reported to have been badly injured when police used rifles to beat them. Taxi drivers transported wounded individuals to area hospitals.

On September 27, 2007, the government of Burma said that between eight and ten protestors had been killed the day before. However, eye witness accounts from on the ground in Burma suggested that the death toll could be higher; this view was subsequently echoed by British Prime Minister Gordon Brown.

A day later, there were reports that religious sites had been sealed off and the military had raided a number of Buddhist monasteries. Many monks were apparently taken away in military trucks, while the rest were confined. The number of monks taken away varied from as little as 60 to as many as 700, according to the Asian Human Rights Commission. It was not known where the detained monks had been taken, however, later reports suggested that they had been moved to prisons in a remote part of the country's north.

In other developments, one person was reported to have died during an overnight raid at one of the monasteries. As well, there were rumors that pro-democracy figure Suu Kyi had been removed from her home and taken to a prison. There was no confirmation, however, regarding this report.

At the same time, in an attempt to stave off the flow of information from the isolated country to the outside world, especially as global attention was now fixed on Burma, the authorities in the

country also cut off Internet access. In fact, the police and military were tasked with searching people for cameras and other technological items that could be used to transmit information outside of the country.

It was believed that these measures, in addition to the presence of combat military battalions on the streets of the major cities, were intended to intimidate the citizenry of Burma, and ultimately quell the protest action. To some degree, the crackdown was successful, because the next days saw much smaller demonstrations. Additionally, the state-run media reported that the order had been restored.

Nevertheless, an international outcry was already gaining steam followed the dissemination of news about the ruling junta's decision to crack down harshly on the protestors. The United Nations (U.N.) Security Council had already convened an emergency session to discuss the devolving crisis in Burma, while the U.N. Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari had traveled to Asia following a meeting with top global leaders. He was tasked with the mission of urging Burma's ruling military dictatorship to cease their use of force on protestors, and to mediate reconciliatory dialogue between the two sides.

There were also hopes that China, which has imported energy resources from Burma, would use its influence to urge Burma's authorities to show restraint in dealing with protestors. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), of which Burma holds membership, expressed "revulsion" at the violence in that country, prompting an apology from the Burmese (Myanmarese) envoy to that regional body.

The United States (U.S.) and the European Union issued a joint statement condemning the events in Burma, and calling for a process of dialogue between the ruling regime and the pro-democracy opposition in that country. As well, the U.S. and the EU called on the U.N. Security Council to impose sanctions.

The U.S. already moved in the direction of tightened economic sanctions against Burma. At the United Nations, United States President George W. Bush paved the way for this action and condemned the ruling junta for carrying out an undemocratic "19-year reign of fear" in Burma. Days after Bush's assertion, the U.S. Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control said that it would "not stand by as the regime tries to silence the voices of the Burmese people through repression and intimidation," and announced a travel ban on Burma's top officials.

For his part, United Kingdom Prime Minister Gordon Brown promised no hint of impunity for those responsible for human rights violations. Along those lines, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, warned that the leadership of Burma could well be prosecuted for their repressive actions.

By September 29, 2007, it was confirmed that a Japanese journalist working on behalf of Agence France Presse (AFP) had been among those killed during the violent crackdown. Newly inaugurated Japanese Prime Minister Ysuo Fakuda described the killing of Kenji Nagai as "deplorable" and his government demanded an investigation into the matter. This was because some of the televised footage of the killing of Nagai by a soldier at point-blank range suggested that it may not have been accidental. Underscoring the gravity of the situation, the Japanese government also announced that it was deploying Deputy Foreign Minister Mitoji Yannuaka to Burma to press for action. Japan, which has been a generous donor to Burma, said that it would also review its financial aid to that country.

Meanwhile, U.N. Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari was able to meet with opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. It was the first time a foreign envoy had been allowed to meet with the pro-democracy advocate in several years. He also met with some of the military leaders before finally being able to meet with the head of Burma's junta, Than Shwe. In those talks, he reportedly advocated reconciliatory talks with the political opposition. Days after that meeting with Gambari, the ruling junta announced that it was willing to participate in talks with opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, albeit with conditions. The state-run television service also broadcast images of Suu Kyi for the first time in years. Gambari was reported to said that he was "cautiously encouraged" by this news.

Gambari then returned to the U.N. to report on his mission in Burma. At the U.N., the envoy reported that he warned Burma's leadership of "serious international repercussions" that might ensue in the wake of its violent crackdown. Gambari also expressed concern about the military's regime's arbitrary arrests and human rights abuses that followed the mass protests that swept through the main cities of the country. He spoke of night raids at homes and monasteries, mass relocations, beatings and other forms of abuse, as well as the detainment of monks. Moreover, Gambari echoed concerns conveyed by British Prime Minister Gordon Brown that the death toll in Burma was likely much higher than officially registered.

A week later, three of the leading activists behind recent pro-democracy protests were arrested. The arrests occurred at a time when thousands of people attended a pro-government rally, which analysts said had been compelled by the authorities. Amnesty International, the human rights group, said that the arrests were also ongoing despite assurances to the contrary by the government to the United Nations (U.N.).

For its part, the U.N. Security Council issued a statement in mid-October 2007 denouncing the government's harsh suppression of the pro-democracy activists. Around the same period, it was announced that U.N. envoy, Ibrahim Gambari would return to Burma for another visit.

Meanwhile, following discussions with United Nations envoy to Burma (Myanmar), Ibrahim Gambari, in which he called for reconciliation with the opposition, the ruling junta made the

decision to create the position of political liaison. New Light of Myanmar -- the state-run publication -- announced that the government had agreed to Gambari's recommendation "in view of smooth relations." It was announced that Aung Kyi had been appointed to the post and was viewed as something of a moderate by the international community, when compared with the rest of the country's leadership.

Late October 2007 saw Burma's (Myanmar's) pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi meet for the first time with the emissary appointed by the ruling junta to liaise with the opposition. Whether or not this new dynamic would move relations between the military government and the pro-democracy opposition in a positive direction was unknown. Previous attempts at dialogue were not met with success.

In other developments at the time, Gambari traveled to China to call on Beijing to place more pressure on Burma.

In early November 2007, the ruling military government of Burma (Myanmar) said that it would expel the United Nations (U.N.) top diplomat, Charles Petrie. The government of Burma said that Petrie's mandate as U.N. Burman Country Chief would not be renewed. Petrie gained attention when he criticized the government's decision to use violence to quell and suppress anti-government protests. The international community reacted with dismay to the news. Moreover, the United States said that the timing of Petrie's expulsion was an outrage.

The announcement was made a day prior to the scheduled arrival of U.N. Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari in Burma for his second trip in the aftermath of the government crackdown. As such, analysts noted that Gambari's mission was made that much more difficult. Instead of focusing on the aims of reconciliation, Gambari, who arrived in Burma on November 4, 2007, had to answer questions about the international organization that he represents.

The second week of November 2007 saw detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi meet with three colleagues from the National League for Democracy (NLD). The meeting was the first in more than three years. Also present at the start of the meeting was Aung Kyi -- the emissary who had been appointed by the military junta to liaise between the two sides. Witnesses said that despite her lengthy time under house arrest, Suu Kyi appeared optimistic about the prospects of reconciliation with the military regime leading Burma (Myanmar). In both her statements to United Nations envoy, Ibrahim Gambari, and in her expressed views following the meeting with the NLD colleagues, she expressed willingness to work with the government to find common ground. Gambari publicized a statement from Suu Kyi which read, "In the interest of the nation, I stand ready to co-operate with the government in order to make this process of dialogue a success."

Key Developments in 2008-2009

The government of Burma (Myanmar) announced in early 2008 that it would hold a constitutional referendum in May 2008, to be followed by general elections in 2010. A statement from the ruling junta was read on state media and asserting the following: "Multi-party democratic elections will be held in 2010, according to the new constitution. It is suitable to change the military administration to a democratic, civil administrative system, as good fundamentals have been established." It went on to state, "The country's basic infrastructure has been built, although there is still more to do in striving for the welfare of the nation." The military regime that has previously stated that it has a roadmap for democracy, however, no timetable for elections have ever been announced before.

The opposition National League for Democracy (NLD), which won the last elections but did not take power due to the junta's actions, characterized the announcement as both "vague" and strange." Specifically, opposition spokesperson, Nyan Win, said, "I was surprised that they announced an election date without knowing the referendum results."

In early May 2008, a tropical cyclone battered Burma, killing tens of thousands of people and destroying thousands of buildings including more than 20,000 homes. The government admitted that scores were killed in Rangoon alone and that the overall death toll across the country would rise at an alarming rate. Indeed, the death toll was soon estimated to be a shocking 100,000. The Irrawaddy region of the country was hardest hit. Four other regions of the country were also affected, including the main city of Rangoon, as well as Bago, Karen and Mon. Tens of thousands of survivors were made homeless as a result of the Cyclone Nargis and vast swaths of the country were described to be akin to a "war zone" in appearance.

In late May 2008, weeks after Burma was struck by the devastating cyclone discussed above, the military junta of that country extended the house arrest of pro-democracy leader, Ang San Suu Kyi. The authorities also arrested close to two dozen activists on a protest march to the house of the Nobel Peace Prize laureate in the city of Rangoon where she has been in detention for years. This action by the government was expected to accentuate condemnation by the international community of the military regime in Burma (Myanmar), which was already under increased criticism for its poor handling of post-cyclone relief efforts. To date, only a small number of victims have received aid despite an overwhelming international humanitarian effort.

Meanwhile, the new draft constitution was ratified by referendum in mid-May 2008 despite the prevailing chaos of devastating cyclone that gripped the country (as discussed just above). By the close of the month, the new charter was officially promulgated into law. The new constitution was part of the military regime's program toward multi-party general elections to be held in 2010 for representatives to parliament. But its provisions reserved 25 percent of the parliamentary seats for the military -- a move intended to consolidate the military junta's grip on power.

At the start of February 2009, Aung San Suu Kyi told United Nations envoy Ibrahim Gambari that

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon should not visit her country unless political prisoners were released from jail. The pro-democracy opposition leader of Burma (Myanmar), who has spent most of the previous two decades under house arrest, said that there was no rule of law. Indeed, she noted that after trials in which no defense lawyers were allowed to participate, activists had been subjected to severe prison sentences as long as 100 years. As well, human rights groups have observed that the number of political prisoners has substantially increased ever since the 2007 pro-democracy protests, which had been led by Buddhist monks. Moreover, the hard-line government moved to tighten its grip on power by constitutionally enshrining guarantees that 25 percent of all seats in any future parliament would be composed of the military.

For his part, Gambari has been tasked with revitalizing reconciliation talks between the military government and the opposition. However, Gambari has been criticized for his failure to accomplish much in the time he has functioned in this capacity. Notably, the United Nations envoy has not managed to garner any substantial concessions from Burma's hard-line leadership.

Special Report:

Aung San Suu Kyi's found guilty and detention extended; international community reacts with condemnation; U.S. Senator makes landmark visit and leaves with U.S. prisoner

Background:

In May 2009, pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi was imprisoned and faced trial over a visit by an uninvited American man. The man reportedly swam across a lake and stayed at her home for two days but there was no information regarding his motives at the time. Nevertheless, the military junta of Burma, also known as Myanmar, accused her of violating the terms of her house arrest.

According to reports, Aung San Suu Kyi was charged under the Law Safeguarding the State from the Dangers of Subversive Elements and was being held at the Insein high security prison in the capital city of Rangoon. A trial was scheduled to begin on May 18, 2009. Reports from the ground in Burma indicated that Aung San Suu Kyi was "composed, upright, crackling with energy" at the trial, according to British ambassador Mark Canning, who was allowed to attend the trial. However, Canning acknowledged that he had little confidence in the outcome of the legal process saying, "I think this is a story where the conclusion is already scripted."

Should she be found guilty, Aung San Suu Kyi faced a sentence with a maximum term of five years in jail. Such a ruling would extend her time in detention, which was set to expire on May 27, 2009, and would keep her detained well beyond the time set for elections in 2010. For her part, Aung San Suu Kyi insisted she was innocent, and maintained that she had not violated the terms of her house arrest. Her lawyer, Kyi Win, said that she was in good health and "mentally strong." He

promised vindication for his client and in the last week of May 2009, he said that Aung San Suu Kyi would testify at her trial where she would proclaim her innocence. Her case, however, was not helped by the fact that her defense witnesses were not allowed to speak.

Meanwhile, in an interview with Irrawaddy, Kyi Win also identified the American man, John Yettaw, as an intruder. Yettaw -- a Vietnam veteran from Missouri -- was expected to also face trial on security offenses and immigration violations.

The international community reacted by condemning the actions of the government. United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton demanded that Aung San Suu Kyi be immediately released. Jose Ramos Horta, the president of East Timor and a Nobel Peace Prize winner, promised to call for an International Criminal Court investigation of Burma's military junta if they did not release Aung San Suu Kyi. United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, along with the Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean), expressed grave concern for Aung San Suu Kyi. Several world leaders went further by accusing the government of Burma (Myanmar) of exploiting the incident to further their own political agenda -- namely, removing the country's democratic icon from the landscape ahead of the elections in 2010. To that end, Prime Minister Gordon Brown of the United Kingdom said, "If the 2010 elections are to have any semblance of credibility, she and all political prisoners must be freed to participate."

By the close of May 2009, reports were emerging about Aung San Suu Kyi's deteriorating health. Her party -- the National League for Democracy (NLD) -- said that the pro-democracy leader was in grave need of medical attention. The military junta disputed this claim and said that Aung San Suu Kyi was "provided with adequate health care" and "in good health."

The court was expected to hear final arguments at the start of June 2009, but the trial of the pro-democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, was delayed until mid-month, due to efforts to reinstate the witnesses for the defense. It was generally expected that Aung San Suu Kyi would be convicted at the close of the trial. Most international critics have said that the military junta would exploit the situation to keep the pro-democracy leader imprisoned until elections are held in 2010. For its part, the military junta has eschewed international condemnation and characterized the trial of Aung San Suu Kyi as "an internal legal issue."

By mid-2009, the world was awaiting the verdict in the trial of Aung San Suu Kyi. At the start of July 2009, the military junta of Burma (Myanmar) rejected United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon from visiting pro-democracy icon and opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest for several years. The military junta said that the meeting could not be permitted due to an ongoing trial in which Aung San Suu Kyi was accused of violating the terms of her detainment when an uninvited American entered her home. The United Nations chief was in Burma (Myanmar) for two days but made little progress on the matter of Aung San Suu Kyi's freedom or democratization of the country.

In response to what British Prime Minister Gordon Brown characterized as the regime's "obstinacy," the United Kingdom said that it would impose new sanctions on Burma (Myanmar). Speaking of the impending report on Secretary General Ban's two-day trip, which yielded few productive results, Prime Minister Brown said: "We await the secretary general's report. I hope that there is still the possibility of a change of approach from Burma but if not, my sad conclusion is that the Burmese regime has put increased isolation - including the possibility of further sanctions - on the international agenda."

Update:

In August 2009, pro-democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, who had been on trial for violating security laws when an American man entered her home without her consent, was found guilty by a court in Burma (Myanmar). The court sentenced her to three years in prison although that time frame was reduced to another 18 months of house arrest. As noted above, the extended detention -- at a time when the prevailing term of house arrest had already lapsed -- ensured that the pro-democracy leader's detainment would continue. The court case was itself regarded as spurious, with key players on the international scene decrying the fact that the pro-democracy leader was denied a full defense and, instead, being subjected to what many described as a "sham" of a legal process, intended to facilitate her continued state of detention. There was general consensus that the outcome of the case was pre-determined and that Aung San Suu Kyi would, indeed, be found guilty and her detainment would be extended. To that end, there was a sense that the ruling military junta of Burma (Myanmar) wanted to ensure that Aung San Suu Kyi would have only a limited influence on forthcoming elections, which were expected to take place in 2010.

Not surprisingly, the international outcry against the outcome of these legal proceedings was pronounced. The United Nations demanded her immediate release and expressed "serious concern" regarding the sentence inflicted on Aung San Suu Kyi. But critics noted that the United States' statement was a far cry from the original United States draft, which outright "condemned" the military junta of Burma (Myanmar) for its actions. That said, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon strongly deplored the verdict and called for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. He said: "Unless she and all other political prisoners in Myanmar (Burma) are released and allowed to participate in free and fair elections, the credibility of the political process will remain in doubt."

The governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and France respectively reacted with strong condemnation of the verdict. United States President Barack Obama demanded Aung San Suu Kyi's "immediate unconditional release" and characterized her sentence as unjust. Along a similar vein, United Kingdom Prime Minister Gordon Brown said that he was "saddened and angry" by the extended detainment of the country's pro-democracy leader in what he termed as a "sham" trial. In a statement, the British head of government excoriated the court's findings as a "purely political sentence." French President Nicolas Sarkozy was expected to call on the European Union to impose new sanctions on Burma (Myanmar). To that end, the

judges who ruled on Aung San Suu Kyi's case would be added to the "black list" of military and government officials who were subject to a travel ban and frozen overseas assets by the European bloc. But Asian neighbors were not so quick to endorse such action. Indeed, Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva -- the chairman of the Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean) at the time -- warned that the imposition of sanctions against Burma (Myanmar) could lead to further challenges in dealing with that country. As well, trading partners of Burma (Myanmar), such as India, were conspicuously silent, while another trading partner, China, said that the world should respect Burma's (Myanmar's) legal processes.

In a related development, United States Senator James Webb of Virginia traveled to Burma (Myanmar) to meet with the military ruler of that country, Than Shwe. Senator Webb's office issued a statement noting that he was the highest ranking United States official to meet with Than Shwe. Senator Webb, who has chaired the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee on East Asia and Pacific affairs, also met with members of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD). It was subsequently announced that Webb was able to meet for 45 minutes with Aung San Suu Kyi herself.

The particular political meaning behind Senator Webb's visit, as it related to United States foreign policy, was unknown. In the past, the Virginia Democrat who has strong ties to President Barack Obama, has expressed support for the notion of increased engagement with Burma (Myanmar). More recently, he acknowledged that this case in question against Aung San Suu Kyi would not facilitate such an outcome. For its part, the Obama administration has made clear that it would review existing United States foreign toward Burma (Myanmar).

After he left Burma (Myanmar), Senator Webb said that during his meeting with officials of that country, he had asked for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, and for her to be allowed to take part in the country's political process. Senator Webb said, "I'm hopeful as the months move forward they will take a look." He continued, "With the scrutiny of the outside world judging their government very largely through how they are treating Aung San Suu Kyi, it's to their advantage that she's allowed to participate in the political process." Whether or not the military junta ruling Burma (Myanmar) would heed this call was yet to be seen.

Meanwhile, John Yettaw, a United States citizen who swam across a lake and entered Aung San Suu Kyi's home without her consent, was also found guilty in court. He was sentenced to seven years in jail, four of which included hard labor. Yettaw left Burma (Myanmar) with Senator Webb and after landing in the Thai capital of Bangkok, he was taken to a hospital. Officials of Burma (Myanmar) said that he had been official deported. Regardless of the particular explanation, the United States citizen was now out of Burma's (Myanmar's) jurisdiction and would not be serving his sentence there.

Special Report:

United States Policy on Burma (Myanmar)

At the start of November 2009, the United States Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia, Kurt Campbell, met with the democratically-elected leader of Burma (Myanmar), Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been kept under house arrest by the ruling military junta of that country. The government of Burma (Myanmar) arranged for the meeting to take place at the Inya Lake Hotel and marked the highest level visit by an American official to Suu Kyi since August 2009 when Senator Jim Webb, Chairman of the East Asian and Pacific Affairs Subcommittee of the United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was in Burma (Myanmar). Earlier, Assistant Secretary Campbell met with the country's Prime Minister General Thein Sein, as well as a number of other government officials. These moves appeared to be consistent with a potential foreign policy shift indicated by the United States towards Burma (Myanmar). To that end, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that while the United States intended to keep sanctions in place against Burma (Myanmar) for the immediate future, it was exploring increased engagement.

During his trip to Asia, United States President Obama waded into stormy geopolitical waters by attending a meeting of the 10-country bloc Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), which was also attended by one of the leaders of the military junta ruling Burma (Myanmar). It was a move aimed at pressing Burma (Myanmar) towards a return to democracy. While some hardliners at home were expected to rail against President Obama for attending such a meeting, it appeared to be consistent the Obama administration's policy of "pragmatic engagement." In the past, leaders from the United States have not attended meetings with Asean when the military leadership of Burma (Myanmar) was present.

In something of a policy shift, it was hoped that increased engagement would yield more productive results on the path towards democratic change in Burma (Myanmar). Still, such engagement, would not include the removal of sanctions until democratic progress has been tracked. During this notable meeting attended by Burma's (Myanmar's) General Thein Sein, President Obama demanded the release of pro-democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been held under house arrest for much of the last two decades. As well, a joint statement by the United States and Asean called for "free, fair, inclusive and transparent" elections in Burma (Myanmar) in 2010.

Recent Developments (2009-2010):

The Supreme Court of Myanmar, also known as Burma, announced in late December 2009 that it would hear the appeal against the house arrest of pro-democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. In August 2009, Aung San Suu Kyi was given 18 months of further house arrest for violating her

pervious detention, when an American man -- John Yettaw -- entered her home without her permission. Her defense lawyers unsuccessfully argued that he had entered her home without her permission and stayed despite her repeated attempts to get him to leave. She was nonetheless found guilty in what the Western world deemed to be a sham trial, and the military regime ruling Burma (Myanmar) was accused of using the case to extend her house arrest ahead of general elections expected to take place in 2010. As a symbol of democracy, the military regime has been reticent to have Aung San Suu Kyi free to rally the supporters of her National League for Democracy in those anticipated elections. But the international outcry has been strong and this latest development -- the legal appeal -- was interpreted to be a means by which the military regime of Burma (Myanmar) has hoped to show some conciliation on the controversial issue of Aung San Suu Kyi's extended house arrest.

On Feb. 26, 2010, the Supreme Court in military-ruled Burma (also known as Myanmar) denied the legal appeal of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi. The authorities of Burma (Myanmar) were not willing to entertain her claim that Yettaw entered her house without her consent. Analysts believe that the military junta of Burma (Myanmar) has a vested interest in keeping Suu KYi -- a symbol of democratic opposition -- out of the political fray when elections are held later in 2010. Perhaps for that very reason, the military junta of Burma (Myanmar) has also determined that she cannot contest the elections on the basis of the fact that she married a foreign national.

Meanwhile, according to the annual report by Human Rights Watch, the year 2009 saw the already-dismal human rights situation in Burma (Myanmar) deteriorate even further despite plans by the military junta to hold elections later in 2010. Human Rights Watch said that 2009 in Burma (Myanmar) was marked by an institutionalized violation of citizens' basic rights, such as freedom of speech, association and assembly. The report made note of the thousands of political prisoners in that country, most of them being victims of political persecution, and it specified that there had been several arrests of pro-democracy activists in 2007 and 2008, who were subject to unfair court cases. The most prominent of these cases, of course, were allies of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party. For her part, she herself has been subject to extended house arrest in the last year in what the writers viewed as an example of the ruling military junta's unwillingness to allow genuine political participation, legal and governmental transparency, and democratization.

Perhaps underscoring the pertinence of the report, as it was being released, the authorities of Burma (Myanmar) charged eight pro-democracy activists, including four Buddhist monks and a school teacher, for their roles in the Buddhist monk-led protest in 2007. The report additionally detailed the systematic practices of extra-judicial killings, forced labor, sexual violence, torture, as well as the confiscation of land and property. The human rights watchdog agency also noted that Burma (Myanmar) was an extremely inhospitable environment for human rights activists to work. Kenneth Roth, the agency's executive director, said: "There is an embattled human rights

movement but it is very difficult for human rights activists to work in a place like Burma."

In early 2010, conflict between the country's armed forces and ethnic insurgent groups was intensifying. At issue has been the government's plan to transpose armed opposition groups that signed cease-fire agreement into Border Guard Forces. The situation has ultimately led to increased displacement of people in the states of Shan and Karen since June 2009. The number of displaced people grew to more than 500,000 by the latter months of 2009, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center.

In mid-April 2010, a series of three explosions in Burma's (Myanmar's) former capital city, Rangoon, left at least nine people dead and scores more injured. The blasts occurred at a park close to Kandawgyi Lake just as people were gathering to celebrate the New Year water festival. Authorities in Burma (Myanmar) said that the explosions had been caused by bombs and placed the blame on "terrorists" but stopped short of naming any particular group. In the past, the authorities have blamed political dissidents and ethnic groups seeking autonomy for such incidences. There was some speculation about there being a political factor involved in the explosions given the timing ahead of much-anticipated elections. On the issue of those elections, despite their much-vaunted status as the first democratic polls in two decades, they would not be fully participatory elections due to the decision by the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy to boycott the vote. Led by jailed pro-democracy icon, Aung San Suu Kyi, the National League for Democracy has made it clear that it would not participate in an election it views as a sham, due to unjust electoral laws intended to keep its leader from being on the ballot.

Landmark Elections of 2010

Long-awaited elections in Burma, also known as Myanmar, were to be held on Nov. 7, 2010. Ideally regarded as "landmark elections," given the fact that it would be the first so-called democratic voting in the country since 1990 when, despite election victory by Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, the military refused to recognize the election results and took control of the country instead. Following years of little or no progress on the road back to civilian rule, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) -- the military junta running Burma or Myanmar -- was touting these elections as a fulfillment of that promise. Nevertheless, the international community and human rights groups have seriously questioned the credibility and legitimacy of the forthcoming elections, pointing to the fact that the structure of the election contest was designed to favor the ruling junta-backed political party, and that there would be no international monitors to witness the elections.

In total, by September 2010, more than 25 political parties were approved to contest the multi-party general elections. Significantly, however, five political parties were disbanded by the country's electoral commission on the basis of their failure to re-register ahead of the 2010

elections. These five dissolved political parties were listed as Union Pa-Oh National Organization, Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, Shan State Kokang Democratic Party, Wa National Development Party, and National League for Democracy -- the winner of the previous democratic elections. But Aung San Suu Kyi's party has made it clear that these elections should not be legitimized via participation. Indeed, the party's very leader -- Aung San Suu Kyi, who has spent most of the last decade under house arrest for her political efforts -- has been prohibited from contesting the November 2010 polls. As noted by Aung Din, a former political prisoner who leads the United States Campaign for Burma: "Any political process in Burma without Aung San Suu Kyi is like removing Nelson Mandela from South Africa's anti-apartheid movement."

Ahead of the polls, analysts expressed the view that the chance of the opposition winning the elections was quite small. The junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), led by Burma's Prime Minister Thein Sein, was expected to contest every one of the 498 elected seats at stake, whereas the opposition would be contesting less than 200. Since the military would be according 25 percent of the parliamentary seats or 166 in national legislatures, it was clear that the proverbial deck would be stacked against the opposition. Also worth noting was the fact that with independent monitors prohibited from witnessing and reporting on the elections, there was no guarantee of a free and fair process.

Meanwhile, attention was on the matter of whether or not Aung San Suu Kyi would be released when her house arrest was set to expire -- notably, in mid-November 2010, one week after the election was scheduled to be held. Note that the pro-democracy opposition leader has said that she would not vote in the elections to protest what she and many in her party view as a sham election. With key opposition figures making it clear that they would not participate in the election, the ruling authorities of Burma (also known as Myanmar), warned that those found guilty of encouraging an election boycott could face time in prison.

In the days ahead of the election, the country was hit by a major internet disruption. While some reports said that Burma (also known as Myanmar) had been subject to a cyber attack, there were parallel suggestions that the ruling military junta was responsible for the internet disruption in an attempt to curtail communications ahead of the voting.

Election day in Burma -- also known as Myanmar -- was marked by low voter turnout. Perhaps the lack of popular participation was due to the aforementioned boycott by key members of the opposition. Regardless, the opposition, political critics, and the international community, all railed against the structure of the aforementioned election process that appeared to favor the junta-backed USDP, arguing that the election itself was no more than a sham. Indeed, the United Kingdom's ambassador to Myanmar, Andrew Heyn, characterized the election as "neither free, nor fair, nor inclusive." United States President Barack Obama, who was in Asia at the time, described the election in similar terms, saying that it was "anything but free and fair." The United States government also released a statement in which it described the election in Burma (also known as Myanmar) as being fundamentally flawed, lacking democratic transparency, and ultimately failing

to meet any of the internationally accepted standards associated with legitimate elections." Indeed, the litany of electoral irregularities appeared endless, ranging from intimidation of voters to ballot manipulation and other forms of chicanery.

Although no official results were immediately available, indications pointed to a clear victory by the pro-junta Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), thanks to the fact that they ran in several uncontested seats in a system intended to reify the military junta's political power. Of the 219 seats declared by the time of writing, the USDP apparently won 190. Clearly, more than 100 seats in the 330-seat lower House of Representatives were still outstanding. As well, partial results showed the USDP carried 95 of 107 seats in the 168-seat upper House of Nationalities. Among the winning USDP candidates was Prime Minister Thein Sein, who left the military in order to contest the elections.

While opposition parties contesting the election were on track to win some seats in Yangon, they would not be the dominant players in parliament. That being said, it was not beyond the realm of possibility that the opposition could work in concert with ethnic parties to act as a significant minority bloc in the future parliament.

Note that the full official results (available after the elections) were as follows --

House of Nationalities -

percent of vote by party - USDP 74.8%, others (NUP, SNDP, RNDP, NDF, AMRDP) 25.2%

seats by party - USDP 129, others 39

House of Representatives -

percent of vote by party - USDP 79.6%, others (NUP, SNDP, RNDP, NDF, AMRDP) 20.4%

seats by party - USDP 259, others 66

Special Report:

Pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi released from house arrest

Even as the election results were being tallied, attention was also on Aung San Suu Kyi -- the pro-democracy leader and iconic figure who was forced to stay out of the political process during the landmark elections.

Burma's high court rejected the pro-democracy leader's appeal against her house arrest. At issue was her extended detainment due to the 2009 case of John Yettaw, an American who swam across a lake and entered her home without her consent. Suu Kyi was charged and found guilty of violating security laws as a result, with the sentence resulting in her extended house arrest. This

decision by the high court in 2010 served to remind observers across the world that the ruling authorities intended to ensure that the record showed Suu Kyi to be guilty for the actions of Yettaw.

Accordingly, questions arose about whether or not Suu Kyi would be released from detention despite this ruling. Suu Kyi herself said she was unwilling to accept a conditional release requiring her to stay away from political activity, if offered. In fact, her lawyer, Nyan Win, said in an interview with BBC News, "[Ms Suu Kyi] will not accept a limited release." In the backdrop of these developments, the government of the United Kingdom and the leadership of the European Union were said to be engaged in heavy lobbying for Suu Kyi's unconditional release, which they said would have a "significant impact" on Burma's (Myanmar's) standing in the world.

On Nov. 12, 2010, reports were emerging from Burma, also known as Myanmar, indicating that military authorities had signed an order finally authorizing the release of Suu Kyi. Crowds gathered in the thousands outside the headquarters of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy in anticipation of her possible release. Ultimately, however, that release would not occur on that day. A spokesperson from the National League for Democracy addressed the thousands of supporters standing outside party headquarters that they should go home since Suu Kyi was unlikely to be freed in the immediate future. Expectations were that she might be released the next day -- Nov. 13, 2010 -- although there was no official statement from the ruling military authorities of the country. Meanwhile, there was an increasing police presence outside Suu Kyi's house, presumably in anticipation of her release.

Suu Kyi's lawyer, Nyan Win, observed that with the expiration of her term of detention imminent, there was no reason why Suu Kyi should continue to be held under house arrest. To this end, he said, "There is no law to hold her for another day. Her detention period expires on Saturday and she will be released." He continued, "They should release her for the country." Nyan Win indicated that after her release, Suu Kyi would meet with the committee members of her National League for Democracy, the media, and the public. It was a meeting that not only Burma (Myanmar) -- but the entire global community -- was awaiting with great anticipation.

On Nov. 13, 2010, after much anticipation, Aung San Suu Kyi was finally released from house arrest. The news came after reports surfaced that military authorities had arrived at the compound of her home in Rangoon and formally granted her freedom. Suu Kyi emerged from her home about half an hour later to greet the thousands of supporters who had been waiting for up to 24 hours for the news of her release from house arrest.

Speaking outside her home, the pro-democracy leader addressed the throngs of ecstatic supporters. Suu Kyi was immediately drowned out by cheers, chants of her name, and the singing of the national anthem. In response, she inserted some humor into the highly charged and emotional scene saying, "I have to give you the first political lesson since my release. We haven't seen each other for so long, so we have many things to talk about. If you have any words for me, please

come to the [NLD] headquarters tomorrow and we can talk then and I'll use a loud speaker." She then continued, "There is a time to be quiet and a time to talk. People must work in unison. Only then can we achieve our goal."

The nature of that work -- and the ultimate goal -- was yet to be determined, especially since Burma's (Myanmar's) most well-known political figure no longer had the structural backing of a political party. By opting to boycott the elections (discussed above), the NLD effectively relinquished its legal right to exist. Accordingly, the road for Suu Kyi, and those associated with her now-disbanded National League for Democracy Party (NLD), was unknown. Also in the realm of the unknown was the matter as to whether or not there were conditions attached to Suu Kyi's release. That being said, the general consensus was that the military authorities of Burma (Myanmar) would not have released the pro-democracy leader if they believed she still posed a threat to their power.

Nevertheless, the hours following the news of Suu Kyi's release were marked by celebration both at home and abroad. The international community lauded her release with United Nations Secretary General saying that Suu Kyi was an "inspiration" and urging that all political prisoners in Burma (Myanmar) be likewise granted their freedom. United Kingdom Prime Minister David Cameron struck a similar tone saying, "Aung San Suu Kyi is an inspiration for all of us who believe in freedom of speech, democracy, and human rights." United States President Barack Obama said that the decision by the military authorities of Burma (Myanmar) to free Suu Kyi was "long overdue." He additionally characterized Suu Kyi as "a hero of mine." President Obama also spoke to about the fundamental right to political expression as follows: "Whether Aung San Suu Kyi is living in the prison of her house, or the prison of her country, does not change the fact that she, and the political opposition she represents, has been systematically silenced, incarcerated, and deprived of any opportunity to engage in political processes."

Indeed, at a time of celebration, the harsh reality was that many of the conditions that led to Suu Kyi's detainment and suppression have remained in place, with the same old guard -- now arguably legitimized by recent elections -- still making the decisions as to whether a citizen of Burma, also known of Myanmar, is entitled to essential freedoms as well as basic human rights and dignity.

Despite these uncomfortable facts, Suu Kyi began her first days of freedom by taking a diplomatic and conciliatory tone. On Nov. 14, 2010, in an interview with BBC News, Suu Kyi said she was willing to convene talks with all political factions, with an eye on national reconciliation. To this end, she said, "I think we will have to sort out our differences across the table, talking to each other, agreeing to disagree, or finding out why we disagree and trying to remove the sources of our disagreement." Suu Kyi also gave some insight as to her future role on the political landscape of Burma (Myanmar), saying: "I just think of myself as one of the workers for democracy. Well, better known, perhaps, than the others here in Burma but one of those working for democracy."

Presidential Election of 2011

February 4, 2011 marked the presidential election in Burma (Myanmar) and came in the aftermath of much-anticipated parliamentary elections in 2010. Ahead of those parliamentary elections, the ruling junta transformed itself into the Union Solidarity and Development Party so it could contest the vote. Thanks to the boycott from the main opposition bloc, which won the country's last democratic elections in 1990, as well as a contrived electoral process, the Union Solidarity and Development Party was able to win the elections and, therefore, dominate the new parliament. The presidential election -- an internal vote within the parliament -- was expected to yield a result favorable to the Union Solidarity and Development Party. Thus, it came as no surprise when General Thein Sein -- the prime minister of the country until the 2010 elections -- was chosen to be president, effectively ensuring that the old guard of the ruling junta still remained in control of the country. While Senior General Than Shwe, who ruled the country for 18 years, would no longer be the head of state, he was yet expected to hold a great deal of power on the political scene, given his connections to the National Defense Security Council, which has been empowered to make key decisions without the approval of the parliament.

Special Report:

Political reform at home leads to restoration of diplomatic ties with the United States

Summary:

The United States restored diplomatic relations with (Myanmar) on Jan. 13, 2012, in response to the government's move toward political reform. These measures have included allowing pro-democracy icon and opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi to contest upcoming parliamentary by-elections, a ceasefire with ethnic Karen rebels, and the release of political prisoners.

Landmark Visit of United States Secretary of State Clinton

In the latter part of 2011, foreign policy was at the forefront of the political landscape in Burma (Myanmar) as the Obama administration in the United States announced that it would send United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to Burma (Myanmar) on the first visit by an American secretary of state in half a century. The decision appeared to be a test of sorts for the new civilian government.

Speaking from a regional summit in Indonesia at the time, President Barack Obama, linked the new domestic developments in Burma (Myanmar) with the decision to engage with that country. In particular, he referenced the regime's recent treatment of pro-democracy icon and opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, who was released from house arrest and was preparing to contest

impending parliamentary by-elections (as discussed below). President Obama said, "Last night, I spoke to Aung San Suu Kyi directly and confirmed she supports American engagement to move this process forward." President Obama noted that Secretary of State Clinton would "explore whether the United States can empower a positive transition in Burma." He explained, "That possibility will depend on the Burmese government taking more concrete action. If Burma fails to move down the path of reform it will continue to face sanctions and isolation."

As November 2011 came to an end, Secretary of State Clinton landed in Burma (Myanmar) in the highly-anticipated historic visit to that country. There, Secretary of State Clinton met with Burmese President Thein Sein and pledged improved ties with Burma -- but only if that country continued on the path of democratization and reform. "The United States is prepared to walk the path of reform with you if you keep moving in the right direction," Clinton said. In an interview with media, Secretary of State Clinton addressed the recent moves to elections as follows: "These are incremental steps and we are prepared to go further if reforms maintain momentum. In that spirit, we are discussing what it will take to upgrade diplomatic relations and exchange ambassadors." But the United States' top diplomat asserted: "We're not at the point where we could consider lifting sanctions." One of the sticking points for the United States has been Burma's relationship with North Korea; the United States has apparently made it clear that Burma should sever "illicit ties" with North Korea. For its part, the government of Burma appeared to welcome the "new chapter" in bilateral relations.

It should be noted that Secretary of State Clinton also held talks with pro-democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, in what the international community regarded as a landmark meeting of two of the most iconic female politicians of the modern era.

The Political Realm in Burma (Myanmar)

Just before United States Secretary of State Clinton arrived in Burma (Myanmar) in the aforementioned landmark visit, the domestic landscape in this country was dominated by the news that the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by noted pro-democracy icon, Aung San Suu Kyi, decided to rejoin the political scene. The NLD said that it would re-registered as a legal political party and contest the forthcoming by-elections. Notably, Aung San Suu Kyi would herself be among the 48 candidates of the NLD seeking to contest the parliamentary by-elections, which were to be held in April 2012.

Speaking of this prospect at the time during an interview with Agence France Presse, Aung San Suu Kyi noted, "If I think I should take part in the election, I will. Some people are worried that taking part could harm my dignity. Frankly, if you do politics, you should not be thinking about your dignity." She continued, "I stand for the re-registration of the NLD party. I would like to work effectively towards amending the constitution. So we have to do what we need to do."

The move constituted something of a political comeback for the NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi after

years of absence from the country's political arena. Indeed, the NLD boycotted the previous elections because of electoral laws prohibited Aung San Suu Kyi from contesting those polls. The NLD also accused the ruling junta of rigging the political structure to favor its newly-formed Union Solidarity and Development Party, and essentially creating a contrived electoral process. Now, the NLD had apparently decided that the time had come to re-enter the political system.

Note: By mid-December 2011, the NLD's bid to re-register as a legal political party was approved. Then, as noted here, in January 2012, it was confirmed that Aung San Suu Kyi would contest those elections for a parliamentary seat in the April 2012 vote.

Democratic Reform and Diplomatic Engagement

In late 2011, as the United States opened the door cautiously to bilateral dialogue, the government of Burma (Myanmar) appeared to be advancing measures intended to demonstrate its reformist credentials when Burmese President Thein Sein signed legislation allowing peaceful demonstrations for the first time. While the new law requires protesters to seek approval at least five days in advance of a possible rally, the move was clearly a shift in the direction of increased freedoms since all protests were previously prohibited. Indeed, it demonstrated a clear easing of long-standing political restrictions.

By the start of January 2012, the government of Burma (Myanmar) appeared to be traversing the path of political reform as the country's most prominent political dissidents were released from jail. Among those enjoying new-found freedom were student protesters imprisoned since the late 1980s, Buddhist monks involved in 2007 pro-democracy protests, journalists, as well as ethnic and minority activists. In addition, former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt, who was detained in a 2004 purge, was released from house arrest.

The release of political prisoners was something the United States has urged for some time. United States President Barack Obama hailed the news that the government of Burma (Myanmar) had decided to free political dissidents from detainment, characterizing the move as a "substantial step forward." He said, "I spoke about the flickers of progress that were emerging in Burma. Today, that light burns a bit brighter, as prisoners are reunited with their families and people can see a democratic path forward."

In addition, there was new emerging from Burma (Myanmar) that the government was forging a ceasefire with ethnic Karen rebels. At issue was an emerging agreement with the Karen National Union.

In the background of these shifts was the parallel path of increased political participation of the opposition with the re-registering of the main opposition party, and the inclusion of Aung San Suu Kyi in impending parliamentary by-elections, as discussed here.

This groundwork yielded fruit for Burma (Myanmar) when the United States announced that Washington D.C. would restore diplomatic relations with Nay Pyi Taw in response to the Burmese government's move toward political reform. On Jan. 13, 2012, United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that her country would commence the process of exchanging ambassadors with Burma (Myanmar).

As noted by Secretary of States Clinton, the restoration of bilateral relations would be an ongoing process and it would be dependent on further reform. She said, "An American ambassador will help strengthen our efforts to support the historic and promising steps that are now unfolding."

The development was a clear diplomatic victory for the Obama administration's policy of engagement. For his part, President Obama urged leaders in Burma (Myanmar) to take "additional steps to build confidence." He continued, "Much more remains to be done to meet the aspirations of the Burmese people, but the United States is committed to continuing our engagement."

This progress illuminated the success of Secretary of State Clinton's landmark visit to Burma (Myanmar) in December 2011, which facilitated productive results. At the time, Secretary of State Clinton said that she wanted to be "in country" to decide for herself whether President Thein Sein was serious about taking the path of democratization. To that end, it was believed that her visit could encourage Burma (Myanmar) to continue traversing that path of reform.

It should be noted that there was no immediate call for international sanctions against Burma (Myanmar) to be eased. Those sanctions -- in place since the 1990s -- have included arms embargos, travel bans on officials of the ruling regime, and asset prohibitions on investment. While the United States has clearly rewarded Burma (Myanmar) for its recent thrust for reform, the lifting of sanctions was not likely to occur until democratic changes in Burma (Myanmar) can be classified as incontrovertible and irreversible.

International analysts would be watching the ruling government's future treatment of the political prisoners who were recently released from detainment. Would they be able to participate in the proverbial public sphere, without fear of recrimination? For its part, the government has said that it does not recognize the categorization "political prisoner" and, instead, has argued that it only jails people for criminality. That being said, President Thein Sein took a sanguine tone as he suggested that the prisoners who were released could "play a constructive role in the political process." A week later, President Thein Sein made it clear that his country was moving on the "right track to democracy" from which there was no turning back.

Primer on Parliamentary By-elections in Burma (Myanmar)

Winds of Change Sweep Across Burma (Myanmar) as Pro-Democracy Icon Suu Kyi Wins Parliamentary Election

Summary:

Pro-democracy icon and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi won victory in parliamentary by-elections in Burma (also known as Myanmar). Suu Kyi, who was released from 20 years of house arrest in 2010, was contesting a district to the south of the former capital city of Yangon. Early results gave her a clear victory. Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy also won most of the other seats up for grabs in these by-elections. It should be noted that the United States restored diplomatic relations with Burma (Myanmar) at the start of 2012 in response to the government's move toward political reform. These measures included allowing Suu Kyi to contest the parliamentary by-elections, a ceasefire with ethnic Karen rebels, and the release of political prisoners. It should also be noted that Suu Kyi complained of political censorship by the ruling authorities ahead of the election. Nevertheless, she and her party ultimately saw victory on election day although they would remain an opposition force in the overall parliament that was dominated by the ruling party. That ruling party -- the Union Solidarity and Development Party -- was itself formed by the former military authorities.

In Detail:

The National League for Democracy (NLD), led by noted pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi decided to rejoin the political scene. The NLD said it would re-register as a legal political party and contest the forthcoming by-elections to the parliament. Notably, Aung San Suu Kyi would herself be among the 48 candidates of the NLD seeking to contest the parliamentary by-elections, which were to be held in April 2012.

Speaking of this prospect at the time during an interview with Agence France Presse, Aung San Suu Kyi noted, "If I think I should take part in the election, I will. Some people are worried that taking part could harm my dignity. Frankly, if you do politics, you should not be thinking about your dignity." She continued, "I stand for the re-registration of the NLD party. I would like to work effectively towards amending the constitution. So we have to do what we need to do."

The move constituted something of a political comeback for the NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi after years of absence from the country's political arena. Indeed, the NLD boycotted the previous elections because of electoral laws prohibited Aung San Suu Kyi from contesting those polls. The NLD also accused the ruling junta of rigging the political structure to favor its newly-formed Union Solidarity and Development Party, and essentially creating a contrived electoral process. Now, the NLD had apparently decided that the time had come to re-enter the political system.

By mid-December 2011, the NLD's bid to re-register as a legal political party was approved. Then, in January 2012, it was confirmed that Aung San Suu Kyi would contest those elections for a parliamentary seat in the April 2012 vote. By the first week of March 2012, the political campaign was set to begin with public speeches set to be broadcast. It should be noted that Aung San Suu

Kyi said some of her address was censored by the country's authorities. She said her criticism of military rule was cut from her speech. Ahead of the by-elections, Suu Kyi characterized the election campaign as not "genuinely free and fair" and warned that democratic reforms were "not irreversible." She expressed support for her party's participation at the polls, though, saying that it was "what our people want."

April 1, 2012 --

Even with this discouraging news regarding the prevailing climate of (even limited) political repression in Burma (Myanmar), voters went to the polls on April 1, 2012, to vote in the highly-anticipated parliamentary elections. For her part, Suu Kyi, who was released from 20 years of house arrest in 2010, was contesting the Kawhmu district to the south of the former capital city of Yangon. Early results gave her a clear victory although official results were yet in the offing. Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy also saw victory, having won most of the other seats up for grabs in these by-elections. Indeed the National League for Democracy was on track to win 43 of the 45 seats at stake, effectively sweeping the by-election contests. Tens of thousands of supporters of Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy rallied in front of the party headquarters in Yangon to celebrate the election victory.

In her first public speech a day after the parliamentary by-elections, Suu Kyi said her party's election performance was the people's victory. Accordingly, she promised to protect the rights of the minority despite her party's win by a majority. Suu Kyi also reiterated her three election objectives: rule of law, internal peace, and amendment to constitution.

It should be noted that the United States restored diplomatic relations with Burma (Myanmar) at the start of 2012 in response to the government's move toward political reform. These measures included allowing Suu Kyi to contest the parliamentary by-elections, a ceasefire with ethnic Karen rebels, and the release of political prisoners. It should also be noted that Suu Kyi complained of political censorship by the ruling authorities ahead of the election. Nevertheless, she and her party ultimately enjoyed victory on election day. Of course, Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy would remain an opposition force in the overall parliament that was dominated by the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party, which was itself formed by the former military authorities.

These by-elections were the latest test for democracy in Burma (Myanmar) and showed that the balance of power would not be transformed easily, although the return of Aung San Suu Kyi to elected office was a significant milestone in the national narrative. Accordingly, the by-elections and the vote results were lauded by the international community. The Obama White House in the United States issued a statement that read as follows: "This election is an important step in [Myanmar's] democratic transformation and we hope it is an indication that the government of [Myanmar] intends to continue along the path of greater openness, transparency, and reform."

Note that in the last week of April 2012, opposition leader Suu Kyi and others refused to take their seats in parliament arguing that the oath of office would have to be changed. At issue for members of the National League for Democracy party was a dispute over the wording of the oath, which called on members of parliament to "protect" the constitution, rather than "abide" by it (their preference). Ohn Kyaing, a spokesperson for the party, said: "We want to change that constitution because it's not a democratic constitution," said Ohn Kyaing, a spokesman for the NLD. That being said, as April 2012 came to a close, Suu Kyi reversed her stance and said that she would, in fact, enter parliament. According to reports from Burma, her supporters were upset that the person for whom they had voted might boycott the parliament over the constitutional oath dispute. Suu Kyi, therefore, decided it was in the best interests of her constituents that she reverse her position and move towards participation in legislative government.

Special Report

President Obama set to become first U.S. leader to visit Burma (Myanmar)

Coming off his re-election victory in the United States in November 2012, United States President Barack Obama was set to visit Burma (Myanmar). According to the White House, President Obama would travel to the southeast Asian country of Burma (Myanmar) as part of a three-leg tour in the third week of November 2012, that would also include visits to Thailand, as well as Cambodia -- the site of the summit of the Association of South East Asian Nations. In Burma (Myanmar), he would meet with President Thein Sein as well as pro-democracy icon and opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi.

President Obama would make history as the first United States leader to visit Burma (Myanmar), which was subject to economic sanctions due to its prior record of political repression, but which has since been undergoing a process of economic and political reform advocated by the Obama administration. Indeed, until the announcement of the president's trip to Burma (Myanmar), Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had the distinction of being the most senior United States official to travel to Burma when she visited in December 2011. The White House said the president's visit to Burma (Myanmar) was intended "to encourage Burma's ongoing democratic transition." That said, further reforms were likely needed as political prisoners remain detained in that country and ethno-religious violence between ethnic Rakhine Buddhists and the Muslim Rohingya minority in Rakhine state has increasingly become a problem.

