Myanmar

Myanmar is a complex mixture of some 100 ethnic groups, most of which distrust most of the others. This has never made for a particularly harmonious body-politic. Following independence in 1948, inter-ethnic insurrections lasted for almost two decades, much of it funded by narcotic trafficking, which still remains an important part of Myanmar’s unofficial economy. The dictatorship of General Ne Win that emerged in 1962 attempted to impose a ‘Burmeses way to socialism’ (Burma was the country’s former name) which eventually fell victim to a military coup in the late 1980s.

This deeply troubled, inward-looking, military-dominated country got no closer to becoming a democratic and open society in 2003. The junta continued to arrest people it accused of trying to seize power. In March 2003, a bomb exploded in Yangon killing one person. Rebel groups were regarded as too weak and too far from Yangon to have caused the explosion. This implied that elements of the military might have been involved in the attack, which coincided with Armed Forces Day. Bomb attacks continued with the worst incidents in May 2003 when around 10 people were killed in a number of explosions. In July 2003, the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) claimed it had uncovered a bomb plot to assassinate senior members of the regime. Twelve people were arrested and the junta tried to associate them with the NLD, which distrust most of the others.

Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD

Myanmar’s first free elections in 1990 had resulted in a landslide victory for the NLD headed by Aung San Suu Kyi, who promptly found herself denied power and condemned by the military government to years of house arrest, becoming the world’s best-known political prisoner since Nelson Mandela. A legal challenge to her detention in mid-2004 failed, because – it was claimed – the judiciary were too frightened to sign Aung San Suu Kyi’s release papers. The decision not to release her provoked an angry outburst from United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan, who said that the military government’s proposals, its so-called ‘road-map’ to civilian rule was ‘incomplete and lacking in credibility’ without the participation of opposition parties, notably the NLD.

In May 2002, Suu Kyi had actually been released and a government spokesman had announced that no restrictions would be placed upon her. A government publication said, ‘today is a new page for the SPDC to the negotiating table. She said she would maintain her campaign for democracy. She cautioned the international community not to relax the sanctions that had helped bring the SPDC to the negotiating table. She said she would maintain her campaign for a tourist boycott of Myanmar. Few analysts believed the SPDC was ready to embrace democracy. They were right. Suu Kyi’s re-arrest in May 2003 was a setback for the international community, which had been hoping that its interaction with the junta was achieving positive results. Her detention appeared to be the result of her criticism of the junta for failing to engage in serious talks with the opposition, although the military had claimed that it was open to dialogue. Suu Kyi complained that she and the NLD had never been directly approached by the junta for negotiations and that offers, which were made through the foreign media, were merely a publicity stunt. However, many analysts and diplomats suggested that some members of the junta genuinely wanted dialogue, but had been blocked by SPDC chairman Senior General Than Shwe. The claims, along with an upsurge in pro-democracy protests, including
violent clashes between the police and demonstrators, which reportedly left dozens dead, shook the junta and Suu Kyi was accused of plotting an armed uprising.

**Asean embarrassment**

In 2004, the behaviour of the SPDC Junta had become a source of embarrassment to its fellow Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean) members. The failure to release Suu Kyi had jeopardised Asean’s annual summit with the European Union (EU) in October 2004. The EU had planned to follow the example of the US in imposing economic sanctions on Myanmar. The ruling junta likened the sanctions to weapons of mass destruction, claiming that the country’s isolation would obstruct international dialogue with Myanmar and damage the economy.

**The economy**

Myanmar’s economy is centralised and based mainly on agriculture and forestry, with an important black market sector. In addition to largely loss-making state-owned enterprises, there is a thriving co-operative sector. The private sector, which includes traders, farmers, small-scale industries and transport enterprises, is growing. The target is to transform the economic structure into an agro-based industrial economy.

Economic policy is guided by the five-year economic plan, which runs from 2001–06. There are severe structural constraints, including shortages of power and foreign exchange and a chronic budget deficit. Tourism has slumped due to international sanctions and boycotts called by Myanmar’s opposition. Foreign debt is equal to around three-quarters of GDP, a large part of which is in arrears. Tax evasion is widespread and the government is limited in raising tax revenue by the size of the grey economy. Defence expenditure is high, yet education and health expenditures have been cut to curb public sector deficits. The financial crisis at the beginning of 2003 had depressed domestic demand and the garments and textile sectors were hit by sanctions introduced by the US in July 2003 in response to the detention of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Myanmar’s gross domestic product (GDP) reportedly grew by 10 per cent in the financial year to March 2003, driven by strong performances in the mining, energy, construction and manufacturing sectors. However, as existing (US) and threatened (EU) sanctions risked constraining exports, the prospects for 2003/04 looked less optimistic. According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Myanmar’s official economic data needs to be treated with some scepticism; although economic growth has been reported at 10 per cent for three years, this is not borne out by supporting data relating to the consumption of crude oil, natural gas and fertilisers. Electricity generation—normally a key indicator—appeared to have declined since 2002, along with agricultural production.

The fiscal deficit for 2002/03 was 4.1 per cent of GDP, well above the targeted 2.5 per cent figure. Of the overall deficit, 60 per cent was attributed to the losses of
state-owned enterprises, many of which were so high that, especially taking sanctions into account, privatisation was no longer an option. Inflation in 2003 was put at 40 per cent, by far the highest among Asean members but lower than the 47 per cent recorded at the end of 2002.