Special Report

Sectarian Violence in Burma

In late May 2013, in a meeting with United States President Barack Obama, Thein Sein, the leader of Burma (Myanmar) acknowledged that his country had "many challenges" and needed to undertake social and political reforms, as he referred to the ethno-sectarian tensions spreading across the country. Indeed, in recent months, international human rights advocacy groups have expressed grave concerns over the spate of communal violence between the majority Buddhist population and the minority Muslim population that had plaguing Burma (Myanmar).

Going back to 2012, President Thein Sein announced a state of emergency in the country's western state of Rakhine following a week of sectarian attacks. The state is home to the ethnic Rakhine Buddhist majority but also has a notable Muslim population. That Muslim population included the Rohingya minority -- a stateless people not regarded as Burmese citizens and viewed as illegal immigrants from neighboring Bangladesh.

The spate of violence in the western Rakhine state was sparked by the rape and murder of a Buddhist woman a month prior in May 2012. The climate of tension and conflict increased at the start of June 2012 when a mob attacked Muslims traveling on a bus, killing ten people. Since then, clashes involving Buddhists and Muslims left as many as scores of people dead, several more injured, as well as significant property damage. The state of emergency included the imposition of curfews and allowed the military to take over administrative control of the affected region.

In March 2013, sectarian violence between Buddhists and Muslims erupted in Burma again -- this time in the town of Meiktila. Located to the south of Mandalay, Meiktila was beset by unrest with deadly consequences. The fracas appeared to have started as a result of a conflict in a gold shop, which quickly turned volatile as several Muslim mosques were set ablaze. As well, fighting broke out between persons from the rival sectarian communities. BBC News reported that at least 30 people were killed over the course of days, pointing to the apparent bodies of 20 Muslims. There were related reports by local witnesses that Burmese authorities were rounding up Buddhist agitators who may have been connected to those deaths.

Hundreds of riot police were soon deployed to the town, although they were soon accused of doing little to stop the violence. Accordingly, President Thein Sein soon announced a state of emergency. During a speech broadcast by the media, the head of state explained that the new order would allow the military to restore order in Meiktila. The eruptions of sectarian violence would be dealt with on a case-by-case basis to bring an end to the unrest; however, a plan to address the communal dissonance on a sustained basis was yet to surface in Burma.

In April 2013, at least 40 people were killed as a result of violence between Buddhists and Muslims in central Burma (Myanmar) and at the end of the month, 400 Buddhists armed with bricks and sticks ambushed mosques set more than 100 homes in Okkan ablaze. One person died in this incident while several more individuals were injured.

By late May 2013, during a meeting with United States President Barack Obama, Burmese

President Thein Sein acknowledged that his country had "many challenges" and needed to undertake social and political reforms, as he referred to the ethno-sectarian tensions spreading across the country. Indeed, in recent months, international human rights advocacy groups have expressed grave concerns over the spate of anti-Muslim violence plaguing Burma (Myanmar).

Later, during an address at Johns Hopkins University in Washington, Thein Sein referred to the ethno-sectarian challenges facing his country as it transitions to full democracy, saying, "I know how much people want to see democracy take root." He called for Burma (Myanmar) to "forge a new and more inclusive national identity" and noted that his country would have to halt the spate of anti-Muslim violence that was plaguing the country in recent months. In this regard, he said: "We must end all forms of discrimination and ensure not only that inter-communal violence is brought to a halt, but that all perpetrators are brought to justice."

Special Report

Reconciliation with Kachin Rebels

The end of May 2013 saw the government of Burma -- also known as Myanmar -- forge a peace deal with the Kachin rebels, potentially bringing an end to years of fighting between the military and the rebels. At issue has been the aspirations of the Kachin Independence Army, which has been fighting for 50 years for ethnic Kachins to hold greater autonomy in northern Burma (also known as Myanmar), especially with regard to the exploitation of natural resources and the effects of the quality of life for Kachin people. The Kachin rebels were the only major ethnic group not to have a bilateral ceasefire agreement with the government until this point.

Only months earlier at the start of 2013, Burma's (Myanmar's) military forces were carrying out an assault on Kachin rebels close to the border with China. At the time, the government promised to resolve their differences with the Kachin rebels, and established its own unilateral ceasefire. Soon thereafter, the government abandoned that position as it carried out the aforementioned assault on a Kachin rebel base as part of a larger ongoing offensive operation. With the possibility of the military going after other Kachin rebel strongholds, rebel forces were reported to be retreating to forested areas. There was a strong suggestion that the conflict could soon be transformed from a straightforward battle between the military of Burma (Myanmar) and the Kachin Independence Army into a more complicated guerrilla war between the two sides.

But as discussed here, at the close of May 2013, the government of Burma (Myanmar) had managed to foreclose that possibility -- at least for now -- as it forged a peace deal with the Kachin Independence Organization -- the political wing of the Kachin Independence Army. The development could potentially bring a conclusion to years of violence and inaugurate new possibilities for the Kachin people who have been beset by conflict for decades, which left as many

as 100,000 people displaced. The agreement was brokered by the United Nations and an ethnic umbrella entity, the United Nationalities Federal Council.

Primer on 2015 parliamentary elections in Burma

New day dawns in Burma as pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy seize historic victory in landmark elections --

Summary

Pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory in historic parliamentary elections held in Burma (Myanmar). It was not the first such victory for Suu Kyi and the NLD. In 1990, they won the elections but were prevented from taking power by the military dictatorship. In 2010, elections branded as "democratic" were held, but were orchestrated to award power to the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). It was, in plain terms, a sham election. Finally, in 2015, with Suu Kyi and the NLD capturing a super-majority of seats in parliament, it was clear that their popular mandate had been ratified at the polls. The only question left was how Suu Kyi could vitiate the constitutional curbs to her gaining the presidency. After more than a decade under house arrest, the general consensus among the people of Burma was that Suu Kyi had more than earned the right to lead the country for which she has been steadfast a fighter for democracy.

In Detail

Parliamentary elections were set to be held in Burma (also known as Myanmar) on Nov. 8, 2018. At stake would be the composition of the legislative branch of government. In Burma, there is a bicameral parliament, consisting of the House of Nationalities [Amyotha Hluttaw] and the House of Representatives [Pythu Hluttaw]. In the House of Nationalities [Amyotha Hluttaw], there are 224 seats, 168 of which are directly elected and 56 of which are appointed by the military; members serve five-year terms. In the House of Representatives [Pythu Hluttaw], there are 440 seats, 330 of which are directly elected and 110 of which are appointed by the military; members serve five-year terms.

The last multiparty elections were last held on Nov. 7, 2010, and were described as a sham due to the boycott of the National League for Democracy, as well as the fact that the system was set up to favor the election of members of the ruling military junta. As expected, these 2010 elections, which were being touted as "landmark elections," given the fact that it would be the first so-called democratic voting in the country since 1990 when, despite election victory by Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, the military refused to recognize the election results and took control of the country instead. Following years of little or no progress on the road back to civilian

power, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) -- the military junta running Burma or Myanmar -- was presenting these 2010 elections as a fulfillment of that promise. Nevertheless, the international community and human rights groups seriously questioned the credibility and legitimacy of the elections, pointing to the fact that the structure of the contest was designed to favor the ruling junta-backed political party, and that there would be no international monitors to witness the elections.

In total, by September 2010, more than 25 political parties were approved to contest the multi-party general elections. Significantly, however, five political parties were disbanded by the country's electoral commission on the basis of their failure to re-register ahead of the 2010 elections. These five dissolved political parties were listed as Union Pa-Oh National Organization, Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, Shan State Kokang Democratic Party, Wa National Development Party, and National League for Democracy -- the winner of the previous democratic elections. But Aung San Suu Kyi's party made it clear that these elections should not be legitimized via participation. Indeed, the party's very leader -- Aung San Suu Kyi, who has spent most of the last decade under house arrest for her political efforts -- had been prohibited from contesting the November 2010 polls.

Ahead of the polls, analysts expressed the view that the chance of the opposition winning the elections was quite small. The junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), led by Burma's Prime Minister Thein Sein, was expected to contest every one of the 498 elected seats at stake, whereas the opposition would be contesting less than 200. Since the military would be according 25 percent of the parliamentary seats or 166 in national legislatures, it was clear that the proverbial deck would be stacked against the opposition. Also worth noting was the fact that with independent monitors prohibited from witnessing and reporting on the elections, there was no guarantee of a free and fair process.

Election day in Burma (also known as Myanmar) was marked by low voter turnout. Perhaps the lack of popular participation was due to the aforementioned boycott by key members of the opposition. Election results pointed to a clear victory by the pro-junta Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), thanks to the fact that they ran in several uncontested seats in a system intended to reify the military junta's political power. Among the winning USDP candidates was Prime Minister Thein Sein, who left the military in order to contest the elections. While opposition parties contesting the election were on track to win some seats in Yangon, they would not be the dominant players in parliament.

In 2015, it was to be seen if a more competitive contest would characterize the election landscape. The chances of a more competitive contest were somewhat mitigated by the government's decision to ban any political parties from criticizing either the military or the military-dominated constitution in the country's state media during the campaign season. Instead, the parties contesting the elections would be given 15 minutes to publicize their policies in state media; however, their

platforms would have to be approved by the Election Commission and the Ministry of Information; they were also subject to rejection if they were deemed to have violated the rules. The curbs on free speech were not likely to facilitate dissenting views, and clearly were intended to protect the ruling party's lock on power.

For its part, the National League for Democracy, led by pro-democracy icon, Aung San Suu Kyi, made clear that it would not be deterred from expressing its views ahead of election day. Furthermore, the opposition leader herself urged voters to choose "real change" at the polls. Aung San Suu Kyi said, "We want to form the government for real change. The coming election is our chance to change the system and go for democracy. People should not miss the chance."

Ahead of the elections, Shwe Mann -- the leader of the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) -- was ousted from his post by President Thein Sein. There were suspicions that his sacking was linked with his positive ties with Aung San Suu Kyi. Regardless of the actual rationale for the move, Shwe Mann noted that the National League for Democracy commanded the support of many people in the country and could very well win the elections.

Should that end come to pass -- that is to say, should the National League for Democracy win the parliamentary elections -- the main question surrounded the role of the party's leader Aung San Suu Kyi. According to the country's constitution, she would be barred from becoming president due to the fact that her two children were citizens of the United Kingdom. Aung San Suu Kyi addressed this issue herself in early November 2015 when she would be "above the president" if her party was victorious. When questioned about this proposition, Aung San Suu Kyi said, "I will be above the president. It's a very simple message." She explained that there was nothing in the constitution barring her from assuming a hitherto unknown post with more political power above the president. That claim was somewhat mitigated by the fact that Clause 58 in the constitution actually states that the president "takes precedence over all other persons" in the country. The performance of the political parties was to be determined. Because the constitution granted 25 percent of parliamentary seats to the military, the National League for Democracy would have to secure at least two-thirds of the remaining seats in order to choose the next president. Assuming they achieved that benchmark, it was to be seen how the constitutional issues would be resolved.

On Nov. 8, 2015, voters went to the polls to vote in these landmark elections in Burma. Once the polls were closed, the counting of the ballots had begun and was expected to continue for several days. Nevertheless, preliminary results indicated that Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy was on track to win a landslide victory. Indeed, based on the partial count at the time, the country's pro-democracy icon had led her party to victory by capturing over 80 percent of the vote share. Aung San Suu Kyi herself won her parliamentary seat for a constituency in Rangoon. The final vote count was unknown, though, and was not expected to be known for several days, with an official announcement to come later in November 2015.

Given the vote count trends, the military-backed government quickly conceded defeat and indicated that it would respect the election results. Indeed, President Thein Sein had conveyed congratulations to Aung San Suu Kyi's party for its election success. Via the social media outlet, Facebook, President Thein Sein also promised a smooth transition of power, as he wrote: "Our government will respect the people's decision and choice and will hand over power as scheduled."

Reconciliation talks between the party leadership of the National League for Democracy and the army's leaders were in the offing. Those were expected to be difficult, as the military was not likely to be enthused about its diminished political power. For the military, with its guarantee of 25 percent of the parliamentary seats, the big question was whether or not the opposition would have a sufficiently successful election performance as to offset its influence, particularly with regard to choosing the next president.

For her part, Aung San Suu Kyi has made it clear that she would be leading the country moving forward. Regardless of the constitutional obstacles in front of her, Aung San Suu Kyi said in interviews with the international media that she would be "making all the decisions as the leader of the winning party." Giving an idea of her strategy to vitiate the constitutional curbs at play, she indicated that a new leadership post would be established at the highest echelon of power. As such, the next president would have "no authority."

At the international level, United States President Barack Obama expressed congratulations to Burma for its conduct of the elections and the victory for the National League for Democracy. Of particular significance was the hard work of diplomacy undertaken by President Obama and his then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to spur Burma on the path of reform and democratization, which included strenuously urging the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. Also of note were the high profiles and historic visits by both Obama and Clinton to Burma in 2012 and 2011 respectively, which included personal meetings with Aung San Suu Kyi. Those moves by the Obama administration in the United States to engage with Burma were largely credited with moving the country on its transition to democracy. For the Obama administration, the effort was regarded as an indisputable diplomatic victory and the kind of success that would characterize the Obama legacy.

Meanwhile, the vote counting continued in Burma and on Nov. 13, 2015 -- five days after the historic vote -- it was clear that the lead for the National League for Democracy was insurmountable. While no official results would be announced until the end of November 2015, it was not clear that the party had clinched the super-majority needed to control parliament and choose the next president.

Aung San Suu Kyi again made it clear that she would be leading the country moving forward. Regardless of the constitutional obstacles in front of her, Aung San Suu Kyi said in interviews with the international media that she would be "making all the decisions as the leader of the winning

party." Giving an idea of her strategy to establish a new post that sit at the highest echelon of power, she said that the next president would have "no authority."

In November 2015, it was clear that a new day was dawning in Burma (Myanmar) and after more than 25 years of fighting for her country's freedom, even being subject to house arrest for her efforts, Aung San Suu Kyi had finally found her moment of political vindication.

Government formation negotiations taking place in Burma; will Aung San Suu Kyi navigate constitutional curbs to become president?

Going back to November 2015, pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory in historic parliamentary elections held in Burma (Myanmar). It was not the first such victory for Suu Kyi and the NLD. In 1990, they won the elections but were prevented from taking power by the military dictatorship. In 2010, elections branded as "democratic" were held, but were orchestrated to award power to the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). It was, in plain terms, a sham election. Finally, in 2015, with Suu Kyi and the NLD capturing a super-majority of seats in parliament, it was clear that their popular mandate had been ratified at the polls. The only question left was how Suu Kyi could vitiate the constitutional curbs to her gaining the presidency.

At issue was the fact that according to the existing constitution that went into force under the former military junta, Aung San Suu Kyi would be prohibited from becoming the president due to the fact that two of her children were citizens of the United Kingdom. Aung San Suu Kyi had addressed this issue herself in early November 2015 -- ahead of the elections that ended in victory for her party -- when she would be "above the president." When questioned about this proposition, Aung San Suu Kyi said, "I will be above the president. It's a very simple message." She explained that there was nothing in the constitution barring her from assuming a hitherto unknown post with more political power above the president. That claim was somewhat mitigated by the fact that Clause 58 in the constitution actually states that the president "takes precedence over all other persons" in the country. However, as noted by Aung San Suu Kyi herself in interviews with the international media, she would be "making all the decisions as the leader of the winning party." Giving an idea of her strategy to vitiate the constitutional curbs at play, she indicated that a new leadership post would be established at the highest echelon of power. As such, the next president would have "no authority." Again, the constitutional maneuvers to achieve this end remained unknown. But after more than a decade under house arrest, the general consensus among the people of Burma was that Suu Kyi had more than earned the right to lead the country for which she has been a steadfast fighter for democracy.

By the start of February 2016, negotiations over government formation were ongoing. Both the National League for Democracy (NLD) were involved in that process, although neither side was

hinting towards the actual content of those talks, which were taking place in a "closed door" context. The legal process leading to Aung San Suu Kyi gaining the presidency promised to be difficult, quite likely involving a constitutional amendment, which would itself require approval by 75 percent of parliament and ratification in a national referendum. As such, the negotiations were likely characterized by deal-making and concessions.

In mid-February 2016, all reports indicated that the spirit of goodwill between Aung San Suu Kyi and Myanmar's military had evaporated, with dissonance building over the division of power. As such, it was unlikely that a new president would be selected before mid-March 2016 -- only two weeks ahead of the April 1, 2016, deadline when the new government would commence its tenure.

As February 2016 came to a close, the assessment of meetings between the two sides indicated that the military was against a quick change to the constitution. The military's commander-in-chief Min Aung Hlaing was reported to have said that the constitution should be amended "at an appropriate time" under the aegis of constitutional provisions. The complete quote as reported by the media was as follows: "Since Myanmar (Burma) has been undergoing democratization only for five years, necessary provisions should be amended at an appropriate time in accordance with the chapter XII of the constitution." On first blush, this position indicated a stalemate of sorts. However, some members of the National League for Democracy were suggesting that the particular articles of the constitution preventing Aung San Suu Kyi from assuming the presidency might be temporarily suspended -- perhaps as part of a power-sharing agreement.

With the new government set to commence its term at the start of April 2016, the window was closing for an actual deal to be reached. Perhaps with this reality in mind, there was a strategic calculation being made to accelerate the timetable for selecting a president.

At the start of March 2016, the National League for Democracy advanced the name of Htin Kyaw, a close friend and stalwart of Suu Kyi to be its presidential candidate, and the name of Henry Van Thio to be a vice president in a nod to the country's ethnic minorities. The military was concerned about the candidacies of both, citing the fact that Htin Kyaw was not an elected member of parliament, even though the constitution does not require that a candidate be a lawmaker. The military was also concerned about Henry Van Thio's time spent abroad. Regardless of this disapproval, the two candidates were confirmed and by mid-March 2016, Htin Kyaw became the new president of Burma.

It should be noted that the National League for Democracy made clear that Aung San Suu Kyi would remain as the head of the party, and would essentially steer the agenda of the government, despite not having a formal position in that government. It was not clear how precisely this arrangement would take place; however, the party was emphasizing the fact that its head would be the country's de facto if not de jure leader.

Editor's Note:

Aung San Suu Kyi

Born in 1945, Aung San Suu Kyi was the daughter of Burma's independence hero, General Aung San, who was assassinated in 1947. Suu Kyi was educated at Oxford University in the United Kingdom. In the 1980s, when she returned to Burma (also known as Myanmar), she became embroiled in popular unrest against the ruling dictator of the time, Ne Win. In 1989, as the military junta declared martial law, Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest. Nevertheless, Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won a landslide victory in the country's elections a year later in 1990. She was never allowed to take power and the military junta -- which controlled Myanmar (Burma) for decades -- refused to transition the country to civilian democratic rule.

Once known as State Law and Order Restoration Council, or SLORC, the leadership body of the ruling military junta changed its name to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 1997. Although landmark elections were held in 2010, they were boycotted by Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy and condemned by the international community for being a sham, aimed only at reinforcing the power of the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party. Nevertheless, the military authorities of Burma (Myanmar) have insisted that the elections were emblematic of Burma's (Myanmar's) transition from military rule to a civilian democracy.

For her part, Aung San Suu Kyi has spent most of the period of 1989 to 2010 under house arrest for her political efforts, which were aimed at pressing the ruling forces on the return to legitimate and transparent democracy. Although she was released for a short period of time in the mid-1990s with limited freedom, by the year 2000, Suu Kyi was subjected to almost continuous detention until her release in November 2010. Even after her arrest, she was not allowed to contest the 2010 elections.

Since 2013, there has been a thrust for change and reform in Burma (Myanmar), largely attributable to emerging engagement with the Obama administration in the United States. On consequence of that path toward more meaningful political reform has been the inclusion of Aung San Suu Kyi in the political process. In addition to the re-registering her National League for Democracy as a legitimate political party was the fact that Suu Kyi would contest the 2012 parliamentary by-elections. By the start of April 2012, Suu Kyi re-entered the realm of elected politics having won a seat in the country's parliament. In 2015, Suu Kyi led the National League for Democracy to victory in a landslide victory in parliamentary elections. This outcome was a vindication for the woman who has championed democracy for her country at great personal cost.

For her steadfast efforts to advance legitimate and transparent democracy in Burma (Myanmar), Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991.

-- March 2016

Written by Dr. Denise Youngblood Coleman, Editor in Chief, www.countrywatch.com . Research sources listed in Bibliography.

Political Risk Index

Political Risk Index

The **Political Risk Index** is a proprietary index measuring the level of risk posed to governments, corporations, and investors, based on a myriad of political and economic factors. The [Political Risk Index](#) is calculated using an established methodology by CountryWatch's Editor-in-Chief and is based on varied criteria* including the following consideration: political stability, political representation, democratic accountability, freedom of expression, security and crime, risk of conflict, human development, jurisprudence and regulatory transparency, economic risk, foreign investment considerations, possibility of sovereign default, and corruption. Scores are assigned from 0-10 using the aforementioned criteria. A score of 0 marks the highest political risk, while a score of 10 marks the lowest political risk. Stated differently, countries with the lowest scores pose the greatest political risk. A score of 0 marks the most dire level of political risk and an ultimate nadir, while a score of 10 marks the lowest possible level of political risk, according to this proprietary index. Rarely will there be scores of 0 or 10 due to the reality that countries contain complex landscapes; as such, the index offers a range of possibilities ranging from lesser to greater risk.

Country	Assessment

Afghanistan	2
Albania	4
Algeria	6
Andorra	9
Angola	4
Antigua	8
Argentina	4
Armenia	4-5
Australia	9.5
Austria	9.5
Azerbaijan	4
Bahamas	8.5
Bahrain	6
Bangladesh	3.5
Barbados	8.5-9
Belarus	3
Belgium	9
Belize	8

Benin	5
Bhutan	5
Bolivia	5
Bosnia-Herzegovina	4
Botswana	7
Brazil	7
Brunei	7
Bulgaria	6
Burkina Faso	4
Burma (Myanmar)	4.5
Burundi	3
Cambodia	4
Cameroon	5
Canada	9.5
Cape Verde	6
Central African Republic	3
Chad	4
Chile	9

China	7
China: Hong Kong	8
China: Taiwan	8
Colombia	7
Comoros	5
Congo DRC	3
Congo RC	4
Costa Rica	8
Cote d'Ivoire	4.5
Croatia	7
Cuba	4-4.5
Cyprus	5
Czech Republic	8
Denmark	9.5
Djibouti	4.5
Dominica	7
Dominican Republic	6
East Timor	5

Ecuador	6
Egypt	5
El Salvador	7
Equatorial Guinea	4
Eritrea	3
Estonia	8
Ethiopia	4
Fiji	5
Finland	9
Fr.YugoslavRep.Macedonia	5
France	9
Gabon	5
Gambia	4
Georgia	5
Germany	9.5
Ghana	6
Greece	4.5-5
Grenada	8

Guatemala	6
Guinea	3.5
Guinea-Bissau	3.5
Guyana	4.5
Haiti	3.5
Holy See (Vatican)	9
Honduras	4.5-5
Hungary	7
Iceland	8.5-9
India	7.5-8
Indonesia	6
Iran	3.5-4
Iraq	2.5-3
Ireland	8-8.5
Israel	8
Italy	7.5
Jamaica	6.5-7
Japan	9

Jordan	6.5
Kazakhstan	6
Kenya	5
Kiribati	7
Korea, North	1
Korea, South	8
Kosovo	4
Kuwait	7
Kyrgyzstan	4.5
Laos	4.5
Latvia	7
Lebanon	5.5
Lesotho	6
Liberia	3.5
Libya	2
Liechtenstein	9
Lithuania	7.5
Luxembourg	9

Madagascar	4
Malawi	4
Malaysia	8
Maldives	4.5
Mali	4
Malta	8
Marshall Islands	6
Mauritania	4.5-5
Mauritius	7
Mexico	6.5
Micronesia	7
Moldova	5
Monaco	9
Mongolia	5
Montenegro	6
Morocco	6.5
Mozambique	4.5-5
Namibia	6.5-7

Nauru	6
Nepal	4
Netherlands	9.5
New Zealand	9.5
Nicaragua	5
Niger	4
Nigeria	4.5
Norway	9.5
Oman	7
Pakistan	3.5
Palau	7
Panama	7.5
Papua New Guinea	5
Paraguay	6.5-7
Peru	7
Philippines	6
Poland	8
Portugal	7.5

Qatar	7.5
Romania	5.5
Russia	5.5
Rwanda	5
Saint Kitts and Nevis	8
Saint Lucia	8
Saint Vincent and Grenadines	8
Samoa	7
San Marino	9
Sao Tome and Principe	5.5
Saudi Arabia	6
Senegal	6
Serbia	5
Seychelles	7
Sierra Leone	4.5
Singapore	9
Slovak Republic (Slovakia)	8
Slovenia	8

Solomon Islands	6
Somalia	2
South Africa	7
Spain	7.5
Sri Lanka	5
Sudan	3.5
Suriname	5
Swaziland	5
Sweden	9.5
Switzerland	9.5
Syria	2
Tajikistan	4.5
Tanzania	6
Thailand	6.5
Togo	4.5
Tonga	7
Trinidad and Tobago	8
Tunisia	6

Turkey	7
Turkmenistan	4.5
Tuvalu	7
Uganda	6
Ukraine	3.5-4
United Arab Emirates	7
United Kingdom	9
United States	9.5
Uruguay	8
Uzbekistan	4
Vanuatu	7
Venezuela	4
Vietnam	5
Yemen	3
Zambia	4.5
Zimbabwe	3

***Methodology**

The [Political Risk Index](#) is calculated by CountryWatch's Editor-in-Chief and is based on the

combined scoring of varied criteria as follows --

1. political stability (record of peaceful transitions of power, ability of government to stay in office and carry out policies as a result of productive executive-legislative relationship, perhaps with popular support vis a vis risk of government collapse)
2. political representation (right of suffrage, free and fair elections, multi-party participation, and influence of foreign powers)
3. democratic accountability (record of respect for political rights, human rights, and civil liberties, backed by constitutional protections)
4. freedom of expression (media freedom and freedom of expression, right to dissent or express political opposition, backed by constitutional protections)
5. security and crime (the degree to which a country has security mechanisms that ensures safety of citizens and ensures law and order, without resorting to extra-judicial measures)
6. risk of conflict (the presence of conflict; record of coups or civil disturbances; threat of war; threats posed by internal or external tensions; threat or record of terrorism or insurgencies)
7. human development (quality of life; access to education; socio-economic conditions; systemic concern for the status of women and children)
8. jurisprudence and regulatory transparency (the impartiality of the legal system, the degree of transparency within the regulatory system of a country and the durability of that structure)
9. economic conditions (economic stability, investment climate, degree of nationalization of industries, property rights, labor force development)
10. corruption (the degree of corruption in a country and/or efforts by the government to address graft and other irregularities)

Editor's Note:

As of 2015, the current climate of upheaval internationally -- both politically and economically -- has affected the ratings for several countries across the world.

North Korea, [Afghanistan](#), [Somalia](#), and [Zimbabwe](#) -- retain their low rankings.

Several Middle Eastern and North African countries, such as [Tunisia](#), [Egypt](#), [Libya](#), [Syria](#), [Iraq](#) and [Yemen](#) were downgraded in recent years due to political instability occurring in the "season of unrest" sweeping the region since 2011 and continuing today. The worst downgrades affected [Syria](#) where civil war is at play, along with the rampage of terror being carried out by Islamist terrorists who have also seized control over part of Syrian territory. [Iraq](#) has been further downgraded due to the rampage of Islamist terrorists and their takeover of wide swaths of Iraqi territory. [Libya](#) has also been downgraded further due to its slippage into failed state status; an issue in [Libya](#) have been an ongoing power struggle between rival militias. [Yemen](#) continues to hold steady with a poor ranking due to continued unrest at the hands of Houthi rebels, secessionists, al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, and Islamic State. Its landscape has been further complicated by the fact that it is now the site of a proxy war between [Iran](#) and [Saudi Arabia](#). Conversely, [Tunisia](#) and [Egypt](#) have seen slight upgrades as these countries stabilize.

In Africa, [Zimbabwe](#) continues to be one of the bleak spots of the world with the Mugabe regime effectively destroying the country's once vibrant economy, and miring [Zimbabwe](#) with an exceedingly high rate of inflation, debilitating unemployment, devolving public services, and critical food shortages; rampant crime and political oppression round out the landscape. [Somalia](#) also sports a poor ranking due to the continuing influence of the terror group, al-Shabab, which was not operating across the border in [Kenya](#). On the upside, [Nigeria](#), which was ineffectively dealing with the threat posed by the terror group, Boko Haram, was making some strides on the national security front with its new president at the helm. [Mali](#) was slightly upgraded due to its efforts to return to constitutional order following the 2012 coup and to neutralize the threat of separatists and Islamists. But the [Central African Republic](#) was downgraded due to the takeover of the government by Muslim Seleka rebels and a continued state of lawlessness in that country. [South Sudan](#) -- the world's newest nation state -- has not been officially included in this assessment; however, it can be unofficially assessed to be in the vicinity of "3" due to its manifold political and economic challenges. [Burkina Faso](#), [Burundi](#) and [Guinea](#) have been downgraded due to political unrest, with [Guinea](#) also having to deal with the burgeoning Ebola crisis.

In Europe, [Ukraine](#) was downgraded due to the unrest facing that country following its Maidan revolution that triggered a pro-Russian uprising in the eastern part of the country. [Russia](#) was also implicated in the Ukrainian crisis due to its intervention on behalf of pro-Russian separatists, as well as its annexation of the Ukrainian territory of Crimea. Strains on the infrastructure of southern and eastern European countries, such as [Serbia](#), [Croatia](#), and [Hungary](#), due to an influx of refugees was expected to pose social and economic challenges, and slight downgrades were made accordingly. So too, a corruption crisis for the Romanian prime minister has affected the ranking of that country. Meanwhile, the rankings for [Spain](#), [Portugal](#), [Ireland](#), and [Italy](#) were maintained due to debt woes and the concomitant effect on the euro zone. [Greece](#), another euro zone nation, was earlier downgraded due to its sovereign debt crisis; however, no further downgrade was added since the country was able to successfully forge a bailout rescue deal with creditor institutions. Cyprus' exposure to Greek banks yielded a downgrade in its case.

In Asia, [Nepal](#) was downgraded in response to continuous political instability and a constitutional crisis that prevails well after landmark elections were held. Both [India](#) and China retain their rankings; [India](#) holds a slightly higher ranking than [China](#) due to its record of democratic representation and accountability. Increasing violence and political instability in [Pakistan](#) resulted in a downgrade for this country's already low rating. Meanwhile, [Singapore](#) retained its strong rankings due to its continued effective stewardship of the economy and political stability.

In the Americas, ongoing political and economic woes, as well as crime and corruption have affected the rankings for [Mexico](#), [Guatemala](#), and [Brazil](#). [Argentina](#) was downgraded due to its default on debt following the failure of talks with bond holders. [Venezuela](#) was downgraded due to its mix of market unfriendly policies and political oppression. For the moment, the [United States](#) maintains a strong ranking along with [Canada](#), and most of the English-speaking countries of the Caribbean; however, a renewed debt ceiling crisis could cause the [United States](#) to be downgraded in a future edition. Finally, a small but significant upgrade was attributed to [Cuba](#) due to its recent pro-business reforms and its normalization of ties with the United States.

Source:

Dr. Denise Youngblood Coleman, Editor in Chief, CountryWatch Inc. www.countrywatch.com

Updated:

2015

Political Stability

Political Stability

The **Political Stability Index** is a proprietary index measuring a country's level of stability, standard of good governance, record of constitutional order, respect for human rights, and overall strength of democracy. The [Political Stability Index](#) is calculated using an established methodology* by CountryWatch's Editor-in-Chief and is based on a given country's record of peaceful transitions of power, ability of a government to stay in office and carry out its policies vis a vis risk credible risks of government collapse. Threats include coups, domestic violence and instability, terrorism, etc. This index measures the dynamic between the quality of a country's government

and the threats that can compromise and undermine stability. Scores are assigned from 0-10 using the aforementioned criteria. A score of 0 marks the lowest level of political stability and an ultimate nadir, while a score of 10 marks the highest level of political stability possible, according to this proprietary index. Rarely will there be scores of 0 or 10 due to the reality that countries contain complex landscapes; as such, the index offers a range of possibilities ranging from lesser to greater stability.

Country	Assessment
Afghanistan	2
Albania	4.5-5
Algeria	5
Andorra	9.5
Angola	4.5-5
Antigua	8.5-9
Argentina	7
Armenia	5.5
Australia	9.5
Austria	9.5
Azerbaijan	5
Bahamas	9
Bahrain	6

Bangladesh	4.5
Barbados	9
Belarus	4
Belgium	9
Belize	8
Benin	5
Bhutan	5
Bolivia	6
Bosnia-Herzegovina	5
Botswana	8.5
Brazil	7
Brunei	8
Bulgaria	7.5
Burkina Faso	4
Burma (Myanmar)	4.5
Burundi	4
Cambodia	4.5-5
Cameroon	6

Canada	9.5
Cape Verde	6
Central African Republic	3
Chad	4.5
Chile	9
China	7
China: Hong Kong	8
China: Taiwan	8
Colombia	7.5
Comoros	5
Congo DRC	3
Congo RC	5
Costa Rica	9.5
Cote d'Ivoire	3.5
Croatia	7.5
Cuba	4.5
Cyprus	8
Czech Republic	8.5

Denmark	9.5
Djibouti	5
Dominica	8.5
Dominican Republic	7
East Timor	5
Ecuador	7
Egypt	4.5-5
El Salvador	7.5-8
Equatorial Guinea	4.5
Eritrea	4
Estonia	9
Ethiopia	4.5
Fiji	5
Finland	9
Fr.YugoslavRep.Macedonia	6.5
France	9
Gabon	5
Gambia	4.5

Georgia	5
Germany	9.5
Ghana	7
Greece	6
Grenada	8.5
Guatemala	7
Guinea	3.5-4
Guinea-Bissau	4
Guyana	6
Haiti	3.5-4
Holy See (Vatican)	9.5
Honduras	6
Hungary	7.5
Iceland	9
India	8
Indonesia	7
Iran	3.5
Iraq	2.5

Ireland	9.5
Israel	8
Italy	8.5-9
Jamaica	8
Japan	9
Jordan	6
Kazakhstan	6
Kenya	5
Kiribati	8
Korea, North	2
Korea, South	8.5
Kosovo	5.5
Kuwait	7
Kyrgyzstan	5
Laos	5
Latvia	8.5
Lebanon	5.5
Lesotho	5

Liberia	3.5-4
Libya	2
Liechtenstein	9
Lithuania	9
Luxembourg	9.5
Madagascar	4
Malawi	5
Malaysia	8
Maldives	4.5-5
Mali	4.5-5
Malta	9
Marshall Islands	8
Mauritania	6
Mauritius	8
Mexico	6.5-7
Micronesia	8
Moldova	5.5
Monaco	9.5

Mongolia	6.5-7
Montenegro	8
Morocco	7
Mozambique	5
Namibia	8.5
Nauru	8
Nepal	4.5
Netherlands	9.5
New Zealand	9.5
Nicaragua	6
Niger	4.5
Nigeria	4.5
Norway	9.5
Oman	7
Pakistan	3
Palau	8
Panama	8.5
Papua New Guinea	6

Paraguay	8
Peru	7.5
Philippines	6
Poland	9
Portugal	9
Qatar	7
Romania	7
Russia	6
Rwanda	5
Saint Kitts and Nevis	9
Saint Lucia	9
Saint Vincent and Grenadines	9
Samoa	8
San Marino	9.5
Sao Tome and Principe	7
Saudi Arabia	6
Senegal	7.5
Serbia	6.5

Seychelles	8
Sierra Leone	4.5
Singapore	9.5
Slovak Republic (Slovakia)	8.5
Slovenia	9
Solomon Islands	6.5-7
Somalia	2
South Africa	7.5
Spain	9
Sri Lanka	5
Sudan	3
Suriname	5
Swaziland	5
Sweden	9.5
Switzerland	9.5
Syria	2
Tajikistan	4.5
Tanzania	6

Thailand	6
Togo	5
Tonga	7
Trinidad and Tobago	8
Tunisia	5
Turkey	7.5
Turkmenistan	5
Tuvalu	8.5
Uganda	6
Ukraine	3.5-4
United Arab Emirates	7
United Kingdom	9
United States	9
Uruguay	8.5
Uzbekistan	4
Vanuatu	8.5
Venezuela	4.5-5
Vietnam	4.5

Yemen	2.5
Zambia	5
Zimbabwe	3

*Methodology

The Political Stability Index is calculated by CountryWatch's Editor-in-Chief and is based on the combined scoring of varied criteria as follows --

1. record of peaceful transitions of power (free and fair elections; adherence to political accords)
2. record of democratic representation, presence of instruments of democracy; systemic accountability
3. respect for human rights; respect for civil rights
4. strength of the system of jurisprudence, adherence to constitutional order, and good governance
5. ability of a government to stay in office and carry out its policies vis a vis risk credible risks of government collapse (i.e. government stability versus a country being deemed "ungovernable")
6. threat of coups, insurgencies, and insurrection
7. level of unchecked crime and corruption
8. risk of terrorism and other threats to national security
9. relationship with regional powers and international community; record of bilateral or multilateral cooperation
10. degree of economic strife (i.e. economic and financial challenges)

Editor's Note:

As of 2015, the current climate of upheaval internationally -- both politically and economically --

has affected the ratings for several countries across the world. The usual suspects -- North Korea, [Afghanistan](#), and [Somalia](#) -- retain their low rankings. The reclusive and ultra-dictatorial North Korean regime, which has terrified the world with its nuclear threats, has exhibited internal instability. Of note was a cut-throat purge of hundreds of high ranking officials deemed to be a threat to Kim Jung-un. Despite their attempts to recover from years of lawlessness, war, and warlordism, both [Afghanistan](#) and [Somalia](#) continue to be beset by terrorism and turmoil. In [Afghanistan](#), while international forces have seen success in the effort against the terror group, al-Qaida, the other Islamist extremist group, the Taliban, continues to carry out a vicious insurgency using terrorism. In [Somalia](#), while the government attempts to do the nation's business, the terror group, al-Shabab continues to make its presence known not only in [Somalia](#), but across the border into [Kenya](#) with devastating results/ Also in this category is [Iraq](#), which continues to be rocked by horrific violence and terrorism at the hands of Islamic State, which has taken over wide swaths of Iraqi territory.

Syria, [Libya](#), and [Yemen](#) have been added to this unfortunate echelon of the world's most politically unstable countries. [Syria](#) has been mired by the twin hazards of 1. a civil war as rebels oppose the Assad regime; and 2. the rampage of terror being carried out by Islamic State, which also seized control over vast portions of Syrian territory. Meanwhile, the post-Qaddhafi landscape of [Libya](#) has devolved into chaos as rival militias battle for control -- the elected government of the country notwithstanding. Rounding out this grim triad is [Yemen](#), which was dealing with a Houthi rebellion, secessionists in the south, as well as the threat of terrorism from al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula as well as Islamic State, while also being the site of a proxy war between Shi'a [Iran](#) and Sunni [Saudi Arabia](#).

Meanwhile, several Middle Eastern and North African countries, such as [Tunisia](#), [Egypt](#), and [Bahrain](#) were downgraded in recent years due to political instability occurring in the "season of unrest" sweeping the region since 2011 and continuing today. All three of these countries have stabilized in recent years and have been upgraded accordingly. In [Bahrain](#), the landscape had calmed. In [Egypt](#), the secular military-backed government has generated criticism for its crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood; however, the country had ratified the presidency via democratic elections and were on track to hold parliamentary elections as the country moved along the path of democratization. Perhaps the most impressive story was coming out of [Tunisia](#) -- the country whose Jasmine Revolution sparked the entire Arab Spring -- and where after a few years of strife, a new progressive constitution was passed into law and a secular government had been elected to power. [Tunisia](#), [Egypt](#), and [Bahrain](#) have seen slight upgrades as these countries stabilize.

In Africa, the [Central African Republic](#) was downgraded the previous year due to the takeover of the government by Muslim Seleka rebels. Although the country has been trying to emerge from this crisis, the fact of the matter was that it was difficult to halt the precipitous decline into lawlessness in that country. [Zimbabwe](#) has maintained its consistently poor ranking due to the

dictatorial regime of Mugabe, who continues to hold a tight grip on power, intimidates the opposition, squashes dissent, and oppresses the white farmer population of the country. Moving in a slightly improved direction is [Nigeria](#), which has sported abysmal ratings due to the government's fecklessness in dealing with the threat posed by the Islamist terror group, Boko Haram. Under its newly-elected government, there appears to be more of a concerted effort to make national security a priority action item. [Mali](#) was also slightly upgraded due to its efforts to return to constitutional order following the 2012 coup and to neutralize the threat of separatists and Islamists. Political instability has visited [Burkina Faso](#) and [Burundi](#) as the leaders of those countries attempted to side-step constitutional limits to hold onto power. In [Burundi](#), an attempted coup ensued but quelled, and the president won a (questionable) new term in office; unrest has since punctuated the landscape. In [Burkina Faso](#), the political climate has turned stormy as a result of a successful coup that ended the rule of the president, and then a putsch against the transitional government. These two African countries have been downgraded as a result.

It should be noted that the African country of South [Sudan](#) -- the world's newest nation state -- has not been officially included in this assessment; however, it can be unofficially assessed to be in the vicinity of "3" due to its manifold political and economic challenges. [Guinea](#) has endured poor rankings throughout, but was slightly downgraded further over fears of social unrest and the Ebola heath crisis.

In Europe, [Ukraine](#) was downgraded due to the unrest facing that country following its Maidan revolution that triggered a pro-Russian uprising in the eastern part of the country. [Russia](#) was also implicated in the Ukrainian crisis due to its intervention on behalf of pro-Russian separatists, as well as its annexation of the Ukrainian territory of Crimea. [Serbia](#) and [Albania](#) were slightly downgraded due to eruptions of unrest, while [Romania](#) was slightly downgraded on the basis of corruption charges against the prime minister. [Spain](#), [Portugal](#), [Ireland](#), and [Italy](#) were downgraded due to debt woes and the concomitant effect on the euro zone. [Greece](#), another euro zone nation, was downgraded the previous year due to its sovereign debt crisis; however, the country successfully forged a rescue deal with international creditors and stayed within the Euro zone. Greek voters rewarded the hitherto unknown upstart party at the polls for these efforts. As a result, [Greece](#) was actually upgraded slightly as it proved to the world that it could endure the political and economic storms. Meanwhile, [Germany](#), [France](#), [Switzerland](#), the [United Kingdom](#), the [Netherlands](#), and the Scandinavian countries continue to post impressive ranking consistent with these countries' strong records of democracy, freedom, and peaceful transfers of power.

In Asia, [Nepal](#) was downgraded in response to continuous political instability well after landmark elections that prevails today. [Cambodia](#) was very slightly downgraded due to post-election instability that has resulted in occasional flares of violence. Despite the "trifecta of tragedy" in [Japan](#) in 2011 -- the earthquake, the ensuing tsunami, and the resulting nuclear crisis -- and the appreciable destabilization of the economic and political terrain therein, this country has only slightly been downgraded. Japan's challenges have been assessed to be transient, the government

remains accountable, and there is little risk of default. Both [India](#) and China retain their rankings; [India](#) holds a slightly higher ranking than [China](#) due to its record of democratic representation and accountability. Increasing violence and political instability in [Pakistan](#) resulted in a downgrade for this country's already low rating.

In the Americas, [Haiti](#) retained its downgraded status due to ongoing political and economic woes. [Mexico](#) was downgraded due to its alarming rate of crime. [Guatemala](#) was downgraded due to charges of corruption, the arrest of the president, and uncertainty over the outcome of elections. [Brazil](#) was downgraded due to the corruption charges erupting on the political landscape, the stalling of the economy, and the increasingly loud calls for the impeachment of President Rousseff. [Argentina](#) was downgraded due to its default on debt following the failure of talks with bond holders. [Venezuela](#) was downgraded due to the fact that the country's post-Chavez government is every bit as autocratic and nationalistic, but even more inclined to oppress its political opponents. [Colombia](#) was upgraded slightly due to efforts aimed at securing a peace deal with the FARC insurgents. A small but significant upgrade was attributed to [Cuba](#) due to its recent pro-business reforms and its normalization of ties with the United States. Meanwhile, the [United States](#), [Canada](#), [Costa Rica](#), [Panama](#), and most of the English-speaking countries of the Caribbean retain their strong rankings due to their records of stability and peaceful transfers of power.

In the Pacific, [Fiji](#) was upgraded due to its return to constitutional order and democracy with the holding of the first elections in eight years.

In Oceania, [Maldives](#) has been slightly downgraded due to the government's continued and rather relentless persecution of the country's former pro-democracy leader - former President Nasheed.

Source:

Dr. Denise Youngblood Coleman, Editor in Chief, CountryWatch Inc. www.countrywatch.com

Updated:

2015

Freedom Rankings

Freedom Rankings

Freedom in the World

Editor's Note: This ranking by Freedom House quantifies political freedom and civil liberties into a single combined index on each sovereign country's level of freedom and liberty. The initials "PR" and "CL" stand for Political Rights and Civil Liberties, respectively. The number 1 represents the most free countries and the number 7 represents the least free. Several countries fall in the continuum in between. The freedom ratings reflect an overall judgment based on survey results.

Country	PR	CL	Freedom Status	Trend Arrow
Afghanistan	6 ?	6	Not Free	
Albania*	3	3	Partly Free	
Algeria	6	5	Not Free	
Andorra*	1	1	Free	
Angola	6	5	Not Free	
Antigua and Barbuda*	3 ?	2	Free	
Argentina*	2	2	Free	
Armenia	6	4	Partly Free	
Australia*	1	1	Free	
Austria*	1	1	Free	

Azerbaijan	6	5	Not Free
Bahamas*	1	1	Free
Bahrain	6 ?	5	Not Free ?
Bangladesh*	3 ?	4	Partly Free
Barbados*	1	1	Free
Belarus	7	6	Not Free
Belgium*	1	1	Free
Belize*	1	2	Free
Benin*	2	2	Free
Bhutan	4	5	Partly Free
Bolivia*	3	3	Partly Free
Bosnia-Herzegovina*	4	3	Partly Free
Botswana*	3 ?	2	Free
Brazil*	2	2	Free
Brunei	6	5	Not Free
Bulgaria*	2	2	Free
Burkina Faso	5	3	Partly Free
Burma	7	7	Not Free

Burundi*	4	5	Partly Free	↑
Cambodia	6	5	Not Free	↓
Cameroon	6	6	Not Free	
Canada*	1	1	Free	
Cape Verde*	1	1	Free	
Central African Republic	5	5	Partly Free	
Chad	7	6	Not Free	
Chile*	1	1	Free	
China	7	6	Not Free	
Colombia*	3	4	Partly Free	
Comoros*	3	4	Partly Free	
Congo (Brazzaville)	6	5	Not Free	↓
Congo (Kinshasa)	6	6	Not Free	↓
Costa Rica*	1	1	Free	
Cote d'Ivoire	6	5	Not Free	
Croatia*	1 ?	2	Free	
Cuba	7	6	Not Free	
Cyprus*	1	1	Free	

Czech Republic*	1	1	Free	
Denmark*	1	1	Free	
Djibouti	5	5	Partly Free	
Dominica*	1	1	Free	
Dominican Republic*	2	2	Free	↓
East Timor*	3	4	Partly Free	
Ecuador*	3	3	Partly Free	
Egypt	6	5	Not Free	
El Salvador*	2	3	Free	
Equatorial Guinea	7	7	Not Free	
Eritrea	7	7 ?	Not Free	
Estonia*	1	1	Free	
Ethiopia	5	5	Partly Free	↓
Fiji	6	4	Partly Free	
Finland*	1	1	Free	
France*	1	1	Free	
Gabon	6	5 ?	Not Free ?	
The Gambia	5	5 ?	Partly Free	

Georgia	4	4	Partly Free	
Germany*	1	1	Free	
Ghana*	1	2	Free	
Greece*	1	2	Free	
Grenada*	1	2	Free	
Guatemala*	4 ?	4	Partly Free	
Guinea	7	6 ?	Not Free	
Guinea-Bissau*	4	4	Partly Free	
Guyana*	2	3	Free	
Haiti*	4	5	Partly Free	
Honduras	4 ?	4 ?	Partly Free	
Hungary*	1	1	Free	
Iceland*	1	1	Free	
India*	2	3	Free	
Indonesia*	2	3	Free	
Iran	6	6	Not Free	↓
Iraq	5 ?	6	Not Free	
Ireland*	1	1	Free	

Israel*	1	2	Free	
Italy*	1	2	Free	
Jamaica*	2	3	Free	
Japan*	1	2	Free	
Jordan	6 ?	5	Not Free ?	
Kazakhstan	6	5	Not Free	↓
Kenya	4	4 ?	Partly Free	
Kiribati*	1	1	Free	
Kosovo	5 ?	4 ?	Partly Free ?	
Kuwait	4	4	Partly Free	
Kyrgyzstan	6 ?	5 ?	Not Free ?	
Laos	7	6	Not Free	
Latvia*	2	1	Free	
Lebanon	5	3 ?	Partly Free	
Lesotho*	3 ?	3	Partly Free ?	
Liberia*	3	4	Partly Free	
Libya	7	7	Not Free	
Liechtenstein*	1	1	Free	

Lithuania*	1	1	Free	
Luxembourg*	1	1	Free	
Macedonia*	3	3	Partly Free	↑
Madagascar	6 ?	4 ?	Partly Free	
Malawi*	3 ?	4	Partly Free	
Malaysia	4	4	Partly Free	
Maldives*	3 ?	4	Partly Free	
Mali*	2	3	Free	
Malta*	1	1	Free	↓
Marshall Islands*	1	1	Free	
Mauritania	6	5	Not Free	
Mauritius*	1	2	Free	
Mexico*	2	3	Free	
Micronesia*	1	1	Free	
Moldova*	3 ?	4	Partly Free	
Monaco*	2	1	Free	
Mongolia*	2	2	Free	↑
Montenegro*	3	2 ?	Free ?	

Morocco	5	4	Partly Free	↓
Mozambique	4 ?	3	Partly Free	
Namibia*	2	2	Free	
Nauru*	1	1	Free	
Nepal	4	4	Partly Free	
Netherlands*	1	1	Free	
New Zealand*	1	1	Free	
Nicaragua*	4	4 ?	Partly Free	
Niger	5 ?	4	Partly Free	
Nigeria	5	4	Partly Free	↓
North Korea	7	7	Not Free	↓
Norway*	1	1	Free	
Oman	6	5	Not Free	
Pakistan	4	5	Partly Free	
Palau*	1	1	Free	
Panama*	1	2	Free	
Papua New Guinea*	4	3	Partly Free	
Paraguay*	3	3	Partly Free	

Peru*	2	3	Free	
Philippines	4	3	Partly Free	↓
Poland*	1	1	Free	
Portugal*	1	1	Free	
Qatar	6	5	Not Free	
Romania*	2	2	Free	
Russia	6	5	Not Free	↓
Rwanda	6	5	Not Free	
Saint Kitts and Nevis*	1	1	Free	
Saint Lucia*	1	1	Free	
Saint Vincent and Grenadines*	2	1	Free	
Samoa*	2	2	Free	
San Marino*	1	1	Free	
Sao Tome and Principe*	2	2	Free	
Saudi Arabia	7	6	Not Free	
Senegal*	3	3	Partly Free	
Serbia*	2 ?	2	Free	
Seychelles*	3	3	Partly Free	

Sierra Leone*	3	3	Partly Free	
Singapore	5	4	Partly Free	
Slovakia*	1	1	Free	↓
Slovenia*	1	1	Free	
Solomon Islands	4	3	Partly Free	
Somalia	7	7	Not Free	
South Africa*	2	2	Free	
South Korea*	1	2	Free	
Spain*	1	1	Free	
Sri Lanka*	4	4	Partly Free	
Sudan	7	7	Not Free	
Suriname*	2	2	Free	
Swaziland	7	5	Not Free	
Sweden*	1	1	Free	
Switzerland*	1	1	Free	↓
Syria	7	6	Not Free	
Taiwan*	1 ?	2 ?	Free	
Tajikistan	6	5	Not Free	

Tanzania	4	3	Partly Free	
Thailand	5	4	Partly Free	
Togo	5	4 ?	Partly Free	
Tonga	5	3	Partly Free	
Trinidad and Tobago*	2	2	Free	
Tunisia	7	5	Not Free	
Turkey*	3	3	Partly Free	↓
Turkmenistan	7	7	Not Free	
Tuvalu*	1	1	Free	
Uganda	5	4	Partly Free	
Ukraine*	3	2	Free	
United Arab Emirates	6	5	Not Free	
United Kingdom*	1	1	Free	
United States*	1	1	Free	
Uruguay*	1	1	Free	
Uzbekistan	7	7	Not Free	
Vanuatu*	2	2	Free	
Venezuela	5 ?	4	Partly Free	

Vietnam	7	5	Not Free	↓
Yemen	6 ?	5	Not Free ?	
Zambia*	3	4 ?	Partly Free	
Zimbabwe	6 ?	6	Not Free	

Methodology:

PR and CL stand for political rights and civil liberties, respectively; 1 represents the most free and 7 the least free rating. The ratings reflect an overall judgment based on survey results.

? ? up or down indicates a change in political rights, civil liberties, or status since the last survey.

↑ ↓ up or down indicates a trend of positive or negative changes that took place but that were not sufficient to result in a change in political rights or civil liberties ratings of 1-7.

* indicates a country's status as an electoral democracy.

Source:

This data is derived from the latest edition of Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2010 edition.

Available at URL: <http://www.freedomhouse.org>

Updated:

Reviewed in 2015

Human Rights

Editor's Note

The former military authorities that ruled this country changed the historic name - Burma - to

Union of Myanmar or Myanmar. Although the new name is used in conventional practice today, it was never endorsed by a sitting legislature. CountryWatch references this country by both the historic and conventional names in its materials, however, the lack of legitimization in regard to the conventional usage should be duly noted.

Overview of Human Rights in Burma (also known as Myanmar)

The union of Myanmar, also known as Burma, is ruled by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). This military government is the country's de facto government. The human rights record in Myanmar, or Burma, is extremely poor and actually worsened in recent years. The SPDC is responsible for many of the human rights abuses committed.

Notably, citizens do not have the right to change their government. The government restricts, forcibly when deemed necessary, the freedoms of speech, press, assembly, association, movement, and religion. Citizens' privacy rights are also infringed upon as security forces are known to monitor citizens' personal conversations and movements. Some people have been forcibly relocated without just cause, compensation for land or property, or legal recourse.

Discrimination against Muslims and other religious and ethnic minorities is almost sanctioned by the government. The government tightly controls the nations' Muslim population. Trafficking in persons, forced recruitment of child soldiers, and forced labor are all abuses committed in Myanmar or Burma as well. Ethnic armed groups, such as the Karen National Union (KNU), the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), and the Shan State Army-South (SSA), also commit human rights abuses in the region.

Killings, rapes, forced labor and conscription of child soldiers have been reported. As well, there have been crackdowns on dissent and protestors, as demonstrated in the developments that ensued since 2007 (see Political Conditions for details). Human rights organizations are restricted. Those who work for such organizations often face harassment and threats of violence from the authorities. The country continues to fail to comply with many of the international arena's human rights norms and laws.

See Political Conditions for details related to elections of 2010, touted as being democratic but condemned by the international community as being far from participatory and orchestrated so that the same individuals playing leading roles in the military junta would be returned to power under the cover of democratic polls.

Editor's Note on Pro-democracy icon, Aung San Suu Kyi

Born in 1945, Aung San Suu Kyi was the daughter of Burma's independence hero, General Aung San, who was assassinated in 1947. Suu Kyi was educated at Oxford University in the United Kingdom. In the 1980s, when she returned to Burma (also known as Myanmar), she became embroiled in popular unrest against the ruling dictator of the time, Ne Win. In 1989, as the military junta declared martial law, Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest. Nevertheless, Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won a landslide victory in the country's elections a year later in 1990. She was never allowed to take power and the military junta -- which controlled Myanmar (Burma) for decades -- refused to transition the country to civilian democratic rule.

Once known as State Law and Order Restoration Council, or SLORC, the leadership body of the ruling military junta changed its name to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 1997. Although landmark elections were held in 2010, they were boycotted by Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy and condemned by the international community for being a sham, aimed only at reinforcing the power of the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party. Nevertheless, the military authorities of Burma (Myanmar) have insisted that the elections were emblematic of Burma's (Myanmar's) transition from military rule to a civilian democracy.

For her part, Aung San Suu Kyi has spent most of the last decade under house arrest for her political efforts, aimed at pressing the ruling forces on the return to legitimate and transparent democracy. Although she was released for a short period of time in the mid-1990s with limited freedom, by the year 2000, Suu Kyi was subjected to almost continuous detention until her release in November 2010. For her steadfast efforts to advance legitimate and transparent democracy in Burma (Myanmar), Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991.

Human Development Index (HDI) Rank:

See full ranking list in Social Overview of Country Review.

Human Poverty Index Rank:

50th out of 103

Gini Index:

N/A

Life Expectancy at Birth (years):

64.5 years

Unemployment Rate:

5%

Population living on \$1 a day (%):

N/A

Population living on \$2 a day (%):

N/A

Population living beneath the Poverty Line (%):

25%

Internally Displaced People:

550,000-1,000,000

Note-147,000 refugees currently reside in Myanmar or Burma

Total Crime Rate (%):

N/A

Health Expenditure (% of GDP):

Public: 0.4%

% of GDP Spent on Education:

N/A

Human Rights Conventions Party to:

- International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
- Conventions on the Rights of the Child

*Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite index that measures the level of well-being in 177 nations in the world. It uses factors such as poverty, literacy, life-expectancy, education, gross

domestic product, and purchasing power parity to assess the average achievements in each nation. It has been used in the United Nation's Human Development Report since 1993.

*Human Poverty Index Ranking is based on certain indicators used to calculate the Human Poverty Index. Probability at birth of not surviving to age 40, adult literacy rate, population without sustainable access to an improved water source, and population below income poverty line are the indicators assessed in this measure.

*The Gini Index measures inequality based on the distribution of family income or consumption. A value of 0 represents perfect equality (income being distributed equally), and a value of 100 perfect inequality (income all going to one individual).

*The calculation of the total crime rate is the % of the total population which has been effected by property crime, robbery, sexual assault, assault, or bribery (corruption) related occurrences.

Government Functions

Editor's Note:

The former military authorities that ruled this country changed the historic name - Burma - to Union of Myanmar or Myanmar. Although the new name is used in conventional practice today, it was never endorsed by a sitting legislature. CountryWatch references this country by both the historic and conventional names in its materials, however, the lack of legitimization in regard to the conventional usage should be duly noted.

Background:

In 1989, the official English name of the country was changed from the Union of Burma to the Union of Myanmar, and the English name of the capital was changed from Rangoon to Yangon. The military government of Myanmar stated that the change of the names was due to the recognition of the country by its original name. In the Burmese language the country has been known as Myanmar since the 13th century. The British colonial administration renamed it Burma, as well as renaming Yangon to Rangoon. The military government also stated that the name change of the country was needed in order to include all non-ethnic Burmese. Regardless, the

name change was not legitimized by a sitting assembly.

Myanmar gained independence from Britain in 1948 and adopted an independence constitution in 1974. From 1962 to 1988, the Burma Socialist Program Party, or BSPP, was the official political party in Myanmar, and the president of the country was the chairman of the BSPP. In September 1988, the armed forces in Myanmar took control of the government, and since then Myanmar has been under the rule of the military junta with the constitution in abeyance.

Constitution:

According to the 1974 constitution, the country's governing power was vested in the unicameral People's Assembly or Pyithu Hluttaw, with authorities in legislative, executive and judicial areas. In 1988, after the military junta took power, the constitution was suspended. A national convention was convened in 1993 to draft a new constitution but collapsed in 1996; this convention reconvened in 2004 but does not include participation of democratic opposition.

Note: A new draft constitution was ratified by referendum in May 2008 despite the prevailing chaos of devastating cyclone that gripped the country. By the close of the month, the new charter was officially promulgated into law. The new constitution was part of the military regime's program toward multi-party general elections to be held in 2010 for representatives to parliament.

Governing Regime:

Under the military regime, a new ruling body, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), was created. All the former state organs were abolished, and the SLORC assumed all their duties. In 1997, the SLORC was dissolved and replaced by the State Peace and Development Council, or SPDC.

At the executive level, the chief of state is the chairman of the SPDC. The head of government is the prime minister. The cabinet is overseen by SPDC.

At the legislative level, the 1974 constitution provided for the aforementioned unicameral People's Assembly or Pyithu Hluttaw, however, since the military junta came to power, the legislative branch had not been allowed to convene.

The legal system is based on British common law and remnants of the British-era legal system are in place, however, since the military junta came to power, there is no guarantee of a fair public trial and the judiciary is not independent of the executive branch.

As noted above, a new draft constitution was ratified by referendum in May 2008. By the close of the month, the new charter was officially promulgated into law. The new constitution was part of the military regime's program toward multi-party general elections to be held in 2010 for representatives to parliament.

Those landmark elections were held in 2010, but were boycotted by Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, and condemned by the international community for being a sham, aimed only at reinforcing the power of the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party. Nevertheless, the military authorities of Burma (Myanmar) have insisted that the elections were emblematic of Burma's (Myanmar's) transition from military rule to a civilian democracy.

Political Process:

In order to consolidate its political power by promising a democratic election, the military regime abolished the law of keeping the BSPP as the sole political party, and new parties were encouraged to register for general elections to a new Constituent Assembly. In May 1990, multi-party elections were held, with more than 90 parties participating in the elections. The main opposition party, the National League for Democracy, or NLD, won an overwhelming majority of seats to the assembly. However, the new assembly did not convene because the ruling military regime refused to give up power to the NLD.

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Update:

Elections in 2015 have more significantly returned the country to the path of democratization.

Government Structure

Names:

conventional long form:

Union of Myanmar

conventional short form:

Myanmar

local long form:

Pyidaungzu Myanma Naingngandaw (translated by the Burmese as Union of Myanmar)

local short form:

Myanma Naingngandaw

former:

Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma; Burma; Union of Burma

Note:

The former military authorities that ruled this country changed the historic name - Burma - to Union of Myanmar or Myanmar. Although the new name is used in conventional practice today, it was never endorsed by a sitting legislature.

Type:

Emerging democracy; Burma was for some time controlled by a military junta; elections were held in 2010 but lacked true democratic transparency and competitiveness; elections in 2015 have more significantly returned the country to the path of democratization.

Executive Branch:

Introduction:

Chairman of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) Gen. THAN SHWE ruled from 1992 to the time of elections in 2010. In 1997 SLORC changed its name to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

Meanwhile, Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the National League for Democracy, which won the elections in 1990 with over 82 percent of all parliamentary seats, was viewed as the democratically-elected leader of the country by much of the international community. SLORC,

however, has refused to recognize the results of the election.

Elections were held in 2010 and resulted in a victory for the military-backed party although the polls were criticized as non-competitive; see "Note" below. Since that time, the leadership of the country has officially changed; see "Head of State" below. However, in 2015 elections resulted in a victory for the National League for Democracy and resulted in a tectonic shift on the political landscape and new leadership as discussed in the "Primer" below.

Head of State:

President Htin Kyaw (since 2016 following the 2015 elections discussed in the "Primer" below).

Note on elections and leadership:

Going back to November 2015, pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory in historic parliamentary elections held in Burma (Myanmar). It was not the first such victory for Suu Kyi and the NLD. In 1990, they won the elections but were prevented from taking power by the military dictatorship. In 2010, elections branded as "democratic" were held, but were orchestrated to award power to the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). It was, in plain terms, a sham election. Finally, in 2015, with Suu Kyi and the NLD capturing a super-majority of seats in parliament, it was clear that their popular mandate had been ratified at the polls. The only question left was how Suu Kyi could vitiate the constitutional curbs to her gaining the presidency.

At issue was the fact that according to the existing constitution that went into force under the former military junta, Aung San Suu Kyi would be prohibited from becoming the president due to the fact that two of her children were citizens of the United Kingdom. Aung San Suu Kyi had addressed this issue herself in early November 2015 -- ahead of the elections that ended in victory for her party -- when she would be "above the president." When questioned about this proposition, Aung San Suu Kyi said, "I will be above the president. It's a very simple message." She explained that there was nothing in the constitution barring her from assuming a hitherto unknown post with more political power above the president. That claim was somewhat mitigated by the fact that Clause 58 in the constitution actually states that the president "takes precedence over all other persons" in the country. However, as noted by Aung San Suu Kyi herself in interviews with the international media, she would be "making all the decisions as the leader of the winning party." Giving an idea of her strategy to vitiate the constitutional curbs at play, she indicated that a new leadership post would be established at the highest echelon of power. As such, the next president would have "no authority." Again, the constitutional maneuvers to achieve this end remained unknown. But after more than a decade under house arrest, the general consensus among the people of Burma was that Suu Kyi had more than earned the right to lead the country for which she has been a steadfast fighter for democracy.

By the start of February 2016, negotiations over government formation were ongoing. Both the National League for Democracy (NLD) were involved in that process, although neither side was hinting towards the actual content of those talks, which were taking place in a "closed door" context. The legal process leading to Aung San Suu Kyi gaining the presidency promised to be difficult, quite likely involving a constitutional amendment, which would itself require approval by 75 percent of parliament and ratification in a national referendum. As such, the negotiations were likely characterized by deal-making and concessions.

In mid-February 2016, all reports indicated that the spirit of goodwill between Aung San Suu Kyi and Myanmar's military had evaporated, with dissonance building over the division of power. As such, it was unlikely that a new president would be selected before mid-March 2016 -- only two weeks ahead of the April 1, 2016, deadline when the new government would commence its tenure.

As February 2016 came to a close, the assessment of meetings between the two sides indicated that the military was against a quick change to the constitution. The military's commander-in-chief Min Aung Hlaing was reported to have said that the constitution should be amended "at an appropriate time" under the aegis of constitutional provisions. The complete quote as reported by the media was as follows: "Since Myanmar (Burma) has been undergoing democratization only for five years, necessary provisions should be amended at an appropriate time in accordance with the chapter XII of the constitution." On first blush, this position indicated a stalemate of sorts. However, some members of the National League for Democracy were suggesting that the particular articles of the constitution preventing Aung San Suu Kyi from assuming the presidency might be temporarily suspended -- perhaps as part of a power-sharing agreement.

With the new government set to commence its term at the start of April 2016, the window was closing for an actual deal to be reached. Perhaps with this reality in mind, there was a strategic calculation being made to accelerate the timetable for selecting a president.

At the start of March 2016, the the National League for Democracy advanced the name of Htin Kyaw, a close friend and stalwart of Suu Kyi to be its presidential candidate, and the name of Henry Van Thio to be a vice president in a nod to the country's ethnic minorities. The military was concerned about the candidacies of both, citing the fact that Htin Kyaw was not an elected member of parliament, even though the constitution does not require that a candidate be a lawmaker. The military was also concerned about Henry Van Thio's time spent abroad. Regardless of this disapproval, the two candidates were confirmed and by mid-March 2016, Htin Kyaw became the new president of Burma.

It should be noted that the National League for Democracy made clear that Aung San Suu Kyi would remain as the head of the party, and would essentially steer the agenda of the government, despite not having a formal position in that government. It was not clear how precisely this

arrangement would take place; however, the party was emphasizing the fact that its head would be the country's de facto if not de jure leader.

Cabinet:

The cabinet is appointed by the president and confirmed by the parliament

Legislative Branch:

Bicameral parliament:

Consists of the House of Nationalities [Amyotha Hluttaw] and the House of Representatives [Pythu Hluttaw]

House of Nationalities [Amyotha Hluttaw]:

224 seats, 168 directly elected and 56 appointed by the military; members serve five-year terms)

House of Representatives [Pythu Hluttaw]:

440 seats, 330 directly elected and 110 appointed by the military; members serve five-year terms)

Elections and Government:

Primer on 2015 parliamentary elections in Burma

Nov. 8, 2015 --

New day dawns in Burma as pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy seize historic victory in landmark elections

Summary

Pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory in historic parliamentary elections held in Burma (Myanmar). It was not the first such victory for Suu Kyi and the NLD. In 1990, they won the elections but were prevented from taking power by the military dictatorship. In 2010, elections branded as "democratic" were held, but were orchestrated to award power to the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). It was, in plain terms, a sham election. Finally, in 2015, with Suu Kyi and the

NLD capturing a super-majority of seats in parliament, it was clear that their popular mandate had been ratified at the polls. The only question left was how Suu Kyi could vitiate the constitutional curbs to her gaining the presidency. After more than a decade under house arrest, the general consensus among the people of Burma was that Suu Kyi had more than earned the right to lead the country for which she has been a steadfast fighter for democracy.

In Detail

Parliamentary elections were set to be held in Burma (also known as Myanmar) on Nov. 8, 2018. At stake would be the composition of the legislative branch of government. In Burma, there is a bicameral parliament, consisting of the House of Nationalities [Amyotha Hluttaw] and the House of Representatives [Pythu Hluttaw]. In the House of Nationalities [Amyotha Hluttaw], there are 224 seats, 168 of which are directly elected and 56 of which are appointed by the military; members serve five-year terms. In the House of Representatives [Pythu Hluttaw], there are 440 seats, 330 of which are directly elected and 110 of which are appointed by the military; members serve five-year terms.

The last multiparty elections were last held on Nov. 7, 2010, and were described as a sham due to the boycott of the National League for Democracy, as well as the fact that the system was set up to favor the election of members of the ruling military junta. As expected, these 2010 elections, which were being touted as "landmark elections," given the fact that it would be the first so-called democratic voting in the country since 1990 when, despite election victory by Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, the military refused to recognize the election results and took control of the country instead. Following years of little or no progress on the road back to civilian power, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) -- the military junta running Burma or Myanmar -- was presenting these 2010 elections as a fulfillment of that promise. Nevertheless, the international community and human rights groups seriously questioned the credibility and legitimacy of the elections, pointing to the fact that the structure of the contest was designed to favor the ruling junta-backed political party, and that there would be no international monitors to witness the elections.

In total, by September 2010, more than 25 political parties were approved to contest the multiparty general elections. Significantly, however, five political parties were disbanded by the country's electoral commission on the basis of their failure to re-register ahead of the 2010 elections. These five dissolved political parties were listed as Union Pa-Oh National Organization, Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, Shan State Kokang Democratic Party, Wa National Development Party, and National League for Democracy -- the winner of the previous democratic elections. But Aung San Suu Kyi's party made it clear that these elections should not be legitimized via participation. Indeed, the party's very leader -- Aung San Suu Kyi, who has spent most of the last decade under house arrest for her political efforts -- had been prohibited from contesting the November 2010 polls.

Ahead of the polls, analysts expressed the view that the chance of the opposition winning the elections was quite small. The junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), led by Burma's Prime Minister Thein Sein, was expected to contest every one of the 498 elected seats at stake, whereas the opposition would be contesting less than 200. Since the military would be according 25 percent of the parliamentary seats or 166 in national legislatures, it was clear that the proverbial deck would be stacked against the opposition. Also worth noting was the fact that with independent monitors prohibited from witnessing and reporting on the elections, there was no guarantee of a free and fair process.

Election day in Burma (also known as Myanmar) was marked by low voter turnout. Perhaps the lack of popular participation was due to the aforementioned boycott by key members of the opposition. Election results pointed to a clear victory by the pro-junta Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), thanks to the fact that they ran in several uncontested seats in a system intended to reify the military junta's political power. Among the winning USDP candidates was Prime Minister Thein Sein, who left the military in order to contest the elections. While opposition parties contesting the election were on track to win some seats in Yangon, they would not be the dominant players in parliament.

In 2015, it was to be seen if a more competitive contest would characterize the election landscape. The chances of a more competitive contest were somewhat mitigated by the government's decision to ban any political parties from criticizing either the military or the military-dominated constitution in the country's state media during the campaign season. Instead, the parties contesting the elections would be given 15 minutes to publicize their policies in state media; however, their platforms would have to be approved by the Election Commission and the Ministry of Information; they were also subject to rejection if they were deemed to have violated the rules. The curbs on free speech were not likely to facilitate dissenting views, and clearly were intended to protect the ruling party's lock on power.

For its part, the National League for Democracy, led by pro-democracy icon, Aung San Suu Kyi, made clear that it would not be deterred from expressing its views ahead of election day. Furthermore, the opposition leader herself urged voters to choose "real change" at the polls. Aung San Suu Kyi said, "We want to form the government for real change. The coming election is our chance to change the system and go for democracy. People should not miss the chance."

Ahead of the elections, Shwe Mann -- the leader of the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) -- was ousted from his post by President Thein Sein. There were suspicions that his sacking was linked with his positive ties with Aung San Suu Kyi. Regardless of the actual rationale for the move, Shwe Mann noted that the National League for Democracy commanded the support of many people in the country and could very well win the elections.

Should that end come to pass -- that is to say, should the National League for Democracy win the parliamentary elections -- the main question surrounded the role of the party's leader Aung San Suu Kyi. According to the country's constitution, she would be barred from becoming president due to the fact that her two children were citizens of the United Kingdom. Aung San Suu Kyi addressed this issue herself in early November 2015 when she would be "above the president" if her party was victorious. When questioned about this proposition, Aung San Suu Kyi said, I will be above the president. It's a very simple message." She explained that there was nothing in the constitution barring her from assuming a hitherto unknown post with more political power above the president. That claim was somewhat mitigated by the fact that Clause 58 in the constitution actually states that the president "takes precedence over all other persons" in the country. The performance of the political parties was to be determined. Because the constitution granted 25 percent of parliamentary seats to the military, the National League for Democracy would have to secure at least two-thirds of the remaining seats in order to choose the next president. Assuming they achieved that benchmark, it was to be seen how the constitutional issues would be resolved.

On Nov. 8, 2015, voters went to the polls to vote in these landmark elections in Burma. Once the polls were closed, the counting of the ballots had begun and was expected to continue for several days. Nevertheless, preliminary results indicated that Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy was on track to win a landslide victory. Indeed, based on the partial count at the time, the country's pro-democracy icon had led her party to victory by capturing over 80 percent of the vote share. Aung San Suu Kyi herself won her parliamentary seat for a constituency in Rangoon. The final vote count was unknown, though, and was not expected to be known for several days, with an official announcement to come later in November 2015.

Given the vote count trends, the military-backed government quickly conceded defeat and indicated that it would respect the election results. Indeed, President Thein Sein had conveyed congratulations to Aung San Suu Kyi's party for its election success. Via the social media outlet, Facebook, President Thein Sein also promised a smooth transition of power, as he wrote: "Our government will respect the people's decision and choice and will hand over power as scheduled."

Reconciliation talks between the party leadership of the National League for Democracy and the army's leaders were in the offing. Those were expected to be difficult, as the military was not likely to be enthused about its diminished political power. For the military, with its guarantee of 25 percent of the parliamentary seats, the big question was whether or not the opposition would have a sufficiently successful election performance as to offset its influence, particularly with regard to choosing the next president.

For her part, Aung San Suu Kyi has made it clear that she would be leading the country moving forward. Regardless of the constitutional obstacles in front of her, Aung San Suu Kyi said in interviews with the international media that she would be "making all the decisions as the leader of the winning party." Giving an idea of her strategy to vitiate the constitutional curbs at play, she

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Meanwhile, the vote counting continued in Burma and on Nov. 13, 2015 -- five days after the historic vote -- it was clear that the lead for the National League for Democracy was insurmountable. While no official results would be announced until the end of November 2015, it was not clear that the party had clinched the super-majority needed to control parliament and choose the next president.

Aung San Suu Kyi again made it clear that she would be leading the country moving forward. Regardless of the constitutional obstacles in front of her, Aung San Suu Kyi said in interviews with the international media that she would be "making all the decisions as the leader of the winning party." Giving an idea of her strategy to establish a new post that sit at the highest echelon of power, she said that the next president would have "no authority."

In November 2015, it was clear that a new day was dawning in Burma (Myanmar) and after more than 25 years of fighting for her country's freedom, even being subject to house arrest for her efforts, Aung San Suu Kyi had finally found her moment of political vindication.

Note on Governance

Going back to November 2015, pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory in historic parliamentary elections held in Burma (Myanmar). It was not the first such victory for Suu Kyi and the NLD. In 1990, they won the elections but were prevented from taking power by the military dictatorship. In 2010, elections branded as "democratic" were held, but were orchestrated to award power to the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). It was, in plain terms, a sham election. Finally, in 2015, with Suu Kyi and the NLD capturing a super-majority of seats in parliament, it was clear that their popular mandate had been ratified at the polls. The only question left was how Suu Kyi

could vitiate the constitutional curbs to her gaining the presidency.

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By the start of February 2016, negotiations over government formation were ongoing. Both the National League for Democracy (NLD) were involved in that process, although neither side was hinting towards the actual content of those talks, which were taking place in a "closed door" context. The legal process leading to Aung San Suu Kyi gaining the presidency promised to be difficult, quite likely involving a constitutional amendment, which would itself require approval by 75 percent of parliament and ratification in a national referendum. As such, the negotiations were likely characterized by deal-making and concessions.

In mid-February 2016, all reports indicated that the spirit of goodwill between Aung San Suu Kyi and Myanmar's military had evaporated, with dissonance building over the division of power. As such, it was unlikely that a new president would be selected before mid-March 2016 -- only two weeks ahead of the April 1, 2016, deadline when the new government would commence its tenure.

As February 2016 came to a close, the assessment of meetings between the two sides indicated that the military was against a quick change to the constitution. The military's commander-in-chief Min Aung Hlaing was reported to have said that the constitution should be amended "at an appropriate time" under the aegis of constitutional provisions. The complete quote as reported by the media was as follows: "Since Myanmar (Burma) has been undergoing democratization only for five years, necessary provisions should be amended at an appropriate time in accordance with the chapter XII of the constitution." On first blush, this position indicated a stalemate of sorts. However, some members of the National League for Democracy were suggesting that the

particular articles of the constitution preventing Aung San Suu Kyi from assuming the presidency might be temporarily suspended -- perhaps as part of a power-sharing agreement.

With the new government set to commence its term at the start of April 2016, the window was closing for an actual deal to be reached. Perhaps with this reality in mind, there was a strategic calculation being made to accelerate the timetable for selecting a president.

At the start of March 2016, the National League for Democracy advanced the name of Htin Kyaw, a close friend and stalwart of Suu Kyi to be its presidential candidate, and the name of Henry Van Thio to be a vice president in a nod to the country's ethnic minorities. The military was concerned about the candidacies of both, citing the fact that Htin Kyaw was not an elected member of parliament, even though the constitution does not require that a candidate be a lawmaker. The military was also concerned about Henry Van Thio's time spent abroad. Regardless of this disapproval, the two candidates were confirmed and by mid-March 2016, Htin Kyaw became the new president of Burma.

It should be noted that the National League for Democracy made clear that Aung San Suu Kyi would remain as the head of the party, and would essentially steer the agenda of the government, despite not having a formal position in that government. It was not clear how precisely this arrangement would take place; however, the party was emphasizing the fact that its head would be the country's de facto if not de jure leader.

Judicial Branch:

Limited; remnants of the British-era legal system in place, but there is no guarantee of a fair public trial; the judiciary is not independent of the executive

Constitution:

January 1974; suspended on September 1988; a new constitution was to take effect when the bicameral legislature convened on January 2011

Legal System:

Does not accept compulsory ICJ jurisdiction

Administrative Divisions:

7 divisions (taing-myar, singular - taing) and 7 states* (pyi ne-myar, singular - pyi ne) --

divisions:

Ayeyarwady, Bago, Magway, Mandalay, Sagaing, Tanintharyi, Yangon

states:

Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, Rakhine (Arakan), Shan

Political Parties and Leaders:

All Mon Region Democracy Party or AMRDP [NAING NGWE THEIN]
Arakan National Party or ANP [Dr. AYE MAUNG] (formed from the 2013 merger of the Rakhine Nationalities Development Party and the Arakan League for Democracy)
National Democratic Force or NDF [KHIN MAUNG SWE]
National League for Democracy or NLD [AUNG SAN SUU KYI]
National Unity Party or NUP [THAN TIN]
Pa-O National Organization or PNO [AUNG KHAN HTI]
Shan Nationalities Democratic Party or SNDP [SAI AIK PAUNG]
Shan Nationalities League for Democracy or SNLD [KHUN HTUN OO]
Ta'ang National Party or TNP [AIK MONE]
Union Solidarity and Development Party or USDP [HTAY OO]
Zomi Congress for Democracy or ZCD [PU CIN SIAN THANG]

Suffrage:

18 years of age; universal

Principal Government Officials

Editor's Note:

The former military authorities that ruled this country changed the historic name - Burma - to Union of Myanmar or Myanmar. Although the new name is used in conventional practice today, it was never endorsed by a sitting legislature. CountryWatch references this country by both the historic and conventional names in its materials, however, the lack of legitimization in regard to the conventional usage should be duly noted.

Government of Burma (Myanmar) --

Executive Branch:

Introduction:

Chairman of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) Gen. THAN SHWE ruled from 1992 to the time of elections in 2010. In 1997 SLORC changed its name to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

Meanwhile, Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the National League for Democracy, which won the elections in 1990 with over 82 percent of all parliamentary seats, was viewed as the democratically-elected leader of the country by much of the international community. SLORC, however, has refused to recognize the results of the election.

Elections were held in 2010 and resulted in a victory for the military-backed party although the polls were criticized as non-competitive; see "Note" below. Since that time, the leadership of the country has officially changed; see "Head of State" below. However, in 2015 elections resulted in a victory for the National League for Democracy and resulted in a tectonic shift on the political landscape and new leadership as discussed in the "Primer" below.

Head of State:

President Htin Kyaw (since 2016 following the 2015 elections discussed in the "Primer" below).

Note on elections and leadership:

Going back to November 2015, pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory in historic parliamentary elections held in Burma (Myanmar). It was not the first such victory for Suu Kyi and the NLD. In 1990, they won the elections but were prevented from taking power by the military dictatorship. In 2010, elections

branded as "democratic" were held, but were orchestrated to award power to the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). It was, in plain terms, a sham election. Finally, in 2015, with Suu Kyi and the NLD capturing a super-majority of seats in parliament, it was clear that their popular mandate had been ratified at the polls. The only question left was how Suu Kyi could vitiate the constitutional curbs to her gaining the presidency.

At issue was the fact that according to the existing constitution that went into force under the former military junta, Aung San Suu Kyi would be prohibited from becoming the president due to the fact that two of her children were citizens of the United Kingdom. Aung San Suu Kyi had addressed this issue herself in early November 2015 -- ahead of the elections that ended in victory for her party -- when she would be "above the president." When questioned about this proposition, Aung San Suu Kyi said, I will be above the president. It's a very simple message." She explained that there was nothing in the constitution barring her from assuming a hitherto unknown post with more political power above the president. That claim was somewhat mitigated by the fact that Clause 58 in the constitution actually states that the president "takes precedence over all other persons" in the country. However, as noted by Aung San Suu Kyi herself in interviews with the international media, she would be "making all the decisions as the leader of the winning party." Giving an idea of her strategy to vitiate the constitutional curbs at play, she indicated that a new leadership post would be established at the highest echelon of power. As such, the next president would have "no authority." Again, the constitutional maneuvers to achieve this end remained unknown. But after more than a decade under house arrest, the general consensus among the people of Burma was that Suu Kyi had more than earned the right to lead the country for which she has been steadfast a fighter for democracy.

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the media was as follows: "Since Myanmar (Burma) has been undergoing democratization only for five years, necessary provisions should be amended at an appropriate time in accordance with the chapter XII of the constitution." On first blush, this position indicated a stalemate of sorts. However, some members of the National League for Democracy were suggesting that the particular articles of the constitution preventing Aung San Suu Kyi from assuming the presidency might be temporarily suspended -- perhaps as part of a power-sharing agreement.

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Cabinet:

The cabinet is appointed by the president and confirmed by the parliament

Legislative Branch:

Bicameral parliament:

Consists of the House of Nationalities [Amyotha Hluttaw] and the House of Representatives [Pythu Hluttaw]

House of Nationalities [Amyotha Hluttaw]:

224 seats, 168 directly elected and 56 appointed by the military; members serve five-year terms)

House of Representatives [Pythu Hluttaw]:

440 seats, 330 directly elected and 110 appointed by the military; members serve five-year terms)

Elections and Government:

Primer on 2015 parliamentary elections in Burma

Nov. 8, 2015 --

New day dawns in Burma as pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy seize historic victory in landmark elections

Summary

Pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory in historic parliamentary elections held in Burma (Myanmar). It was not the first such victory for Suu Kyi and the NLD. In 1990, they won the elections but were prevented from taking power by the military dictatorship. In 2010, elections branded as "democratic" were held, but were orchestrated to award power to the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). It was, in plain terms, a sham election. Finally, in 2015, with Suu Kyi and the NLD capturing a super-majority of seats in parliament, it was clear that their popular mandate had been ratified at the polls. The only question left was how Suu Kyi could vitiate the constitutional curbs to her gaining the presidency. After more than a decade under house arrest, the general consensus among the people of Burma was that Suu Kyi had more than earned the right to lead the country for which she has been a steadfast fighter for democracy.

In Detail

Parliamentary elections were set to be held in Burma (also known as Myanmar) on Nov. 8, 2018. At stake would be the composition of the legislative branch of government. In Burma, there is a bicameral parliament, consisting of the House of Nationalities [Amyotha Hluttaw] and the House of Representatives [Pythu Hluttaw]. In the House of Nationalities [Amyotha Hluttaw], there are 224 seats, 168 of which are directly elected and 56 of which are appointed by the military; members serve five-year terms. In the House of Representatives [Pythu Hluttaw], there are 440 seats, 330 of which are directly elected and 110 of which are appointed by the military; members serve five-year terms.

The last multiparty elections were last held on Nov. 7, 2010, and were described as a sham due to

the boycott of the National League for Democracy, as well as the fact that the system was set up to favor the election of members of the ruling military junta. As expected, these 2010 elections, which were being touted as "landmark elections," given the fact that it would be the first so-called democratic voting in the country since 1990 when, despite election victory by Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, the military refused to recognize the election results and took control of the country instead. Following years of little or no progress on the road back to civilian power, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) -- the military junta running Burma or Myanmar -- was presenting these 2010 elections as a fulfillment of that promise. Nevertheless, the international community and human rights groups seriously questioned the credibility and legitimacy of the elections, pointing to the fact that the structure of the contest was designed to favor the ruling junta-backed political party, and that there would be no international monitors to witness the elections.

In total, by September 2010, more than 25 political parties were approved to contest the multi-party general elections. Significantly, however, five political parties were disbanded by the country's electoral commission on the basis of their failure to re-register ahead of the 2010 elections. These five dissolved political parties were listed as Union Pa-Oh National Organization, Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, Shan State Kokang Democratic Party, Wa National Development Party, and National League for Democracy -- the winner of the previous democratic elections. But Aung San Suu Kyi's party made it clear that these elections should not be legitimized via participation. Indeed, the party's very leader -- Aung San Suu Kyi, who has spent most of the last decade under house arrest for her political efforts -- had been prohibited from contesting the November 2010 polls.

Ahead of the polls, analysts expressed the view that the chance of the opposition winning the elections was quite small. The junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), led by Burma's Prime Minister Thein Sein, was expected to contest every one of the 498 elected seats at stake, whereas the opposition would be contesting less than 200. Since the military would be according 25 percent of the parliamentary seats or 166 in national legislatures, it was clear that the proverbial deck would be stacked against the opposition. Also worth noting was the fact that with independent monitors prohibited from witnessing and reporting on the elections, there was no guarantee of a free and fair process.

Election day in Burma (also known as Myanmar) was marked by low voter turnout. Perhaps the lack of popular participation was due to the aforementioned boycott by key members of the opposition. Election results pointed to a clear victory by the pro-junta Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), thanks to the fact that they ran in several uncontested seats in a system intended to reify the military junta's political power. Among the winning USDP candidates was Prime Minister Thein Sein, who left the military in order to contest the elections. While opposition parties contesting the election were on track to win some seats in Yangon, they would not be the dominant players in parliament.

In 2015, it was to be seen if a more competitive contest would characterize the election landscape. The chances of a more competitive contest were somewhat mitigated by the government's decision to ban any political parties from criticizing either the military or the military-dominated constitution in the country's state media during the campaign season. Instead, the parties contesting the elections would be given 15 minutes to publicize their policies in state media; however, their platforms would have to be approved by the Election Commission and the Ministry of Information; they were also subject to rejection if they were deemed to have violated the rules. The curbs on free speech were not likely to facilitate dissenting views, and clearly were intended to protect the ruling party's lock on power.

For its part, the National League for Democracy, led by pro-democracy icon, Aung San Suu Kyi, made clear that it would not be deterred from expressing its views ahead of election day. Furthermore, the opposition leader herself urged voters to choose "real change" at the polls. Aung San Suu Kyi said, "We want to form the government for real change. The coming election is our chance to change the system and go for democracy. People should not miss the chance."

Ahead of the elections, Shwe Mann -- the leader of the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) -- was ousted from his post by President Thein Sein. There were suspicions that his sacking was linked with his positive ties with Aung San Suu Kyi. Regardless of the actual rationale for the move, Shwe Mann noted that the National League for Democracy commanded the support of many people in the country and could very well win the elections.

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As February 2016 came to a close, the assessment of meetings between the two sides indicated that the military was against a quick change to the constitution. The military's commander-in-chief Min Aung Hlaing was reported to have said that the constitution should be amended "at an appropriate time" under the aegis of constitutional provisions. The complete quote as reported by the media was as follows: "Since Myanmar (Burma) has been undergoing democratization only for five years, necessary provisions should be amended at an appropriate time in accordance with the chapter XII of the constitution." On first blush, this position indicated a stalemate of sorts. However, some members of the National League for Democracy were suggesting that the particular articles of the constitution preventing Aung San Suu Kyi from assuming the presidency might be temporarily suspended -- perhaps as part of a power-sharing agreement.

With the new government set to commence its term at the start of April 2016, the window was closing for an actual deal to be reached. Perhaps with this reality in mind, there was a strategic calculation being made to accelerate the timetable for selecting a president.

At the start of March 2016, the National League for Democracy advanced the name of Htin Kyaw, a close friend and stalwart of Suu Kyi to be its presidential candidate, and the name of Henry Van Thio to be a vice president in a nod to the country's ethnic minorities. The military was concerned about the candidacies of both, citing the fact that Htin Kyaw was not an elected member of parliament, even though the constitution does not require that a candidate be a lawmaker. The military was also concerned about Henry Van Thio's time spent abroad. Regardless of this disapproval, the two candidates were confirmed and by mid-March 2016, Htin Kyaw became the new president of Burma.

It should be noted that the National League for Democracy made clear that Aung San Suu Kyi would remain as the head of the party, and would essentially steer the agenda of the government,

despite not having a formal position in that government. It was not clear how precisely this arrangement would take place; however, the party was emphasizing the fact that its head would be the country's de facto if not de jure leader.

-- as of 2016

Leader Biography

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LEADERSHIP

Note on Governance

Going back to November 2015, pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory in historic parliamentary elections held in Burma (Myanmar). It was not the first such victory for Suu Kyi and the NLD. In 1990, they won the

elections but were prevented from taking power by the military dictatorship. In 2010, elections branded as "democratic" were held, but were orchestrated to award power to the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). It was, in plain terms, a sham election. Finally, in 2015, with Suu Kyi and the NLD capturing a super-majority of seats in parliament, it was clear that their popular mandate had been ratified at the polls. The only question left was how Suu Kyi could vitiate the constitutional curbs to her gaining the presidency.

At issue was the fact that according to the existing constitution that went into force under the former military junta, Aung San Suu Kyi would be prohibited from becoming the president due to the fact that two of her children were citizens of the United Kingdom. Aung San Suu Kyi had addressed this issue herself in early November 2015 -- ahead of the elections that ended in victory for her party -- when she would be "above the president." When questioned about this proposition, Aung San Suu Kyi said, I will be above the president. It's a very simple message." She explained that there was nothing in the constitution barring her from assuming a hitherto unknown post with more political power above the president. That claim was somewhat mitigated by the fact that Clause 58 in the constitution actually states that the president "takes precedence over all other persons" in the country. However, as noted by Aung San Suu Kyi herself in interviews with the international media, she would be "making all the decisions as the leader of the winning party." Giving an idea of her strategy to vitiate the constitutional curbs at play, she indicated that a new leadership post would be established at the highest echelon of power. As such, the next president would have "no authority." Again, the constitutional maneuvers to achieve this end remained unknown. But after more than a decade under house arrest, the general consensus among the people of Burma was that Suu Kyi had more than earned the right to lead the country for which she has been a steadfast fighter for democracy.

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Foreign Relations

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General Relations

Since 1948, strict neutralism was the cornerstone of the foreign policy of Burma (Myanmar). As such, Burma (Myanmar) became a founding member of the Non-aligned Movement, but withdrew in 1979. It maintains bilateral relations with other Southeast Asian nations, and became a member of ASEAN in 1997.

After the 1962 military takeover, Burma (Myanmar)'s contacts with other countries were sharply reduced. Nonetheless, it maintained continuous membership within the United Nations and other U.N.-associated organizations.

Burma (Myanmar) became the center of one diplomatic row between the European Union and ASEAN when the European Union would not allow Burma (Myanmar) to attend the talks

between the two groups. ASEAN responded by saying that it would not attend the talks without Burma (Myanmar).

Regional Relations

Burma (Myanmar) was the first country to recognize the People's Republic of China in 1949, but relations deteriorated during the mid-1960s when support for the "Cultural Revolution" by some ethnic Chinese led to anti-Chinese riots. Relations between the two countries improved over the next two decades. In early 2000, after the Taiwan presidential election, the Burma (Myanmar) government reiterated its stand to abide by "One-China" principle no matter how the leadership changes in Taiwan, stressing that Burma (Myanmar) would not establish official links with Taiwan in any form.

As a result of the military takeover in 1988, and the violent suppression of anti-governmental demonstrations, Japan and many countries of the West halted all assistance to Burma (Myanmar). A number of other countries have also taken steps to limit their contact with the regime.

In recent years, Burma (Myanmar) has shared good relations with Japan, which included the recipient of a large aid donor program until 1988. In recent years, Myanmar has strengthened its economic cooperation with Japan. In February 1998, Myanmar and Japan reached an agreement on the establishment of an economic cooperation committee between the two countries to enhance bilateral economic cooperation. In December 1999, the two countries jointly held an economic conference in Myanmar to promote the economic cooperation.

Burma (Myanmar) and Thailand had made considerable efforts to overcome their border and fishing disputes in 1999. After two Thai coast guards and three Burmese (Myanmarese) navy men were killed in two separate disputes over fishing rights, leaders from both countries met in March in an attempt to resolve their disputes and work out a plan to curb the drug trade in the region. On March 18, 1999, an agreement concerning procedures to avoid marine conflict was reached which included the mandatory flying of the national flag and a dedicated radio frequency for emergency use. The regional border committee also met in mid-March.

In 2000, relations between Burma (Myanmar) and Thailand showed signs of normalization following a hostage-taking incident at Burma (Myanmar) Embassy in Bangkok in October 1999, in which five Myanmar hostage takers were flown by the Thai side to the Thai-Burma (Myanmar) border and set free. In March 2000, Thailand and Burma (Myanmar) announced that the two countries would hold talks on fishery cooperation and reopening the Burma (Myanmar) waters to Thai fishermen. Burma (Myanmar) closed its waters to Thai fishermen in October 1999 because of the hostage incident.

Burma (Myanmar) and Thailand entered a new relationship when Thaksin Shinawatra became the Thai prime minister in early 2001. In June, the new Thai prime minister made a two-day visit to Burma (Myanmar), and he said then that the two countries were now back on track. Prime Minister Thaksin criticized the policy of "flexible engagement" by the previous Thai government led by Chuan Leekpai. Under such a policy, Thailand had often been critical of Burma (Myanmar), and had not always supported it in international forums like the United Nations or the International Labor Organization. As a result, exchange visits of senior leaders of both sides had been suspended. Under the new Thai government's "forward engagement" policy towards Burma (Myanmar), exchange visits of senior officials resumed.

In September 2001, Burma's (Myanmar's) head of military intelligence Lieutenant-General Khin Nyunt visited Thailand with the goal of soothing tensions over drug smuggling and border fighting. There had been heavy exchanges of fire across the border of Myanmar and Thailand for several weeks, and several Thai and Burmese (Myanmarese) refugees were killed. According to a military source in Burma (Myanmar), several hundred Burmese (Myanmarese) soldiers also died in the fighting. Now with the visit by Khin Nyunt, both sides agreed that the two countries need cooperation from all sides to effectively suppress drug trafficking. The two sides also talked about business cooperation.

Burma (Myanmar) has been eager to get financial support from Thailand to help sustain its crumbling economy. In Thailand, the Thaksin government was committed to expanding the country's economy. As that involves strengthening bilateral ties, Burma (Myanmar) was a high priority within the context of the Thai government's policies.

Relations between Burma (Myanmar) and Malaysia had generally been good, with Malaysia often taking on the role of being Burma's (Myanmar's) champion on the international scene, when criticisms about its ruling military junta arose. But there appeared to be a significant shift in 2006 in the climate of bilateral relations.

In July 2006, Malaysia's Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar criticized the military government of Burma (Myanmar) for being an obstacle to regional reform. His comments came just prior to a scheduled ASEAN conference, where Malaysia currently holds the chairman's position. The harsh criticism also signaled a notable shift since, in the past, Malaysia had been a strong defender of Burma. But Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar said that his country could no longer defend Burma since it was not moving toward any kind of democratic reform. As such, the Malaysian cabinet minister said that Burma's lack of progress would, by extension, affect the rest of the region, which wanted to forge better ties with the West.

It was unlikely that the remarks of the Malaysian foreign minister were made without some tacit consent from other South East Asian governments. As such, there was some speculation that Burma was at risk of being suspended from ASEAN for failing to move toward democracy.

Other Significant Relations

Although the United States (U.S.) provided aid to Burma (Myanmar) in the past, including military funding and anti-narcotics equipment, as well as overseas private investment programs, ever since the 1988 coup, all such assistance has been halted indefinitely. The status of other bilateral projects such as development consultancy projects as well as cultural and educational exchange programs are also suspended.

On the diplomatic front, the United States downgraded its representation in Burma (Myanmar) from Ambassador to Charge d'Affairs.

In February 2000, the U.S. government announced that it planned to continue sanctions on Burma (Myanmar).

In December 2000, President Clinton awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian honor, to Burma's (Myanmar's) pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi. But Suu Kyi was unable to collect the award in person as she has been under house arrest, and the award was presented to her son, Alexander Aris. When presenting the award, President Clinton said that although Suu Kyi is unable to speak to her people or the world, her struggle continues and her spirit still inspires us.

The U.S. government has stated that relations between the two countries can be improved only on the basis of Burma's (Myanmar's) transformations on three fronts: democratization, human rights and counter-narcotics efforts. Since the liberation of Suu Kyi in May of 2002, it appeared that some measure of transformation in the area of democracy and human rights might be anticipated. To date, Suu Kyi has been returned to house arrest, and no such transformation has ensued. See "Political Conditions" for details.

Special Note:

September 2007 saw Buddhist monks and nuns lead the largest anti-government protest in Burma (also known as Myanmar) in 20 years. The protestors numbered up to 20,000 in total and took to the streets of the former capital of Rangoon. The demonstrations began as a way to decry the price of fuel, however, they carried on for successive days and evolved into larger political rallies with participants calling for an end to the country's dictatorship.

By September 25, 2007, the country's ruling junta cracked down on protestors calling for democracy by prohibiting assemblies of more than five people and instituting curfews in the largest

urban centers of Rangoon and Mandalay. This crackdown occurred after Buddhist monks, nuns and other protestors ignored the authorities' warning that the monks not insert themselves into the political realm. A day later on September 26, 2007, police in Burma opened fire on the protesting monks marching from the Shwedagon Pagoda to the Sule Pagoda in Rangoon's city center. Police also used tear gas to disperse large crowds of anti-government demonstrators. The precise death toll was unknown at the time, however, monks were among the casualties.

An international outcry was already gaining steam followed the dissemination of news about the ruling junta's decision to crack down harshly on the protestors. The United Nations (U.N.) Security Council had already convened an emergency session to discuss the devolving crisis in Burma, while the U.N. Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari had traveled to Asia following a meeting with top global leaders. He was tasked with the mission of urging Burma's ruling military dictatorship to cease their use of force on protestors, and to mediate reconciliatory dialogue between the two sides.

The United States (U.S.) and the European Union issued a joint statement condemning the events in Burma, and calling for a process of dialogue between the ruling regime and the pro-democracy opposition in that country. As well, the U.S. and the EU called on the U.N. Security Council to impose sanctions.

The U.S. already moved in the direction of tightened economic sanctions against Burma. At the United Nations, United States President George W. Bush paved the way for this action and condemned the ruling junta for carrying out an undemocratic "19-year reign of fear" in Burma. Days after Bush's assertion, the U.S. Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control said that it would "not stand by as the regime tries to silence the voices of the Burmese people through repression and intimidation," and announced a travel ban on Burma's top officials.

For his part, United Kingdom Prime Minister Gordon Brown promised no hint of impunity for those responsible for human rights violations. Along those lines, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, warned that the leadership of Burma could well be prosecuted for their repressive actions.

Meanwhile, U.N. Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari was able to meet with opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. It was the first time a foreign envoy had been allowed to meet with the pro-democracy advocate in several years. He also met with some of the military leaders before finally being able to meet with the head of Burma's junta, Than Shwe. In those talks, he reportedly advocated reconciliatory talks with the political opposition. Days after that meeting with Gambari, the ruling junta announced that it was willing to participate in talks with opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, albeit with conditions. The state-run television service also broadcast images of Suu Kyi for the first time in years. Gambari was reported to said that he was "cautiously encouraged" by this news.

Gambari then returned to the U.N. to report on his mission in Burma. At the U.N., the envoy reported that he warned Burma's leadership of "serious international repercussions" that might ensue in the wake of its violent crackdown. Gambari also expressed concern about the military's regime's arbitrary arrests and human rights abuses that followed the mass protests that swept through the main cities of the country. He spoke of night raids at homes and monasteries, mass relocations, beatings and other forms of abuse, as well as the detainment of monks. Moreover, Gambari echoed concerns conveyed by British Prime Minister Gordon Brown that the death toll in Burma was likely much higher than officially registered.

For its part, the U.N. Security Council issued a statement in mid-October 2007 denouncing the government's harsh suppression of the pro-democracy activists. Around the same period, it was announced that U.N. envoy, Ibrahim Gambari would return to Burma for another visit.

In early November 2007, the ruling military government of Burma (Myanmar) said that it would expel the United Nations (U.N.) top diplomat, Charles Petrie. The government of Burma said that Petrie's mandate as U.N. Burman Country Chief would not be renewed. Petrie gained attention when he criticized the government's decision to use violence to quell and suppress anti-government protests. The international community reacted with dismay to the news. Moreover, the United States said that the timing of Petrie's expulsion was an outrage.

The announcement was made a day prior to the scheduled arrival of U.N. Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari in Burma for his second trip in the aftermath of the government crackdown. As such, analysts noted that Gambari's mission was made that much more difficult. Instead of focusing on the aims of reconciliation, Gambari, who arrived in Burma on November 4, 2007, had to answer questions about the international organization that he represents.

Special Entry:

In early May 2008, a tropical cyclone battered Burma, killing more than 4,000 people and destroying thousands of buildings including more than 20,000 homes. The government admitted that scores were killed in Rangoon alone and that the overall death toll across the country could rise as high as 10,000. That number was subsequently upgraded to a shocking 100,000. The Irrawaddy region of the country was hardest hit. Four other regions of the country were also affected, including the main city of Rangoon, as well as Bago, Karen and Mon. Tens of thousands of survivors were made homeless as a result of the Cyclone Nargis and vast swaths of the country were described to be akin to a "war zone" in appearance.

In late May 2008, weeks after Burma (also known as Myanmar) was struck by a devastating cyclone that left more than 100,000 people dead, the military junta of that country extended the

house arrest of pro-democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. The authorities also arrested close to two dozen activists on a protest march to the house of the Nobel Peace Prize laureate in the city of Rangoon where she has been in detention for years. This action by the government was expected to accentuate condemnation by the international community of the military regime in Burma (Myanmar), which was already under increased criticism for its poor handling of post-cyclone relief efforts. To date, only a small number of victims have received aid despite an overwhelming international humanitarian effort.

Status of Aung San Suu Kyi

At the start of July 2009, the military junta of Burma(Myanmar) rejected United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon from visiting pro-democracy icon and opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest for several years. The military junta said that the meeting could not be permitted due to an ongoing trial in which Aung San Suu Kyi was accused of violating the terms of her detainment when an uninvited American entered her home. The United Nations chief was in Burma(Myanmar) for two days but made little progress on the matter of Aung San Suu Kyi's freedom or democratization of the country.

In response to what British Prime Minister Gordon Brown characterized as the regime's "obstinacy," the United Kingdom said that it would impose new sanctions on Burma (Myanmar). Speaking of the impending report on Secretary General Ban's two-day trip, which yielded few productive results, Prime Minister Brown said: "We await the secretary general's report. I hope that there is still the possibility of a change of approach from Burma but if not, my sad conclusion is that the Burmese regime has put increased isolation - including the possibility of further sanctions - on the international agenda."

Special Report: United States Policy on Burma (Myanmar)

At the start of November 2009, the United States Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia, Kurt Campbell, met with the democratically-elected leader of Burma (Myanmar), Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been kept under house arrest by the ruling military junta of that country. The government of Burma (Myanmar) arranged for the meeting to take place at the Inya Lake Hotel and marked the highest level visit by an American official to Suu Kyi since August 2009 when Senator Jim Webb, Chairman of the East Asian and Pacific Affairs Subcommittee of the United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was in Burma (Myanmar). (See "Political Conditions" for details.) Earlier, Assistant Secretary Campbell met with the country's Prime Minister General Thein Sein, as well as a number of other government officials. These moves appeared to be consistent with a potential foreign policy shift indicated by the United States towards Burma (Myanmar). To that end, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that while the United States intended to keep sanctions

in place against Burma (Myanmar) for the immediate future, it was exploring increased engagement.

During his trip to Asia, United States President Obama waded into stormy geopolitical waters by attending a meeting of the 10-country bloc Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), which was also attended by one of the leaders of the military junta ruling Burma (Myanmar). It was a move aimed at pressing Burma (Myanmar) towards a return to democracy. While some hardliners at home were expected to rail against President Obama for attending such a meeting, it appeared to be consistent the Obama administration's policy of "pragmatic engagement." In the past, leaders from the United States have not attended meetings with Asean when the military leadership of Burma (Myanmar) was present.

In something of a policy shift, it was hoped that increased engagement would yield more productive results on the path towards democratic change in Burma (Myanmar). Still, such engagement, would not include the removal of sanctions until democratic progress has been tracked. During this notable meeting attended by Burma's (Myanmar's) General Thein Sein, President Obama demanded the release of pro-democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been held under house arrest for much of the last two decades. As well, a joint statement by the United States and Asean called for "free, fair, inclusive and transparent" elections in Burma (Myanmar) in 2010.

Those elections went off in 2010, as discussed in the "Political Conditions" of this Country Review in a manner that was viewed by the international community under less than optimal conditions, and intended to reinforce the power of the very individuals who were part of the ruling military junta. Rules were also put into place to prevent Aung San Suu Kyi for contesting those elections.

That said, in November 2010, Aung San Suu Kyi was finally released from house arrest. The hours following the news of Suu Kyi's release were marked by celebration both at home and abroad. The international community lauded her release with United Nations Secretary General saying that Suu Kyi was an "inspiration" and urging that all political prisoners in Burma (Myanmar) be likewise granted their freedom. United Kingdom Prime Minister David Cameron struck a similar tone saying, "Aung San Suu Kyi is an inspiration for all of us who believe in freedom of speech, democracy, and human rights." United States President Barack Obama said that the decision by the military authorities of Burma (Myanmar) to free Suu Kyi was "long overdue." He additionally characterized Suu Kyi as "a hero of mine." President Obama also spoke to about the fundamental right to political expression as follows: "Whether Aung San Suu Kyi is living in the prison of her house, or the prison of her country, does not change the fact that she, and the political opposition she represents, has been systematically silenced, incarcerated, and deprived of any opportunity to engage in political processes.

Special Report: Winds of Change Sweep Across Burma (Myanmar)

Summary:

The United States restored diplomatic relations with (Myanmar) on Jan. 13, 2012, in response to the government's move toward political reform. These measures have included allowing pro-democracy icon and opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi to contest upcoming parliamentary by-elections, a ceasefire with ethnic Karen rebels, and the release of political prisoners.

Landmark Visit of United States Secretary of State Clinton

In the latter part of 2011, foreign policy was at the forefront of the political landscape in Burma (Myanmar) as the Obama administration in the United States announced that it would send United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to Burma (Myanmar) on the first visit by an American secretary of state in half a century. The decision appeared to be a test of sorts for the new civilian government.

Speaking from a regional summit in Indonesia at the time, President Barack Obama, linked the new domestic developments in Burma (Myanmar) with the decision to engage with that country. In particular, he referenced the regime's recent treatment of pro-democracy icon and opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, who was released from house arrest and was preparing to contest impending parliamentary by-elections (as discussed below). President Obama said, "Last night, I spoke to Aung San Suu Kyi directly and confirmed she supports American engagement to move this process forward." President Obama noted that Secretary of State Clinton would "explore whether the United States can empower a positive transition in Burma." He explained, "That possibility will depend on the Burmese government taking more concrete action. If Burma fails to move down the path of reform it will continue to face sanctions and isolation."

As November 2011 came to an end, Secretary of State Clinton landed in Burma (Myanmar) in the highly-anticipated historic visit to that country. There, Secretary of State Clinton met with Burmese President Thein Sein and pledged improved ties with Burma -- but only if that country continued on the path of democratization and reform. "The United States is prepared to walk the path of reform with you if you keep moving in the right direction," Clinton said. In an interview with media, Secretary of State Clinton addressed the recent moves to elections as follows: "These are incremental steps and we are prepared to go further if reforms maintain momentum. In that spirit, we are discussing what it will take to upgrade diplomatic relations and exchange ambassadors." But the United States' top diplomat asserted: "We're not at the point where we could consider lifting sanctions." One of the sticking points for the United States has been Burma's relationship with North Korea; the United States has apparently made it clear that Burma should sever "illicit ties" with North Korea. For its part, the government of Burma appeared to welcome the "new chapter" in bilateral relations.

It should be noted that Secretary of State Clinton also held talks with pro-democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, in what the international community regarded as a landmark meeting of two of the most iconic female politicians of the modern era.

The Political Realm in Burma (Myanmar)

Just before United States Secretary of State Clinton arrived in Burma (Myanmar) in the aforementioned landmark visit, the domestic landscape in this country was dominated by the news that the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by noted pro-democracy icon, Aung San Suu Kyi, decided to rejoin the political scene. The NLD said that it would re-registered as a legal political party and contest the forthcoming by-elections. Notably, Aung San Suu Kyi would herself be among the 48 candidates of the NLD seeking to contest the parliamentary by-elections, which were to be held in April 2012.

Speaking of this prospect at the time during an interview with Agence France Presse, Aung San Suu Kyi noted, "If I think I should take part in the election, I will. Some people are worried that taking part could harm my dignity. Frankly, if you do politics, you should not be thinking about your dignity." She continued, "I stand for the re-registration of the NLD party. I would like to work effectively towards amending the constitution. So we have to do what we need to do."

The move constituted something of a political comeback for the NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi after years of absence from the country's political arena. Indeed, the NLD boycotted the previous elections because of electoral laws prohibited Aung San Suu Kyi from contesting those polls. The NLD also accused the ruling junta of rigging the political structure to favor its newly-formed Union Solidarity and Development Party, and essentially creating a contrived electoral process. Now, the NLD had apparently decided that the time had come to re-enter the political system.

Note: By mid-December 2011, the NLD's bid to re-register as a legal political party was approved. Then, as noted here, in January 2012, it was confirmed that Aung San Suu Kyi would contest those elections for a parliamentary seat in the April 2012 vote.

Democratic Reform and Diplomatic Engagement

In late 2011, as the United States opened the door cautiously to bilateral dialogue, the government of Burma (Myanmar) appeared to be advancing measures intended to demonstrate its reformist credentials when Burmese President Thein Sein signed legislation allowing peaceful demonstrations for the first time. While the new law requires protesters to seek approval at least five days in advance of a possible rally, the move was clearly a shift in the direction of increased freedoms since all protests were previously prohibited. Indeed, it demonstrated a clear easing of long-standing political restrictions.

By the start of January 2012, the government of Burma (Myanmar) appeared to be traversing the

path of political reform as the country's most prominent political dissidents were released from jail. Among those enjoying new-found freedom were student protesters imprisoned since the late 1980s, Buddhist monks involved in 2007 pro-democracy protests, journalists, as well as ethnic and minority activists. In addition, former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt, who was detained in a 2004 purge, was released from house arrest.

The release of political prisoners was something the United States has urged for some time. United States President Barack Obama hailed the news that the government of Burma (Myanmar) had decided to free political dissidents from detainment, characterizing the move as a "substantial step forward." He said, "I spoke about the flickers of progress that were emerging in Burma. Today, that light burns a bit brighter, as prisoners are reunited with their families and people can see a democratic path forward."

In addition, there was new emerging from Burma (Myanmar) that the government was forging a ceasefire with ethnic Karen rebels. At issue was an emerging agreement with the Karen National Union.

In the background of these shifts was the parallel path of increased political participation of the opposition with the re-registering of the main opposition party, and the inclusion of Aung San Suu Kyi in impending parliamentary by-elections, as discussed here.

This groundwork yielded fruit for Burma (Myanmar) when the United States announced that Washington D.C. would restore diplomatic relations with Nay Pyi Taw in response to the Burmese government's move toward political reform. On Jan. 13, 2012, United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that her country would commence the process of exchanging ambassadors with Burma (Myanmar).

As noted by Secretary of States Clinton, the restoration of bilateral relations would be an ongoing process and it would be dependent on further reform. She said, "An American ambassador will help strengthen our efforts to support the historic and promising steps that are now unfolding."

The development was a clear diplomatic victory for the Obama administration's policy of engagement. For his part, President Obama urged leaders in Burma (Myanmar) to take "additional steps to build confidence." He continued, "Much more remains to be done to meet the aspirations of the Burmese people, but the United States is committed to continuing our engagement."

This progress illuminated the success of Secretary of State Clinton's landmark visit to Burma (Myanmar) in December 2011, which facilitated productive results. At the time, Secretary of State Clinton said that she wanted to be "in country" to decide for herself whether President Thein Sein was serious about taking the path of democratization. To that end, it was believed that her visit could encourage Burma (Myanmar) to continue traversing that path of reform.

It should be noted that there was no immediate call for international sanctions against Burma (Myanmar) to be eased. Those sanctions -- in place since the 1990s -- have included arms embargos, travel bans on officials of the ruling regime, and asset prohibitions on investment. While the United States has clearly rewarded Burma (Myanmar) for its recent thrust for reform, the lifting of sanctions was not likely to occur until democratic changes in Burma (Myanmar) can be classified as incontrovertible and irreversible.

International analysts would be watching the ruling government's future treatment of the political prisoners who were recently released from detainment. Would they be able to participate in the proverbial public sphere, without fear of recrimination? For its part, the government has said that it does not recognize the categorization "political prisoner" and, instead, has argued that it only jails people for criminality. That being said, President Thein Sein took a sanguine tone as he suggested that the prisoners who were released could "play a constructive role in the political process."

President Obama set to become first U.S. leader to visit Burma (Myanmar)

Coming off his re-election victory in the United States in November 2012, United States President Barack Obama was set to visit Burma (Myanmar). According to the White House, President Obama would travel to the south east Asian country of Burma (Myanmar) as part of a three-leg tour in the third week of November 2012, that would also include visits to Thailand, as well as Cambodia -- the site of the summit of the Association of South East Asian Nations. In Burma (Myanmar), he would meet with President Thein Sein as well as pro-democracy icon and opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi.

President Obama would make history as the first United States leader to visit Burma (Myanmar), which was subject to economic sanctions due to its prior record of political repression, but which has since been undergoing a process of economic and political reform advocated by the Obama administration. Indeed, until the announcement of the president's trip to Burma (Myanmar), Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had the distinction of being the most senior United States official to travel to Burma when she visited in December 2011. The White House said that the president's visit to Burma (Myanmar) was intended "to encourage Burma's ongoing democratic transition." That said, further reforms were likely needed as political prisoners remain detained in that country and ethno-religious violence between ethnic Rakhine Buddhists and the Muslim Rohingya minority in Rakhine state has increasingly become a problem.

Written by Dr. Denise Youngblood Coleman, Editor in Chief, www.countrywatch.com . See Bibliography for list of research sources.

National Security

Editor's Note:

The former military authorities that ruled this country changed the historic name - Burma - to Union of Myanmar or Myanmar. Although the new name is used in conventional practice today, it was never endorsed by a sitting legislature. CountryWatch references this country by both the historic and conventional names in its materials, however, the lack of legitimization in regard to the conventional usage should be duly noted.

External Threats

Myanmar's (Burma's) relations with Thailand are strained, but have showed signs of improvement. There is disagreement over the precise alignment of their mutual boundary. Military forces from both nations have been posted along the border to protect their respective country's territorial integrity and occasionally clash. Nationals seeking employment and/or refugee status frequently cross the border from Burma into Thailand, exacerbating the friction between the two countries. Likewise, the presence of armed Burmese insurgents just across the border in Thailand has agitated Burmese officials. The government of Burma officially closed the border for several months in the summer of 2002. Despite the tainted history, the respective governments of Burma and Thailand have recently demonstrated an eagerness to ease tensions. Economic ties between the two countries remain strong, and the two governments now seem eager to reach a more cooperative level in their relations with one another. Outside of tension with Thailand, the reputation of Burma's ruling military junta for brutal suppression of political opposition has placed it on the radar screens of global human rights watchdogs. It has also earned the enmity of the United States, which has had a negative impact on Burma's economic development.

Crime

The persistence of a thriving narcotics industry poses an ongoing threat to Burma's national security. Burma is the second largest producer of illicit opiates. It is also a significant source of methamphetamines. The drug trade has ensnared the nation's government, law enforcement apparatus and general public in a web of corruption and violence. It has contributed to the prevalence of money laundering, bribery and insurgent movements that derive financial support from the profits it yields. Though Burma's central government hailed the 1996 surrender of drug lord Kung Sa and his Mong Tai army as a major success, it has generally demonstrated a lack of

will and ability to effectively combat the drug trade. In addition to failing to adequately address the production and trafficking of narcotics, the Burmese government has not taken sufficient measures to prevent the laundering of drug trafficking proceeds. Outside of drug-related crime, Burma has a relatively low crime rate.

Insurgencies

Armed insurgencies and political unrest have posed an ongoing threat to Burma's ruling military regime. One cause for the insurrection has been the government's own disregard for democracy. In 1988, the regime jailed and/or killed thousands of pro-democracy activists. Two years later it refused to relinquish power, even though the opposition had won a national election by an overwhelming majority. Major anti-government demonstrations occurred in 1996 and 1998.

The military junta's treatment of Aung San Suu Kyi has been particularly inflammatory. Her integral role in Burma's democratic movement has made her a target of government oppression. To date, she had spent several consecutive years under house arrest. Aung San Suu Kyi is immensely popular, both at home and outside of her native Burma. She is the daughter of the late Burmese nationalist, General Aung San, a driving force behind the nation's post-Second World War independence movement. Her efforts to foster democracy and a respect for human rights in Burma earned her the Noble Prize for Peace in 1991. Popular unrest and violence ensued in the aftermath of an attack perpetuated by government affiliates on her convoy in May 2003 that left dozens dead or injured.

While some who oppose Burma's government have adopted peaceful means to affect change, others have chosen to express their discontent through violence. Over the course of the last decade, anti-government sentiment has given rise to a series of premeditated, armed attacks. In addition to striking a natural gas pipeline, the perpetrators have also bombed family members of senior military officials in Rangoon. Two small bombs were detonated in downtown Rangoon in the spring of 2003. Burmese authorities reported finding other explosive devices in 1999 and 2000 before they were detonated. The government enhanced security at Rangoon's international airport in Rangoon after two rocket-propelled grenades devices were discovered nearby in early 2002.

Burma's government has also faced significant opposition from various ethnic minority groups. The border with Thailand remains a hotbed of ethnic insurgencies. Fighting between government forces and various armed militias has periodically occurred in the Chin and Rakhine states near that border, as well as in Burma's southern Shan, Mon, and Karen states. Crossfire killed several people and stranded a group of tourists in the town of Tachileik, Shan in February 2001.

In October 2004, Prime Minister Khin Nyunt and his allies were removed from power by senior officials in the junta. In November of that same year, the junta announced that they would release

9,000 prisoners they claimed were being held unfairly due to Khin Nyunt's regime. It is unclear how many have been released, and of those released only about 50 appeared to have been held due to their political beliefs. One of those released was Min Ko Naing, a key figure in the 1988 demonstrations.

Terrorism

The government of Burma has demonstrated a desire to cooperate with global initiatives to combat international terrorism. It has made several public statements to that effect. In so doing, it has made specific reference to its willingness to share information relevant to the success of counterterrorist initiatives. It has also begun to enact legislation that will facilitate the blocking of terrorist assets. Burma has adopted five of the twelve international conventions and protocols pertaining to terrorism.

Burma has also suffered from domestic terrorism. As mentioned in the "Insurgencies" section, while some who oppose Burma's government have adopted peaceful means to affect change, others have chosen to express their discontent through violence. Over the course of the last decade, anti-government sentiment has given rise to a series of premeditated, armed attacks, some of which have placed non-combatants in harm's way. The government is also contending with several ethnic insurgent movements (see above section on insurgencies). The United States State Department alleges that at least one such group may have ties to South Asian extremists.

Defense Forces

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Military Data

Military Branches:

Myanmar Armed Forces (Tatmadaw): Army, Navy, Air Force

Eligible age to enter service:

18 with no conscription

Mandatory Service Terms:

2-year service obligation

Manpower in general population-fit for military service:

males age 16-49: 10,451,515

females age 16-49: 11,181,537

Manpower reaching eligible age annually:

males: 522,478

females: 506,388

Military Expenditures:

N/A

Chapter 3

Economic Overview

Economic Overview

Overview

Burma is endowed with fertile soil and has important offshore oil and gas deposits. It is also the world's largest exporter of teak and a principal source of jade, pearls, rubies and sapphires. However, long-term economic mismanagement under military rule has prevented the economy from developing in line with its potential. The country suffers from pervasive government controls, inefficient economic policies, and widespread poverty. Agriculture remains the dominant sector of the economy. Other sectors include industry and services. Tourist potential is great but remains undeveloped because of a weak infrastructure and Burma's international image, which has been damaged by the junta's human rights abuses and oppression of the democratic opposition. Government controls and inefficient policies have resulted in serious macroeconomic imbalances, including monetary and fiscal instability, high inflation, multiple official exchange rates that overvalue the Burmese kyat, and a distorted interest rate regime. Most overseas development assistance ceased after the junta began to suppress the democracy movement in 1988 and subsequently refused to honor the results of the 1990 legislative elections. The transfer of state assets, particularly real estate, to cronies and military families in 2010 and 2011 under the guise of a privatization policy further widened the gap between the economic elite and the public. Still, overall, the country saw an uptick in its economy, driven by stronger domestic demand and a recovery in exports. In the near term, domestic demand should stabilize and GDP growth will moderate. Inflation is expected to rise from low levels, but remain contained.

In November 2010, Myanmar held its first elections in two decades, and many countries in Asia now consider it a democracy. However, Western countries are skeptical that much will change and expect the junta to exert control from behind the scenes. Foreign investment has declined substantially due to an increasingly unfriendly business environment. To promote foreign investment and private sector development requires improvements in business climate and political situation. In January 2011, representing a step in this direction, Myanmar began discussions with South Korea's bourse operator about opening a stock market. Myanmar's quasi-civilian government took office in March 2011 and began the task of overhauling its economy, easing media censorship, legalizing trade unions and protests and freeing political prisoners. The United States reacted with diplomatic and economic gestures, sending Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to Myanmar in 2011 as the first U.S. secretary of state to visit in more than 50 years. During 2011 the Myanmar government took initial steps toward reforming and opening up the economy by lowering export taxes, easing restrictions on its financial sector, and reaching out to international organizations for assistance. Although the Burmese government has good economic relations with

its neighbors, significant improvements in economic governance, the business climate, and the political situation are still needed to promote serious foreign investment.

In April 2012, Burma's multiple exchange rates were abolished and the Central Bank of Myanmar established a managed float of the Burmese kyat. Then, in July 2012, the United States eased sanctions to allow American companies to invest in and provide financial services to Myanmar under the condition that the companies make detailed disclosures about their dealings. The goal of the unusual reporting requirement was to promote greater transparency in the country as it is still considered among the world's most corrupt. "Easing sanctions is a strong signal of our support for reform, and will provide immediate incentives for reformers and significant benefits to the people of Burma," United States President Barack Obama was quoted as saying in a Reuters article. He added that the unfinished state of reforms left the United States "deeply concerned about the lack of transparency in Burma's investment environment and the military's role in the economy."

Meanwhile, a 2012 Asian Development Bank study indicated that Myanmar could follow Asia's fast growing economies and expand at 7 percent to 8 percent a year, become a middle income nation, and triple per capita income by 2030 if it can surmount substantial development challenges by further implementing across-the-board reforms. In August 2013, it was revealed that decreasing global demand, weak infrastructure and reluctant investors could result in Myanmar coming up way short of its rice export target for the year. Industry experts and government officials slammed the 3 million-tonne target for the fiscal year ending March 2014 as unrealistic. "It's quite impossible to export 3 million tonnes of rice ... simply because we can't expect dramatic increase in rice production this year," an expert at the Agriculture Ministry told Reuters, requesting anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to media. Myanmar generated \$124 million from 320,000 tonnes of rice exported from April to July 2013, according to Commerce Ministry data cited by Reuters. It shipped 1.45 million tonnes of the grain in 2012/2013 and traders forecast about 1.5 million tonnes for 2013/2014.

In September 2013, Burma enacted a new anti-corruption law. The government's commitment to reform, and the subsequent easing of most Western sanctions, had begun to pay dividends. Plus, Burma's abundant natural resources, young labor force, and proximity to Asia's dynamic economies have attracted foreign investment in the energy sector, garment industry, information technology, and food and beverages. Foreign direct investment spiked to US\$2.7 billion in FY 2012 from US\$1.9 billion in FY 2011. Despite these improvements, Burma remains one of the poorest countries in Asia - more than one-fourth of the country's 60 million people live in poverty. The previous government's isolationist policies and economic mismanagement have left Burma with poor infrastructure, endemic corruption, underdeveloped human resources, and inadequate access to capital, which will require a major commitment to reverse. The Burmese government has been slow to address impediments to economic development such as an opaque revenue collection system and antiquated banking system. Key benchmarks of sustained economic progress would include modernizing and opening the financial sector, increasing budget allocations for social

services, and accelerating agricultural and land reforms.

Overall, economic growth in fiscal year 2013 was strong and expected to climb further in fiscal year 2014, underpinned by investor optimism from continuing policy reforms and strengthening external ties. Inflation risks were increasing, while institutional weakness and inadequate infrastructure continued to impede long-term growth. In February 2014, the Export-Import Bank of the United States launched operations in Myanmar to support U.S. trade with the country and help integrate it into the world economy. According to reporters, a Burmese official said that “the Export-Import Bank of the United States is open for business in Burma, for sovereign lending to facilitate U.S. export credit sales on terms up to five years in repayment.”

Overall, growth accelerated again in 2014.

In March 2015, Myanmar launched an export strategy aimed at strengthening smaller companies in a departure from 49 years of military rule when a few large firms dominated the economy, according to the International Trade Centre (ITC) as reported by Reuters. In May 2015, Myanmar was targeting economic growth of 9.3 percent in the fiscal year that started that month, driven by an unprecedented amount of foreign investment and rapid expansion in its nascent telecoms sector.

The target was outlined in the country's National Planning Act, approved by President Thein Sein on April 9 and seen by Reuters. It surpasses estimates by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which had forecast 8.3 percent growth and the World Bank, which saw about 8 percent expansion this fiscal year.

The \$8.1 billion FDI recorded for 2014-2015 was a whopping 25 times the \$329.6 million received in 2009-2010. An official at the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development told Reuters its FDI target for the current fiscal year was \$6 billion. In mid-July 2015, Citigroup Inc and Standard Chartered Plc were set to advise Myanmar on its first credit rating, according to Reuters who cited people with direct knowledge of the matter, paving the way for the country to issue its maiden international bond.

“Getting a credit rating is of the first importance for Myanmar, helping it to clean up its public finances,” said Sean Turnell, a professor at Macquarie University in Sydney who has advised the U.S. Congress on Myanmar's economy, in a Reuters article.

“It's also important symbolically, sending the signal the country is...not the land of caprice it was so often in the past,” he said.

Economic Performance

Burma was not directly hit by the global financial and economic crisis given its absence of financial and trade links with industrialized countries. However, exports and private consumption declined owing to the economic slowdown in neighboring countries, a collapse in commodity prices, and the

impact of Cyclone Nargis that hit Burma in May 2008 causing large casualties and economic losses, especially in the agricultural sector. As a result, real GDP growth slowed from 2007 to 2008. Economic growth picked up in 2009 and 2010, reflecting increasing demand from neighboring countries and a partial recovery in agricultural production in areas damaged by the cyclone.

According to CountryWatch estimated calculations for 2014:

Real GDP growth rate was: 6.9 percent

Inflation was measured at: 0.0 percent

The fiscal deficit/surplus as percent of GDP (%) was: -3.7 percent

Updated in 2015

**Please note that the figures in our Economic Performance section are estimates or forecasts based on IMF-based data that are formulated using CountryWatch models of analysis.*

Supplementary Sources: Asian Development Bank and Reuters

Nominal GDP and Components

Nominal GDP and Components					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Nominal GDP (LCU billions)	46,344.24	47,851.00	54,756.00	63,323.00	76,471.11
Nominal GDP Growth Rate (%)	15.802	3.251	14.430	15.646	19.112
Consumption (LCU billions)	26,884.42	27,758.50	31,764.11	36,733.85	46,774.04
Government Expenditure (LCU)	6,721.11	6,939.63	7,941.03	9,183.46	11,693.51

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
billions)					
Gross Capital Formation (LCU billions)	13,541.34	13,981.61	15,999.18	18,502.38	19,295.96
Exports of Goods & Services (LCU billions)	7,140.42	7,372.58	8,436.46	9,756.40	11,503.17
Imports of Goods & Services (LCU billions)	7,300.33	7,537.68	8,625.38	9,974.89	12,795.57

Population and GDP Per Capita

Population and GDP Per Capita					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Population, total (million)	50.110	50.537	50.979	51.419	51.846
Population growth (%)	0.8087	0.8521	0.8746	0.8631	0.8304
Nominal GDP per Capita (LCU 1000s)	924,850.09	946,850.82	1,074,089.33	1,231,509.75	1,474,966.48

Real GDP and Inflation

Real GDP and Inflation					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Real Gross Domestic Product (LCU billions 2005 base)	45,017.57	45,202.58	48,931.23	53,430.37	57,523.89
Real GDP Growth Rate (%)	13.375	0.4110	8.249	9.195	7.661
GDP Deflator (2005=100.0)	102.947	105.859	111.904	118.515	132.938
Inflation, GDP Deflator (%)	2.766	2.829	5.710	5.908	12.170

Government Spending and Taxation

Government Spending and Taxation					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Government Fiscal Budget (billions)	7,207.81	11,954.92	13,732.03	18,404.58	19,582.47
Fiscal Budget Growth Rate (percentage)	7.228	65.861	14.865	34.027	6.400
National Tax Rate Net of Transfers (%)	11.267	23.314	23.325	26.157	20.817
Government Revenues Net of Transfers (LCU billions)	5,221.80	11,156.13	12,772.10	16,563.26	15,918.94
Government Surplus(-) Deficit(+) (LCU billions)	-1986.0080	-798.7860	-959.9370	-1841.3190	-3663.5310
Government Surplus(+) Deficit(-) (%GDP)	-4.2853	-1.6693	-1.7531	-2.9078	-4.7907

Money Supply, Interest Rates and Unemployment

Money Supply, Interest Rates and Unemployment					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Money and Quasi-Money (M2) (LCU billions)	12,231.26	16,102.45	21,505.38	28,721.18	34,684.72
Money Supply Growth Rate (%)	30.450	31.650	33.553	33.553	20.764
Lending Interest Rate (%)	16.333	13.000	13.000	13.000	16.399
Unemployment Rate (%)	4.000	4.000	4.000	4.000	4.000

Foreign Trade and the Exchange Rate

Foreign Trade and the Exchange Rate					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Official Exchange Rate (LCU/\$US)	827.546	860.490	965.731	1,002.98	1,162.62
Trade Balance NIPA (\$US billions)	-0.1932	-0.1919	-0.1956	-0.2178	-1.1116
Trade Balance % of GDP	-0.3450	-0.3450	-0.3450	-0.3450	-1.6900
Total Foreign Exchange Reserves (\$US billions)	7.362	7.353	7.344	7.335	916.728

Data in US Dollars

Data in US Dollars					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Nominal GDP (\$US billions)	56.002	55.609	56.699	63.135	65.775
Exports (\$US billions)	8.628	8.568	8.736	9.727	9.894
Imports (\$US billions)	8.822	8.760	8.931	9.945	11.006

Energy Consumption and Production Standard Units

Energy Consumption and Production Standard Units					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Petroleum Consumption (TBDP)	25.324	25.004	25.000	25.921	26.954
Petroleum Production (TBDP)	20.736	20.496	20.569	20.174	20.508
Petroleum Net Exports (TBDP)	-4.5877	-4.5084	-4.4314	-5.7476	-6.4460
Natural Gas Consumption (bcf)	117.952	124.662	162.449	158.926	176.591
Natural Gas Production (bcf)	421.012	425.160	463.577	586.218	641.303
Natural Gas Net Exports (bcf)	303.060	300.498	301.128	427.292	464.711
Coal Consumption (1000s st)	763.902	1,298.52	1,326.81	1,337.34	1,389.39
Coal Production (1000s st)	749.315	1,223.31	1,256.72	1,226.12	1,227.75
Coal Net Exports (1000s st)	-14.5871	-75.2119	-70.0899	-111.2242	-161.6397
Nuclear Production (bil kwh)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Hydroelectric Production (bil kwh)	7.443	7.688	9.288	8.440	8.801
Renewables Production (bil kwh)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000

Energy Consumption and Production QUADS

Energy Consumption and Production QUADS					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Petroleum Consumption (Quads)	0.0541	0.0534	0.0534	0.0553	0.0576
Petroleum Production (Quads)	0.0443	0.0441	0.0441	0.0441	0.0350
Petroleum Net Exports (Quads)	-0.0098	-0.0093	-0.0093	-0.0113	-0.0226
Natural Gas Consumption (Quads)	0.1203	0.1272	0.1657	0.1621	0.1801
Natural Gas Production (Quads)	0.4290	0.4323	0.4719	0.6065	0.5599
Natural Gas Net Exports (Quads)	0.3087	0.3051	0.3062	0.4444	0.3797
Coal Consumption (Quads)	0.0153	0.0260	0.0265	0.0267	0.0278
Coal Production (Quads)	0.0153	0.0260	0.0264	0.0245	0.0221
Coal Net Exports (Quads)	0.0000	0.0000	-0.0001	-0.0022	-0.0056
Nuclear Production (Quads)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Hydroelectric Production (Quads)	0.0744	0.0769	0.0929	0.0844	0.0880
Renewables Production (Quads)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000

World Energy Price Summary

World Energy Price Summary					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Petroleum-WTI (\$/bbl)	95.054	94.159	97.943	93.112	48.709
Natural Gas-Henry Hub (\$/mmbtu)	3.999	2.752	3.729	4.369	2.614
Coal Thermal-Australian (\$/mt)	121.448	96.364	84.562	70.130	57.511

CO2 Emissions

CO2 Emissions					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Petroleum Based (mm mt C)	1.208	1.193	1.193	1.237	1.286
Natural Gas Based (mm mt C)	1.914	2.023	2.636	2.578	2.865
Coal Based (mm mt C)	0.4378	0.7442	0.7604	0.7664	0.7963
Total CO2 Emissions (mm mt C)	3.560	3.959	4.589	4.581	4.947

Agriculture Consumption and Production

Agriculture Consumption and Production					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Corn Total Consumption (1000 metric tons)	1,362.19	1,470.26	1,532.15	1,613.72	1,594.75
Corn Production (1000 metric tons)	1,482.21	1,497.03	1,594.08	1,719.31	1,602.40
Corn Net Exports (1000 metric tons)	120.020	26.777	61.932	105.586	7.657
Soybeans Total Consumption (1000 metric tons)	231.912	162.356	155.600	151.500	145.407
Soybeans Production (1000 metric tons)	237.223	162.305	159.626	153.968	137.066
Soybeans Net Exports (1000 metric tons)	5.311	-0.0508	4.026	2.468	-8.3406
Rice Total Consumption (1000 metric tons)	29,009.89	26,216.60	26,372.10	26,423.30	25,457.65
Rice Production (1000 metric tons)	29,029.46	26,216.17	26,360.54	26,412.91	24,927.29

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rice Net Exports (1000 metric tons)	19.564	-0.4272	-11.5624	-10.3869	-530.3590
Coffee Total Consumption (metric tons)	7,662.00	7,994.00	8,194.00	8,503.28	8,589.38
Coffee Production (metric tons)	7,464.04	7,733.89	8,078.96	8,482.59	8,067.17
Coffee Net Exports (metric tons)	-197.9589	-260.1074	-115.0426	-20.6893	-522.2095
Cocoa Beans Total Consumption (metric tons)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Cocoa Beans Production (metric tons)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Cocoa Beans Net Exports (metric tons)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Wheat Total Consumption (1000 metric tons)	358.809	412.093	365.028	355.535	320.472
Wheat Production (1000 metric tons)	172.188	180.953	185.709	185.610	161.415
Wheat Net Exports (1000 metric tons)	-186.6212	-231.1402	-179.3193	-169.9250	-159.0569

World Agriculture Pricing Summary

World Agriculture Pricing Summary					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Corn Pricing Summary (\$/metric ton)	291.684	298.417	259.389	192.881	169.750
Soybeans Pricing Summary (\$/metric ton)	540.667	591.417	538.417	491.771	390.417
Rice Pricing Summary (\$/metric ton)	458.558	525.071	473.989	425.148	386.033
Coffee Pricing Summary (\$/kilogram)	5.976	4.111	3.076	4.424	3.526
Cocoa Beans Pricing Summary (\$/kilogram)	2.980	2.392	2.439	3.062	3.135
Wheat Pricing Summary (\$/metric ton)	316.264	313.242	312.248	284.895	203.177

Metals Consumption and Production

Metals Consumption and Production					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Copper Consumption (1000 mt)	9,000.00	19,000.00	20,000.00	26,099.12	24,462.89
Copper Production (1000 mt)	8,930.66	18,820.85	19,889.95	27,806.18	25,159.03
Copper Net Exports (1000 mt)	-69.3411	-179.1510	-110.0520	1,707.06	696.140
Zinc Consumption (1000 mt)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Zinc Production (1000 mt)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Zinc Exports (1000 mt)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Lead Consumption (1000 mt)	195.572	200.000	200.000	200.380	181.908
Lead Production (1000 mt)	0.0000	198.114	198.899	206.250	196.187
Lead Exports (1000 mt)	-195.5722	-1.8858	-1.1005	5.870	14.279
Tin Consumption (1000 mt)	30.000	30.000	30.000	28.758	28.654

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Tin Production (1000 mt)	29.769	29.717	29.835	31.355	30.497
Tin Exports (1000 mt)	-0.2311	-0.2829	-0.1651	2.597	1.843
Nickel Consumption (1000 mt)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Nickel Production (1000 mt)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Nickel Exports (1000 mt)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Gold Consumption (kg)	182.188	187.851	194.024	207.038	196.990
Gold Production (kg)	91.324	94.162	97.257	103.780	100.157
Gold Exports (kg)	-90.8643	-93.6886	-96.7675	-103.2583	-96.8325
Silver Consumption (mt)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Silver Production (mt)	494.596	518.962	527.353	545.742	501.552
Silver Exports (mt)	494.596	518.962	527.353	545.742	501.552

World Metals Pricing Summary

World Metals Pricing Summary					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Copper (\$/mt)	8,828.19	7,962.35	7,332.10	6,863.40	5,510.46
Zinc (\$/mt)	2,193.90	1,950.41	1,910.26	2,160.97	1,931.68
Tin (\$/mt)	26,053.68	21,125.99	22,282.80	21,898.87	16,066.63
Lead (\$/mt)	2,400.81	2,064.64	2,139.79	2,095.46	1,787.82
Nickel (\$/mt)	22,910.36	17,547.55	15,031.80	16,893.38	11,862.64
Gold (\$/oz)	1,569.21	1,669.52	1,411.46	1,265.58	1,160.66
Silver (\$/oz)	35.224	31.137	23.850	19.071	15.721

Economic Performance Index

Economic Performance Index

The Economic Performance rankings are calculated by CountryWatch's editorial team, and are based on criteria including sustained economic growth, monetary stability, current account deficits, budget surplus, unemployment and structural imbalances. Scores are assessed from 0 to 100 using this aforementioned criteria as well as CountryWatch's proprietary economic research data and models.

	Bank stability risk	Monetary/ Currency stability	Government Finances	Empl./ Unempl.	Econ.GNP growth or decline/ forecast
	0 - 100	0 - 100	0 - 100	0 - 100	%
North Americas					
Canada	92	69	35	38	3.14%
United States	94	76	4	29	3.01%
Western Europe					
Austria	90	27	30	63	1.33%
Belgium	88	27	19	23	1.15%
Cyprus	81	91	16	80	-0.69%
Denmark	97	70	45	78	1.20%
Finland	89	27	41	33	1.25%

France	87	27	18	27	1.52%
Germany	86	27	22	21	1.25%
Greece	79	27	5	24	-2.00%
Iceland	90	17	2	34	-3.04%
Italy	85	27	37	24	0.84%
Ireland	92	27	11	10	-1.55%
Luxembourg	99	27	28	66	2.08%
Malta	77	27	41	51	0.54%
Netherlands	91	27	26	74	1.30%
Norway	98	44	10	76	1.08%
Portugal	77	27	13	20	0.29%
Spain	83	27	9	3	-0.41%
Sweden	94	72	54	32	1.23%
Switzerland	97	86	55	77	1.53%
United Kingdom	85	12	9	37	1.34%
Central and Eastern Europe					
Albania	44	60	33	6	2.30%
Armenia	45	59	49	30	1.80%

Azerbaijan	56	4	84	99	2.68%
Belarus	59	21	83	98	2.41%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	34	68	69	N/A	0.50%
Bulgaria	58	75	88	49	0.20%
Croatia	69	68	94	9	0.18%
Czech Republic	80	89	29	70	1.67%
Estonia	72	90	66	92	0.80%
Georgia	36	60	53	56	2.00%
Hungary	70	66	26	54	-0.16%
Latvia	67	100	65	44	-3.97%
Lithuania	65	91	87	79	-1.65%
Macedonia (FYR)	53	69	56	2	2.03%
Moldova	23	36	81	67	2.50%
Poland	74	74	38	12	2.72%
Romania	62	56	70	62	0.75%
Russia	73	18	90	8	4.00%
Serbia	48	49	52	5	1.97%

Montenegro	39	27	73	1	-1.70%
Slovak Republic	80	62	30	14	4.06%
Slovenia	81	27	36	65	1.12%
Ukraine	41	11	57	N/A	3.68%
Africa					
Algeria	57	18	96	7	4.55%
Angola	49	1	97	N/A	7.05%
Benin	19	91	20	N/A	3.22%
Botswana	68	58	76	N/A	6.33%
Burkina Faso	16	91	13	N/A	4.41%
Burundi	2	91	6	N/A	3.85%
Cameroon	26	91	91	N/A	2.58%
Cape Verde	52	87	4	N/A	4.96%
Central African Republic	9	91	32	N/A	3.18%
Chad	22	91	89	N/A	4.42%
Congo	52	87	87	N/A	12.13%
Côte d'Ivoire	25	91	82	28	2.98%
Dem. Republic					

Congo	4	91	47	N/A	5.44%
Djibouti	31	76	50	N/A	4.47%
Egypt	37	20	24	69	5.01%
Equatorial Guinea	82	91	85	N/A	0.94%
Eritrea	1	3	1	18	1.81%
Ethiopia	6	45	8	N/A	6.96%
Gabon	64	91	96	N/A	5.36%
Gambia	8	48	86	N/A	4.82%
Ghana	9	11	69	N/A	4.50%
Guinea	10	7	91	N/A	3.03%
Guinea-Bissau	5	91	46	N/A	3.47%
Kenya	20	41	59	N/A	4.11%
Lesotho	13	40	12	N/A	2.98%
Liberia	12	73	74	N/A	5.92%
Libya	73	2	94	N/A	5.22%
Madagascar	4	22	24	N/A	-1.02%
Malawi	7	25	55	N/A	5.96%
Mali	20	91	82	N/A	5.12%

Mauritania	15	13	93	N/A	4.58%
Mauritius	65	52	56	55	4.10%
Morocco	37	72	48	26	3.23%
Mozambique	12	23	71	N/A	6.45%
Namibia	40	39	62	N/A	1.70%
Niger	10	91	21	N/A	4.41%
Nigeria	30	6	61	N/A	6.98%
Rwanda	21	40	68	N/A	5.39%
Sao Tome & Principe	1	61	100	N/A	3.40%
Senegal	24	91	63	N/A	3.44%
Seychelles	60	67	97	N/A	4.01%
Sierra Leone	5	10	39	N/A	4.77%
Somalia	2	38	59	N/A	3.19%
South Africa	61	37	70	N/A	2.59%
Sudan	16	5	73	N/A	5.52%
Swaziland	32	44	79	N/A	1.09%
Tanzania	15	45	32	N/A	6.17%
Togo	8	91	92	N/A	2.56%

Tunisia	50	61	44	39	4.00%
Uganda	11	17	54	N/A	5.59%
Zambia	29	20	49	N/A	5.84%
Zimbabwe	0	8	16	N/A	2.24%
South and Central America					
Argentina	66	3	80	36	3.50%
Belize	47	76	80	N/A	1.00%
Bolivia	32	51	61	81	3.99%
Brazil	71	47	78	11	5.50%
Chile	78	25	92	73	4.72%
Columbia	47	52	34	47	2.25%
Costa Rica	60	42	39	57	3.45%
Ecuador	43	76	75	64	2.51%
El Salvador	35	76	67	N/A	1.04%
Guatemala	46	59	58	N/A	2.52%
Honduras	27	47	58	N/A	2.00%
Mexico	69	42	52	61	4.07%
Nicaragua	23	49	42	N/A	1.75%

Panama	66	76	72	45	5.00%
Paraguay	35	46	66	16	5.27%
Peru	59	66	75	22	6.33%
Suriname	58	26	81	59	4.02%
Uruguay	70	26	27	N/A	5.71%
Venezuela	55	1	28	13	-2.63%
Caribbean					
Antigua & Barbuda	72	76	15	N/A	-2.01%
Bahamas	74	76	45	87	-0.50%
Barbados	67	76	33	15	-0.50%
Bermuda	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Cuba	45	76	18	95	0.25%
Dominica	53	76	65	N/A	1.40%
Dominican Republic	54	39	43	4	3.50%
Grenada	63	76	48	N/A	0.80%
Guyana	28	56	17	N/A	4.36%
Haiti	11	27	89	N/A	-8.50%
Jamaica	42	9	85	19	-0.28%

St Lucia	55	76	67	N/A	1.14%
St Vincent & Grenadines	49	76	95	N/A	0.50%
Trinidad & Tobago	82	37	77	72	2.13%
Middle East					
Bahrain	84	76	62	91	3.48%
Iran	51	19	40	58	3.01%
Iraq	48	9	8	N/A	7.27%
Israel	87	62	12	48	3.20%
Jordan	41	51	3	N/A	4.10%
Kuwait	96	4	99	N/A	3.10%
Lebanon	63	54	2	N/A	6.00%
Oman	76	16	88	N/A	4.71%
Qatar	99	16	83	N/A	18.54%
Saudi Arabia	76	8	98	N/A	3.70%
Syria	61	24	40	N/A	5.00%
Turkey	75	23	27	60	5.20%
United Arab Emirates	96	24	98	94	1.29%

Yemen	28	2	78	N/A	7.78%
Asia					
Afghanistan	17	70	74	N/A	8.64%
Bangladesh	13	43	25	N/A	5.38%
Bhutan	24	55	5	N/A	6.85%
Brunei	78	19	99	75	0.48%
Cambodia	18	67	42	N/A	4.77%
China	54	90	19	68	11.03%
Hong Kong	89	76	14	82	5.02%
India	31	38	34	35	8.78%
Indonesia	42	46	37	31	6.00%
Japan	88	89	6	71	1.90%
Kazakhstan	62	13	76	42	2.40%
Korea North	18	65	23	N/A	1.50%
Korea South	83	63	22	85	4.44%
Kyrgyz Republic	24	15	84	88	4.61%
Laos	17	54	7	N/A	7.22%
Macao	91	76	14	82	3.00%

Malaysia	68	65	44	90	4.72%
Maldives	44	55	17	N/A	3.45%
Mongolia	33	5	77	93	7.22%
Myanmar	3	41	72	N/A	5.26%
Nepal	3	14	25	N/A	2.97%
Pakistan	19	15	31	41	3.00%
Papua New Guinea	75	50	11	N/A	7.96%
Philippines	30	48	53	43	3.63%
Singapore	93	75	63	40	5.68%
Sri Lanka	38	22	10	N/A	5.50%
Taiwan	84	88	35	89	6.50%
Tajikistan	6	6	60	97	4.00%
Thailand	56	64	90	96	5.46%
Turkmenistan	51	53	68	N/A	12.00%
Uzbekistan	40	10	60	100	8.00%
Vietnam	25	12	20	N/A	6.04%
Pacific					
Australia	96	63	31	46	2.96%

Fiji	46	53	3	N/A	2.06%
Marshall Islands	27	76	46	N/A	1.08%
Micronesia (Fed. States)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
New Caledonia	96	73	51	52	2.00%
New Zealand	98	73	51	52	2.00%
Samoa	34	88	64	N/A	-2.77%
Solomon Islands	14	71	1	N/A	3.36%
Tonga	26	57	38	N/A	0.60%
Vanuatu	33	58	47	N/A	3.80%

Source:

CountryWatch Inc. www.countrywatch.com

Updated:

This material was produced in 2010; it is subject to updating in 2012.

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Chapter 4

Investment Overview

Foreign Investment Climate

Background

Burma, a resource-rich country, suffers from pervasive government controls, inefficient economic policies, corruption, and rural poverty. Despite Burma's emergence as a natural gas exporter, socio-economic conditions have deteriorated under the regime's mismanagement, leaving most of the public in poverty, while military leaders and their business cronies exploit the country's ample natural resources. The transfer of state assets, especially real estate, to cronies and military families in 2010 under the guise of a privatization policy further widened the gap between the economic elite and the public. The economy suffers from serious macroeconomic imbalances - including unpredictable inflation, fiscal deficits, multiple official exchange rates that overvalue the Burmese kyat, a distorted interest rate regime, unreliable statistics, and an inability to reconcile national accounts.

The business climate is widely perceived as opaque, corrupt, and highly inefficient. Clearly, Burma's poor investment climate hampers the inflow of foreign investment; in recent years, foreign investors have shied away from nearly every sector except for natural gas, power generation, timber, and mining. The exploitation of natural resources does not benefit the population at large. Other areas, such as manufacturing and services, are struggling with inadequate infrastructure, unpredictable import/export policies, deteriorating health and education systems, and endemic corruption.

Though the Burmese government has good economic relations with its neighbors, better investment and business climates and an improved political situation are needed to promote serious foreign investment, exports, and tourism. It was yet to be seen how the climate post-Elections 2010 would impact the landscape in Burma (Myanmar).

Foreign Investment Assessment

Although the Burmese government has taken steps to liberalize the country's economy, its poor human rights record has incurred the wrath of a host of nations, including the United States. The resulting sanctions have had a negative impact on Burma's economy.

Burma completely lacks regulatory and legal transparency. All existing regulations, including those covering foreign investment, import-export procedures, licensing, and foreign exchange, are subject to change with no advance or written notice at the whim of the regime's ruling generals.

Industries

Agricultural processing; knit and woven apparel; wood and wood products; copper, tin, tungsten, iron; construction materials; pharmaceuticals; fertilizer; cement

Import Commodities

Fabric, petroleum products, plastics, machinery, transport equipment, construction materials, crude oil; food products

Import Partners

China 31.1%, Singapore 22.3%, Thailand 15.1%, South Korea 6.3%, Malaysia 4.8%, Japan 4.3%

Export Commodities

Clothing, gas, wood products, pulses, beans, fish, rice

Export Partners

Thailand 31.5%, US 10.2%, India 9.3%, China 5.8%, Japan 4.8%

Ports and Harbors

Bhamo, Chauk, Mandalay, Moulmein, Myitkyina, Pathein, Rangoon, Sittwe, Tavoy

Telephone System

Barely meets minimum requirements for local and intercity service for business and government; international service is fair; country code: 95

Internet Users

28,000

Judicial System

Burmese law stipulates that commercial disputes must be resolved through a Burmese arbitration procedure. Many foreign investors have sought to resolve differences through informal channels, rather than arbitration.

Note:

The government regularly issues new regulations with no advance notice and no opportunity for review or comment by domestic or foreign market participants. The government rarely publishes its new regulations and regulatory changes, preferring to communicate new rules verbally to interested parties and often refusing to follow up in writing. The unpredictable nature of the regulatory and legal situation – and irregular enforcement of existing laws – makes investment in Burma extremely challenging without good -- and well-connected -- local legal advice.

Labor Force

22.14 million; agriculture 70%, industry 7%, services 23%

Corruption Perception Ranking

As reported by Transparency International, from least to most corrupt, Burma or Myanmar is ranked as one of the most corrupt countries according to this index. See full listing elsewhere in this Country Review.

Cultural Considerations

Buddhism has greatly influenced the standards of etiquette in Burma. Rules of which foreign visitors should be mindful include: never touch an adult or child on the head; never expose the bottom of your feet to another person; never point to an image or statue of a Buddha with the toes or index finger; and remove shoes before entering a private home or place of worship.

Country Website (s)

www.myanmar.com

Foreign Investment Index

Foreign Investment Index

The Foreign Investment Index is a proprietary index measuring attractiveness to international investment flows. The Foreign Investment Index is calculated using an established methodology by CountryWatch's Editor-in-Chief and is based on a given country's economic stability (sustained economic growth, monetary stability, current account deficits, budget surplus), economic risk (risk of non-servicing of payments for goods or services, loans and trade-related finance, risk of sovereign default), business and investment climate (property rights, labor force and laws, regulatory transparency, openness to foreign investment, market conditions, and stability of government). Scores are assigned from 0-10 using the aforementioned criteria. A score of 0 marks the lowest level of foreign investment viability, while a score of 10 marks the highest level of foreign investment viability, according to this proprietary index.

Country	Assessment
Afghanistan	2
Albania	4.5
Algeria	6
Andorra	9

Angola	4.5-5
Antigua	8.5
Argentina	5
Armenia	5
Australia	9.5
Austria	9-9.5
Azerbaijan	5
Bahamas	9
Bahrain	7.5
Bangladesh	4.5
Barbados	9
Belarus	4
Belgium	9
Belize	7.5
Benin	5.5
Bhutan	4.5
Bolivia	4.5
Bosnia-Herzegovina	5

Botswana	7.5-8
Brazil	8
Brunei	7
Bulgaria	5.5
Burkina Faso	4
Burma (Myanmar)	4.5
Burundi	4
Cambodia	4.5
Cameroon	5
Canada	9.5
Cape Verde	6
Central African Republic	3
Chad	4
Chile	9
China	7.5
China: Hong Kong	8.5
China: Taiwan	8.5
Colombia	7

Comoros	4
Congo DRC	4
Congo RC	5
Costa Rica	8
Cote d'Ivoire	4.5
Croatia	7
Cuba	4.5
Cyprus	7
Czech Republic	8.5
Denmark	9.5
Djibouti	4.5
Dominica	6
Dominican Republic	6.5
East Timor	4.5
Ecuador	5.5
Egypt	4.5-5
El Salvador	6
Equatorial Guinea	4.5

Eritrea	3.5
Estonia	8
Ethiopia	4.5
Fiji	5
Finland	9
Former Yugoslav Rep. of Macedonia	5
France	9-9.5
Gabon	5.5
Gambia	5
Georgia	5
Germany	9-9.5
Ghana	5.5
Greece	5
Grenada	7.5
Guatemala	5.5
Guinea	3.5
Guinea-Bissau	3.5
Guyana	4.5

Haiti	4
Holy See (Vatican)	n/a
Hong Kong (China)	8.5
Honduras	5.5
Hungary	8
Iceland	8-8.5
India	8
Indonesia	5.5
Iran	4
Iraq	3
Ireland	8
Israel	8.5
Italy	8
Jamaica	5.5
Japan	9.5
Jordan	6
Kazakhstan	6
Kenya	5

Kiribati	5.5
Korea, North	1
Korea, South	9
Kosovo	4.5
Kuwait	8.5
Kyrgyzstan	4.5
Laos	4
Latvia	7
Lebanon	5
Lesotho	5.5
Liberia	3.5
Libya	3
Liechtenstein	9
Lithuania	7.5
Luxembourg	9-9.5
Madagascar	4.5
Malawi	4.5
Malaysia	8.5

Maldives	6.5
Mali	5
Malta	9
Marshall Islands	5
Mauritania	4.5
Mauritius	7.5-8
Mexico	6.5-7
Micronesia	5
Moldova	4.5-5
Monaco	9
Mongolia	5
Montenegro	5.5
Morocco	7.5
Mozambique	5
Namibia	7.5
Nauru	4.5
Nepal	4
Netherlands	9-9.5

New Zealand	9.5
Nicaragua	5
Niger	4.5
Nigeria	4.5
Norway	9-9.5
Oman	8
Pakistan	4
Palau	4.5-5
Panama	7
Papua New Guinea	5
Paraguay	6
Peru	6
Philippines	6
Poland	8
Portugal	7.5-8
Qatar	9
Romania	6-6.5
Russia	6

Rwanda	4
Saint Kitts and Nevis	8
Saint Lucia	8
Saint Vincent and Grenadines	7
Samoa	7
San Marino	8.5
Sao Tome and Principe	4.5-5
Saudi Arabia	7
Senegal	6
Serbia	6
Seychelles	5
Sierra Leone	4
Singapore	9.5
Slovak Republic (Slovakia)	8.5
Slovenia	8.5-9
Solomon Islands	5
Somalia	2
South Africa	8

Spain	7.5-8
Sri Lanka	5.5
Sudan	4
Suriname	5
Swaziland	4.5
Sweden	9.5
Switzerland	9.5
Syria	2.5
Tajikistan	4
Taiwan (China)	8.5
Tanzania	5
Thailand	7.5-8
Togo	4.5-5
Tonga	5.5-6
Trinidad and Tobago	8-8.5
Tunisia	6
Turkey	6.5-7
Turkmenistan	4

Tuvalu	7
Uganda	5
Ukraine	4.5-5
United Arab Emirates	8.5
United Kingdom	9
United States	9
Uruguay	6.5-7
Uzbekistan	4
Vanuatu	6
Venezuela	5
Vietnam	5.5
Yemen	3
Zambia	4.5-5
Zimbabwe	3.5

Editor's Note:

As of 2015, the global economic crisis (emerging in 2008) had affected many countries across the world, resulting in changes to their rankings. Among those countries affected were top tier economies, such as the [United Kingdom](#), [Iceland](#), [Switzerland](#) and [Austria](#). However, in all these cases, their rankings have moved back upward in the last couple of years as anxieties have eased. Other top tier countries, such as [Spain](#), [Portugal](#), [Ireland](#), and [Italy](#), suffered some

effects due to debt woes and the concomitant effect on the euro zone. Greece, another euro zone nation, was also downgraded due to its sovereign debt crisis; however, Greece's position on the precipice of default incurred a sharper downgrade than the other four euro zone countries mentioned above. Cyprus' exposure to Greek bank yielded a downgrade in its case. Slovenia and [Latvia](#) have been slightly downgraded due to a mix of economic and political concerns but could easily be upgraded in a future assessment, should these concerns abate. Meanwhile, the crisis in eastern [Ukraine](#) fueled downgrades in that country and neighboring [Russia](#).

Despite the "trifecta of tragedy" in [Japan](#) in 2011 -- the earthquake, the ensuing tsunami, and the resulting nuclear crisis -- and the appreciable destabilization of the economic and political terrain therein, this country has only slightly been downgraded. Japan's challenges have been assessed to be transient, the government remains accountable, and there is little risk of default. Both [India](#) and China retain their rankings; [India](#) holds a slightly higher ranking than [China](#) due to its record of democratic representation and accountability.

There were shifts in opposite directions for [Mali](#) and [Nigeria](#) versus the [Central African Republic](#), [Burkina Faso](#), and [Burundi](#). [Mali](#) was slightly upgraded due to its efforts to return to constitutional order following the 2012 coup and to neutralize the threat of separatists and Islamists. Likewise, a new government in [Nigeria](#) generated a slight upgrade as the country attempts to confront corruption, crime, and terrorism. But the [Central African Republic](#) was downgraded due to the takeover of the government by Seleka rebels and the continued decline into lawlessness in that country. Likewise, the attempts by the leaders of [Burundi](#) and [Burkina Faso](#) to hold onto power by by-passing the constitution raised eyebrows and resulted in downgrades.

Political unrest in [Libya](#) and [Algeria](#) have contributed to a decision to marginally downgrade these countries as well. [Syria](#) incurred a sharper downgrade due to the devolution into de facto civil war and the dire security threat posed by Islamist terrorists. [Iraq](#) saw a similar downgrade as a result of the takeover of wide swaths of territory and the threat of genocide at the hands of Islamist terrorists. [Yemen](#), likewise, has been downgraded due to political instability at the hands of secessionists, terrorists, Houthi rebels, and the intervention of external parties. Conversely, [Egypt](#) and [Tunisia](#) saw slight upgrades as their political environments stabilize.

At the low end of the spectrum, devolving security conditions and/or economic crisis have resulted in countries like [Pakistan](#), [Afghanistan](#), [Somalia](#), and [Zimbabwe](#) maintaining their low ratings.

The [United States](#) continues to retain its previous slight downgrade due to the enduring threat of default surrounding the debt ceiling in that country, matched by a conflict-ridden political climate. In the case of [Mexico](#), there is limited concern about default, but increasing alarm over the security situation in that country and the government's ability to contain it. In [Argentina](#), a default to bond holders resulted in a downgrade to that country. Finally, a small but significant upgrade was attributed to [Cuba](#) due to its recent pro-business reforms and its normalization of ties with the

United States.

Source:

CountryWatch Inc. www.countrywatch.com

Updated:

2015

Corruption Perceptions Index

Corruption Perceptions Index

Transparency International: [Corruption Perceptions Index](#)

Editor's Note:

Transparency International's [Corruption Perceptions Index](#) is a composite index which ranks countries in terms of the degree to which corruption is perceived to exist among public officials. This index indicates the views of national and international business people and analysts about the levels of corruption in each country. The highest (and best) level of transparency is indicated by the number, 10. The lower (and worse) levels of transparency are indicated by lower numbers.

Rank	Country/Territory	CPI 2009 Score	Surveys Used	Confidence Range
1	New Zealand	9.4	6	9.1 - 9.5
2	Denmark	9.3	6	9.1 - 9.5
3	Singapore	9.2	9	9.0 - 9.4
3	Sweden	9.2	6	9.0 - 9.3

5	Switzerland	9.0	6	8.9 - 9.1
6	Finland	8.9	6	8.4 - 9.4
6	Netherlands	8.9	6	8.7 - 9.0
8	Australia	8.7	8	8.3 - 9.0
8	Canada	8.7	6	8.5 - 9.0
8	Iceland	8.7	4	7.5 - 9.4
11	Norway	8.6	6	8.2 - 9.1
12	Hong Kong	8.2	8	7.9 - 8.5
12	Luxembourg	8.2	6	7.6 - 8.8
14	Germany	8.0	6	7.7 - 8.3
14	Ireland	8.0	6	7.8 - 8.4
16	Austria	7.9	6	7.4 - 8.3
17	Japan	7.7	8	7.4 - 8.0
17	United Kingdom	7.7	6	7.3 - 8.2
19	United States	7.5	8	6.9 - 8.0
20	Barbados	7.4	4	6.6 - 8.2
21	Belgium	7.1	6	6.9 - 7.3
22	Qatar	7.0	6	5.8 - 8.1

22	Saint Lucia	7.0	3	6.7 - 7.5
24	France	6.9	6	6.5 - 7.3
25	Chile	6.7	7	6.5 - 6.9
25	Uruguay	6.7	5	6.4 - 7.1
27	Cyprus	6.6	4	6.1 - 7.1
27	Estonia	6.6	8	6.1 - 6.9
27	Slovenia	6.6	8	6.3 - 6.9
30	United Arab Emirates	6.5	5	5.5 - 7.5
31	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	6.4	3	4.9 - 7.5
32	Israel	6.1	6	5.4 - 6.7
32	Spain	6.1	6	5.5 - 6.6
34	Dominica	5.9	3	4.9 - 6.7
35	Portugal	5.8	6	5.5 - 6.2
35	Puerto Rico	5.8	4	5.2 - 6.3
37	Botswana	5.6	6	5.1 - 6.3
37	Taiwan	5.6	9	5.4 - 5.9
39	Brunei Darussalam	5.5	4	4.7 - 6.4
39	Oman	5.5	5	4.4 - 6.5

39	Korea (South)	5.5	9	5.3 - 5.7
42	Mauritius	5.4	6	5.0 - 5.9
43	Costa Rica	5.3	5	4.7 - 5.9
43	Macau	5.3	3	3.3 - 6.9
45	Malta	5.2	4	4.0 - 6.2
46	Bahrain	5.1	5	4.2 - 5.8
46	Cape Verde	5.1	3	3.3 - 7.0
46	Hungary	5.1	8	4.6 - 5.7
49	Bhutan	5.0	4	4.3 - 5.6
49	Jordan	5.0	7	3.9 - 6.1
49	Poland	5.0	8	4.5 - 5.5
52	Czech Republic	4.9	8	4.3 - 5.6
52	Lithuania	4.9	8	4.4 - 5.4
54	Seychelles	4.8	3	3.0 - 6.7
55	South Africa	4.7	8	4.3 - 4.9
56	Latvia	4.5	6	4.1 - 4.9
56	Malaysia	4.5	9	4.0 - 5.1
56	Namibia	4.5	6	3.9 - 5.1

56	Samoa	4.5	3	3.3 - 5.3
56	Slovakia	4.5	8	4.1 - 4.9
61	Cuba	4.4	3	3.5 - 5.1
61	Turkey	4.4	7	3.9 - 4.9
63	Italy	4.3	6	3.8 - 4.9
63	Saudi Arabia	4.3	5	3.1 - 5.3
65	Tunisia	4.2	6	3.0 - 5.5
66	Croatia	4.1	8	3.7 - 4.5
66	Georgia	4.1	7	3.4 - 4.7
66	Kuwait	4.1	5	3.2 - 5.1
69	Ghana	3.9	7	3.2 - 4.6
69	Montenegro	3.9	5	3.5 - 4.4
71	Bulgaria	3.8	8	3.2 - 4.5
71	FYR Macedonia	3.8	6	3.4 - 4.2
71	Greece	3.8	6	3.2 - 4.3
71	Romania	3.8	8	3.2 - 4.3
75	Brazil	3.7	7	3.3 - 4.3
75	Colombia	3.7	7	3.1 - 4.3

75	Peru	3.7	7	3.4 - 4.1
75	Suriname	3.7	3	3.0 - 4.7
79	Burkina Faso	3.6	7	2.8 - 4.4
79	China	3.6	9	3.0 - 4.2
79	Swaziland	3.6	3	3.0 - 4.7
79	Trinidad and Tobago	3.6	4	3.0 - 4.3
83	Serbia	3.5	6	3.3 - 3.9
84	El Salvador	3.4	5	3.0 - 3.8
84	Guatemala	3.4	5	3.0 - 3.9
84	India	3.4	10	3.2 - 3.6
84	Panama	3.4	5	3.1 - 3.7
84	Thailand	3.4	9	3.0 - 3.8
89	Lesotho	3.3	6	2.8 - 3.8
89	Malawi	3.3	7	2.7 - 3.9
89	Mexico	3.3	7	3.2 - 3.5
89	Moldova	3.3	6	2.7 - 4.0
89	Morocco	3.3	6	2.8 - 3.9
89	Rwanda	3.3	4	2.9 - 3.7

95	Albania	3.2	6	3.0 - 3.3
95	Vanuatu	3.2	3	2.3 - 4.7
97	Liberia	3.1	3	1.9 - 3.8
97	Sri Lanka	3.1	7	2.8 - 3.4
99	Bosnia and Herzegovina	3.0	7	2.6 - 3.4
99	Dominican Republic	3.0	5	2.9 - 3.2
99	Jamaica	3.0	5	2.8 - 3.3
99	Madagascar	3.0	7	2.8 - 3.2
99	Senegal	3.0	7	2.5 - 3.6
99	Tonga	3.0	3	2.6 - 3.3
99	Zambia	3.0	7	2.8 - 3.2
106	Argentina	2.9	7	2.6 - 3.1
106	Benin	2.9	6	2.3 - 3.4
106	Gabon	2.9	3	2.6 - 3.1
106	Gambia	2.9	5	1.6 - 4.0
106	Niger	2.9	5	2.7 - 3.0
111	Algeria	2.8	6	2.5 - 3.1
111	Djibouti	2.8	4	2.3 - 3.2

111	Egypt	2.8	6	2.6 - 3.1
111	Indonesia	2.8	9	2.4 - 3.2
111	Kiribati	2.8	3	2.3 - 3.3
111	Mali	2.8	6	2.4 - 3.2
111	Sao Tome and Principe	2.8	3	2.4 - 3.3
111	Solomon Islands	2.8	3	2.3 - 3.3
111	Togo	2.8	5	1.9 - 3.9
120	Armenia	2.7	7	2.6 - 2.8
120	Bolivia	2.7	6	2.4 - 3.1
120	Ethiopia	2.7	7	2.4 - 2.9
120	Kazakhstan	2.7	7	2.1 - 3.3
120	Mongolia	2.7	7	2.4 - 3.0
120	Vietnam	2.7	9	2.4 - 3.1
126	Eritrea	2.6	4	1.6 - 3.8
126	Guyana	2.6	4	2.5 - 2.7
126	Syria	2.6	5	2.2 - 2.9
126	Tanzania	2.6	7	2.4 - 2.9
130	Honduras	2.5	6	2.2 - 2.8

130	Lebanon	2.5	3	1.9 - 3.1
130	Libya	2.5	6	2.2 - 2.8
130	Maldives	2.5	4	1.8 - 3.2
130	Mauritania	2.5	7	2.0 - 3.3
130	Mozambique	2.5	7	2.3 - 2.8
130	Nicaragua	2.5	6	2.3 - 2.7
130	Nigeria	2.5	7	2.2 - 2.7
130	Uganda	2.5	7	2.1 - 2.8
139	Bangladesh	2.4	7	2.0 - 2.8
139	Belarus	2.4	4	2.0 - 2.8
139	Pakistan	2.4	7	2.1 - 2.7
139	Philippines	2.4	9	2.1 - 2.7
143	Azerbaijan	2.3	7	2.0 - 2.6
143	Comoros	2.3	3	1.6 - 3.3
143	Nepal	2.3	6	2.0 - 2.6
146	Cameroon	2.2	7	1.9 - 2.6
146	Ecuador	2.2	5	2.0 - 2.5
146	Kenya	2.2	7	1.9 - 2.5

146	Russia	2.2	8	1.9 - 2.4
146	Sierra Leone	2.2	5	1.9 - 2.4
146	Timor-Leste	2.2	5	1.8 - 2.6
146	Ukraine	2.2	8	2.0 - 2.6
146	Zimbabwe	2.2	7	1.7 - 2.8
154	Côte d'Ivoire	2.1	7	1.8 - 2.4
154	Papua New Guinea	2.1	5	1.7 - 2.5
154	Paraguay	2.1	5	1.7 - 2.5
154	Yemen	2.1	4	1.6 - 2.5
158	Cambodia	2.0	8	1.8 - 2.2
158	Central African Republic	2.0	4	1.9 - 2.2
158	Laos	2.0	4	1.6 - 2.6
158	Tajikistan	2.0	8	1.6 - 2.5
162	Angola	1.9	5	1.8 - 1.9
162	Congo Brazzaville	1.9	5	1.6 - 2.1
162	Democratic Republic of Congo	1.9	5	1.7 - 2.1
162	Guinea-Bissau	1.9	3	1.8 - 2.0
162	Kyrgyzstan	1.9	7	1.8 - 2.1

162	Venezuela	1.9	7	1.8 - 2.0
168	Burundi	1.8	6	1.6 - 2.0
168	Equatorial Guinea	1.8	3	1.6 - 1.9
168	Guinea	1.8	5	1.7 - 1.8
168	Haiti	1.8	3	1.4 - 2.3
168	Iran	1.8	3	1.7 - 1.9
168	Turkmenistan	1.8	4	1.7 - 1.9
174	Uzbekistan	1.7	6	1.5 - 1.8
175	Chad	1.6	6	1.5 - 1.7
176	Iraq	1.5	3	1.2 - 1.8
176	Sudan	1.5	5	1.4 - 1.7
178	Myanmar	1.4	3	0.9 - 1.8
179	Afghanistan	1.3	4	1.0 - 1.5
180	Somalia	1.1	3	0.9 - 1.4

Methodology:

As noted above, the highest (and best) level of transparency with the least perceived corruption is indicated by the number, 10. The lower (and worse) levels of transparency are indicated by lower numbers.

According to Transparency International, the [Corruption Perceptions Index](#) (CPI) table shows a

country's ranking and score, the number of surveys used to determine the score, and the confidence range of the scoring.

The rank shows how one country compares to others included in the index. The CPI score indicates the perceived level of public-sector corruption in a country/territory.

The CPI is based on 13 independent surveys. However, not all surveys include all countries. The surveys used column indicates how many surveys were relied upon to determine the score for that country.

The confidence range indicates the reliability of the CPI scores and tells us that allowing for a margin of error, we can be 90% confident that the true score for this country lies within this range.

Note:

Kosovo, which separated from the Yugoslav successor state of [Serbia](#), is not listed above. No calculation is available for [Kosovo](#) at this time, however, a future corruption index by Transparency International may include the world's newest country in its tally. Taiwan has been listed above despite its contested status; while Taiwan claims sovereign status, [China](#) claims ultimate jurisdiction over Taiwan. Hong Kong, which is also under the rubric of Chinese sovereignty, is listed above. Note as well that Puerto Rico, which is a [United States](#) domain, is also included in the list above. These inclusions likely have to do with the size and fairly autonomous status of their economies.

Source:

Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index; available at URL: <http://www.transparency.org>

Updated:

Uploaded in 2011 using most recent ranking available; reviewed in 2015.

Competitiveness Ranking

Competitiveness Ranking

Editor's Note:

The Global Competitiveness Report's competitiveness ranking is based on the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI), which was developed for the World Economic Forum. The GCI is based on a number of competitiveness considerations, and provides a comprehensive picture of the competitiveness landscape in countries around the world. The competitiveness considerations are: institutions, infrastructure, macroeconomic environment, health and primary education, higher education and training, goods market efficiency, labour market efficiency, financial market development, technological readiness, market size, business sophistication, and innovation. The rankings are calculated from both publicly available data and the Executive Opinion Survey.

Country/Economy	GCI 2010 Rank	GCI 2010 Score	GCI 2009 Rank	Change 2009-2010
Switzerland	1	5.63	1	0
Sweden	2	5.56	4	2
Singapore	3	5.48	3	0
United States	4	5.43	2	-2
Germany	5	5.39	7	2
Japan	6	5.37	8	2
Finland	7	5.37	6	-1
Netherlands	8	5.33	10	2
Denmark	9	5.32	5	-4
Canada	10	5.30	9	-1
Hong Kong SAR	11	5.30	11	0
United Kingdom	12	5.25	13	1

Taiwan, China	13	5.21	12	-1
Norway	14	5.14	14	0
France	15	5.13	16	1
Australia	16	5.11	15	-1
Qatar	17	5.10	22	5
Austria	18	5.09	17	-1
Belgium	19	5.07	18	-1
Luxembourg	20	5.05	21	1
Saudi Arabia	21	4.95	28	7
Korea, Rep.	22	4.93	19	-3
New Zealand	23	4.92	20	-3
Israel	24	4.91	27	3
United Arab Emirates	25	4.89	23	-2
Malaysia	26	4.88	24	-2
China	27	4.84	29	2
Brunei Darussalam	28	4.75	32	4
Ireland	29	4.74	25	-4
Chile	30	4.69	30	0

Iceland	31	4.68	26	-5
Tunisia	32	4.65	40	8
Estonia	33	4.61	35	2
Oman	34	4.61	41	7
Kuwait	35	4.59	39	4
Czech Republic	36	4.57	31	-5
Bahrain	37	4.54	38	1
Thailand	38	4.51	36	-2
Poland	39	4.51	46	7
Cyprus	40	4.50	34	-6
Puerto Rico	41	4.49	42	1
Spain	42	4.49	33	-9
Barbados	43	4.45	44	1
Indonesia	44	4.43	54	10
Slovenia	45	4.42	37	-8
Portugal	46	4.38	43	-3
Lithuania	47	4.38	53	6
Italy	48	4.37	48	0

Montenegro	49	4.36	62	13
Malta	50	4.34	52	2
India	51	4.33	49	-2
Hungary	52	4.33	58	6
Panama	53	4.33	59	6
South Africa	54	4.32	45	-9
Mauritius	55	4.32	57	2
Costa Rica	56	4.31	55	-1
Azerbaijan	57	4.29	51	-6
Brazil	58	4.28	56	-2
Vietnam	59	4.27	75	16
Slovak Republic	60	4.25	47	-13
Turkey	61	4.25	61	0
Sri Lanka	62	4.25	79	17
Russian Federation	63	4.24	63	0
Uruguay	64	4.23	65	1
Jordan	65	4.21	50	-15
Mexico	66	4.19	60	-6

Romania	67	4.16	64	-3
Colombia	68	4.14	69	1
Iran	69	4.14	n/a	n/a
Latvia	70	4.14	68	-2
Bulgaria	71	4.13	76	5
Kazakhstan	72	4.12	67	-5
Peru	73	4.11	78	5
Namibia	74	4.09	74	0
Morocco	75	4.08	73	-2
Botswana	76	4.05	66	-10
Croatia	77	4.04	72	-5
Guatemala	78	4.04	80	2
Macedonia, FYR	79	4.02	84	5
Rwanda	80	4.00	n/a	n/a
Egypt	81	4.00	70	-11
El Salvador	82	3.99	77	-5
Greece	83	3.99	71	-12
Trinidad and Tobago	84	3.97	86	2

Philippines	85	3.96	87	2
Algeria	86	3.96	83	-3
Argentina	87	3.95	85	-2
Albania	88	3.94	96	8
Ukraine	89	3.90	82	-7
Gambia, The	90	3.90	81	-9
Honduras	91	3.89	89	-2
Lebanon	92	3.89	n/a	n/a
Georgia	93	3.86	90	-3
Moldova	94	3.86	n/a	n/a
Jamaica	95	3.85	91	-4
Serbia	96	3.84	93	-3
Syria	97	3.79	94	-3
Armenia	98	3.76	97	-1
Mongolia	99	3.75	117	18
Libya	100	3.74	88	-12
Dominican Republic	101	3.72	95	-6
Bosnia and Herzegovina	102	3.70	109	7

Benin	103	3.69	103	0
Senegal	104	3.67	92	-12
Ecuador	105	3.65	105	0
Kenya	106	3.65	98	-8
Bangladesh	107	3.64	106	-1
Bolivia	108	3.64	120	12
Cambodia	109	3.63	110	1
Guyana	110	3.62	104	-6
Cameroon	111	3.58	111	0
Nicaragua	112	3.57	115	3
Tanzania	113	3.56	100	-13
Ghana	114	3.56	114	0
Zambia	115	3.55	112	-3
Tajikistan	116	3.53	122	6
Cape Verde	117	3.51	n/a	n/a
Uganda	118	3.51	108	-10
Ethiopia	119	3.51	118	-1
Paraguay	120	3.49	124	4

Kyrgyz Republic	121	3.49	123	2
Venezuela	122	3.48	113	-9
Pakistan	123	3.48	101	-22
Madagascar	124	3.46	121	-3
Malawi	125	3.45	119	-6
Swaziland	126	3.40	n/a	n/a
Nigeria	127	3.38	99	-28
Lesotho	128	3.36	107	-21
Côte d'Ivoire	129	3.35	116	-13
Nepal	130	3.34	125	-5
Mozambique	131	3.32	129	-2
Mali	132	3.28	130	-2
Timor-Leste	133	3.23	126	-7
Burkina Faso	134	3.20	128	-6
Mauritania	135	3.14	127	-8
Zimbabwe	136	3.03	132	-4
Burundi	137	2.96	133	-4
Angola	138	2.93	n/a	n/a

Chad	139	2.73	131	-8
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Methodology:

The competitiveness rankings are calculated from both publicly available data and the Executive Opinion Survey, a comprehensive annual survey conducted by the World Economic Forum together with its network of Partner Institutes (leading research institutes and business organizations) in the countries covered by the Report.

Highlights according to WEF --

- The [United States](#) falls two places to fourth position, overtaken by [Sweden](#) and [Singapore](#) in the rankings of the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report 2010-2011
- The People's Republic of [China](#) continues to move up the rankings, with marked improvements in several other Asian countries
- [Germany](#) moves up two places to fifth place, leading the Eurozone countries
- [Switzerland](#) tops the rankings

Source:

World Economic Forum; available at URL: <http://www.weforum.org>

Updated:

2011 using most recent ranking available; reviewed in 2015.

Taxation

Corporate Tax

The corporate income tax in Myanmar (Burma) in recent years was 30 percent. Enterprises operating under the Foreign Investment Law are eligible for three year tax holiday. Manufacturing

companies may also benefit from a income tax reduction of up to 50 percent on profits from the export of its manufactured goods. New enterprises are also eligible for customs duties exemption on all capital equipment and raw materials. Withholding taxes on interest are 15 percent for resident foreigners and 20 percent for non-resident foreigners. Dividends are exempt from tax.

Commercial Tax

Goods, including imported goods, and services are subject to a commercial turnover tax. Generally, the tax is levied at the point of sale and ranges from 5 percent to 25 percent for general goods and from 30 percent-200 percent on goods such as tobacco products, liquor, gems and pearls. Services are subject to a the following rates: 5 percent for trading; 8 percent for passenger transport; 10 percent on hotel and restaurant services; 15 percent for entertainment, except for movies, which are subject to a 30 percent tax.

Stock Market

The Myanmar Securities Exchange Center, in Yangon, was formed in 1996, and is a joint venture of the Daiwa Institute of Research of Japan and the Myanmar Economic Bank.

Partner Links

Partner Links

Chapter 5

Social Overview

People

Editor's Note:

The former military authorities that ruled this country changed the historic name - Burma - to Union of Myanmar or Myanmar. Although the new name is used in conventional practice today, it was never endorsed by a sitting legislature. CountryWatch references this country by both the historic and conventional names in its materials, however, the lack of legitimization in regard to the conventional usage should be duly noted.

Background

Burma, also known as Myanmar, is located in the western portion of mainland Southeast Asia. It is bordered by several countries: China to the north and northeast, Laos to the east, Thailand to the southeast, Bangladesh to the west, and India to the northwest.

Cultural Demography

The population of Myanmar -- about 59 million -- is highly diverse. There are eight major ethnic groups subdivided into some 135 ethnic minorities. The largest ethnic group is the Burman (also known as the Bamar), which constitutes about 70 percent of the population. Other major ethnic groups include Shan, Karen, Rakhine, Mon, Kachin, Kayah and Chin. There are also small percentages of Chinese and Indian minorities, as well as a very small community of Europeans and other Westerners.

The ethnic diversity has resulted in linguistic diversity. The official language is Burmese, and several indigenous languages are also spoken. These languages belong to three language families: the Burmese and most of the other languages belong to the Sino-Tibetan family; the Shan language belongs to the Tai family; languages spoken by the Mon belong to the Mon-Khmer subfamily of the Austro-Asiatic family. English was once the official language in Myanmar during the colonial times, but it ceased to be the official language after Myanmar gained independence. Though having lost its importance in schools and colleges, teaching of English is still required for elementary

schools.

The major religion of Myanmar is Buddhism, which claims more than 80 percent of the population as followers. As in many Southeast Asian countries, the Theravada sect of Buddhism is prevalent in Myanmar. Buddhist monasteries and pagodas dot the landscape of Myanmar and reflect the major religion of the land. In addition, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Animism are practiced in Myanmar.

Human Development

The population of Myanmar has a life expectancy rate of 64.5 years of age for the total population. The infant mortality rate of Myanmar is 50.76 deaths per 1,000 live births. In terms of literacy, 89.9 percent of the population, age 15 and over, can read and write.

About two percent of GDP is spent on health expenditures. Access to water and sanitation is generally good, especially in urban areas; however, access is more problematic in rural areas.

A notable measure of human development is the Human Development Index (HDI), which is formulated by the United Nations Development Program. The HDI is a composite of several indicators, which measure a country's achievements in three main areas of human development: longevity, knowledge and education, as well as economic standard of living. The HDI from a recent Human Development Report places Myanmar in the low human development category, at 132nd place among 169 countries and territories surveyed.

Note: Although the concept of human development is complicated and cannot be properly captured by values and indices, the HDI, which is calculated and updated annually, offers a wide-ranging assessment of human development in certain countries, not based solely upon traditional economic and financial indicators.

Written by Dr. Denise Youngblood Coleman, Editor in Chief, www.countrywatch.com . See Bibliography for list of research sources.

Human Development Index

Human Development Index

Human Development Index (Ranked Numerically)

The [Human Development Index](#) (HDI) is used to measure quality of life in countries across the world. The HDI has been compiled since 1990 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on a regular basis. The HDI is a composite of several indicators, which measure a country's achievements in three main arenas of human development: longevity, education, and economic standard of living. Although the concept of human development is complicated and cannot be properly captured by values and indices, the HDI offers a wide-ranging assessment of human development in certain countries, not based solely upon traditional economic and financial indicators. For more information about the methodology used to calculate the HDI, please see the "Source Materials" in the appendices of this review.

Very High Human Development	High Human Development	Medium Human Development	Low Human Development
1. Norway	43. Bahamas	86. Fiji	128. Kenya
2. Australia	44. Lithuania	87. Turkmenistan	129. Bangladesh
3. New Zealand	45. Chile	88. Dominican Republic	130. Ghana
4. United States	46. Argentina	89. China	131. Cameroon
5. Ireland	47. Kuwait	90. El Salvador	132. Myanmar (Burma)
6. Liechtenstein	48. Latvia	91. Sri Lanka	133. Yemen
7. Netherlands	49. Montenegro	92. Thailand	134. Benin
8. Canada	50. Romania	93. Gabon	135. Madagascar
9. Sweden	51. Croatia	94. Suriname	136. Mauritania

10. Germany	52. Uruguay	95. Bolivia	137. Papua New Guinea
11. Japan	53. Libya	96. Paraguay	138. Nepal
12. South Korea	54. Panama	97. Philippines	139. Togo
13. Switzerland	55. Saudi Arabia	98. Botswana	140. Comoros
14. France	56. Mexico	99. Moldova	141. Lesotho
15. Israel	57. Malaysia	100. Mongolia	142. Nigeria
16. Finland	58. Bulgaria	101. Egypt	143. Uganda
17. Iceland	59. Trinidad and Tobago	102. Uzbekistan	144. Senegal
18. Belgium	60. Serbia	103. Micronesia	145. Haiti
19. Denmark	61. Belarus	104. Guyana	146. Angola
20. Spain	62. Costa Rica	105. Namibia	147. Djibouti
21. Hong King	63. Peru	106. Honduras	148. Tanzania
22. Greece	64. Albania	107. Maldives	149. Cote d'Ivoire
23. Italy	65. Russian Federation	108. Indonesia	150. Zambia
24. Luxembourg	66. Kazakhstan	109. Kyrgyzstan	151. Gambia
25. Austria	67. Azerbaijan	110. South Africa	152. Rwanda
26. United Kingdom	68. Bosnia and Herzegovina	111. Syria	153. Malawi

27. Singapore	69. Ukraine	112. Tajikistan	154. Sudan
28. Czech Republic	70. Iran	113. Vietnam	155. Afghanistan
29. Slovenia	71. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	114. Morocco	156. Guinea
30. Andorra	72. Mauritius	115. Nicaragua	157. Ethiopia
31. Slovakia	73. Brazil	116. Guatemala	158. Sierra Leone
32. United Arab Emirates	74. Georgia	117. Equatorial Guinea	159. Central African Republic
33. Malta	75. Venezuela	118. Cape Verde	160. Mali
34. Estonia	76. Armenia	119. India	161. Burkina Faso
35. Cyprus	77. Ecuador	120. East Timor	162. Liberia
36. Hungary	78. Belize	121. Swaziland	163. Chad
37. Brunei	79. Colombia	122. Laos	164. Guinea-Bissau
38. Qatar	80. Jamaica	123. Solomon Islands	165. Mozambique
39. Bahrain	81. Tunisia	124. Cambodia	166. Burundi
40. Portugal	82. Jordan	125. Pakistan	167. Niger
41. Poland	83. Turkey	126. Congo RC	168. Congo DRC

42. Barbados	84. Algeria	127. Sao Tome and Principe	169. Zimbabwe
	85. Tonga		

Methodology:

For more information about the methodology used to calculate the HDI, please see the "Source Materials" in the appendices of this Country Review.

Reference:

As published in United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Report 2010.

Source:

United Nations Development Programme's [Human Development Index](http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/) available at URL: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>

Updated:

Uploaded in 2011 using ranking available; reviewed in 2015

Life Satisfaction Index

Life Satisfaction Index

Life Satisfaction Index

Created by Adrian G. White, an Analytic Social Psychologist at the University of Leicester, the "Satisfaction with Life Index" measures subjective life satisfaction across various countries. The data was taken from a metastudy (see below for source) and associates the notion of subjective happiness or life satisfaction with qualitative parameters such as health, wealth, and access to basic education. This assessment serves as an alternative to other measures of happiness that tend to rely on traditional and quantitative measures of policy on quality of life, such as GNP and GDP.

The methodology involved the responses of 80,000 people across the globe.

Rank	Country	Score
1	Denmark	273.4
2	Switzerland	273.33
3	Austria	260
4	Iceland	260
5	The Bahamas	256.67
6	Finland	256.67
7	Sweden	256.67
8	Iran	253.33
9	Brunei	253.33
10	Canada	253.33
11	Ireland	253.33
12	Luxembourg	253.33
13	Costa Rica	250
14	Malta	250
15	Netherlands	250

16	Antiguaand Barbuda	246.67
17	Malaysia	246.67
18	New Zealand	246.67
19	Norway	246.67
20	Seychelles	246.67
21	Saint Kitts and Nevis	246.67
22	United Arab Emirates	246.67
23	United States	246.67
24	Vanuatu	246.67
25	Venezuela	246.67
26	Australia	243.33
27	Barbados	243.33
28	Belgium	243.33
29	Dominica	243.33
30	Oman	243.33
31	Saudi Arabia	243.33
32	Suriname	243.33
33	Bahrain	240

34	Colombia	240
35	Germany	240
36	Guyana	240
37	Honduras	240
38	Kuwait	240
39	Panama	240
40	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	240
41	United Kingdom	236.67
42	Dominican Republic	233.33
43	Guatemala	233.33
44	Jamaica	233.33
45	Qatar	233.33
46	Spain	233.33
47	Saint Lucia	233.33
48	Belize	230
49	Cyprus	230
50	Italy	230
51	Mexico	230

52	Samoa	230
53	Singapore	230
54	Solomon Islands	230
55	Trinidad and Tobago	230
56	Argentina	226.67
57	Fiji	223.33
58	Israel	223.33
59	Mongolia	223.33
60	São Tomé and Príncipe	223.33
61	El Salvador	220
62	France	220
63	Hong Kong	220
64	Indonesia	220
65	Kyrgyzstan	220
66	Maldives	220
67	Slovenia	220
68	Taiwan	220
69	East Timor	220

70	Tonga	220
71	Chile	216.67
72	Grenada	216.67
73	Mauritius	216.67
74	Namibia	216.67
75	Paraguay	216.67
76	Thailand	216.67
77	Czech Republic	213.33
78	Philippines	213.33
79	Tunisia	213.33
80	Uzbekistan	213.33
81	Brazil	210
82	China	210
83	Cuba	210
84	Greece	210
85	Nicaragua	210
86	Papua New Guinea	210
87	Uruguay	210

88	Gabon	206.67
89	Ghana	206.67
90	Japan	206.67
91	Yemen	206.67
92	Portugal	203.33
93	Sri Lanka	203.33
94	Tajikistan	203.33
95	Vietnam	203.33
96	Bhutan	200
97	Comoros	196.67
98	Croatia	196.67
99	Poland	196.67
100	Cape Verde	193.33
101	Kazakhstan	193.33
102	South Korea	193.33
103	Madagascar	193.33
104	Bangladesh	190
105	Republic of the Congo	190

106	The Gambia	190
107	Hungary	190
108	Libya	190
109	South Africa	190
110	Cambodia	186.67
111	Ecuador	186.67
112	Kenya	186.67
113	Lebanon	186.67
114	Morocco	186.67
115	Peru	186.67
116	Senegal	186.67
117	Bolivia	183.33
118	Haiti	183.33
119	Nepal	183.33
120	Nigeria	183.33
121	Tanzania	183.33
122	Benin	180
123	Botswana	180

124	Guinea-Bissau	180
125	India	180
126	Laos	180
127	Mozambique	180
128	Palestinian Authority	180
129	Slovakia	180
130	Myanmar	176.67
131	Mali	176.67
132	Mauritania	176.67
133	Turkey	176.67
134	Algeria	173.33
135	Equatorial Guinea	173.33
136	Romania	173.33
137	Bosnia and Herzegovina	170
138	Cameroon	170
139	Estonia	170
140	Guinea	170
141	Jordan	170

142	Syria	170
143	Sierra Leone	166.67
144	Azerbaijan	163.33
145	Central African Republic	163.33
146	Republic of Macedonia	163.33
147	Togo	163.33
148	Zambia	163.33
149	Angola	160
150	Djibouti	160
151	Egypt	160
152	Burkina Faso	156.67
153	Ethiopia	156.67
154	Latvia	156.67
155	Lithuania	156.67
156	Uganda	156.67
157	Albania	153.33
158	Malawi	153.33
159	Chad	150

160	Côte d'Ivoire	150
161	Niger	150
162	Eritrea	146.67
163	Rwanda	146.67
164	Bulgaria	143.33
165	Lesotho	143.33
166	Pakistan	143.33
167	Russia	143.33
168	Swaziland	140
169	Georgia	136.67
170	Belarus	133.33
171	Turkmenistan	133.33
172	Armenia	123.33
173	Sudan	120
174	Ukraine	120
175	Moldova	116.67
176	Democratic Republic of the Congo	110
177	Zimbabwe	110

178	Burundi	100
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Commentary:

European countries, such as [Denmark](#), [Iceland](#), [Finland](#), [Sweden](#), [Switzerland](#), [Austria](#) resided at the top of the ranking with highest levels of self-reported life satisfaction. Conversely, European countries such as [Latvia](#), [Lithuania](#), [Moldova](#), [Belarus](#) and [Ukraine](#) ranked low on the index. African countries such as Democratic Republic of Congo, [Zimbabwe](#) and [Burundi](#) found themselves at the very bottom of the ranking, and indeed, very few African countries could be found in the top 100. [Japan](#) was at the mid-way point in the ranking, however, other Asian countries such as [Brunei](#) and [Malaysia](#) were in the top tier, while [Pakistan](#) was close to the bottom with a low level of self-identified life satisfaction. As a region, the Middle East presented a mixed bag with Saudi Arabians reporting healthy levels of life satisfaction and Egyptians near the bottom of the ranking. As a region, Caribbean countries were ranked highly, consistently demonstrating high levels of life satisfaction. The findings showed that health was the most crucial determining factor in life satisfaction, followed by prosperity and education.

Source:

White, A. (2007). A Global Projection of Subjective Well-being: A Challenge To Positive Psychology? *Psychiatry* 56, 17-20. The data was extracted from a meta-analysis by Marks, Abdallah, Simms & Thompson (2006).

Uploaded:

Based on study noted above in "Source" ; reviewed in 2015

Happy Planet Index

Happy Planet Index

The Happy Planet Index (HPI) is used to measure human well-being in conjunction with environmental impact. The HPI has been compiled since 2006 by the New Economics Foundation. The index is a composite of several indicators including subjective life satisfaction, life

expectancy at birth, and ecological footprint per capita.

As noted by NEFA, the HPI "reveals the ecological efficiency with which human well-being is delivered." Indeed, the index combines environmental impact with human well-being to measure the environmental efficiency with which, country by country, people live long and happy lives. The countries ranked highest by the HPI are not necessarily the ones with the happiest people overall, but the ones that allow their citizens to live long and fulfilling lives, without negatively impacting this opportunity for either future generations or citizens of other countries. Accordingly, a country like the [United States](#) will rank low on this list due to its large per capital ecological footprint, which uses more than its fair share of resources, and will likely cause planetary damage.

It should be noted that the HPI was designed to be a counterpoint to other well-established indices of countries' development, such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which measures overall national wealth and economic development, but often obfuscates the realities of countries with stark variances between the rich and the poor. Moreover, the objective of most of the world's people is not to be wealthy but to be happy. The HPI also differs from the [Human Development Index](#) (HDI), which measures quality of life but not ecology, since it [HPI] also includes sustainability as a key indicator.

Rank	Country	HPI
1	Costa Rica	76.1
2	Dominican Republic	71.8
3	Jamaica	70.1
4	Guatemala	68.4
5	Vietnam	66.5
6	Colombia	66.1
7	Cuba	65.7
8	El Salvador	61.5

9	Brazil	61.0
10	Honduras	61.0
11	Nicaragua	60.5
12	Egypt	60.3
13	Saudi Arabia	59.7
14	Philippines	59.0
15	Argentina	59.0
16	Indonesia	58.9
17	Bhutan	58.5
18	Panama	57.4
19	Laos	57.3
20	China	57.1
21	Morocco	56.8
22	Sri Lanka	56.5
23	Mexico	55.6
24	Pakistan	55.6
25	Ecuador	55.5
26	Jordan	54.6

27	Belize	54.5
28	Peru	54.4
29	Tunisia	54.3
30	Trinidad and Tobago	54.2
31	Bangladesh	54.1
32	Moldova	54.1
33	Malaysia	54.0
34	Tajikistan	53.5
35	India	53.0
36	Venezuela	52.5
37	Nepal	51.9
38	Syria	51.3
39	Burma	51.2
40	Algeria	51.2
41	Thailand	50.9
42	Haiti	50.8
43	Netherlands	50.6
44	Malta	50.4

45	Uzbekistan	50.1
46	Chile	49.7
47	Bolivia	49.3
48	Armenia	48.3
49	Singapore	48.2
50	Yemen	48.1
51	Germany	48.1
52	Switzerland	48.1
53	Sweden	48.0
54	Albania	47.9
55	Paraguay	47.8
56	Palestinian Authority	47.7
57	Austria	47.7
58	Serbia	47.6
59	Finland	47.2
60	Croatia	47.2
61	Kyrgyzstan	47.1
62	Cyprus	46.2

63	Guyana	45.6
64	Belgium	45.4
65	Bosnia and Herzegovina	45.0
66	Slovenia	44.5
67	Israel	44.5
68	South Korea	44.4
69	Italy	44.0
70	Romania	43.9
71	France	43.9
72	Georgia	43.6
73	Slovakia	43.5
74	United Kingdom	43.3
75	Japan	43.3
76	Spain	43.2
77	Poland	42.8
78	Ireland	42.6
79	Iraq	42.6
80	Cambodia	42.3

81	Iran	42.1
82	Bulgaria	42.0
83	Turkey	41.7
84	Hong Kong	41.6
85	Azerbaijan	41.2
86	Lithuania	40.9
87	Djibouti	40.4
88	Norway	40.4
89	Canada	39.4
90	Hungary	38.9
91	Kazakhstan	38.5
92	Czech Republic	38.3
93	Mauritania	38.2
94	Iceland	38.1
95	Ukraine	38.1
96	Senegal	38.0
97	Greece	37.6
98	Portugal	37.5

99	Uruguay	37.2
100	Ghana	37.1
101	Latvia	36.7
102	Australia	36.6
103	New Zealand	36.2
104	Belarus	35.7
105	Denmark	35.5
106	Mongolia	35.0
107	Malawi	34.5
108	Russia	34.5
109	Chad	34.3
110	Lebanon	33.6
111	Macedonia	32.7
112	Republic of the Congo	32.4
113	Madagascar	31.5
114	United States	30.7
115	Nigeria	30.3
116	Guinea	30.3

117	Uganda	30.2
118	South Africa	29.7
119	Rwanda	29.6
120	Democratic Republic of the Congo	29.0
121	Sudan	28.5
122	Luxembourg	28.5
123	United Arab Emirates	28.2
124	Ethiopia	28.1
125	Kenya	27.8
126	Cameroon	27.2
127	Zambia	27.2
128	Kuwait	27.0
129	Niger	26.9
130	Angola	26.8
131	Estonia	26.4
132	Mali	25.8
133	Mozambique	24.6
134	Benin	24.6

135	Togo	23.3
136	Sierra Leone	23.1
137	Central African Republic	22.9
138	Burkina Faso	22.4
139	Burundi	21.8
140	Namibia	21.1
141	Botswana	20.9
142	Tanzania	17.8
143	Zimbabwe	16.6

Source: This material is derived from the Happy Planet Index issued by the New Economics Foundation (NEF).

Methodology: The methodology for the calculations can be found at URL: <http://www.happyplanetindex.org/>

Status of Women

Gender Related Development Index (GDI) Rank:

Not Ranked

Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) Rank:

Not Ranked

Female Population:

25.6 million

Female Life Expectancy at birth:

64.5 years

Total Fertility Rate:

3.1

Maternal Mortality Ratio:

360

Total Number of Women Living with HIV/AIDS:

53,000-190,000

Ever Married Women, Ages 15-19 (%):

11%

Mean Age at Time of Marriage:

25

Contraceptive Use Among Married Women, Any Method (%):

33%

Female Adult Literacy Rate:

89 %

Combined Female Gross enrollment ratio for Primary, Secondary and Tertiary schools:

49%

Female-Headed Households (%):

N/A

Economically Active Females (%):

65.8%

Female Contributing Family Workers (%):

N/A

Female Estimated Earned Income:

N/A

Seats in Parliament held by women (%):

Lower or Single House: N/A

Upper House or Senate: N/A

Year Women Received the Right to Vote:

1935

Year Women Received the Right to Stand for Election:

1946

*The Gender Development Index (GDI) is a composite index which measures the average achievement in a country. While very similar to the Human Development Index in its use of the same variables, the GDI adjusts the average achievement of each country in terms of life expectancy, enrollment in schools, income, and literacy in accordance to the disparities between males and females.

*The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is a composite index measuring gender inequality in three of the basic dimensions of empowerment; economic participation and decision-making, political participation and decision-making, and power over economic resources.

*Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is defined as the average number of babies born to women during their reproductive years. A TFR of 2.1 is considered the replacement rate; once a TFR of a population reaches 2.1 the population will remain stable assuming no immigration or emigration takes place. When the TFR is greater than 2.1 a population will increase and when it is less than 2.1 a population will eventually decrease, although due to the age structure of a population it will take

years before a low TFR is translated into lower population.

*Maternal Mortality Rate is the number of deaths to women per 100,000 live births that resulted from conditions related to pregnancy and or delivery related complications.

*Economically Active Females are the share of the female population, ages 15 and above, whom supply, or are able to supply, labor for the production of goods and services.

*Female Contributing Family Workers are those females who work without pay in an economic enterprise operated by a relative living in the same household.

*Estimated Earned Income is measured according to Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) in US dollars.

Global Gender Gap Index

Global Gender Gap Index

Editor's Note:

The Global Gender Gap Index by the World Economic Forum ranks most of the world's countries in terms of the division of resources and opportunities among males and females. Specifically, the ranking assesses the gender inequality gap in these four arenas:

1. Economic participation and opportunity (salaries and high skilled employment participation levels)
2. Educational attainment (access to basic and higher level education)
3. Political empowerment (representation in decision-making structures)
4. Health and survival (life expectancy and sex ratio)

	2010 rank	2010 score	2010 rank among 2009 countries	2009 rank	2009 score	2008 rank	2008 score	2007 rank

Country								
Iceland	1	0.8496	1	1	0.8276	4	0.7999	4
Norway	2	0.8404	2	3	0.8227	1	0.8239	2
Finland	3	0.8260	3	2	0.8252	2	0.8195	3
Sweden	4	0.8024	4	4	0.8139	3	0.8139	1
New Zealand	5	0.7808	5	5	0.7880	5	0.7859	5
Ireland	6	0.7773	6	8	0.7597	8	0.7518	9
Denmark	7	0.7719	7	7	0.7628	7	0.7538	8
Lesotho	8	0.7678	8	10	0.7495	16	0.7320	26
Philippines	9	0.7654	9	9	0.7579	6	0.7568	6
Switzerland	10	0.7562	10	13	0.7426	14	0.7360	40
Spain	11	0.7554	11	17	0.7345	17	0.7281	10
South Africa	12	0.7535	12	6	0.7709	22	0.7232	20
Germany	13	0.7530	13	12	0.7449	11	0.7394	7
Belgium	14	0.7509	14	33	0.7165	28	0.7163	19
United Kingdom	15	0.7460	15	15	0.7402	13	0.7366	11
Sri Lanka	16	0.7458	16	16	0.7402	12	0.7371	15

Netherlands	17	0.7444	17	11	0.7490	9	0.7399	12
Latvia	18	0.7429	18	14	0.7416	10	0.7397	13
United States	19	0.7411	19	31	0.7173	27	0.7179	31
Canada	20	0.7372	20	25	0.7196	31	0.7136	18
Trinidad and Tobago	21	0.7353	21	19	0.7298	19	0.7245	46
Mozambique	22	0.7329	22	26	0.7195	18	0.7266	43
Australia	23	0.7271	23	20	0.7282	21	0.7241	17
Cuba	24	0.7253	24	29	0.7176	25	0.7195	22
Namibia	25	0.7238	25	32	0.7167	30	0.7141	29
Luxembourg	26	0.7231	26	63	0.6889	66	0.6802	58
Mongolia	27	0.7194	27	22	0.7221	40	0.7049	62
Costa Rica	28	0.7194	28	27	0.7180	32	0.7111	28
Argentina	29	0.7187	29	24	0.7211	24	0.7209	33
Nicaragua	30	0.7176	30	49	0.7002	71	0.6747	90
Barbados	31	0.7176	31	21	0.7236	26	0.7188	n/a
Portugal	32	0.7171	32	46	0.7013	39	0.7051	37
Uganda	33	0.7169	33	40	0.7067	43	0.6981	50

Moldova	34	0.7160	34	36	0.7104	20	0.7244	21
Lithuania	35	0.7132	35	30	0.7175	23	0.7222	14
Bahamas	36	0.7128	36	28	0.7179	n/a	n/a	n/a
Austria	37	0.7091	37	42	0.7031	29	0.7153	27
Guyana	38	0.7090	38	35	0.7108	n/a	n/a	n/a
Panama	39	0.7072	39	43	0.7024	34	0.7095	38
Ecuador	40	0.7072	40	23	0.7220	35	0.7091	44
Kazakhstan	41	0.7055	41	47	0.7013	45	0.6976	32
Slovenia	42	0.7047	42	52	0.6982	51	0.6937	49
Poland	43	0.7037	43	50	0.6998	49	0.6951	60
Jamaica	44	0.7037	44	48	0.7013	44	0.6980	39
Russian Federation	45	0.7036	45	51	0.6987	42	0.6994	45
France	46	0.7025	46	18	0.7331	15	0.7341	51
Estonia	47	0.7018	47	37	0.7094	37	0.7076	30
Chile	48	0.7013	48	64	0.6884	65	0.6818	86
Macedonia, FYR	49	0.6996	49	53	0.6950	53	0.6914	35
Bulgaria	50	0.6983	50	38	0.7072	36	0.7077	25

Kyrgyz Republic	51	0.6973	51	41	0.7058	41	0.7045	70
Israel	52	0.6957	52	45	0.7019	56	0.6900	36
Croatia	53	0.6939	53	54	0.6944	46	0.6967	16
Honduras	54	0.6927	54	62	0.6893	47	0.6960	68
Colombia	55	0.6927	55	56	0.6939	50	0.6944	24
Singapore	56	0.6914	56	84	0.6664	84	0.6625	77
Thailand	57	0.6910	57	59	0.6907	52	0.6917	52
Greece	58	0.6908	58	85	0.6662	75	0.6727	72
Uruguay	59	0.6897	59	57	0.6936	54	0.6907	78
Peru	60	0.6895	60	44	0.7024	48	0.6959	75
China	61	0.6881	61	60	0.6907	57	0.6878	73
Botswana	62	0.6876	62	39	0.7071	63	0.6839	53
Ukraine	63	0.6869	63	61	0.6896	62	0.6856	57
Venezuela	64	0.6863	64	69	0.6839	59	0.6875	55
Czech Republic	65	0.6850	65	74	0.6789	69	0.6770	64
Tanzania	66	0.6829	66	73	0.6797	38	0.7068	34
Romania	67	0.6826	67	70	0.6805	70	0.6763	47

Malawi	68	0.6824	68	76	0.6738	81	0.6664	87
Paraguay	69	0.6804	69	66	0.6868	100	0.6379	69
Ghana	70	0.6782	70	80	0.6704	77	0.6679	63
Slovak Republic	71	0.6778	71	68	0.6845	64	0.6824	54
Vietnam	72	0.6776	72	71	0.6802	68	0.6778	42
Dominican Republic	73	0.6774	73	67	0.6859	72	0.6744	65
Italy	74	0.6765	74	72	0.6798	67	0.6788	84
Gambia, The	75	0.6762	75	75	0.6752	85	0.6622	95
Bolivia	76	0.6751	76	82	0.6693	80	0.6667	80
Brueni Darussalem	77	0.6748	77	94	0.6524	99	0.6392	n/a
Albania	78	0.6726	78	91	0.6601	87	0.6591	66
Hungary	79	0.6720	79	65	0.6879	60	0.6867	61
Madagascar	80	0.6713	80	77	0.6732	74	0.6736	89
Angola	81	0.6712	81	106	0.6353	114	0.6032	110
Bangladesh	82	0.6702	82	93	0.6526	90	0.6531	100
Malta	83	0.6695	83	88	0.6635	83	0.6634	76
Armenia	84	0.6669	84	90	0.6619	78	0.6677	71

Brazil	85	0.6655	85	81	0.6695	73	0.6737	74
Cyprus	86	0.6642	86	79	0.6706	76	0.6694	82
Indonesia	87	0.6615	87	92	0.6580	93	0.6473	81
Georgia	88	0.6598	88	83	0.6680	82	0.6654	67
Tajikistan	89	0.6598	89	86	0.6661	89	0.6541	79
El Salvador	90	0.6596	90	55	0.6939	58	0.6875	48
Mexico	91	0.6577	91	98	0.6503	97	0.6441	93
Zimbabwe	92	0.6574	92	95	0.6518	92	0.6485	88
Belize	93	0.6536	93	87	0.6636	86	0.6610	94
Japan	94	0.6524	94	101	0.6447	98	0.6434	91
Mauritius	95	0.6520	95	96	0.6513	95	0.6466	85
Kenya	96	0.6499	96	97	0.6512	88	0.6547	83
Cambodia	97	0.6482	97	104	0.6410	94	0.6469	98
Malaysia	98	0.6479	98	100	0.6467	96	0.6442	92
Maldives	99	0.6452	99	99	0.6482	91	0.6501	99
Azerbaijan	100	0.6446	100	89	0.6626	61	0.6856	59
Senegal	101	0.6414	101	102	0.6427	n/a	n/a	n/a
Suriname	102	0.6407	102	78	0.6726	79	0.6674	56

United Arab Emirates	103	0.6397	103	112	0.6198	105	0.6220	105
Korea, Rep.	104	0.6342	104	115	0.6146	108	0.6154	97
Kuwait	105	0.6318	105	105	0.6356	101	0.6358	96
Zambia	106	0.6293	106	107	0.6310	106	0.6205	101
Tunisia	107	0.6266	107	109	0.6233	103	0.6295	102
Fiji	108	0.6256	108	103	0.6414	n/a	n/a	n/a
Guatemala	109	0.6238	109	111	0.6209	112	0.6072	106
Bahrain	110	0.6217	110	116	0.6136	121	0.5927	115
Burkina Faso	111	0.6162	111	120	0.6081	115	0.6029	117
India	112	0.6155	112	114	0.6151	113	0.6060	114
Mauritania	113	0.6152	113	119	0.6103	110	0.6117	111
Cameroon	114	0.6110	114	118	0.6108	117	0.6017	116
Nepal	115	0.6084	115	110	0.6213	120	0.5942	125
Lebanon*	116	0.6084	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Qatar	117	0.6059	116	125	0.5907	119	0.5948	109
Nigeria	118	0.6055	117	108	0.6280	102	0.6339	107
Algeria	119	0.6052	118	117	0.6119	111	0.6111	108

Jordan	120	0.6048	119	113	0.6182	104	0.6275	104
Ethiopia	121	0.6019	120	122	0.5948	122	0.5867	113
Oman	122	0.5950	121	123	0.5938	118	0.5960	119
Iran	123	0.5933	122	128	0.5839	116	0.6021	118
Syria	124	0.5926	123	121	0.6072	107	0.6181	103
Egypt	125	0.5899	124	126	0.5862	124	0.5832	120
Turkey	126	0.5876	125	129	0.5828	123	0.5853	121
Morocco	127	0.5767	126	124	0.5926	125	0.5757	122
Benin	128	0.5719	127	131	0.5643	126	0.5582	123
Saudi Arabia	129	0.5713	128	130	0.5651	128	0.5537	124
Côte d'Ivoire*	130	0.5691	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Mali	131	0.5680	129	127	0.5860	109	0.6117	112
Pakistan	132	0.5465	130	132	0.5458	127	0.5549	126
Chad	133	0.5330	131	133	0.5417	129	0.5290	127
Yemen	134	0.4603	132	134	0.4609	130	0.4664	128
Belarus	n/a	n/a	n/a	34	0.7141	33	0.7099	23
Uzbekistan	n/a	n/a	n/a	58	0.6913	55	0.6906	41

*new country 2010

Commentary:

According to the report's index, Nordic countries, such as [Iceland](#), [Norway](#), [Finland](#), and [Sweden](#) have continued to dominate at the top of the ranking for gender equality. Meanwhile, [France](#) has seen a notable decline in the ranking, largely as a result of decreased number of women holding ministerial portfolios in that country. In the Americas, the [United States](#) has risen in the ranking to top the region, predominantly as a result of a decreasing wage gap, as well as higher number of women holding key positions in the current Obama administration. [Canada](#) has continued to remain as one of the top ranking countries of the Americas, followed by the small Caribbean island nation of Trinidad and Tobago, which has the distinction of being among the top three countries of the Americas in the realm of gender equality. [Lesotho](#) and South African ranked highly in the index, leading not only among African countries but also in global context. Despite [Lesotho](#) still lagging in the area of life expectancy, its high ranking was attributed to high levels of female participation in the labor force and female literacy. The [Philippines](#) and [Sri Lanka](#) were the top ranking countries for gender equality for Asia, ranking highly also in global context. The [Philippines](#) has continued to show strong performance in all strong performance on all four dimensions (detailed above) of the index. Finally, in the Arab world, the [United Arab Emirates](#) held the highest-rank within that region of the world; however, its placement near the bottom of the global list highlights the fact that Arab countries are generally poor performers when it comes to the matter of gender equality in global scope.

Source:

This data is derived from the latest edition of The Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum.

Available at URL:

<http://www.weforum.org/en/Communities/Women%20Leaders%20and%20Gender%20Parity/Gende>

Updated:

Based on latest available data as set forth in chart; reviewed in 2014

Culture and Arts

Etiquette

Please Note:

The military authorities ruling this country have changed the historic name - Burma - to Union of Myanmar or Myanmar. Although the new name is used in conventional practice today, it was never endorsed by a sitting legislature. CountryWatch references this country by both the historic and conventional names in its materials, however, the lack of legitimization in regard to the conventional usage should be duly noted.

Cultural Dos and Taboos

1. The handshake is an appropriate form of greeting. For a more traditional greeting, place your hands together, as if praying, and make a slight bow or bow your head.
2. As Buddhism is the predominant religion, respect the religious codes when traveling through the country. Some rules to follow are: Never touch an adult or child on the head. Never expose the bottom of your feet to another person. Never point to an image or statue of a Buddha with the toes or index finger. Remove shoes before entering a private home or place of worship.
3. One should not present a Buddhist monk with a gift or other item directly. An intermediary or emissary should be employed instead. If there is no intermediary, one should place the gift or object in an area where the monk can retrieve it himself. This rule of convention is especially applicable in the case of cross-gender exchanges between women and monks.
4. Dress casually yet modestly and with respect for the culture in mind. Also, dress appropriately for the weather according to the region and season.
5. Flirting between the sexes is not acceptable.

6. Public displays of affection are frowned upon.
7. Never give a gift wrapped in black wrapping paper, as this color is considered unlucky.
8. Use extreme caution when discussing politics. Due to the national and international political problems that the country has experienced, government officials are wary of outsiders. The Burmese government has incarcerated and deported Westerners under suspect of spreading democratic literature or taking photographs of public buildings.

Travel Information

Please Note: This is a generalized travel guide and it is intended to coalesce several resources, which a traveler might find useful, regardless of a particular destination. As such, it does not include travel warnings for specific "hot spot" destinations.

For travel alerts and warnings, please see the United States Department of State's listings available at URL:

<http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings.html>

Please note that travel to the following countries, based on these warnings, is ill-advised, or should be undertaken with the utmost precaution:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Honduras, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Palestinian Territories of West Bank and Gaza, Philippines areas of Sulu Archipelago, Mindanao, and southern Sulu Sea, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Venezuela, and Yemen.

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Please Note:

The military authorities ruling this country have changed the historic name - Burma - to Union of Myanmar or Myanmar. Although the new name is used in conventional practice today, it was never endorsed by a sitting legislature. CountryWatch references this country by both the historic and conventional names in its materials, however, the lack of legitimization in regard to the conventional usage should be duly noted.

International Travel Guide

Checklist for Travelers

- 1.** Take out travel insurance to cover hospital treatment or medical evacuation. Overseas medical costs are expensive to most international travelers, where one's domestic, nationalized or even private health insurance plans will not provide coverage outside one's home country. Learn about "reciprocal insurance plans" that some international health care companies might offer.
- 2.** Make sure that one's travel insurance is appropriate. If one intends to indulge in adventurous activities, such as parasailing, one should be sure that one is fully insured in such cases. Many traditional insurance policies do not provide coverage in cases of extreme circumstances.
- 3.** Take time to learn about one's destination country and culture. Read and learn about the place one is traveling. Also check political, economic and socio-cultural developments at the destination by reading country-specific travel reports and fact sheets noted below.
- 4.** Get the necessary visas for the country (or countries) one intends to visit - but be aware that a visa does not guarantee entry. A number of useful sites regarding visa and other entry requirements are noted below.
- 5.** Keep in regular contact with friends and relatives back at home by phone or email, and be sure to leave a travel itinerary.
- 6.** Protect one's personal information by making copies of one's passport details, insurance policy, travelers checks and credit card numbers. Taking copies of such documents with you, while leaving another collection copies with someone at home is also good practice for travelers. Taking copies of one's passport photograph is also recommended.
- 7.** Stay healthy by taking all possible precautions against illness. Also, be sure to take extra supplies of prescription drugs along for the trip, while also taking time to pack general pharmaceutical supplies, such as aspirin and other such painkillers, bandages, stomach ailment medication, anti-inflammatory medication and anti-bacterial medication.
- 8.** Do not carry illicit drugs. Understand that the punishment for possession or use of illegal drugs in some countries may be capital punishment. Make sure your prescription drugs are legal in the countries you plan to visit.
- 9.** Know the laws of one's destination country and culture; be sure to understand the repercussions of breaking those laws and regulations. Often the transparency and freedoms of the juridical system at home is not consistent with that of one's destination country. Become aware of these complexities and subtleties before you travel.

10. For longer stays in a country, or where the security situation is volatile, one should register one's self and traveling companions at the local embassy or consulate of one's country of citizenship.

11. Women should take care to be prepared both culturally and practically for traveling in a different country and culture. One should be sure to take sufficient supplies of personal feminine products and prescription drugs. One should also learn about local cultural standards for women, including norms of dressing. Be aware that it is simply inappropriate and unsafe for women to travel alone in some countries, and take the necessary precautions to avoid risk-filled situations.

12. If one is traveling with small children, one should pack extra supplies, make arrangements with the travel carrier for proper seating that would adequately accommodate children, infants or toddlers. Note also that whether one is male or female, traveling with children means that one's hands are thus not free to carry luggage and bags. Be especially aware that this makes one vulnerable to pickpockets, thieves and other sorts of crime.

13. Make proper arrangements for accommodations, well in advance of one's arrival at a destination. Some countries have limited accommodation, while others may have culturally distinctive facilities. Learning about these practicalities before one travels will greatly aid the enjoyment of one's trip.

14. Travel with different forms of currency and money (cash, traveler's checks and credit cards) in anticipation that venues may not accept one or another form of money. Also, ensuring that one's financial resources are not contained in one location, or by one person (if one is traveling with others) can be a useful measure, in the event that one loses a wallet or purse.

15. Find out about transportation in the destination country. In some places, it might be advisable to hire a local driver or taxi guide for safety reasons, while in other countries, enjoying one's travel experience may well be enhanced by renting a vehicle and seeing the local sights and culture independently. Costs may also be prohibitive for either of these choices, so again, prior planning is suggested.

Tips for Travelers

Travel to, from and within Burma is strictly controlled by the Government of Burma. A passport and visa are required. Travelers are required to show their passports with valid visa at airports, train stations and hotels. There are frequent security roadblocks on all roads and immigration checkpoints in Burma, even on domestic air flights.

Upon entry into Burma, tourists are required to exchange a minimum of \$200 (U.S.) for Foreign Exchange Certificates (FEC). The FEC office is located between Immigration and Customs. The face value of the FEC, issued in denominations from one to 20 dollar equivalents, is equal to the U.S. dollar, but its actual value fluctuates. Any amount over \$200 (U.S.) may be exchanged back to U.S. dollars. The first \$200 (U.S.) cannot be exchanged back into U.S. dollars. These procedures are subject to change without notice.

The military government rarely issues visas to journalists, and several journalists traveling to Burma on tourist visas have been denied entry. Journalists, and tourists mistaken for journalists, have been harassed. Some journalists have had film and notes confiscated upon leaving the country.

Foreigners have been caught up in the Burmese Government's suppression of the democratic opposition. Foreign citizens have been detained, arrested, tried and deported for, among other activities, distributing pro-democracy literature, photographing sites and activities, and visiting the homes and offices of Burmese pro-democracy leaders. Burmese authorities have warned embassy officials that future offenders of these vague, unspecified restrictions will be jailed in lieu of deportation.

The Burmese authorities have announced that terrorist groups operate within the city limits of Rangoon. A small incendiary device exploded at a downtown pagoda in 1996 and other bomb devices were reportedly found by Burmese authorities in 1999 and 2000.

The Thai-Burma border area in Southern Shan, Mon, Karen, Karenni, Chin and Rakhine states have been the scene of occasional fighting between government forces and various insurgent groups.

Burmese authorities require that hotels and guesthouses furnish information about the identities and activities of their foreign guests. Burmese who interact with foreigners may be compelled to report on those interactions to the Burmese Government.

Unrestricted travel exists to the main tourist areas of Pagan, Inle Lake and the Mandalay area. The military government restricts access to some areas of the country on an ad hoc basis. Those planning to travel in Burma should check with Burmese tourism authorities to see if travel is permitted. However, some tourists traveling to places where permission is not expressly required have reported delays due to questioning by local security personnel. Reportedly, 10 of the 14 Burmese states and divisions are polluted with anti-personnel land mines.

Street crime is becoming more common in Burma. There have been reports of vehicle hijackings and home invasion robberies. With the increase of the drug trade in Burma, individuals carrying automatic weapons on the street are not uncommon.

The loss or theft abroad of a passport should be reported immediately to local police and the appropriate embassy.

Medical facilities in Burma are inadequate for even routine medical care. There are few trained medical personnel because the universities were closed for several years and have recently

reopened. Common drugs for sale, such as insulin, are often adulterated products and unsafe to use. HIV/AIDS is rampant in the country, as is malaria and hepatitis. Hospital and medical services are available in Rangoon; elsewhere, medical care is limited.

Please check with your own insurance company to confirm whether your policy applies overseas, including provision for medical evacuation. Serious medical problems requiring hospitalization and/or medical evacuation back to your country can cost tens of thousands of dollars. Please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas hospital or doctor, or if you will be reimbursed later for expenses that you incur. Some insurance policies also include coverage for psychiatric treatment and for disposition of remains in the event of death.

While in a foreign country, you may encounter road conditions that differ significantly from those in your country. The information below concerning Burma is provided for general reference only, and it may not be totally accurate in a particular location or circumstance.

Safety of Public Transportation: Fair
Urban Road Conditions/Maintenance: Good
Rural Road Conditions/Maintenance: Poor
Availability of Roadside Assistance: Poor

The Burmese Ministry of Transportation is responsible for roads outside the major cities. City authorities are responsible for roads in the major metropolitan areas.

Rangoon's main roads are generally good. Traffic in the capital is increasing rapidly, but serious congestion is still rare. Slow-moving vehicles, bicycles, and heavy pedestrian traffic create numerous hazards for drivers on Rangoon's streets. Most roads outside Rangoon are one lane and a half, pot-holed, and unlighted at night.

Driving at night is dangerous. Burmese drivers do not turn on their headlights until the sky is dark, thereby adding another danger to driving at twilight.

Vehicles are required to drive on the right side of the road. However, over 80 percent of the vehicles in use have the steering wheel on the right, as in Great Britain, adding a complication to the dangerous driving situation in Burma. The speed limit in the area of schools is posted at 48 kph, or about 30 mph. There are no other speed limits posted in Burma. The right of way is generally respected with the exception that military convoys and motorcades take precedence. Right turns on a red light are permitted.

Most vehicle accidents are generally settled between the parties with the party at fault paying the damages. Accidents that require an investigation are concluded quickly and rarely result in criminal prosecution.

There is no roadside assistance, and ambulances are not available in most parts of the country.

Truck drivers traversing from China to Rangoon are known to be frequently under the influence of methamphetamine-spiked beetlenuts. Drunken and/or drugged drivers are common on the roads during the four-day water festival of early spring.

There are no seat belt laws, and functioning seat belts generally are not found in vehicles. Child care seats are also not required and not available in Burma.

Customs regulations are restrictive and strictly enforced. It is illegal to take many items, including antiques, out of Burma. Foreigners have been detained, searched and imprisoned for attempting to take Burmese gems out of the country.

The military government restricts access to outside information. Newspapers are censored for articles unfavorable to the military government, and Internet access is illegal. Travelers have reported that their luggage is closely searched upon arrival and departure by immigration authorities.

As of September 2000, Internet connections are illegal except to the government and a few businesses. It is illegal to own an unregistered modem in Burma, and tourists have had their laptop computers taken and held at the airport until their departure. E-mail is available at some large hotels. All e-mails are read by military intelligence. It is very expensive to send photographs via e-mail. One foreign visitor was presented a bill for \$2,000 (U.S.) after transmitting one photograph via a major hotel's e-mail system.

While in a foreign country you are subject to that country's laws and regulations. Persons violating the law, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested or imprisoned. Penalties for possession, use or trafficking in illegal drugs in Burma are strict, and convicted offenders can expect stiff jail terms, fines and even the death penalty.

Some foreigners have been denied even minimal rights in criminal proceedings in Burma, especially if suspected of engaging in political activity of any type. This includes, but is not limited to, denial of access to an attorney, court records, and family and consular visits. The criminal justice system is under the control of the military junta, which orders maximum sentences for all offenses. Torture has been reported in Burmese jails, and, in 2000, a foreigner was tortured so that he would surrender his personal possessions to his jailers.

Consular officers do not always receive timely notification of the detention, arrest, or deportation of foreign citizens. In addition, the Burmese Government has on occasion refused to give embassy consular officers access to arrested/detained citizens. Citizens who are arrested or detained should

request immediate contact with their embassy. Foreign citizens are encouraged to carry their passports with them at all times, so that, if questioned by local officials, proof of identity and citizenship is readily available.

Not all major credit cards can be used in Burma, and generally only large international hotels in Rangoon and Mandalay accept them. There are no automatic cash machines in the country to access currency from overseas, and it is not possible to cash a personal check drawn on a foreign bank.

Although moneychangers sometimes approach travelers to offer to change dollars into Burmese kyat at the market rate, it is illegal to exchange currency except at authorized locations such as the airport, banks and government stores.

Foreign Exchange Certificates (FEC) are required by foreigners for the payment of plane tickets, train tickets and most hotels. Burmese kyat are accepted for most other transactions. It is possible to purchase FEC with some credit cards at the Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank in Rangoon or any place that exchanges foreign currency.

Taking photographs of people in uniform or any military installation is discouraged by Burmese authorities, and it could lead to arrest or the confiscation of cameras and film.

Telephone services are poor in Rangoon and other major cities and non-existent in some other areas.

Note: This information is directly quoted from the United States Department of State Consular Information Sheet.

Sources: *United States Department of State Consular Information Sheet*

Business Culture: Information for Business Travelers

For general information on etiquette in Myanmar see our Cultural Etiquette page.

Online Resources Regarding Entry Requirements and Visas

Online Resources Regarding Entry Requirements and Visas

Foreign Entry Requirements for Americans from the United States Department of State
http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html

Visa Services for Non-Americans from the United States Department of State

http://travel.state.gov/visa/visa_1750.html

Visa Bulletins from the United States Department of State

http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/bulletin/bulletin_1360.html

Visa Waivers from the United States Department of State

http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/without/without_1990.html - new

Passport and Visa Information from the Government of the United Kingdom

<http://www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

Visa Information from the Government of Australia

<http://www.dfat.gov.au/visas/index.html>

Passport Information from the Government of Australia

<https://www.passports.gov.au/Web/index.aspx>

Passport Information from the Government of Canada

http://www.voyage.gc.ca/preparation_information/passport_passeport-eng.asp

Visa Information from the Government of Canada

http://www.voyage.gc.ca/preparation_information/visas-eng.asp

Online Visa Processing by Immigration Experts by VisaPro

<http://www.visapro.com>

Sources: United States Department of State, United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Government of Australia: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Government of Canada Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

Useful Online Resources for Travelers

Country-Specific Travel Information from United States

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html

Travel Advice by Country from Government of United Kingdom

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/travel-advice-by-country/>

General Travel Advice from Government of Australia

<http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/General>

Travel Bulletins from the Government of Australia

<http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/TravelBulletins/>

Travel Tips from Government of Australia

<http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/tips/index.html>

Travel Checklist by Government of Canada

http://www.voyage.gc.ca/preparation_information/checklist_sommaire-eng.asp

Travel Checklist from Government of United Kingdom

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/staying-safe/checklist>

Your trip abroad from United States Department of State

http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/brochures/brochures_1225.html

A safe trip abroad from United States Department of State

http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety_1747.html

Tips for expatriates abroad from United States Department of State

http://travel.state.gov/travel/living/residing/residing_1235.html

Tips for students from United States Department of State

http://travel.state.gov/travel/living/studying/studying_1238.html http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/brochures/brochures_1225.html

Medical information for travelers from United States Department of State

http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health_1185.html

US Customs Travel information

<http://www.customs.gov/xp/cgov/travel/>

Sources: United States Department of State; United States Customs Department, United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Government of Australia; Government of Canada: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

Other Practical Online Resources for Travelers

Foreign Language Phrases for Travelers

<http://www.travlang.com/languages/>

<http://www.omniglot.com/language/phrases/index.htm>

World Weather Forecasts

<http://www.intellicast.com/>

<http://www.wunderground.com/>

<http://www.worldweather.org/>

Worldwide Time Zones, Map, World Clock

<http://www.timeanddate.com/>

<http://www.worldtimezone.com/>

International Airport Codes

<http://www.world-airport-codes.com/>

International Dialing Codes

<http://www.kropla.com/dialcode.htm>

<http://www.countrycallingcodes.com/>

International Phone Guide

<http://www.kropla.com/phones.htm>

International Mobile Phone Guide

<http://www.kropla.com/mobilephones.htm>

International Internet Café Search Engine

<http://cybercaptive.com/>

Global Internet Roaming

<http://www.kropla.com/roaming.htm>

World Electric Power Guide

<http://www.kropla.com/electric.htm>

<http://www.kropla.com/electric2.htm>

World Television Standards and Codes

<http://www.kropla.com/tv.htm>

International Currency Exchange Rates

<http://www.xe.com/ucc/>

Banking and Financial Institutions Across the World

<http://www.123world.com/banks/index.html>

International Credit Card or Automated Teller Machine (ATM) Locator

<http://visa.via.infonow.net/locator/global/>

<http://www.mastercard.com/us/personal/en/cardholderservices/atmlocations/index.html>

International Chambers of Commerce

<http://www.123world.com/chambers/index.html>

World Tourism Websites

<http://123world.com/tourism/>

Diplomatic and Consular Information

United States Diplomatic Posts Around the World

<http://www.usembassy.gov/>

United Kingdom Diplomatic Posts Around the World

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/about-the-fco/embassies-and-posts/find-an-embassy-overseas/>

Australia's Diplomatic Posts Around the World

<http://www.dfat.gov.au/missions/>

<http://www.dfat.gov.au/embassies.html>

Canada's Embassies and High Commissions

<http://www.international.gc.ca/ciw-cdm/embassies-ambassades.aspx>

Resources for Finding Embassies and other Diplomatic Posts Across the World

<http://www.escapeartist.com/embassy1/embassy1.htm>

Safety and Security

Travel Warnings by Country from Government of Australia

<http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/>

Travel Warnings and Alerts from United States Department of State

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.html

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/pa/pa_1766.html

Travel Reports and Warnings by Government of Canada

http://www.voyage.gc.ca/countries_pays/menu-eng.asp

http://www.voyage.gc.ca/countries_pays/updates_mise-a-jour-eng.asp

Travel Warnings from Government of United Kingdom

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/travel-advice-by-country/>

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/travel-advice-by-country/?action=noTravelAll#noTravelAll>

Sources: United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the United States Department of State, the Government of Canada: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Government of Australia: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Other Safety and Security Online Resources for Travelers

United States Department of State Information on Terrorism

<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/>

Government of the United Kingdom Resource on the Risk of Terrorism

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?>

[pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1044011304926](http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1044011304926)

Government of Canada Terrorism Guide

<http://www.international.gc.ca/crime/terrorism-terrorisme.aspx?lang=eng>

Information on Terrorism by Government of Australia

<http://www.dfat.gov.au/icat/index.html>

FAA Resource on Aviation Safety

<http://www.faasafety.gov/>

In-Flight Safety Information for Air Travel (by British Airways crew trainer, Anna Warman)

<http://www.warman.demon.co.uk/anna/inflight.html>

Hot Spots: Travel Safety and Risk Information

<http://www.airsecurity.com/hotspots/HotSpots.asp>

Information on Human Rights

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/hr/>

Sources: The United States Department of State, the United States Customs Department, the Government of Canada, the Government of United Kingdom, the Government of Australia, the

Federal Aviation Authority, Anna Warman's In-flight Website, Hot Spots Travel and Risk Information

Diseases/Health Data

Please Note: Most of the entry below constitutes a generalized health advisory, which a traveler might find useful, regardless of a particular destination.

As a supplement, however, reader will also find below a list of countries flagged with current health notices and alerts issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Please note that travel to the following countries, based on these 3 levels of warnings, is ill-advised, or should be undertaken with the utmost precaution:

Level 3 (highest level of concern; avoid non-essential travel) --

Guinea - Ebola

Liberia - Ebola

Nepal - Earthquake zone

Sierra Leone - Ebola

Level 2 (intermediate level of concern; use utmost caution during travel) --

Cameroon - Polio

Somalia - Polio

Vanuatu - Tropical Cyclone zone

Throughout Middle East and Arabia Peninsula - MERS ((Middle East Respiratory Syndrome)

Level 1 (standard level of concern; use practical caution during travel) -

Australia - Ross River disease
Bosnia-Herzegovina - Measles
Brazil - Dengue Fever
Brazil - Malaria
Brazil - Zika
China - H7N9 Avian flu
Cuba - Cholera
Egypt - H5N1 Bird flu
Ethiopia - Measles
Germany - Measles
Japan - Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD)
Kyrgyzstan - Measles
Malaysia -Dengue Fever
Mexico - Chikungunya
Mexico - Hepatitis A
Nigeria - Meningitis
Philippines - Measles
Scotland - Mumps
Singapore - Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD)
South Korea - MERS ((Middle East Respiratory Syndrome)
Throughout Caribbean - Chikungunya
Throughout Central America - Chikungunya
Throughout South America - Chikungunya
Throughout Pacific Islands - Chikungunya

For specific information related to these health notices and alerts please see the CDC's listing available at URL:

<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices>

Please Note:

The military authorities ruling this country have changed the historic name - Burma - to Union of Myanmar or Myanmar. Although the new name is used in conventional practice today, it was never endorsed by a sitting legislature. CountryWatch references this country by both the historic and conventional names in its materials, however, the lack of legitimization in regard to the conventional usage should be duly noted.

Health Information for Travelers to Burma (now known as Myanmar)

Food and waterborne diseases are the number one cause of illness in travelers. Travelers' diarrhea can be caused by viruses, bacteria, or parasites, which are found throughout the region and can contaminate food or water. Infections may cause diarrhea and vomiting (*E. coli*, *Salmonella*, cholera, and parasites), fever (typhoid fever and toxoplasmosis), or liver damage (hepatitis). Make sure your food and drinking water are safe. (See below.)

Malaria is a preventable infection that can be fatal if left untreated. Prevent infection by taking prescription antimalarial drugs and protecting yourself against mosquito bites (see below). Malaria risk in this region exists all year in some cities and all rural areas of these countries, except for Brunei Darussalam and Singapore. For specific locations, see Malaria Information for Travelers to Southeast Asia (<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/regionalmalaria/seasia.htm>). Most travelers to Southeast Asia at risk for malaria should take mefloquine to prevent malaria.

A certificate of yellow fever vaccination may be required for entry into certain of these countries if you are coming from a country in tropical South America or sub-Saharan Africa. (There is no risk for yellow fever in Southeast Asia.) For detailed information, see Comprehensive Yellow Fever Vaccination Requirements (<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/yelfever.htm>).

Dengue, filariasis, Japanese encephalitis, and plague are diseases carried by insects that also occur in this region. Protecting yourself against insect bites (see below) will help to prevent these diseases.

Do not swim in fresh water (except in well-chlorinated swimming pools) in certain areas of Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Philippines, and Thailand to avoid infection with schistosomiasis. (For more information, please see the Swimming Precautions on the Making Travel Safe page at URL <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/safety.htm>.)

Because motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of injury among travelers, walk and drive defensively. Avoid travel at night if possible and always use seat belts.

CDC Recommends the Following Vaccines (as Appropriate for Age):

See your doctor at least 4-6 weeks before your trip to allow time for shots to take effect.

- Hepatitis A or immune globulin (IG).
- Hepatitis B if you might be exposed to blood (for example, health-care workers), have sexual contact with the local population, stay longer than 6 months in the region, or be exposed through medical treatment.
- Japanese encephalitis, only if you plan to visit rural areas for 4 weeks or more, except under special circumstances, such as a known outbreak of Japanese encephalitis.

- Rabies, if you might be exposed to wild or domestic animals through your work or recreation.
- Typhoid vaccination is particularly important because of the presence of *S. typhi* strains resistant to multiple antibiotics in this region.
- As needed, booster doses for tetanus-diphtheria and measles, and a one-time dose of polio for adults. Hepatitis B vaccine is now recommended for all infants and for children ages 11-12 years who did not complete the series as infants.

To Stay Healthy, Do:

- Wash hands often with soap and water.
- Drink only bottled or boiled water, or carbonated (bubbly) drinks in cans or bottles. Avoid tap water, fountain drinks, and ice cubes. If this is not possible, make water safer by BOTH filtering through an "absolute 1-micron or less" filter AND adding iodine tablets to the filtered water. "Absolute 1-micron filters" are found in camping/outdoor supply stores.
- Eat only thoroughly cooked food or fruits and vegetables you have peeled yourself. Remember: boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it.
- If you visit an area where there is risk for malaria, take your malaria prevention medication before, during, and after travel, as directed. (See your doctor for a prescription.)
- Protect yourself from insects by remaining in well-screened areas, using repellents (applied sparingly at 4-hour intervals), and wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants from dusk through dawn.
- To prevent fungal and parasitic infections, keep feet clean and dry, and do not go barefoot.
- Always use latex condoms to reduce the risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

To Avoid Getting Sick:

- Don't eat food purchased from street vendors.
- Don't drink beverages with ice.
- Don't eat dairy products unless you know they have been pasteurized.
- Don't share needles with anyone.
- Don't handle animals (especially monkeys, dogs, and cats), to avoid bites and serious diseases (including rabies and plague). (For more information, please see the Animal-Associated Hazards on the Making Travel Safe page.)
- Don't swim in fresh water. Salt water is usually safer. (For more information, please see the Swimming Precautions on the Making Travel Safe page.)

What You Need To Bring with You:

- Long-sleeved shirt and long pants to wear while outside whenever possible, to prevent illnesses carried by insects (e.g., malaria, dengue, filariasis, and Japanese encephalitis).
- Insect repellent containing DEET (diethylmethyltoluamide), in 30%-35% strength for adults and

6%-10% for children.

- Over-the-counter antidiarrheal medicine to take if you have diarrhea.
- Iodine tablets and water filters to purify water if bottled water is not available. See Do's above for more detailed information about water filters.
- Sunblock, sunglasses, hat.
- Prescription medications: make sure you have enough to last during your trip, as well as a copy of the prescription(s).

After You Return Home:

If you have visited an area where there is risk for malaria, continue taking your malaria medication weekly for 4 weeks after you leave the area. If you become ill after travel-even as long as a year after your trip-tell your doctor the areas you have visited.

For More Information:

Ask your doctor or check the CDC web sites for more information about how to protect yourself against diseases that occur in Southeast Asia, such as:

For information about diseases-

Carried by Insects

Dengue, Japanese encephalitis, Malaria

Carried in Food or Water

Cholera, *Escherichia coli*, diarrhea, Hepatitis A, Schistosomiasis, Typhoid Fever

Person-to-Person Contact

Hepatitis B, HIV/AIDS

For more information about these and other diseases, please check the Diseases (<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/diseases.htm>) section and the Health Topics A-Z (<http://www.cdc.gov/health/diseases.htm>).

Note the Outbreaks section for important updates on this region (<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/outbreaks.htm>).

Note:

Burma (now known as Myanmar) is located in the Southeast Asia health region.

Sources:

The Center for Disease Control Destinations Website:

<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/destinat.htm>

Chapter 6

Environmental Overview

Environmental Issues

General Overview:

Although Burma (Myanmar) is home to many natural resources and a vast eco-system, it is one of the least environmentally protected countries in South East Asia. Further, Burma's (Myanmar's) foreign policy is highly isolationist and as a result, it has not been in a position to receive new environmental technologies or resource management programs.

Moreover, the effects of natural disasters intensify Burma's (Myanmar's) environmental challenges. For example, soil degradation and erosion are caused by cyclones, and forest fires exacerbate problems of deforestation, which are already acute as a consequence of timber exploitation and poor agricultural methods.

Current Issues:

- Deforestation
- Industrial pollution of air, soil, and water
- Inadequate sanitation
- Poor water treatment

Total Greenhouse Gas Emissions (Mtc):

22.5

Country Rank (GHG output):

48th

Natural Hazards:

- Destructive earthquakes
- Cyclones
- Flooding
- Landslides in the rainy season from June to September
- Periodic droughts

Environmental Policy

Regulation and Jurisdiction:

The regulation and protection of the environment in Burma is under the jurisdiction of the following:

- The National Commission for Environmental Affairs-NCEA
- Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation
- The Ministry of Forestry

Major Non-Governmental Organizations:

N/A

International Environmental Accords:

Party to:

- Biodiversity
- Climate Change
- Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol
- Desertification
- Endangered Species
- Law of the Sea
- Nuclear Test Ban
- Ozone Layer Protection

- Ship Pollution
- Tropical Timber 83
- Tropical Timber 94

Signed but not ratified:

- None

Kyoto Protocol Status (year ratified):

2003

Greenhouse Gas Ranking

Greenhouse Gas Ranking

GHG Emissions Rankings

Country Rank	Country
1	United States
2	China
4	Russia

5	Japan
6	India
7	Germany
8	United Kingdom
9	Canada
10	Korea, South
11	Italy
12	Mexico
13	France
14	South Africa
15	Iran
16	Indonesia
17	Australia
18	Spain
19	Brazil
20	Saudi Arabia
21	Ukraine
22	Poland

23	Taiwan
24	Turkey
25	Thailand
26	Netherlands
27	Kazakhstan
28	Malaysia
29	Egypt
30	Venezuela
31	Argentina
32	Uzbekistan
33	Czech Republic
34	Belgium
35	Pakistan
36	Romania
37	Greece
38	United Arab Emirates
39	Algeria
40	Nigeria

41	Austria
42	Iraq
43	Finland
44	Philippines
45	Vietnam
46	Korea, North
47	Israel
48	Portugal
49	Colombia
50	Belarus
51	Kuwait
52	Hungary
53	Chile
54	Denmark
55	Serbia & Montenegro
56	Sweden
57	Syria
58	Libya

59	Bulgaria
60	Singapore
61	Switzerland
62	Ireland
63	Turkmenistan
64	Slovakia
65	Bangladesh
66	Morocco
67	New Zealand
68	Oman
69	Qatar
70	Azerbaijan
71	Norway
72	Peru
73	Cuba
74	Ecuador
75	Trinidad & Tobago
76	Croatia

77	Tunisia
78	Dominican Republic
79	Lebanon
80	Estonia
81	Yemen
82	Jordan
83	Slovenia
84	Bahrain
85	Angola
86	Bosnia & Herzegovina
87	Lithuania
88	Sri Lanka
89	Zimbabwe
90	Bolivia
91	Jamaica
92	Guatemala
93	Luxembourg
94	Myanmar

95	Sudan
96	Kenya
97	Macedonia
98	Mongolia
99	Ghana
100	Cyprus
101	Moldova
102	Latvia
103	El Salvador
104	Brunei
105	Honduras
106	Cameroon
107	Panama
108	Costa Rica
109	Cote d'Ivoire
110	Kyrgyzstan
111	Tajikistan
112	Ethiopia

113	Senegal
114	Uruguay
115	Gabon
116	Albania
117	Nicaragua
118	Botswana
119	Paraguay
120	Tanzania
121	Georgia
122	Armenia
123	Congo, RC
124	Mauritius
125	Nepal
126	Mauritius
127	Nepal
128	Mauritania
129	Malta
130	Papua New Guinea

131	Zambia
132	Suriname
133	Iceland
134	Togo
135	Benin
136	Uganda
137	Bahamas
138	Haiti
139	Congo, DRC
140	Guyana
141	Mozambique
142	Guinea
143	Equatorial Guinea
144	Laos
145	Barbados
146	Niger
147	Fiji
148	Burkina Faso

149	Malawi
150	Swaziland
151	Belize
152	Afghanistan
153	Sierra Leone
154	Eritrea
155	Rwanda
156	Mali
157	Seychelles
158	Cambodia
159	Liberia
160	Bhutan
161	Maldives
162	Antigua & Barbuda
163	Djibouti
164	Saint Lucia
165	Gambia
166	Guinea-Bissau

167	Central African Republic
168	Palau
169	Burundi
170	Grenada
171	Lesotho
172	Saint Vincent & the Grenadines
173	Solomon Islands
174	Samoa
175	Cape Verde
176	Nauru
177	Dominica
178	Saint Kitts & Nevis
179	Chad
180	Tonga
181	Sao Tome & Principe
182	Comoros
183	Vanuatu
185	Kiribati

Not Ranked	Andorra
Not Ranked	East Timor
Not Ranked	Holy See
Not Ranked	Hong Kong
Not Ranked	Liechtenstein
Not Ranked	Marshall Islands
Not Ranked	Micronesia
Not Ranked	Monaco
Not Ranked	San Marino
Not Ranked	Somalia
Not Ranked	Tuvalu

* European Union is ranked 3rd
Cook Islands are ranked 184th
Niue is ranked 186th

Global Environmental Snapshot

Introduction

The countries of the world face many environmental challenges in common. Nevertheless, the nature and intensity of problem vary from region to region, as do various countries' respective capacities, in terms of affluence and infrastructure, to remediate threats to environmental quality.

Consciousness of perils affecting the global environment came to the fore in the last third or so of the 20th century has continued to intensify well into the new millennium. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, considerable environmental progress has been made at the level of institutional developments, international cooperation accords, and public participation. Approximately two-dozen international environmental protection accords with global implications have been promulgated since the late 1970s under auspices of the United Nations and other international organizations, together with many additional regional agreements. Attempts to address and rectify environmental problems take the form of legal frameworks, economic instruments, environmentally sound technologies and cleaner production processes as well as conservation efforts. Environmental impact assessments have increasingly been applied across the globe.

Environmental degradation affects the quality, or aesthetics, of human life, but it also displays potential to undermine conditions necessary for the sustainability of human life. Attitudes toward the importance of environmental protection measures reflect ambivalence derived from this bifurcation. On one hand, steps such as cleaning up pollution, dedicating parkland, and suchlike, are seen as embellishments undertaken by wealthy societies already assured they can successfully perform those functions deemed, ostensibly, more essential-for instance, public health and education, employment and economic development. On the other hand, in poorer countries, activities causing environmental damage-for instance the land degradation effects of unregulated logging, slash-and-burn agriculture, overgrazing, and mining-can seem justified insofar as such activities provide incomes and livelihoods.

Rapid rates of resource depletion are associated with poverty and high population growth, themselves correlated, whereas consumption per capita is much higher in the most developed countries, despite these nations' recent progress in energy efficiency and conservation. It is impossible to sequester the global environmental challenge from related economic, social and political challenges.

First-tier industrialized countries have recently achieved measurable decreases in environmental pollution and the rate of resource depletion, a success not matched in middle income and developing countries. It is believed that the discrepancy is due to the fact that industrialized countries have more developed infrastructures to accommodate changes in environmental policy, to apply environmental technologies, and to invest in public education. The advanced industrialized countries incur relatively lower costs in alleviating environmental problems, in comparison to developing countries, since in the former even extensive environmental programs represent a rather minuscule percentage of total expenditures. Conversely, budget constraints, lagged provision of basic services to the population, and other factors such as debt service and militarization may preclude institution of minimal environmental protection measures in the poorest countries.

A synopsis for the current situation facing each region of the world follows:

Regional Synopsis: Africa

The African continent, the world's second-largest landmass, encompasses many of the world's least developed countries. By global standards, urbanization is comparatively low but rising at a rapid rate. More heavily industrialized areas at the northern and southern ends of the continent experience the major share of industrial pollution. In other regions the most serious environmental problems typically stem from inefficient subsistence farming methods and other forms of land degradation, which have affected an increasingly extensive area under pressure of a widely impoverished, fast-growing population. Africa's distribution of natural resources is very uneven. It is the continent at greatest risk of desertification, especially in the Sahel region at the edge of the Sahara but also in other dry-range areas. Yet at the same time, Africa also harbors some of the earth's richest and most diverse biological zones.

Key Points:

Up to half a billion hectares of African land are moderately to severely degraded, an occurrence reflecting short-fallow shifting cultivation and overgrazing as well as a climatic pattern of recurrent droughts.

Soil degradation is severe along the expanse directly south of the Sahara, from the west to the east coasts. Parts of southern Africa, central-eastern Africa, and the neighboring island of Madagascar suffer from serious soil degradation as well.

Africa contains about 17 percent of the world's forest cover, concentrated in the tropical belt of the continent. Many of the forests, however, are severely depleted, with an estimated 70 percent showing some degree of degradation.

Population growth has resulted in continuing loss of arable land, as inefficient subsistence farming techniques affect increasingly extensive areas. Efforts to implement settled, sustainable agriculture have met with some recent success, but much further progress in this direction is needed. Especially in previously uninhabited forestlands, concern over deforestation is intensifying.

By contrast, the African savanna remains the richest grassland in the world, supporting a substantial concentration of animal and plant life. Wildlife parks are sub-Saharan Africa's greatest tourist attraction, and with proper management-giving local people a stake in conservation and controlling the pace of development-could greatly enhance African economies.

Significant numbers of mammal species in parts of northern, southern and eastern Africa are currently threatened, while the biological diversity in Mauritania and Madagascar is even further

compromised with over 20 percent of the mammal species in these two countries currently under threat.

With marine catch trends increasing from 500,000 metric tons in the 1950s to over 3,000,000 metric tons by 2000, there was increasing concern about the reduction in fisheries and marine life, should this trend continue unabated.

Water resource vulnerability is a major concern in northeastern Africa, and a moderate concern across the rest of the continent. An exception is central Africa, which has plentiful water supplies.

Many Africans lack adequate access to resources, not just (if at all) because the resources are unevenly distributed geographically, but also through institutional failures such as faulty land tenure systems or political upheaval. The quality of Africa's natural resources, despite their spotty distribution, is in fact extraordinarily rich. The infrastructure needed to protect and benefit from this natural legacy, however, is largely lacking.

Regional Synopsis: Asia and the Pacific

Asia-earth's largest landmass-and the many large and nearly innumerable small islands lying off its Pacific shore display extraordinarily contrasting landscapes, levels of development, and degrees of environmental stress. In the classification used here, the world's smallest continent, Australia, is also included in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Asia-Pacific region is home to 9 of the world's 14 largest urban areas, and as energy use for utilities, industry and transport increases in developing economies, urban centers are subject to worsening air quality. Intense population density in places such as Bangladesh or Hong Kong is the quintessential image many people have of Asia, yet vast desert areas such as the Gobi and the world's highest mountain range, the Himalayas, span the continent as well. Forested areas in Southeast Asia and the islands of Indonesia and the Philippines were historically prized for their tropical hardwood, but in many places this resource is now severely depleted. Low-lying small island states are extremely vulnerable to the effects of global warming, both rising sea levels and an anticipated increase in cyclones.

Key Points:

Asian timber reserves are forecast to be depleted in the next 40 years. Loss of natural forest is irreversible in some areas, but plantation programs to restore tree cover may ameliorate a portion of the resulting land degradation.

Increased usage of fossil fuels in China and other parts of southern Asia is projected to result in a

marked increase in emissions, especially in regard to carbon dioxide. The increased usage of energy has led to a marked upsurge in air pollution across the region.

Acidification is an emerging problem regionally, with sulfur dioxide emissions expected to triple by 2010 if the current growth rate is sustained. China, Thailand, India, and Korea seem to be suffering from particularly high rates of acid deposition. By contrast, Asia's most highly developed economy, Japan, has effected substantial improvements in its environmental indicators.

Water pollution in the Pacific is an urgent concern since up to 70 percent of the water discharged into the region's waters receives no treatment. Additionally, the disposal of solid wastes, in like manner, poses a major threat in a region with many areas of high population density.

The Asia-Pacific region is the largest expanse of the world's land that is adversely affected by soil degradation.

The region around Australia reportedly suffers the largest degree of ozone depletion.

The microstates of the Pacific suffer land loss due to global warming, and the consequent rise in the levels of ocean waters. A high-emissions scenario and anthropogenic climate impact at the upper end of the currently predicted range would probably force complete evacuation of the lowest-elevation islands sometime in this century.

The species-rich reefs surrounding Southeast Asia are highly vulnerable to the deleterious effects of coastal development, land-based pollution, over-fishing and exploitative fishing methods, as well as marine pollution from oil spills and other activities.

With marine catch trends increasing from 5,000,000 metric tons in the 1950s to over 20,000,000 metric tons by 2000, there was increasing concern about the reduction in fisheries and marine life, should this trend continue unabated.

Significant numbers of mammal species in parts of China and south-east Asia are currently threatened, while the biological diversity in India, Japan, Australia, the Philippines, Indonesia and parts of Malaysia is even further compromised with over 20 percent of the mammal species in these countries currently under threat.

Water resource vulnerability is a serious concern in areas surrounding the Indian subcontinent.

Regional Synopsis: Central Asia

The Central Asian republics, formerly in the Soviet Union, experience a range of environmental

problems as the result of poorly executed agricultural, industrial, and nuclear programs during the Soviet era. Relatively low population densities are the norm, especially since upon the breakup of the U.S.S.R. many ethnic Russians migrated back to European Russia. In this largely semi-arid region, drought, water shortages, and soil salinization pose major challenges.

Key Points:

The use of agricultural pesticides, such as DDT and other chemicals, has contributed to the contamination of soil and groundwater throughout the region.

Land and soil degradation, and in particular, increased salinization, is mostly attributable to faulty irrigation practices.

Significant desertification is also a problem in the region.

Air pollution is prevalent, mostly due to use of low octane automobile fuel.

Industrial pollution of the Caspian Sea and the Aral Sea, as a result of industrial effluents as well as mining and metal production, presents a challenge to the countries bordering these bodies of water.

One of the most severe environmental problems in the region is attributable to the several billion tons of hazardous materials stored in landfills across Central Asia.

Uzbekistan's particular problem involves the contraction of the Aral Sea, which has decreased in size by a third, as a consequence of river diversions and poor irrigation practices. The effect has been the near-total biological destruction of that body of water.

Kazakhstan, as a consequence of being the heartland of the former Soviet Union's nuclear program, has incurred a high of cancerous malignancies, biogenetic abnormalities and radioactive contamination.

While part of the Soviet Union, the republics in the region experienced very high levels of greenhouse gas emissions, as a consequence of rapid industrialization using cheap but dirty energy sources, especially coal.

By contrast, however, there have recently been substantial reductions in the level of greenhouse gas emissions, especially those attributable to coal burning, with further decreases anticipated over the next decade. These changes are partially due to the use of cleaner energy technologies, such as natural gas, augmented by governmental commitment to improving environmental standards.

Regional Synopsis: Europe

Western Europe underwent dramatic transformation of its landscape, virtually eliminating large-scale natural areas, during an era of rapid industrialization, which intensified upon its recovery from World War II. In Eastern Europe and European Russia, intensive land development has been less prevalent, so that some native forests and other natural areas remain. Air and water pollution from use of dirty fuels and industrial effluents, however, are more serious environmental problems in Eastern than in Western Europe, though recent trends show improvement in many indicators. Acid rain has inflicted heavy environmental damage across much of Europe, particularly on forests. Europe and North America are the only regions in which water usage for industry exceeds that for agriculture, although in Mediterranean nations agriculture is the largest water consumer.

Key Points:

Europe contributes 36 percent of the world's chlorofluorocarbon emissions, 30 percent of carbon dioxide emissions, and 25 percent of sulfur dioxide emissions.

Sulfur and nitrogen oxide emissions are the cause of 30 to 50 percent of Central and Eastern Europe's deforestation.

Acid rain has been an environmental concern for decades and continues to be a challenge in parts of Western Europe.

Overexploitation of up to 60 percent of Europe's groundwater presents a problem in industrial and urban areas.

With marine catch trends increasing from 5,000,000 metric tons in the 1950s to over 20,000,000 metric tons by 2000, there was increasing concern about the reduction in fisheries and marine life, should this trend continue unabated.

Significant numbers of mammal species in parts of western Europe, Eastern Europe and Russia are currently threatened, while the biological diversity on the Iberian Peninsula is even further compromised with over 40 percent of the mammal species in this region currently under threat. As a result, there has been a 10 percent increase in protected areas of Europe.

A major environmental issue for Europe involves the depletion of various already endangered or threatened species, and most significantly, the decline of fish stocks. Some estimates suggest that up to 50 percent of the continent's fish species may be considered endangered species. Coastal fisheries have been over-harvested, resulting in catch limits or moratoriums on many commercially important fish species.

Fortunately, in the last few years, these policies have started to yield measurable results with decreasing trends in marine fish catch.

Recently, most European countries have adopted cleaner production technologies, and alternative methods of waste disposal, including recycling.

The countries of Eastern Europe have made air quality a major environmental priority. This is exemplified by the Russian Federation's addition to the 1995 "Berlin Mandate" (transnational legislation based on resolutions of the Rio Earth Summit) compelling nations to promote "carbon sinks" to absorb greenhouse gases.

On a relative basis, when compared with the degree of industrial emissions emitted by many Eastern European countries until the late 1980s, there has been some marked increase in air quality in the region, as obsolete plants are closed and a transition to cleaner fuels and more efficient energy use takes place.

Regional Synopsis: The Middle and Near East

Quite possibly, the Middle East will exemplify the adage that, as the 20th century was a century fixated on oil, the 21st century will be devoted to critical decisions about water. Many (though far from all) nations in the Middle East rank among those countries with the largest oil and gas reserves, but water resources are relatively scarce throughout this predominantly dry region. Effects of global warming may cause moderately high elevation areas that now typically receive winter "snowpack" to experience mainly rain instead, which would further constrain dry-season water availability. The antiquities and religious shrines of the region render it a great magnet for tourism, which entails considerable economic growth potential but also intensifies stresses on the environment.

Key Points:

Water resource vulnerability is a serious concern across the entire region. The increased usage of, and further demand for water, has exacerbated long-standing water scarcity in the region. For instance, river diversions and industrial salt works have caused the Dead Sea to shrink by one-third from its original surface area, with further declines expected.

The oil industry in the region contributes to water pollution in the Persian Gulf, as a result of oil spills, which have averaged 1.2 million barrels of oil spilt per year (some sources suggest that this figure is understated). The consequences are severe because even after oil spills have been cleaned up, environmental damage to the food webs and ecosystems of marine life will persist for a

prolonged period.

The region's coastal zone is considered one of the most fragile and endangered ecosystems of the world. Land reclamation, shoreline construction, discharge of industrial effluents, and tourism (such as diving in the Red Sea) contribute to widespread coastal damage.

Significant numbers of mammal species in parts of the Middle East are currently threatened.

Since the 1980s, 11 percent of the region's natural forest has been depleted.

Regional Synopsis: Latin America and the Caribbean

The Latin American and Caribbean region is characterized by exceedingly diverse landforms that have generally seen high rates of population growth and economic development in recent decades. The percentage of inhabitants residing in urban areas is quite high at 73.4 percent; the region includes the megacities of Mexico City, Sao Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro. The region also includes the world's second-highest mountain range, the Andes; significant expanses of desert and grassland; the coral reefs of the Caribbean Sea; and the world's largest contiguous tropical forest in the Amazon basin. Threats to the latter from subsistence and commercial farming, mineral exploitation and timbering are well publicized. Nevertheless, of eight countries worldwide that still retain at least 70 percent of their original forest cover, six are in Latin America. The region accounts for nearly half (48.3 percent) of the world's greenhouse gas emissions derived from land clearing, but as yet a comparatively minuscule share (4.3 percent) of such gases from industrial sources.

Key Points:

Although Latin America is one of the most biologically diverse regions of the world, this biodiversity is highly threatened, as exemplified by the projected extinction of up to 100,000 species in the next few decades. Much of this loss will be concentrated in the Amazon area, although the western coastline of South America will also suffer significant depletion of biological diversity. The inventory of rainforest species with potentially useful commercial or medical applications is incomplete, but presumed to include significant numbers of such species that may become extinct before they are discovered and identified.

Up to 50 percent of the region's grazing land has lost its soil fertility as a result of soil erosion, salinization, alkalinization and overgrazing.

The Caribbean Sea, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Pacific Ocean have all been contaminated by agricultural wastes, which are discharged into streams that flow into these major waters. Water pollution derived from phosphorous, nitrates and pesticides adversely affects fish stocks,

contributes to oxygen depletion and fosters overgrowth of aquatic vegetation. Marine life will continue to be severely compromised as a result of these conditions.

Due to industrial development in the region, many beaches of eastern Latin America and the Caribbean suffer from tar deposits.

Most cities in the region lack adequate sewage treatment facilities, and rapid migration of the rural poor into the cities is widening the gap between current infrastructure capacity and the much greater level needed to provide satisfactory basic services.

The rainforest region of the Amazon Basin suffers from dangerously high levels of deforestation, which may be a significant contributory factor to global warming or "the greenhouse effect." In the late 1990s and into the new millennium, the rate of deforestation was around 20 million acres of rainforest being destroyed annually.

Deforestation on the steep rainforest slopes of Caribbean islands contributes to soil erosion and landslides, both of which then result in heavy sedimentation of nearby river systems. When these sedimented rivers drain into the sea and coral reefs, they poison the coral tissues, which are vital to the maintenance of the reef ecosystem. The result is marine degradation and nutrient depletion. Jamaica's coral reefs have never quite recovered from the effects of marine degradation.

The Southern Cone of Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay) suffers the effects of greatly increased ultraviolet-B radiation, as a consequence of more intense ozone depletion in the southern hemisphere.

Water resource vulnerability is an increasingly major concern in the northwestern portion of South America.

Regional Synopsis: North America

North American nations, in particular the United States and Canada, rank among the world's most highly developed industrial economies—a fact which has generated significant pollution problems, but also financial resources and skills that have enabled many problems to be corrected. Although efforts to promote energy efficiency, recycling, and suchlike have helped ease strains on the environment in a part of the world where per capita consumption levels are high, sprawling land development patterns and recent preferences many households have demonstrated for larger vehicles have offset these advances.

Meanwhile, a large portion of North America's original forest cover has been lost, though in many cases replaced by productive second-growth woodland. In recent years, attitudes toward best use

of the region's remaining natural or scenic areas seem to be shifting toward recreation and preservation and away from resource extraction. With increasing attention on the energy scarcity in the United States, however, there is speculation that this shift may be short-lived. Indeed, the energy shortage on the west coast of the United States and associated calls for energy exploration, indicate a possible retrenchment toward resource extraction. At the same time, however, it has also served to highlight the need for energy conservation as well as alternative energy sources.

Despite generally successful anti-pollution efforts, various parts of the region continue to suffer significant air, water and land degradation from industrial, vehicular, and agricultural emissions and runoff. Mexico, as a middle-income country, displays environmental problems characteristic of a developing economy, including forest depletion, pollution from inefficient industrial processes and dirty fuels, and lack of sufficient waste-treatment infrastructure.

Key Points:

Because of significantly greater motor vehicle usage in the United States (U.S.) than in the rest of the world, the U.S. contribution of urban air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, especially carbon dioxide, is disproportionately high in relation to its population.

Acid rain is an enduring issue of contention in the northeastern part of the United States, on the border with Canada.

Mexico's urban areas suffer extreme air pollution from carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, and other toxic air pollutants. Emissions controls on vehicles are in their infancy, compared to analogous regulations in the U.S.

The cities of Mexico, including those on the U.S. border, also discharge large quantities of untreated or poorly treated sewage, though officials are currently planning infrastructure upgrades.

Deforestation is noteworthy in various regions of the U.S., especially along the northwest coastline. Old growth forests have been largely removed, but in the northeastern and upper midwestern sections of the United States, evidence suggests that the current extent of tree cover probably surpasses the figure for the beginning of the 20th century.

Extreme weather conditions in the last few years have resulted in a high level of soil erosion along the north coast of California; in addition, the coastline itself has shifted substantially due to soil erosion and concomitant landslides.

Agricultural pollution-including nitrate contamination of well water, nutrient runoff to waterways, and pesticide exposure-is significant in various areas. Noteworthy among affected places are

California's Central Valley, extensive stretches of the Midwest, and land in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Inland waterways, especially around the Great Lakes, have substantially improved their water quality, due to concentrated efforts at reducing water pollution by governmental, commercial and community representatives. Strict curbs on industrial effluents and near-universal implementation of sewage treatment are the chief factors responsible for this improvement.

A major environmental issue for Canada and the United States involves the depletion of various already endangered or threatened species, and most significantly, the decline of fish stocks. Coastal fisheries have been over-harvested, resulting in catch limits or moratoriums on many commercially important fish species. In the last few years, these policies have started to yield measurable results with decreasing trends in marine fish catch.

Due to the decay of neighboring ecosystems in Central America and the Caribbean, the sea surrounding Florida has become increasingly sedimented, contributing to marine degradation, nutrient depletion of the ecosystem, depletion of fish stocks, and diseases to coral species in particular.

Polar Regions

Key Points:

The significant rise in sea level, amounting 10 to 25 centimeters in the last 100 years, is due to the melting of the Arctic ice sheets, and is attributed to global warming.

The Antarctic suffers from a significant ozone hole, first detected in 1976. By 1985, a British scientific team reported a 40 percent decrease in usual regeneration rates of the ozone. Because a sustained increase in the amount of ultraviolet-B radiation would have adverse consequences upon all planetary life, recent environmental measures have been put into effect, aimed at reversing ozone depletion. These measures are projected to garner significant results by 2050.

Due to air and ocean currents, the Arctic is a sink for toxic releases originally discharged thousands of miles away. Arctic wildlife and Canada's Inuit population have higher bodily levels of contaminants such as PCB and dioxin than those found in people and animals in much of the rest of the world.

Global Environmental Concepts

1. Global Warming and Greenhouse Gases

The Greenhouse Effect:

In the early 19th century, the French physicist, Jean Fourier, contended that the earth's atmosphere functions in much the same way as the glass of a greenhouse, thus describing what is now understood as the "greenhouse effect." Put simply, the "greenhouse effect" confines some of the sun's energy to the earth, preserving some of the planet's warmth, rather than allowing it to flow back into space. In so doing, all kinds of life forms can flourish on earth. Thus, the "greenhouse effect" is necessary to sustain and preserve life forms and ecosystems on earth.

In the late 19th century, a Swedish chemist, Svante Arrhenius, noticed that human activities, such as the burning of coal and other fossil fuels for heat, and the removal of forested lands for urban development, led to higher concentrations of greenhouse gases, like carbon dioxide and methane, in the atmosphere. This increase in the levels of greenhouse gases was believed to advance the "greenhouse effect" exponentially, and might be related to the trend in global warming.

In the wake of the Industrial Revolution, after industrial development took place on a large scale and the total human population burgeoned simultaneously with industrialization, the resulting increase in greenhouse gas emissions could, many scientists believe, be significant enough to have some bearing on climate. Indeed, many studies in recent years support the idea that there is a linkage between human activities and global warming, although there is less consensus on the extent to which this linkage may be relevant to environmental concerns.

That said, some scientists have argued that temperature fluctuations have existed throughout the evolution of the planet. Indeed, Dr. S. Fred Singer, the president of the Science and Environment Policy Project has noted that 3,000-year-old geological records of ocean sediment reveal changes in the surface temperature of the ocean. Hence, it is possible that climate variability is merely a normal fact of the planet's evolution. Yet even skeptics as to anthropogenic factors concur that any substantial changes in global temperatures would likely have an effect upon the earth's ecosystems, as well as the life forms that inhabit them.

The Relationship Between Global Warming and Greenhouse Gases:

A large number of climatologists believe that the increase in atmospheric concentrations of "greenhouse gas emissions," mostly a consequence of human activities such as the burning of fossil

fuels, are contributing to global warming. The cause notwithstanding, the planet has reportedly warmed 0.3°C to 0.6°C over the last century. Indeed, each year during the 1990s was one of the very warmest in the 20th century, with the mean surface temperature for 1999 being the fifth warmest on record since 1880.

In early 2000, a panel of atmospheric scientists for the National Research Council concluded in a report that global warming was, indeed, a reality. While the panel, headed by Chairman John Wallace, a professor of atmospheric sciences at the University of Washington, stated that it remained unclear whether human activities have contributed to the earth's increasing temperatures, it was apparent that global warming exists.

In 2001, following a request for further study by the incoming Bush administration in the [United States](#), the National Academy of Sciences again confirmed that global warming had been in existence for the last 20 years. The study also projected an increase in temperature between 2.5 degrees and 10.4 degrees Fahrenheit by the year 2100. Furthermore, the study found the leading cause of global warming to be emissions of carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels, and it noted that greenhouse gas accumulations in the earth's atmosphere was a result of human activities.

Within the scientific community, the controversy regarding has centered on the difference between surface air and upper air temperatures. Information collected since 1979 suggests that while the earth's surface temperature has increased by about a degree in the past century, the atmospheric temperature five miles above the earth's surface has indicated very little increase. Nevertheless, the panel stated that this discrepancy in temperature between surface and upper air does not invalidate the conclusion that global warming is taking place. Further, the panel noted that natural events, such as volcanic eruptions, can decrease the temperature in the upper atmosphere.

The major consequences of global warming potentially include the melting of the polar ice caps, which, in turn, contribute to the rise in sea levels. Many islands across the globe have already experienced a measurable loss of land as a result. Because global warming may increase the rate of evaporation, increased precipitation, in the form of stronger and more frequent storm systems, is another potential outcome. Other consequences of global warming may include the introduction and proliferation of new infectious diseases, loss of arable land (referred to as "desertification"), destructive changes to existing ecosystems, loss of biodiversity and the isolation of species, and concomitant adverse changes in the quality of human life.

International Policy Development in Regard to Global Warming:

Regardless of what the precise nature of the relationship between greenhouse gas emissions and global warming may be, it seems that there is some degree of a connection between the phenomena. Any substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and global warming trends will

likely involve systematic changes in industrial operations, the use of advanced energy sources and technologies, as well as global cooperation in implementing and regulating these transformations.

In this regard, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) stipulated the following objectives:

1. To stabilize "greenhouse gas" concentrations within the atmosphere, in such a manner that would preclude hazardous anthropogenic intervention into the existing biosphere and ecosystems of the world. This stabilization process would facilitate the natural adaptation of ecosystems to changes in climate.
2. To ensure and enable sustainable development and food production on a global scale.

*** See section on "International Environmental Agreements and Associations" for information related to international policies related to limiting greenhouse gases and controlling climate change emanating from historic summits at Kyoto, Copenhagen, Doha, and Paris. ***

2. Air Pollution

Long before global warming reared its head as a significant issue, those concerned about the environment and public health noted the deleterious effects of human-initiated combustion upon the atmosphere. Killer smogs from coal burning triggered acute health emergencies in London and other places. At a lower level of intensity motor vehicle, power plant, and industrial emissions impaired long-range visibility and probably had some chronic adverse consequences on the respiratory systems of persons breathing such air.

In time, scientists began associating the sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides released from coal burning with significant acid deposition in the atmosphere, eventually falling as "acid rain." This phenomenon has severely degraded forestlands, especially in Europe and a few parts of the [United States](#). It has also impaired some aquatic ecosystems and eaten away the surface of some human artifacts, such as marble monuments. Scrubber technology and conversion to cleaner fuels have enabled the level of industrial production to remain at least constant while significantly reducing acid deposition. Technologies aimed at cleaning the air and curtailing acid rain, soot, and smog may, nonetheless, boomerang as the perils of global warming become increasingly serious. In brief, these particulates act as sort of a sun shade -- comparable to the effect of volcanic eruptions on the upper atmosphere whereby periods of active volcanism correlate with temporarily cooler weather conditions. Thus, while the carbon dioxide releases that are an inevitable byproduct of combustion continue, by scrubbing the atmosphere of pollutants, an industrial society opens itself to greater

insolation (penetration of the sun's rays and consequent heating), and consequently, it is likely to experience a correspondingly greater rise in ambient temperatures.

The health benefits of removing the sources of acid rain and smog are indisputable, and no one would recommend a return to previous conditions. Nevertheless, the problematic climatic effects of continually increasing emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases pose a major global environmental challenge, not as yet addressed adequately.

3. Ozone Depletion

The stratospheric ozone layer functions to prevent ultraviolet radiation from reaching the earth. Normally, stratospheric ozone is systematically disintegrated and regenerated through natural photochemical processes. The stratospheric ozone layer, however, has been depleted unnaturally as a result of anthropogenic (man-made) chemicals, most especially chlorine and bromide compounds such as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), halons, and various industrial chemicals in the form of solvents, refrigerants, foaming agents, aerosol propellants, fire retardants, and fumigants. Ozone depletion is of concern because it permits a greater degree of ultraviolet-B radiation to reach the earth, which then increases the incidences of cancerous malignancies, cataracts, and human immune deficiencies. In addition, even in small doses, ozone depletion affects the ecosystem by disturbing food chains, agriculture, fisheries and other forms of biological diversity.

Transnational policies enacted to respond to the dangers of ozone depletion include the 1985 Vienna Convention on the Protection of the Ozone Layer and the 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. The Montreal Protocol was subsequently amended in London in 1990, Copenhagen in 1992 and Vienna in 1995. By 1996, 155 countries had ratified the Montreal Protocol, which sets out a time schedule for the reduction (and eventual elimination) of ozone depleting substances (OPS), and bans exports and imports of ODS from and to non-participant countries.

In general, the Protocol stipulates that developed countries must eliminate halon consumption by 1994 and CFC consumption by 1996, while developing countries must eliminate these substances by 2010. Consumption of methyl bromide, which is used as a fumigant, was to be frozen at the 1995 in developed countries, and fully eliminated in 2010, while developing countries are to freeze consumption by 2002, based on average 1995-1998 consumption levels. Methyl chloroform is to be phased out by 2005. Under the Montreal Protocol, most ODS will be completely eliminated from use by 2010.

4. Land Degradation

In recent decades, land degradation in more arid regions of the world has become a serious concern. The problem, manifest as both "desertification" and "devegetation," is caused primarily by climate variability and human activities, such as "deforestation," excessive cultivation, overgrazing, and other forms of land resource exploitation. It is also exacerbated by inadequate irrigation practices. Although the effects of droughts on drylands have been temporary in the past, today, the productivity and sustainability of these lands have been severely compromised for the long term. Indeed, in every region of the world, land degradation has become an acute issue.

Desertification and Devegetation:

"Desertification" is a process of land degradation causing the soil to deteriorate, thus losing its nutrients and fertility, and eventually resulting in the loss of vegetation, known as "devegetation." As aforementioned, "desertification" and "devegetation" are caused by human activities, yet human beings are also the greatest casualties. Because these forms of land degradation affect the ability of the soil to produce crops, they concomitantly contribute to poverty. As population increases and demographic concentrations shift, the extent of land subject to stresses by those seeking to wrest subsistence from it has inexorably risen.

In response, the United Nations has formed the Convention to Combat Desertification-aimed at implementing programs to address the underlying causes of desertification, as well as measures to prevent and minimize its effects. Of particular significance is the formulation of policies on transboundary resources, such as areas around lakes and rivers. At a broader level, the Convention has established a Conference of Parties (COP), which includes all ratifying governments, for directing and advancing international action.

To ensure more efficacious use of funding, the Convention intends to reconfigure international aid to utilize a consultative and coordinated approach in the disbursement and expenditure of donor funds. In this way, local communities that are affected by desertification will be active participants in the solution-generation process. In-depth community education projects are envisioned as part of this new international aid program, and private donor financing is encouraged. Meanwhile, as new technologies are developed to deal with the problem of desertification, they need to be distributed for application across the world. Hence, the Convention calls for international cooperation in scientific research in this regard.

Desertification is a problem of sustainable development. It is directly connected to human challenges such as poverty, social and economic well-being and environmental protection as well. Broader environmental issues, such as climate change, biological diversity, and freshwater supplies, are indirectly related, so any effort to resolve this environmental challenge must entail coordinated research efforts and joint action.

Deforestation:

Deforestation is not a recent phenomenon. For centuries, human beings have cut down trees to clear space for land cultivation, or in order to use the wood for fuel. Over the last 200 years, and most especially after World War II, deforestation increased because the logging industry became a globally profitable endeavor, and so the clearing of forested areas was accelerated for the purposes of industrial development. In the long term, this intensified level of deforestation is considered problematic because the forest is unable to regenerate itself quickly. The deforestation that has occurred in tropical rainforests is seen as an especially serious concern, due to the perceived adverse effects of this process upon the entire global ecosystem.

The most immediate consequence of deforestation is soil degradation. Soil, which is necessary for the growth of vegetation, can be a fragile and vital property. Organically, an extensive evolution process must take place before soil can produce vegetation, yet at the same time, the effects of natural elements, such as wind and rain, can easily and quickly degrade this resource. This phenomenon is known as soil erosion. In addition, natural elements like wind and rain reduce the amount of fertile soil on the ground, making soil scarcity a genuine problem. When fertile topsoil that already exists is removed from the landscape in the process of deforestation, soil scarcity is further exacerbated. Equally significant is the fact that once land has been cleared so that the topsoil can be cultivated for crop production, not only are the nutrient reserves in the soil depleted, thus producing crops of inferior quality, but the soil structure itself becomes stressed and deteriorates further.

Another direct result of deforestation is flooding. When forests are cleared, removing the cover of vegetation, and rainfall occurs, the flow of water increases across the surface of land. When extensive water runoff takes place, the frequency and intensity of flooding increases. Other adverse effects of deforestation include the loss of wildlife and biodiversity within the ecosystem that supports such life forms.

At a broader level, tropical rainforests play a vital role in maintaining the global environmental system. Specifically, destruction of tropical rainforests affects the carbon dioxide cycle. When forests are destroyed by burning (or rotting), carbon dioxide is released into the air, thus contributing to an intensified "greenhouse effect." The increase in greenhouse gas emissions like carbon dioxide is a major contributor to global warming, according to many environmental scientists. Indeed, trees themselves absorb carbon dioxide in the process of photosynthesis, so their loss also reduces the absorption of greenhouse gases.

Tropical rainforest destruction also adversely affects the nitrogen cycle. Nitrogen is a key nutrient for both plants and animals. Plants derive nitrogen from soil, while animals obtain it via nitrogen-enriched vegetation. This element is essential for the formation of amino acids, and thereby for

proteins and biochemicals that all living things need for metabolism and growth. In the nitrogen cycle, vegetation acquires these essential proteins and biochemicals, and then cyclically returns them to the atmosphere and global ecosystem. Accordingly, when tropical rainforest ecosystems are compromised, not only is vegetation removed; the atmosphere is also affected and climates are altered. At a more immediate level, the biodiversity within tropical rainforests, including wildlife and insect species and a wealth of plant varieties, is depleted. Loss of rare plants is of particular concern because certain species as yet unknown and unused could likely yield many practical benefits, for instance as medicines.

As a result of the many challenges associated with deforestation, many environmental groups and agencies have argued for government policies on the sustainable development of forests by governments across the globe. While many countries have instituted national policies and programs aimed at reducing deforestation, and substantial research has been advanced in regard to sustainable and regenerative forestry development, there has been very little progress on an international level. Generally speaking, most tropical rainforests are located in developing and less developed countries, where economic growth is often dependent upon the exploitation of tropical rainforests. Timber resources as well as wildlife hunting tend to be particularly lucrative arenas.

In places such as the Amazon, where deforestation takes place for the construction of energy plants aimed at industrialization and economic development, there is an exacerbated effect on the environment. After forests are cleared in order to construct such projects, massive flooding usually ensues. The remaining trees then rot and decay in the wake of the flooding. As the trees deteriorate, their biochemical makeup becomes more acidic, producing poisonous substances such as hydrogen sulphide and methane gases. Acidified water subsequently corrodes the mechanical equipment and operations of the plants, which are already clogged by rotting wood after the floodwaters rise.

Deforestation generally arises from an economically plausible short-term motivation, but nonetheless poses a serious global concern because the effects go beyond national boundaries. The United Nations has established the World Commission on Forest and Sustainable Development. This body's task is to determine the optimal means of dealing with the issue of deforestation, without unduly affecting normal economic development, while emphasizing the global significance of protecting tropical forest ecosystems.

5. Water Resources

For all terrestrial fauna, including humans, water is the most immediate necessity to sustain life. As the population has increased and altered an ever-greater portion of the landscape from its natural condition, demand on water resources has intensified, especially with the development of industrialization and large-scale irrigation. The supply of freshwater is inherently limited, and

moreover distributed unevenly across the earth's landmasses. Moreover, not just demand for freshwater but activities certain to degrade it are becoming more pervasive. By contrast, the oceans form a sort of "last wilderness," still little explored and in large part not seriously affected by human activity. However, coastal environments - the biologically richest part of the marine ecosystem-are experiencing major depletion due to human encroachment and over-exploitation.

Freshwater:

In various regions, for instance the Colorado River in the western [United States](#), current withdrawals of river water for irrigation, domestic, and industrial use consume the entire streamflow so that almost no water flows into the sea at the river's mouth. Yet development is ongoing in many such places, implying continually rising demand for water. In some areas reliant on groundwater, aquifers are being depleted at a markedly faster rate than they are being replenished. An example is the San Joaquin Valley in California, where decades of high water withdrawals for agriculture have caused land subsidence of ten meters or more in some spots. Naturally, the uncertainty of future water supplies is particularly acute in arid and semi-arid regions. Speculation that the phenomenon of global warming will alter geographic and seasonal rainfall patterns adds further uncertainty.

Water conservation measures have great potential to alleviate supply shortages. Some city water systems are so old and beset with leaking pipes that they lose as much water as they meter. Broad-scale irrigation could be replaced by drip-type irrigation, actually enhancing the sustainability of agriculture. In many areas where heavy irrigation has been used for decades, the result is deposition of salts and other chemicals in the soil such that the land becomes unproductive for farming and must be abandoned.

Farming is a major source of water pollution. Whereas restrictions on industrial effluents and other "point sources" are relatively easy to implement, comparable measures to reform hydraulic practices at farms and other "nonpoint sources" pose a significantly knottier challenge. Farm-caused water pollution takes the following main forms:

- Nitrate pollution found in wells in intensive farming areas as a consequence of heavy fertilizer use is a threat to human health. The most serious danger is to infants, who by ingesting high-nitrate water can contract methemoglobinemia, sometimes called "blue baby syndrome," a potentially fatal condition.
- Fertilizer runoff into rivers and lakes imparts unwanted nutrients that cause algae growth and eventual loss of oxygen in the body of water, degrading its ability to support fish and other desirable aquatic life.

- Toxic agricultural chemicals - insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides - are detectable in some aquifers and waterways.

In general, it is much easier to get a pollutant into water than to retrieve it out. Gasoline additives, dry cleaning chemicals, other industrial toxins, and in a few areas radionuclides have all been found in water sources intended for human use. The complexity and long time scale of subterranean hydrological movements essentially assures that pollutants already deposited in aquifers will continue to turn up for decades to come. Sophisticated water treatment processes are available, albeit expensive, to reclaim degraded water and render it fit for human consumption. Yet source protection is unquestionably a more desirable alternative.

In much of the developing world, and even some low-income rural enclaves of the developed world, the population lacks ready access to safe water. Surface water and shallow groundwater supplies are susceptible to contamination from untreated wastewater and failing septic tanks, as well as chemical hazards. The occurrence of waterborne disease is almost certainly greatly underreported.

Marine Resources:

Coastal areas have always been desirable places for human habitation, and population pressure on them continues to increase. Many types of water degradation that affect lakes and rivers also affect coastal zones: industrial effluents, untreated or partially treated sewage, nutrient load from agriculture figure prominently in both cases. Prospects for more extreme storms as a result of global warming, as well as the pervasiveness of poorly planned development in many coastal areas, forebode that catastrophic hurricanes and landslides may increase in frequency in the future. Ongoing rise in sea levels will force remedial measures and in some cases abandonment of currently valuable coastal property.

Fisheries over much of the globe have been overharvested, and immediate conservation measures are required to preserve stocks of many species. Many governments subsidized factory-scale fishing fleets in the 1970s and 1980s, and the resultant catch increase evidently surpassed a sustainable level. It is uncertain how much of the current decline in fish stocks stems from overharvesting and how much from environmental pollution. The deep ocean remains relatively unaffected by human activity, but continental shelves near coastlines are frequently seriously polluted, and these close-to-shore areas are the major biological nurseries for food fish and the smaller organisms they feed on.

6. Environmental Toxins

Toxic chemical pollution exploded on the public consciousness with disclosure of spectacularly polluted industrial areas such as Love Canal near Buffalo, New York. There is no question that pollutants such as organophosphates or radionucleides can be highly deleterious to health, but evidence to date suggests that seriously affected areas are a localized rather than universal problem.

While some explore the possibilities for a lifestyle that fully eschews use of modern industrial chemicals, the most prevalent remediative approach is to focus on more judicious use. The most efficient chemical plants are now able to contain nearly all toxic byproducts of their production processes within the premises, minimizing the release of such substances into the environment. Techniques such as Integrated Pest Management (IPM) dictate limited rather than broadcast use of pesticides: application only when needed using the safest available chemical, supplemented as much as possible with nontoxic controls.

While heightened public awareness and growing technical sophistication suggest a hopeful outlook on limiting the damage from manmade environmental toxins, one must grant that previous incidents of their misuse and mishandling have already caused environmental damage that will have to be dealt with for many years to come. In the case of the most hazardous radioactive substances, the time scale for successful remediation actually extends beyond that of the recorded history of civilization. Moreover, in this era of high population density and rapid economic growth, quotidian activities such as the transport of chemicals will occasionally, seemingly inevitably result in accidents with adverse environmental consequences.

7. "Islandization" and Biodiversity

With increased awareness regarding the adverse effects of unregulated hunting and habitat depletion upon wildlife species and other aspects of biodiversity, large-scale efforts across the globe have been initiated to reduce and even reverse this trend.

In every region of the world, many species of wildlife and areas of biodiversity have been saved from extinction. Nationally, many countries have adopted policies aimed at preservation and conservation of species, and one of the most tangible measures has been the proliferation of protected habitats. Such habitats exist in the form of wildlife reserves, marine life reserves, and other such areas where biodiversity can be protected from external encroachment and exploitation.

Despite these advances in wildlife and biodiversity protection, further and perhaps more intractable challenges linger. Designated reserves, while intended to prevent further species decline, exist as closed territories, fragmented from other such enclaves and disconnected from the larger ecosystem. This environmental scenario is referred to as "islandization." Habitat reserves often serve as oversized zoos or game farms, with landscapes and wildlife that have effectively been "tamed" to suit. Meanwhile, the larger surrounding ecosystem continues to be seriously degraded

and transformed, while within the islandized habitat, species that are the focus of conservation efforts may not have sufficient range and may not be able to maintain healthy genetic variability.

As a consequence, many conservationists and preservationists have demanded that substantially larger portions of land be withheld as habitat reserves, and a network of biological corridors to connect continental reserves be established. While such efforts to combat islandization have considerable support in the [United States](#), how precisely such a program would be instituted, especially across national boundaries, remains a matter of debate. International conservationists and preservationists say without a network of reserves a massive loss of biodiversity will result.

The concept of islandization illustrates why conservation and preservation of wildlife and biodiversity must consider and adopt new, broader strategies. In the past, conservation and preservation efforts have been aimed at specific species, such as the spotted owl and grizzly bear in North America, the Bengal tiger in Southeast Asia, the panda in [China](#), elephants in Africa. Instead, the new approach is to simultaneously protect many and varied species that inhabit the same ecosystem. This method, referred to as "bio-regional conservation," may more efficaciously generate longer-term and more far-reaching results precisely because it is aimed at preserving entire ecosystems, and all the living things within.

More About Biodiversity Issues:

This section is directly taken from the United Nations Environmental Program: "[Biodiversity Assessment](#)"

The Global Biodiversity Assessment, completed by 1500 scientists under the auspices of United Nations Environmental Program in 1995, updated what is known (or unknown) about global biological diversity at the ecosystem, species and genetic levels. The assessment was uncertain of the total number of species on Earth within an order of magnitude. Of its working figure of 13 million species, only 13 percent are scientifically described. Ecological community diversity is also poorly known, as is its relationship to biological diversity, and genetic diversity has been studied for only a small number of species. The effects of human activities on biodiversity have increased so greatly that the rate of species extinctions is rising to hundreds or thousands of times the background level. These losses are driven by increasing demands on species and their habitats, and by the failure of current market systems to value biodiversity adequately. The Assessment calls for urgent action to reverse these trends.

There has been a new recognition of the importance of protecting marine and aquatic biodiversity. The first quantitative estimates of species losses due to growing coral reef destruction predict that almost 200,000 species, or one in five presently contributing to coral reef biodiversity, could die out in the next 40 years if human pressures on reefs continue to increase.

Since Rio, many countries have improved their understanding of the status and importance of their biodiversity, particularly through biodiversity country studies such as those prepared under the auspices of UNEP/GEF. The [United Kingdom](#) identified 1250 species needing monitoring, of which 400 require action plans to ensure their survival. Protective measures for biodiversity, such as legislation to protect species, can prove effective. In the USA, almost 40 percent of the plants and animals protected under the Endangered Species Act are now stable or improving as a direct result of recovery efforts. Some African countries have joined efforts to protect threatened species through the 1994 Lusaka Agreement, and more highly migratory species are being protected by specialized cooperative agreements among range states under the Bonn Agreement.

There is an emerging realization that a major part of conservation of biological diversity must take place outside of protected areas and involve local communities. The extensive agricultural areas occupied by small farmers contain much biodiversity that is important for sustainable food production. Indigenous agricultural practices have been and continue to be important elements in the maintenance of biodiversity, but these are being displaced and lost. There is a new focus on the interrelationship between agrobiodiversity conservation and sustainable use and development practices in smallholder agriculture, with emphasis on use of farmers' knowledge and skills as a source of information for sustainable farming.

Perhaps even more important than the loss of biodiversity is the transformation of global biogeochemical cycles, the reduction in the total world biomass, and the decrease in the biological productivity of the planet. While quantitative measurements are not available, the eventual economic and social consequences may be so significant that the issue requires further attention.

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USFWS. 1994. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service report to Congress, cited in news release 21 July 1994.

Online resources used generally in the Environmental Overview:

Environmental Protection Agency Global Warming Site. URL: <http://www.epa.gov/globalwarming>

Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nations: Forestry. URL: <http://www.fao.org/forestry/site/sofo/en/>

Global Warming Information Page. URL: <http://globalwarming.org>

United Nations Environmental Program. URL: http://www.unep.org/GEO/GEO_Products/Assessment_Reports/

United Nations Global Environmental Outlook. URL: <http://www.unep.org/geo/geo4/media/>

Note on Edition Dates:

The edition dates for textual resources are noted above because they were used to formulate the original content. We also have used online resources (cited above) to update coverage as needed.

Information Resources

For more information about environmental concepts, CountryWatch recommends the following resources:

The United Nations Environmental Program Network (with country profiles)

[<http://www.unep.net/>](http://www.unep.net/)

The United Nations Environment Program on Climate Change

[<http://climatechange.unep.net/>](http://climatechange.unep.net/)

The United Nations Environmental Program on Waters and Oceans

[<http://www.unep.ch/earthw/Pdepwat.htm>](http://www.unep.ch/earthw/Pdepwat.htm)

The United Nations Environmental Program on Forestry: "Forests in Flux"

[<http://www.unep-wcmc.org/forest/flux/homepage.htm>](http://www.unep-wcmc.org/forest/flux/homepage.htm)

FAO "State of the World's Forests"

[<http://www.fao.org/forestry/FO/SOFO/SOFO99/sofo99-e.stm>](http://www.fao.org/forestry/FO/SOFO/SOFO99/sofo99-e.stm)

World Resources Institute.

[<http://www.wri.org/>](http://www.wri.org/)

Harvard University Center for Health and the Global Environment

[<http://www.med.harvard.edu/chge/the-review.html>](http://www.med.harvard.edu/chge/the-review.html)

The University of Wisconsin Center for Sustainability and the Global Environment

<http://sage.aos.wisc.edu/>

International Environmental Agreements and Associations

International Policy Development in Regard to Global Warming:

Introduction

Regardless of what the precise nature of the relationship between greenhouse gas emissions and global warming may be, it seems that there is some degree of a connection between the phenomena. Any substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and global warming trends will likely involve systematic changes in industrial operations, the use of advanced energy sources and technologies, as well as global cooperation in implementing and regulating these transformations.

In this regard, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) stipulated the following objectives:

1. To stabilize "greenhouse gas" concentrations within the atmosphere, in such a manner that would preclude hazardous anthropogenic intervention into the existing biosphere and ecosystems of the world. This stabilization process would facilitate the natural adaptation of ecosystems to changes in climate.
2. To ensure and enable sustainable development and food production on a global scale.

Following are two discussions regarding international policies on the environment, followed by listings of international accords.

Special Entry: The Kyoto Protocol

The UNFCCC was adopted at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, and entered into force in 1994. Over 175 parties were official participants.

Meanwhile, however, many of the larger, more industrialized nations failed to reach the emissions' reduction targets, and many UNFCCC members agreed that the voluntary approach to reducing

emissions had not been successful. As such, UNFCCC members reached a consensus that legally binding limits were necessitated, and agreed to discuss such a legal paradigm at a meeting in Kyoto, [Japan](#) in 1997. At that meeting, the UNFCCC forged the Kyoto Protocol. This concord is the first legally binding international agreement that places limits on emissions from industrialized countries. The major greenhouse gas emissions addressed in the Kyoto Protocol include carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons, sulfur hexafluoride, and methane.

The provisions of the Kyoto Protocol stipulate that economically advanced nations must reduce their combined emissions of greenhouse gases, by approximately five percent from their 1990 levels, before the 2008-2010 deadline. Countries with the highest carbon dioxide emissions, such as the [United States](#) (U.S.), many of the European Union (EU) countries, and [Japan](#), are to reduce emissions by a scale of 6 to 8 percent. All economically advanced nations must show "demonstrable progress" by 2005. In contrast, no binding limits or timetable have been set on developing countries. Presumably, this distinction is due to the fact that most developing countries - - with the obvious exceptions of [India](#) and [China](#) -- simply do not emit as many greenhouse gases as do more industrially advanced countries. Meanwhile, these countries are entrenched in the process of economic development.

Regardless of the aforementioned reasoning, there has been strong opposition against the asymmetrical treatment assigned to emissions limits among developed and developing countries. Although this distinction might be regarded as unfair in principle, associations such as the Alliance of Small Island States have been vocal in expressing how global warming -- a result of greenhouse gas emissions - has contributed to the rise in sea level, and thus deleteriously affected their very existence as island nation states. For this reason, some parties have suggested that economically advanced nations, upon returning to their 1990 levels, should be required to further reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by a deadline of 2005. In response, interested parties have observed that even if such reductions were undertaken by economically advanced nations, they would not be enough to completely control global warming. Indeed, a reduction in the rate of fossil fuel usage by developing nations would also be necessary to have substantial ameliorative effect on global warming. Indeed, a reduction in the rate of fossil fuel usage by developing nations would also be necessary to have substantial ameliorative effect on global warming.

As such, the Protocol established a "Clean Development Mechanism" which permits developed countries to invest in projects aimed at reducing emissions within developing countries in return for credit for the reductions. Ostensibly, the objective of this mechanism is to curtail emissions in developing countries without unduly penalizing them for their economic development. Under this model, the countries with more potential emissions credits could sell them to other signatories of the Kyoto Protocol, whose emissions are forecast to significantly rise in the next few years. Should this trading of emissions credits take place, it is estimated that the Kyoto Protocol's emissions targets could still be met.

In 1999, the International Energy Outlook projected that Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and Newly Independent States, as well as parts of Asia, are all expected to show a marked decrease in their level of energy-related carbon emissions in 2010. Nations with the highest emissions, specifically, the U.S., the EU and [Japan](#), are anticipated to reduce their emissions by up to 8 percent by 2012. By 2000, however, the emissions targets were not on schedule for achievement. Indeed, the U.S. Department of Energy estimates forecast that by 2010, there will be a 34 percent increase in carbon emissions from the 1990 levels, in the absence of major shifts in policy, economic growth, energy prices, and consumer trends. Despite this assessment in the U.S., international support for the Kyoto Protocol remained strong, especially among European countries and island states, who view the pact as one step in the direction away from reliance on fossil fuels and other sources of greenhouse gases.

In 2001, U.S. President, George W. Bush, rejected his country's participation in the Kyoto Protocol, saying that the costs imposed on the global economic system, and especially, on the US, overshadowed the benefits of the Protocol. He also cited the unfair burden on developed nations to reduce emissions, as another primary reasons for withdrawal from the international pact, as well as insufficient evidence regarding the science of global warming. Faced with impassioned international disapproval for his position, the U.S. president stated that his administration remained interested in dealing with the matter of global warming, but would endorse alternative measures to combat the problem, such as voluntary initiatives limiting emissions. Critics of Bush's position, however, have noted that it was the failure of voluntary initiatives to reduce emissions following the Rio Summit that led to the establishment of the Kyoto Protocol in the first place.

In the wake of the Bush administration's decision, many participant countries resigned themselves to the reality that the goals of the Kyoto Protocol might not be achieved without U.S. involvement. Nevertheless, in Bonn, [Germany](#), in July 2001, the remaining participant countries struck a political compromise on some of the key issues and sticking points, and planned to move forward with the Protocol, irrespective of the absence of the U.S. The key compromise points included the provision for countries to offset their targets with carbon sinks (these are areas of forest and farmland which can absorb carbon through the process of photosynthesis). Another compromise point within the broader Bonn Agreement was the reduction of emissions cuts of six gases from over 5 percent to a more achievable 2 percent. A third key change was the provision of funding for less wealthy countries to adopt more progressive technologies.

In late October and early November 2001, the UNFCCC's 7th Conference of the Parties met in Marrakesh, [Morocco](#), to finalize the measures needed to make the Kyoto Protocol operational. Although the UNFCCC projected that ratification of the Protocol would make it legally binding within a year, many critics noted that the process had fallen short of implementing significant changes in policy that would be necessary to actually stop or even slow climate change. They also maintained that the absence of U.S. participation effectively rendered the Protocol into being a

political exercise without any substance, either in terms of transnational policy or in terms of environmental concerns.

The adoption of the compromises ensconced within the Bonn Agreement had been intended to make the provisions of the Kyoto Protocol more palatable to the U.S. In this regard, it failed to achieve its objective as the Bush administration continued to eschew participation in the international accord. Still, however, the Bonn Agreement did manage to render a number of other positive outcomes. Specifically, in 2002, key countries, such as [Russia](#), [Japan](#) and [Canada](#) agreed to ratify the protocol, bringing the number of signatories to 178. The decision by key countries to ratify the protocol was regarded as "the kiss of life" by observers.

By 2005, on the eve of a climate change conference in London, British Prime Minister Tony Blair was hoping to deal with the problems of climate change beyond the provisions set forth in the Kyoto Protocol. Acknowledging that the Kyoto Protocol could not work in its current form, Blair wanted to open the discussion for a new climate change plan.

Blair said that although most of the world had signed on to Kyoto, the protocol could not meet any of its practical goals of cutting greenhouse gas emissions without the participation of the United States, the world's largest polluter. He also noted that any new agreement would have to include India and China -- significant producers of greenhouse gas emissions, but exempt from Kyoto because they have been classified as developing countries. Still, he said that progress on dealing with climate change had been stymied by "a reluctance to face up to reality and the practical action needed to tackle problem."

Blair also touted the "huge opportunities" in technology and pointed toward the possibilities offered by wind, solar and nuclear power, along with fuel cell technology, eco-friendly biofuels, and carbon capture and storage which could generate low carbon power. Blair also asserted that his government was committed to achieving its domestic goal of reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 20 percent by 2010.

In the United States, President George W. Bush has said that global warming remained a debatable issue and despite conclusions reached by his own Environmental Protection Agency, he has not agreed with the conclusion that global warming and climate change are linked with human activities. Bush has also refused to ratify Kyoto on the basis of its economic costs.

Australia, an ally of the United States, has taken a similarly dim view of the Kyoto Protocol. Ahead of the November 2005 climate change meeting in Canada in which new goals for the protocol were to be discussed, Australia's Environment Minister, Ian Campbell, said that negotiating new greenhouse gas emission levels for the Kyoto Protocol would be a waste of time. Campbell said, "There is a consensus that the caps, targets and timetables approach is flawed. If we spend the next five years arguing about that, we'll be fiddling and negotiating while Rome

burns." Campbell, like the Bush administration, has also advocated a system of voluntary action in which industry takes up new technologies rather than as a result of compelling the reduction of emissions. But the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) has called on its government to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, to establish a system of emissions trading, and to set binding limits on emissions. Interestingly, although it did not sign on to Kyoto, Australia was expected to meet its emissions target by 2012 (an 8 percent increase in 1990 levels in keeping with the country's reliance on coal). But this success has nothing to do with new technologies and is due to state-based regulations on land clearing.

Note: The Kyoto Protocol calls for developed nations to cut greenhouse emissions by 5.2 percent of 1990 levels by 2012.

Special Entry: Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen (2009) --

In December 2009, the United Nations Climate Change Summit opened in the Danish capital of Copenhagen. The summit was scheduled to last from Dec. 7-18, 2009. Delegates from more than 190 countries were in attendance, and approximately 100 world leaders, including British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and [United States](#) President Barack Obama, were expected to participate. At issue was the matter of new reductions targets on greenhouse gas emissions by 2020.

Despite earlier fears that little concurrence would come from the conference, effectively pushing significant actions forward to a 2010 conference in [Mexico](#) City, negotiators were now reporting that the talks were productive and several key countries, such as [South Africa](#), had pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The two main issues that could still lead to cleavages were questions of agreement between the industrialized countries and the developing countries of the world, as well as the overall effectiveness of proposals in seriously addressing the perils of climate change.

On Dec. 9, 2009, four countries -- the [United Kingdom](#), [Australia](#), [Mexico](#) and [Norway](#) -- presented a document outlining ideas for raising and managing billions of dollars, which would be intended to help vulnerable countries dealing with the perils of climate change. Described as a "green fund," the concept could potentially help small island states at risk because of the rise in sea level. [Bangladesh](#) identified itself as a potential recipient of an assistance fund, noting that as a country plagued by devastating floods, it was particularly hard-hit by climate change. The "green fund" would fall under the rubric of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, for which developed countries have been committed to quantifying their emission reduction targets, and also to providing financial and technical support to developing countries.

The [United Kingdom](#), [Australia](#), [Mexico](#) and [Norway](#) also called for the creation of a new legal treaty that would replace the Kyoto Protocol. This new treaty, which could go into force in 2012, would focus largely on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. But [Australia](#) went

even further in saying that the successor treaty to the Kyoto Protocol, should be one with provisions covering all countries. Such a move would be a departure from the structure of the Kyoto Protocol, which contained emissions targets for industrialized countries due to the prevailing view that developed countries had a particular historic responsibility to be accountable for climate change. More recently, it has become apparent that substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions demanded by scientists would only come to pass with the participation also of significant developing nation states, such as [China](#) and [India](#). Indeed, one of the most pressing critiques of the Kyoto Protocol was that it was a "paper tiger" that failed to address the impact of the actions of emerging economies like [China](#) and [India](#), with its focus on the developed economies.

Now, in 2009, [China](#) -- as the world's biggest greenhouse gas emitter -- was responding this dubious distinction by vocalizing its criticism of the current scenario and foregrounding its new commitments. Ahead of the Copenhagen summit, [China](#) had announced it would reduce the intensity of its carbon emissions per unit of its GDP in 2020 by 40 to 45 percent against 2005 levels. With that new commitment at hand, [China](#) was now accusing the [United States](#) and the European Union of shirking their own responsibilities by setting weak targets for greenhouse gas emissions cuts. Senior Chinese negotiator, Su Wei, characterized the goals of the world's second largest greenhouse gas emitter -- the [United States](#) -- as "not notable," and the European Union's target as "not enough." Su Wei also took issue with [Japan](#) for setting implausible preconditions.

On Dec. 11, 2009, [China](#) demanded that developed and wealthy countries in Copenhagen should help deliver a real agreement on climate change by delivering on their promises to reduce carbon emissions and provide financial support for developing countries to adapt to global warming. In so doing, China's Vice Foreign Minister He Yafei said his country was hoping that a "balanced outcome" would emerge from the discussions at the summit. Echoing the position of the Australian government, He Yafei spoke of a draft agreement as follows: "The final document we're going to adopt needs to be taking into account the needs and aspirations of all countries, particularly the most vulnerable ones."

China's Vice Foreign Minister emphasized the fact that climate change was "a matter of survival" for developing countries, and accordingly, such countries need wealthier and more developed countries to accentuate not only their pledges of emissions reduction targets, but also their financial commitments under the aforementioned United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. To that end, scientists and leaders of small island states in the Indian Ocean, the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, have highlighted the existential threat posed by global warming and the concomitant rise in sea level.

China aside, attention was also on [India](#) -- another major player in the developing world and a country with an industrializing economy that was impacting the environment. At issue was the Indian government's decision to set a carbon intensity target, which would slow emissions growth by up to 25 percent by the 2020 deadline. This strong position was resisted by some elements in

[India](#), who argued that their country should not be taking such a strong position when developed wealthy countries were yet to show accountability for their previous commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The matter grew so heated that the members of the opposition stormed out of the parliament in protest as Indian Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh defended the policy. But the political pressure at home in [India](#) was leaving the Indian delegation in Copenhagen in a state of chaos as well. In fact, India's top environmental negotiator refused to travel to Copenhagen in protest of the government's newly-announced stance.

China and [India](#) were joined by [Brazil](#) and [South Africa](#) in the crafting of a draft document calling for a new global climate treaty to be completed by June 2010. Of concern has been the realization that there was insufficient time to find concurrence on a full legal treaty, which would leave countries only with a politically-binding text by the time the summit at Copenhagen closed. But Guyana's leader, President Bharrat Jagdeo, warned that the summit in [Denmark](#) would be classified as a failure unless a binding document was agreed upon instead of just political consensus. He urged his cohorts to act with purpose saying, "Never before have science, economics, geo-strategic self-interest and politics intersected in such a way on an issue that impacts everyone on the planet."

Likewise, [Tuvalu](#) demanded that legally binding agreements emerge from Copenhagen. Its proposal was supported by many of the vulnerable countries, from small island states and sub-Saharan Africa, all of whom warned of the catastrophic impact of climate change on their citizens. [Tuvalu](#) also called for more aggressive action, such as an amendment to the 1992 agreement, which would focus on sharp greenhouse gas emissions and the accepted rise in temperatures, due to the impact the rise in seas. The delegation from [Kiribati](#) joined the call by drawing attention to the fact that one village had to be abandoned due to waist-high water, and more such effects were likely to follow. Kiribati's Foreign Secretary, Tessie Lambourne, warned that the people of [Kiribati](#) could well be faced with no homeland in the future saying, "Nobody in this room would want to leave their homeland." But despite such impassioned pleas and irrespective of warnings from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that the rise in sea level from melting polar ice caps would deleteriously affect low-lying atolls such as such as [Tuvalu](#) and [Kiribati](#) in the Pacific, and the [Maldives](#) in the Indian Ocean, the oil-giant [Saudi Arabia](#) was able to block this move.

Meanwhile, within the developed countries, yet another power struggle was brewing. The European Union warned it would only agree to raise its target of 20 percent greenhouse gas emissions reductions to 30 percent if the [United States](#) demonstrated that it would do more to reduce its own emissions. It was unknown if such pressure would yield results. [United States](#) President Barack Obama offered a "provisional" 2020 target of 17 percent reductions, noting that he could not offer greater concessions at Copenhagen due to resistance within the [United States](#) Congress, which was already trying to pass a highly controversial "cap and trade" emissions legislation. However, should that emissions trading bill fail in the Senate, the [United States](#)

Environment Protection Agency's declaration that greenhouse gases pose a danger to human health and the environment was expected to facilitate further regulations and limits on power plants and factories at the national level. These moves could potentially strengthen the Obama administration's offering at Copenhagen. As well, President Obama also signaled that he would be willing to consider the inclusion of international forestry credits.

Such moves indicated willingness by the Obama administration to play a more constructive role on the international environmental scene than its predecessor, the Bush administration. Indeed, ahead of his arrival at the Copenhagen summit, President Barack Obama's top environmental advisors promised to work on a substantial climate change agreement. To that end, [United States](#) Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson said at a press conference, "We are seeking robust engagement with all of our partners around the world." But would this pro-engagement assertion yield actual results?

By Dec. 12, 2009, details related to a draft document prepared by Michael Zammit Cutajar, the head of the Ad-hoc Working Group on Long-Term Cooperative Action, were released at the Copenhagen climate conference. Included in the document were calls for countries to make major reductions in carbon emissions over the course of the next decade. According to the Washington Post, industrialized countries were called on to make cuts of between 25 percent and 40 percent below 1990 levels -- reductions that were far more draconian than the [United States](#) was likely to accept. As discussed above, President Obama had offered a provisional reduction target of 17 percent. The wide gap between the released draft and the United States' actual stated position suggested there was much more negotiating in the offing if a binding agreement could be forged, despite the Obama administration's claims that it was seeking greater engagement on this issue.

In other developments, the aforementioned call for financial support of developing countries to deal with the perils of climate change was partly answered by the European Union on Dec. 11, 2009. The European bloc pledged an amount of 2.4 billion euros (US\$3.5 billion) annually from 2010 to 2012. Environment Minister Andreas Carlgren of [Sweden](#) -- the country that holds the rotating presidency of the European Union at the time of the summit -- put his weight behind the notion of a "legally binding deal." Meanwhile, Yvo de Boer, a top United Nations climate change official, focused less on the essence of the agreement and more on tangible action and effects saying, "Copenhagen will only be a success if it delivers significant and immediate action that begins the day the conference ends."

The division between developed and developing countries in Copenhagen reached new heights on Dec. 14, 2009, when some of the poor and less developed countries launched a boycott at the summit. The move, which was spurred by African countries but backed by [China](#) and [India](#), appeared to be geared toward redirecting attention and primary responsibility to the wealthier and more industrialized countries. The impasse was resolved after the wealthier and more industrialized countries offered assurances that they did not intend on shirking from their commitments to reducing greenhouse gases. As a result, the participating countries ceased the

boycott.

Outside the actual summit, thousands of protestors had gathered to demand crucial global warming, leading to clashes between police and demonstrators elsewhere in the Danish capital city. There were reports of scattered violence across Copenhagen and more than 1,000 people were arrested.

Nevertheless, by the second week of the climate change summit, hopes of forging a strong deal were eroding as developed and developing nations remained deadlocked on sharing cuts in greenhouse gases, and particularly on the matters of financing and temperature goals. In a bid to shore up support for a new climate change, [United States](#) President Barack Obama joined other world leaders in Copenhagen. On Dec. 14, 2009, there was a standoff brewing between the [United States](#) and [China](#). At issue was China's refusal to accept international monitoring of its expressed targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The [United States](#) argued that China's opposition to verification could be a deal-breaker.

By the close of the summit, the difficult process eventually resulted in some consensus being cultivated. A draft text called for \$100 billion a year by 2020 to assist poor nations cope with climate change, while aiming to limit global warming to two degrees Celsius compared with pre-industrial levels. The deal also included specific targets for developed countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and called for reductions by developing countries as a share of their economies. Also included in the agreement was a mechanism to verify compliance. The details of the agreement were supported by President Barack Obama, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

This draft would stand as an interim agreement, with a legally-binding international pact unlikely to materialize until 2010. In this way, the summit in Copenhagen failed to achieve its central objective, which was to negotiate a successor to the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gas emissions.

Editor's Note

In the background of these developments was the growing global consciousness related to global warming and climate change. Indeed, as the Copenhagen summit was ongoing, it was clear there was enormous concurrence on the significance of the stakes with an editorial on the matter of climate change being published in 56 newspapers in 45 countries. That editorial warned that without global action, climate change would "ravage our planet." Meanwhile, a global survey taken by Globescan showed that concern over global warming had exponentially increased from 1998 -- when only 20 percent of respondents believed it to be a serious problem -- to 64 percent in 2009. Such survey data, however, was generated ahead of the accusations by climate change skeptics that some climate scientists may have overstated the case for global warming, based on emails derived in an illicit manner from a British University.

Special Entry: Climate change talks in Doha in [Qatar](#) extend life of Kyoto Protocol (2012)

December 2012 saw climate talks ensue in the Qatari city of Doha as representatives from countries across the world gathered to discuss the fate of the Kyoto Protocol, which seeks to minimize greenhouse gas emissions. The summit yielded results with decisions made (1) to extend the Kyoto Protocol until 2020, and (2) for wealthier countries to compensate poorer countries for the losses and damage incurred as a result of climate change.

In regards to the second matter, Malia Talakai of [Nauru](#), a leading negotiator for the Alliance of Small Island States, explained the necessity of the compensation package as follows: “We are trying to say that if you pollute you must help us.”

This measure was being dubbed the "Loss and Damage" mechanism, and was being linked with [United States](#) President Barack Obama's request for \$60 billion from Congress to deal with the devastation caused by Hurricane Sandy months before. The sight of a hurricane bearing down on the northern Atlantic seaboard, along with the reality of the scope of reconstruction, appeared to have illustrated the economic costs of climate change -- not so much as a distant environmental issue -- but as a danger to the quotidian lives of people. Still, there was blame to be placed on the [United States](#) and European countries -- some of world's largest emitters -- for failing to do more to reduce emissions.

To that latter end, there was in fact little progress made on the central issue of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Had those emissions been reduced, there would have been less of a need to financially deal with the devastation caused by climate change. One interpretation was that the global community was accepting the fact that industrialization was contributing to global warming, which had deleterious effects on the polar ice caps and concomitantly on the rise of sea level, with devastating effects for small island nations. Thus, wealthier countries were willing to pay around \$10 billion a year through 2020, effectively in "damages," to the poor countries that could be viewed as the "collateral damage" of industrial progress. But damages today could potentially be destruction tomorrow, leaving in place the existential challenges and burdens to be born by some of the world's smallest and least wealthy island countries.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the representative for the small island nation states at the Doha summit responded with ire, characterizing the lack of progress on reducing emissions as follows: "We see the package before us as deeply deficient in mitigation (carbon cuts) and finance. It's likely to lock us on the trajectory to a 3,4,5C rise in global temperatures, even though we agreed to keep the global average temperature rise of 1.5C to ensure survival of all islands. There is no new finance (for adapting to climate change and getting clean energy) -- only promises that something might materialize in the future. Those who are obstructive need to talk not about how their people will live, but whether our people will live."

Indeed, in most small island countries not just in the Pacific, but also the Caribbean and Indian Ocean, ecological concerns and the climate crisis have been dominant themes with dire life and death consequences looming in the background for their people. Small island nations in these region are already at risk from the rise of sea-level, tropical cyclones, floods. But their very livelihoods of fishing and subsistence farming were also at risk as a result of ecological and environmental changes. Increasingly high storm surges can wipe out entire villages and contaminate water supplies. Accordingly, the very existence of island nations, such as [Kiribati](#) and [Tuvalu](#), are at severe risk of being obliterated from the map. Yet even with the existential threat of being wiped off the map in the offing, the international community has been either slow or restrictive in its efforts to deal with global warming, climate change, economic and ecological damage, as well as the emerging global challenge of environmental refugees.

A 2012 report from the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the Pacific Regional Environment Program underlined the concerns of small island nations and their people as it concluded that the livelihoods of approximately 10 million people in Pacific island communities were increasingly vulnerable to climate change. In fact, low-lying islands in that region would likely confront losses of up to 18 percent of gross domestic product due to climate change, according to the report. The report covers 21 countries and territories, including [Fiji](#), [Kiribati](#), [Samoa](#) and [Tonga](#), and recommended environmental legislation intended to deal with the climate crisis facing the small island countries particularly. As noted by David Sheppard, the director general of the Pacific Regional Environment Program that co-sponsored this study: "The findings... emphasize the need more than ever to raise the bar through collective actions that address the region's environmental needs at all levels."

Regardless of the failures of the summit in [Qatar](#) (discussed above), the meeting did facilitate a process starting in 2015, which would bind both wealthy and poor countries together in the mission of forging a new binding treaty that would replace the Kyoto Protocol and tackle the central causes of climate change.

For more information on the threats faced in small island nations by climate change and the measures being undertaken to lobby for international action, please see the Alliance for Small Island States available online at the URL: <http://aosis.org/>

Special Report

COP 21 summit in Paris ends with historic agreement to tackle climate change; rare international consensus formed on environmental crisis facing the planet (2015) --

In mid-December 2015, the highly-anticipated United Nations climate conference of parties (COP)

in Paris, [France](#), ended with a historic agreement. In fact, it would very likely be understood as the most significant international agreement signed by all the recognized countries of the world since the Cold War. Accordingly, the Paris Agreement was being distinguished as the first multilateral pact that would compel all countries across the world to cut its carbon emissions -- one of the major causes of increasing greenhouse gas emissions, which contribute to global warming, and its deleterious effects ranging from the dangerous rise in sea level to catastrophic climate change.

The accord, which was dubbed to be the "Paris Agreement," was the work of rigorous diplomacy and fervent environmental advocacy, and it aimed to address the climate change crisis facing the planet. As many as 195 countries were represented in the negotiations that led to the landmark climate deal. Indeed, it was only after weeks of passionate debate that international concurrence was reached in addressing the environmental challenges confronting the world, with particular attention to moving beyond fossil fuels and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The success of the COP 21 summit in Paris and the emergence of the landmark Paris Agreement was, to some extent, attributed to the efforts of France's Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius who presided over the negotiations. The French foreign minister's experience and credentials as a seasoned diplomat and respected statesman paid dividends. He skillfully guided the delegates from almost 200 countries and interest groups along the negotiations process, with ostensibly productive results and a reasonably robust deal to show for it.

On Dec. 12, 2015, French Foreign Minister Fabius officially adopted the agreement, declaring: "I now invite the COP to adopt the decision entitled Paris Agreement outlined in the document. Looking out to the room I see that the reaction is positive, I see no objections. The Paris agreement is adopted." Once Foreign Minister Fabius' gavel was struck, symbolically inaugurating the Paris Agreement into force, the COP delegate rushed to their feet with loud and bouyant cheers as well as thunderous applause.

In general, the Paris Agreement was being hailed as a victory for enviromental activists and a triumph for international diplomats, while at the same time being understood as simply an initial -- and imperfect -- move in the direction of a sustainable future. China's chief negotiator, Xie Zhenhua, issued this message, saying that while the accord was not ideal, it should "not prevent us from marching historical steps forward."

United States President Barack Obama lauded the deal as both "ambitious" and "historic," and the work of strenuous multilateral negotiations as he declared, "Together, we've shown what's possible when the world stands as one." The [United States](#) leader acknowledged that the accord was not "perfect," but he reminded the critics that it was "the best chance to save the one planet we have. "

Former [United States](#) Vice President Al Gore, one of the world's most well known environmental

advocates, issued a lengthy statement on the accomplishments enshrined in the Paris Agreement. He highlighted the fact that the Paris Agreement was a first step towards a future with a reduced carbon footprint on Planet Earth as he said, "The components of this agreement -- including a strong review mechanism to enhance existing commitments and a long-term goal to eliminate global-warming pollution this century -- are essential to unlocking the necessary investments in our future. No agreement is perfect, and this one must be strengthened over time, but groups across every sector of society will now begin to reduce dangerous carbon pollution through the framework of this agreement."

The central provisions of the Paris Agreement included the following items:

- Greenhouse gas emissions should peak as quickly as possible, with a move towards balancing energy sources, and ultimately the decrease of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century
- Global temperature increase would be limited to 1.5 degrees Centigrade above pre-industrial levels and would be held "well below" the two degrees Centigrade threshold
- Progress on these goals would be reviewed every five years beginning in 2020 with new greenhouse gas reduction targets issued every five years
- \$100 billion would be expended each year in climate finance for developing countries to move forward with green technologies, with further climate financing to be advanced in the years beyond

It should be noted that there both legally binding and voluntary elements contained within the Paris Agreement. Specifically, the submission of an emissions reduction target and the regular review of that goal would be legally mandatory for all countries. Stated differently, there would be a system in place by which experts would be able to track the carbon-cutting progress of each country. At the same time, the specific targets to be set by countries would be determined at the discretion of the countries, and would not be binding. While there was some criticism over this non-binding element, the fact of the matter was that the imposition of emissions targets was believed to be a major factor in the failure of climate change talks in Copenhagen, [Denmark](#), in 2009.

In 2015, the talks faced challenges as several countries, such as [China](#) and [India](#), objected to conditions that would stymie economic and development. In order to avoid that kind of landmine, a system Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) was developed and formed the basis of the accord. As such, the Paris Agreement would, in fact, facilitate economic growth and development, as well as technological progress, but with the goal of long-term ecological sustainability based on low carbon sources. In fact, the agreement heralded as "the beginning of the end of the fossil fuel era." As noted by Nick Mabey, the head of the climate diplomacy organization E3G, said, "Paris means governments will go further and faster to tackle climate change than ever before. The transition to a low carbon economy is now unstoppable, ensuring the end of the fossil fuel age."

A particular sticking point in the agreement was the \$100 billion earmarked for climate financing for developing countries to transition from traditional fossil fuels to green energy technologies and a low carbon future. In 2014, a report by the International Energy Agency indicated that the cost of that transition would actually be around \$44 trillion by the mid-century -- an amount that would render the \$100 billion being promised to be a drop in the proverbial bucket. However, the general expectation was that the Republican-controlled Senate in the [United States](#), which would have to ratify the deal in that country, was not interested in contributing significant funds for the cause of climate change.

A key strength of the Paris Agreement was the ubiquitous application of measures to all countries. Of note was the frequently utilized concept of "flexibility" with regard to the Paris Agreement. Specifically, the varying capacities of the various countries in meeting their obligations would be anticipated and accorded flexibility. This aspect presented something of a departure from the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which drew a sharp distinction between developed and developing countries, and mandated a different set of obligations for those categories of countries. Thus, under Kyoto, [China](#) and [India](#) were not held to the same standards as the [United States](#) and European countries. In the Paris Agreement, there would be commitments from all countries across the globe.

Another notable strength of the Paris Agreement was the fact that the countries of the world were finally able to reach consensus on the vital necessity to limit global temperature increases to 1.5 degrees Centigrade. Ahead of the global consensus on the deal, and as controversy continued to surface over the targeted global temperature limits, the leaders of island countries were sounding the alarm about the melting of the Polar ice caps and the associated rise in sea level. Prime Minister Enele Sopoaga of [Tuvalu](#) issued this dismal reminder: "Tuvalu's future ... is already bleak and any further temperature increase will spell the total demise of [Tuvalu](#). No leader in this room carries such a level of worry and responsibility. Just imagine you are in my shoes, what would you do?" It was thus something of a victory for environmental advocates that the countries of the world could find consensus on the lower number -- 1.5 degrees rather than 2 degrees.

A significant weak point with regard to the Paris deal was a "loss and damage" provision, which anticipates that even with all the new undertakings intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and move to a low carbon future, there would nonetheless be unavoidable climate change consequences. Those consequences ranged from the loss of arable land for farmers as well as soil erosion and contamination of potable water by sea water, to the decimation of territory in coastal zones and on small islands, due to the rise in sea level, with entire small island countries being rendered entirely uninhabitable. The reality was that peoples' homes across the world would be destroyed along with their way of life.

With that latter catastrophic effect being a clear and present danger for small island countries, the Association of Small Island States (AOSIS) demanded that the developed world acknowledge its

responsibility for this irreversible damage.. Despite the fact that greenhouse gas emissions and the ensuing plague of global warming was, indeed, the consequence of development in the West (the [United States](#) and Europe) and the large power house countries, such as [Russia](#), [China](#) and [India](#), there was no appetite by those countries to sign on to unlimited liability. Under the Paris Agreement, there was a call for research on insurance mechanisms that would address loss and damage issues, with recommendations to come in the future.

The call for research was being regarded as an evasion of sorts and constituted the weakest aspect of the Paris Agreement. Not surprisingly, a coalition of small island nations demanded a "Marshall Plan" for the Pacific. Borrowing the term "Marshall Plan" from the post-World War II reconstruction effort, the coalition of Pacific island nation, which included [Kiribati](#), [Tuvalu](#), [Fiji](#), and the [Marshall Islands](#), called for an initiative that would include investment in renewable energy and shoreline protection, cultural preservation, economic assistance for economies in transition, and a plan for migration and resettlement for these countries as they confront the catastrophic effects of the melting of the Polar ice caps and the concomitant rise in sea level. The precise contours of the initiative remained unknown, unspecified, and a mere exercise in theory at the time of writing. Yet such an initiative would, at some point, have to be addressed, given the realities of climate change and the slow motion calamity unfolding each day for low-lying island nations across the world.

As noted by Vice President Greg Stone of Conservation International, who also functions as an adviser to the government of [Kiribati](#), "Imagine living in a place where you know it's going to go away someday, but you don't know what day that wave's going to come over and wash your home away." He added, "It's a disaster we know is going to happen." Meanwhile, the intervening years promised to be filled with hardship for small island nations, such as [Kiribati](#). Stone explained, "For every inch of sea-level rise, these islands lose 10 feet of their freshwater table to saltwater intrusion," Stone explained. "So it's not just about the day the water finally goes over the island; it's also about the day that there's just not enough water left and everyone has to move off the island." Presaging the future for island nations that could face submersion, Stone said, "If you look ahead 50 years, a country like [Kiribati](#) could become the first aqueous nation. possibility of migration. That is, they own this big patch of ocean, and they administer it from elsewhere."

Foreign Minister Minister Tony Debrum of the [Marshall Islands](#) emerged as the champion advocating on behalf of small island nation states and a loose coalition of concerned countries from the Pacific to the Caribbean, but with support from the [United States](#). He addressed the comprehensive concerns of small island nations regarding the weaknesses of the deal, while simultaneously making clear that the Paris Agreement signified hope for the countries most at risk. In a formal statement, Debrum declared: "We have made history today. Emissions targets are still way off track, but this agreement has the tools to ramp up ambition, and brings a spirit of hope that we can rise to this challenge. I can go back home to my people and say we now have a pathway to

survival.” Debrum highlighted the imperatives of Pacific island nations, saying, “Our High Ambition Coalition was the lightning rod we needed to lift our sights and expectations for a strong agreement here in Paris. We were joined by countries representing more than half the world. We said loud and clear that a bare-bones, minimalist agreement would not fly. We instead demanded an agreement to mark a turning point in history, and the beginning of our journey to the post-carbon era.”

Debrum of the [Marshall Islands](#) espoused the quintessential synopsis of the accord and its effects for those most likely to be affected by climate change as he noted, “Climate change won’t stop overnight, and my country is not out of the firing line just yet, but today we all feel a little safer.”

Editor's Entry on [Environmental Policy](#):

The low-lying Pacific island nations of the world, including [Kiribati](#), [Tuvalu](#), the [Marshall Islands](#), [Fiji](#), among others, are vulnerable to the threats posed by global warming and climate change, derived from carbon emissions, and resulting in the rise in sea level. Other island nations in the Caribbean, as well as poor countries with coastal zones, were also at particular risk of suffering the deleterious effects of climate change.

Political policy in these countries are often connected to ecological issues, which have over time morphed into an existential crisis of sorts. Indeed, ecological concerns and the climate crisis have also been dominant themes with life and death consequences for the people of island nations in the Pacific. Indeed, the very livelihoods of fishing and subsistence farming remain at risk as a result of ecological and environmental changes. Yet even so, these countries are threatened by increasingly high storm surges, which could wipe out entire villages and contaminate water supplies. Moreover, because these are low lying island nations, the sustained rise in sea level can potentially lead to the terrain of these countries being uninhabitable at best, and submerged at worst. Stated in plain terms, these countries are at severe risk of being obliterated from the map and their plight illuminates the emerging global challenge of environmental refugees. In these manifold senses, climate change is the existential crisis of the contemporary era.

Since the time of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, there have been efforts aimed at extending the life of that agreement, with an eye on minimizing greenhouse gas emissions, and thus minimizing the effects of climate change. Those endeavors have largely ended in failure, as exemplified by the unsuccessful Copenhagen talks in 2009 and the fruitless Doha talks in 2012 respectively. The success of the COP 21 talks in [France](#), with the adoption of the landmark Paris Agreement in 2015, was regarded as the first glimmer of hope. Not only did the Paris Agreement signify the triumph of international diplomacy and global consensus, but it also marked the start of the end of the fossil fuel era, with the path forward toward a low carbon future reliant on greener technologies. Most crucially, the Paris Agreement stood as the first significant response in recent times to the central challenge of climate change and its quotidian effects on the lives of real human

beings across the world.

1. Major International Environmental Accords:

General Environmental Concerns

Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, Espoo, 1991.

Accords Regarding Atmosphere

Annex 16, vol. II (Environmental Protection: Aircraft Engine Emissions) to the 1044 Chicago Convention on International Civil Aviation, Montreal, 1981

Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution (LRTAP), Geneva, 1979

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), New York, 1992

Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, Vienna, 1985 including the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Depleted the Ozone Layer, Montreal, 1987

Accords Regarding Hazardous Substances

Convention on the Ban of the Import into Africa and the Control of Transboundary Movements and Management of Hazardous Wastes within Africa, Bamako, 1991

Convention on Civil Liability for Damage Caused during Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road, Rail and Inland Navigation Vessels (CRTD), Geneva, 1989

Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal (Basel Convention), Basel, 1989

Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents, Helsinki, 1992

Convention to Ban the Importation into Forum Island Countries of Hazardous and Radioactive Wastes and to Control the Transboundary Movement and Management of Hazardous Wastes within the South Pacific Region (Waigani Convention), Waigani, 1995

European Agreement Concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road (ADR), Geneva 1957

FAO International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides, Rome, 1985

2. Major International Marine Accords:

Global Conventions

Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter (London Convention 1972), London, 1972

International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, 1973, as modified by Protocol of 1978 relation thereto (MARPOL 73/78), London, 1973 and 1978

International Convention on Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage 1969 (1969 CLC), Brussels, 1969, 1976, and 1984

International Convention on the Establishment of an International Fund for Compensation for Oil Pollution Damage 1971 (1971 Fund Convention), Brussels, 1971

Convention on Liability and Compensation for Damage in Connection with the Carriage of Hazardous and Noxious Substances by Sea (HNS), London 1996

International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response, and Co-operation (OPRC), London, 1990

International Convention Relation to Intervention on the High Seas in Cases of Oil Pollution Casualties (Intervention Convention), Brussels, 1969

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Montego Bay, 1982

Regional Conventions

Convention for the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping from Ships and Aircraft (Oslo Convention), Oslo, 1972

Convention for the Prevention of Marine Pollution from Land-based Sources (Paris Convention), Paris, 1974

Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North East Atlantic (OSPAR Convention), Paris, 1992

Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area (1974 Helsinki Convention), Helsinki 1974

Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area (1992 Helsinki Convention), Helsinki 1992

Conventions within the UNEP Regional Seas Programme

Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution, Bucharest, 1992

Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region, Cartagena de Indias, 1983

Convention for the Protection, Management, and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Eastern African Region, Nairobi, 1985

Kuwait Regional Convention for Co-operation on the Protection of the Marine Environment from Pollution, [Kuwait](#), 1978

Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment and Coastal Region of the Mediterranean Sea (Barcelona Convention), Barcelona, 1976

Regional Convention for the Conservation of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden Environment, Jeddah, 1982

Convention for the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific Region, Noumea, 1986

Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and Coastal Area of the South-East Pacific, Lima, 1981

Convention for Co-operation in the Protection and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the West and Central African Region, Abidjan, 1981

3. Major Conventions Regarding Living Resources:

Marine Living Resources

Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), Canberra, 1980

International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), Rio de Janeiro, 1966

International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW), Washington, 1946

Nature Conservation and Terrestrial Living Resources

Antarctic Treaty, Washington, D.C., 1959

Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention), Paris, 1972

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Nairobi, 1992

Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), Bonn, 1979

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Washington, D.C., 1973

Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention), Ramsar, 1971

Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD), Paris 1994

FAO International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources, Rome, 1983

International Tropical Timber Agreement, 1994 (ITTA, 1994), Geneva, 1994

Freshwater Resources

Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, Helsinki, 1992

4. Major Conventions Regarding Nuclear Safety:

Convention on Assistance in the Case of a Nuclear Accident or Radiological Emergency (Assistance Convention), Vienna, 1986

Convention on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident (Notification Convention), Vienna, 1986

Convention on Nuclear Safety, Vienna, 1994

Vienna Convention on Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage, Vienna, 1963

5. Major Intergovernmental Organizations

Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)

European Union (EU): Environment

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

Global Environment Facility (GEF)

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES)

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

International Labour Organization (ILO)

International Maritime Organization (IMO)

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

International Oil Pollution Compensation Funds (IOPC Funds)

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Environment Policy Committee (EPOC)

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

World Bank

World Food Programme (WFP)

World Health Organization (WHO)

World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

World Trade Organization (WTO)

6. Major Non-Governmental Organizations

Atmosphere Action Network East Asia (AANE)

Climate Action Network (CAN)

Consumers International (CI)

Earth Council

Earthwatch Institute

Environmental Liaison Centre International (ELCI)

European Environmental Bureau (EEB)

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)

Friends of the Earth International (FoEI)

Greenpeace International

International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)

International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU)

International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)

International Solar Energy Society (ISES)

IUCN-The World Conservation Union

Pesticide Action Network (PAN)

Sierra Club

Society for International Development (SID)

Third World Network (TWN)

Water Environment Federation (WEF)

Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)

World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)

World Federalist Movement (WFM)

World Resources Institute (WRI)

World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF)

7. Other Networking Instruments

Arab Network for Environment and Development (RAED)

Global Legislators for a Balanced Environment (GLOBE)

Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC)

United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN-NGLS)

Appendices

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Methodology Note for Demographic Data:

The demographic numbers for cities and national populations listed in CountryWatch content are derived from the Geoba.se website, which analyzes data from the World Bank. The current demographic numbers displayed on the Countrywatch website are reflective of the latest available estimates.

The demographic information for language, ethnicity and religion listed in CountryWatch content is

derived from a mix of sources including the Altapedia, Central Intelligence Agency Factbook, Infoplease, and State Department Background Notes.

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-- See also list of News Wires services below, which are also used for research purposes. --

Note on Edition Dates:

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United States Department of State, Country Commercial Guides. Washington, D.C. [United States](#) of America. URL:http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/business/com_guides/index.html

The World Bank, Global Development Finance, Country Tables. 1999 to present. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.

The World Bank Group, World Development Indicators. 1999 to present. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.

Yearbook of Tourism Statistics, World Tourism Organization. 1998 to present. Madrid: The World Tourism Organization.

Note on Edition Dates:

The earlier edition dates are noted above because they were used to formulate the original country reviews and serve as the baseline for some of the information covered. Later editions have been used in some cases, and are cited as such, while other more recent online resources (cited above) contain recent and ever-updated data sets used for research.

Methodology Notes for Economic Data:

Estimates by CountryWatch.com of GDP in dollars in most countries are made by converting local currency GDP data from the International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook to US dollars by market exchange rates estimated from the International Monetary Fund International Financial Statistics and projected out by the CountryWatch Macroeconomic Forecast. Real GDP was estimated by deflating current dollar values by the US GDP Implicit Price Deflator.

Exceptions to this method were used for:

- Bosnia-Herzegovina
- Nauru
- Cuba
- Palau
- Holy See
- San Marino
- Korea, North
- [Serbia](#) & Montenegro
- Liberia
- Somalia
- Liechtenstein
- Tonga
- Monaco
- Tuvalu

In these cases, other data and/or estimates by CountryWatch.com were utilized.

Investment Overview

C o r r u p t i o n a n d T r a n s p a r e n c y I n d e x . U R L :
<http://www.transparency.org/documents/cpi/2001/cpi2001.html#cpi>
<<http://www.transparency.org/documents/>

Deloitte Tax Guides. URL: <http://www.deloittetaxguides.com>

Trade Policy Reviews by the World Trade Organization . URL: http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/tpr_e/tp_rep_e.htm#bycountry

United States Department of Energy, Country Analysis Briefs. URL: <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/contents.html>

United States Department of State, Background Notes. URL: http://www.state.gov/www/background_notes/index.html

United States Department of State, Country Commercial Guides. 1996-2006. Washington, D.C. U n i t e d S t a t e s o f A m e r i c a . U R L : http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/business/com_guides/index.html

World Bank: Doing Business. URL: <http://www.doingbusiness.org>

World Bank: Governance Indicators. URL: <http://info.worldbank.org/governance>

Social Overview

Borden, G.A., Conaway, W.A., Morrison, T. 1994. *Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands: How to do Business in Sixty Countries*. Holbrook, Massachusetts, 1994.

Center for Disease Control. URL: <http://www.cdc.gov>

Eldis Country Profiles. URL: <http://www.eldis.org/country/index.htm>

Ethnologue. URL: <http://www.ethnologue.com/>

Government of Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. URL: <http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo>

Government of Canada Foreign Affairs and International Trade. URL: http://www.voyage.gc.ca/consular_home-e.htm

Library of Congress Country Studies. URL: <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html>

Lonely Planet. URL: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/worldguide/>

Steve Kropla's Online Help For World Travelers. URL: <http://www.kropla.com/>

[United Kingdom](http://www.fco.gov.uk/) Ministry of Foreign and Commonwealth Office. URL: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/>

United Nations Human Development Report. URL: <http://www.undp.org/hdro>

UNICEF Statistical Database Online. URL: <http://www.unicef.org/statis/atoz.html>

[United States](http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html) Central Intelligence Agency, World Factbook. 2001. Washington, D.C.: Printing and Photography Group. URL: <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>

United States Department of State, Background Notes. URL: http://www.state.gov/www/background_notes/index.html

United States Department of State, Commercial and Business Affairs: Travel Tips. URL: http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/business/cba_travel.html

United States Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs. URL: <http://travel.state.gov/>

World Health Organization. URL: <http://www.who.int/home-page/>

World News Connection, National Technical Information Service. Springfield, Virginia, USA.

Internet News Service, Xinhua News Agency (U.S.) Inc. Woodside, New York. URL: <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/>

Note on Edition Dates:

The earlier edition dates are noted above because they were used to formulate the original country reviews and serve as the baseline for some of the information covered. Later editions have been used in some cases, and are cited as such, while other more recent online resources (cited above) contain recent and ever-updated data sets used for research.

Methodology Notes for the HDI:

Since 1990, the United Nations Development Programme, in concert with organizations across the globe, has produced the [Human Development Index](#) (or HDI). According to the UNDP, the index measures average achievement in basic human development in one simple composite index, and produces from this index a ranking of countries. The HDI is a composite of three basic components of human development: longevity, knowledge and standard of living. Longevity is measured by life expectancy. Knowledge is measured by combination of adult literacy and mean

years of schooling. Standard of living is measured by purchasing power, based on real GDP per capita (in constant US\$) adjusted for differences in international living costs (or, purchasing power parity, PPP). While the index uses these social indicators to measure national performance with regard to human welfare and development, not all countries provide the same level of information for each component needed to compute the index; therefore, as in any composite indicator, the final index is predicated on projections, predictions and weighting schemes. The index is a static measure, and thus, an incomplete measure of human welfare. In fact, the UNDP says itself the concept of human development focuses on the ends rather than the means of development and progress, examining in this manner, the average condition of all people in a given country.

Specifically, the index is calculated by determining the maximum and minimum for each of the three components (as listed above) and then measuring where each country stands in relation to these scales-expressed as a value between 0 and 1. For example, the minimum adult literary rate is zero percent, the maximum is 100 percent, and the reading skills component of knowledge in the HDI for a country where the literacy rate is 75 percent would be 0.75. The scores of all indicators are then averaged into the overall index.

For a more extensive examination of human development, as well as the ranking tables for each participating country, please visit: <http://www.undp.org>

Note on [History](#) sections

In some CountryWatch Country Reviews, open source content from the State Department Background Notes and Country Guides have been used.

Environmental Overview

Environmental Profiles: A Global Guide to Projects and People. 1993. Linda Sobel Katz, Sarah Orrick, and Robert Honig. New York: Garland Publishing.

The Environment Encyclopedia and Directory, 2nd Edition. 1998. London: Europa.

Environmental Protection Agency Global Warming Site. URL: <http://www.epa.gov/globalwarming>

Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nations: Forestry. URL: <http://www.fao.org/forestry/site/sofo/en/>

Global Warming Information Page. URL: <http://globalwarming.org>

Introduction to Global [Environmental Issues](#), 2nd Edition. 1997. Kevin Pickering and Lewis Owen.

London: Routledge.

Trends: Compendium of Data on Global Change. URL: http://cdiac.esd.ornl.gov/trends/emis/em_cont.htm

United Nations Environmental Program. URL: http://www.unep.org/GEO/GEO_Products/Assessment_Reports/

United Nations Global Environmental Outlook. URL: <http://www.unep.org/geo/geo4/media/>

United States Department of Energy, Country Analysis Briefs. URL: <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/contents.html>

World Climate Data Online. URL: <http://www.worldclimate.com>

World Directory of Country Environmental Studies. 1996. The World Resource Institute.

World Factbook. US Central Intelligence Agency. Washington, D.C.: Printing and Photography Group.

1998-1999 World Resources Guide to the Global Environment by the World Resources Institute. May, 1998.

1998/1999 Yearbook of International Cooperation on Environment and Development. 1998. London: Earthscan Publications.

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Other Sources:

General information has also been used in the compilation of this review, with the courtesy of governmental agencies from this country.

News Services:

CANA Daily Bulletin. Caribbean Media Agency Ltd., St. Michael, [Barbados](#).

Central and Eastern Africa Report, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Integrated Regional Information Network for Central and Eastern Africa.

Daily News, Panafrican News Agency. Dakar, [Senegal](#).

PACNEWS, Pacific Islands Broadcasting Association. Suva, [Fiji](#).

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Washington D.C. USA.

Reuters News. Thomson Reuters. New York, New York. USA.

Southern Africa Report, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Integrated Regional Information Network for Southern Africa.

Voice of America, English Service. Washington D.C.

West Africa Report, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Integrated Regional Information Network for West Africa. 1998-1999

Note: Some or all these news services have been used to research various sections of this Country Review.

USING COUNTRYWATCH.COM AS AN ELECTRONIC SOURCE:

MLA STYLE OF CITATION

Commentary

For items in a "Works Cited" list, CountryWatch.com suggests that users follow recommended patterns for indentation given in the *MLA Handbook*, 4th edition.

Individual Works

Basic form, using an Internet protocol:

Author/editor. *Title of Print Version of Work*. Edition statement (if given). Publication information (Place of publication: publisher, date), if given. *Title of Electronic Work*. Medium. Available Protocol (if applicable):Site/Path/File. Access date.

Examples:

Youngblood-Coleman, Denise. *Country Review: France*. 2003. Houston, Texas: CountryWatch Publications, 2003. *Country Review:France*. Online. Available URL : http://www.countrywatch.com/cw_country.asp?vCOUNTRY=61 October, 12, 2003.

Note:

This is the citation format used when the print version is not used in the reference.

Parts of Works

Basic form, using an Internet protocol:

Author/editor. "Part title." *Title of Print Version of Work*. Edition statement (if given). Publication information (Place of publication: publisher, date), if given. *Title of Electronic Work*. Medium. AvailableProtocol (if applicable): Site/Path/File. Access date.

Examples:

Youngblood-Coleman, Denise. "People." *CountryWatch.com: France*. 2003. Houston, Texas: CountryWatch Publications, 2003. *CountryWatch.com: France*. Online. Available URL : http://www.countrywatch.com/cw_topic.asp?vCOUNTRY=61&SECTION=SOCIAL&TOPIC=CLPEO&TYPE=TEXT. October 12, 2003.

Note:

This is the citation format used when the print version is not used in the reference.

For further source citation information, please email: editor@countrywatch.com or education@countrywatch.com.