International nervousness over trading with Myanmar appeared to be taking effect in 2003. A trade surplus of US$94.3 million in 2002/03 had become a deficit of US$38 million in the first six months of the 2003/4 financial year. Nonetheless, foreign direct investment (FDI) in 2003 was US$95.3 million, up from US$49.2 million in 2002, the largest investments coming from the UK into the transport sector and from Thailand into oil and gas. However, in comparison, it should be noted that FDI in 1996/97 had totalled US$2.8 billion.

A US$260 million, five-year fisheries deal with Thailand was completed in 2004 and a natural gas discovery was made by a joint Korean-Indian-Myanmar venture off Rakhine state. In May 2004, the government said it would reconvene the country’s National Convention, in order to reopen negotiations on a constitution; this should result in a referendum on a new constitution and fresh elections. Although the long-term prospects for sustained growth are good, the banking system needs to be strengthened and more investment is needed in basic infrastructure, education, health and reduction of poverty. No multilateral or bilateral aid agency will openly help to ease Myanmar’s financial problems until there is some evidence of progress on democracy, human rights and narcotic eradication. Myanmar is still a large producer of the opium poppy and will therefore continue to face US sanctions. Myanmar has vowed to eradicate opium production by 2014, a date regarded as too late by many in the international community.

**Outlook**

Myanmar’s international position, both economically and politically, became very weak and very much more isolated in 2004. Economic sanctions and UN disapproval combined with the unease of other Asean members to leave a lonely Myanmar with China as its only supporter.

**Risk assessment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economy</th>
<th>Fair – risking decline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional stability</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Country Profile**

**Historical profile**

Burma (Myanmar) was annexed to British India in the nineteenth century. 1937 Burma became a separate British dependency, with limited self government. 1942 Japan invaded and occupied the country. 1945 Burmese nationalists helped Allied forces to re-occupy the country. 1948 The Union of Burma became independent outside the Commonwealth, with U Nu as the first prime minister. 1962 U Nu was overthrown in a coup led by Ne Win. The Revolutionary Council suspended the constitution and instituted authoritarian control through the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). 1964 Political parties were outlawed. 1973 A new constitution was approved. BSPP became the only authorised political party and the country’s name was changed to the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma. 1974 The revolutionary council was dissolved and Ne Win was elected president by the state council. 1978 An election gave Ne Win the mandate for four more years in power. 1988 A military government, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), took power in September, ending months of unrest. It took over the function of the former ruling party, the BSPP, and the parliament, or Pyithu Hluttaw. 1989 The change of name from Burma to Myanmar was claimed to be for the benefit of the minority, non-Burmese sections of the population. 1990 The government fulfilled its promise to hold multi-party elections, but said a new constitution must be brought into effect before power could be transferred to the victorious National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung Sang Suu Kyi. 1996 The law and order situation deteriorated and open conflict erupted. SLORC closed the universities and detained protesters. 1997 Bomb attacks were aimed at leading SLORC figures. Several thousand Karen National Union (KNU) ethnic minority refugees were forced across the Thai border leading to international protests when refugees were killed by SLORC forces. The US imposed economic sanctions, banning investments by US companies. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) admitted Myanmar as a full member of the Association. A governing military junta, formed by the top four SLORC leaders, was named the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). 1998 The SPDC detained some 110 leading members of the NLD. 1999 Madame Aung Sang Suu Kyi was physically isolated from her supporters by the authorities, who, early in the year, refused her dying husband a visa to come and visit her for the last time. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) banned Myanmar from its activities until it ceases using forced labour. 2001 The military junta approached Aung San Suu Kyi to arrange talks – the first contact in five years. President Jiang Zemin of China visited Myanmar – the first Chinese head of state to visit the country since the military junta seized power in 1988. 2002 Aung San Suu Kyi (NLD) was released from house arrest. 2003 In April, the military junta introduced a new rice trading policy, totally

**Key Indicators**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>47.11</td>
<td>47.75</td>
<td>48.30</td>
<td>48.97</td>
<td>50.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross domestic product (GDP)</td>
<td>US$bn</td>
<td>6.40</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>4.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita</td>
<td>US$</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP real growth</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>46.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer prices</td>
<td>1995=100</td>
<td>270.2</td>
<td>327.2</td>
<td>514.0</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exports (fob) (goods)</td>
<td>US$m</td>
<td>1,125.2</td>
<td>1,618.8</td>
<td>2,544.0</td>
<td>2,900.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imports (fob) (goods)</td>
<td>US$m</td>
<td>2,115.9</td>
<td>2,134.9</td>
<td>2,736.0</td>
<td>2,200.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance of trade</td>
<td>US$m</td>
<td>-990.7</td>
<td>-516.1</td>
<td>-192.0</td>
<td>700.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total reserves minus gold</td>
<td>US$m</td>
<td>265.5</td>
<td>223.0</td>
<td>400.5</td>
<td>470.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign exchange</td>
<td>US$m</td>
<td>265.3</td>
<td>222.8</td>
<td>399.9</td>
<td>469.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange rate per US$</td>
<td>6.29</td>
<td>6.52</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>6.57</td>
<td>6.35</td>
</tr>
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removing the government’s control of rice, which it had held for the previous 40 years. In June, Japan suspended aid to Myanmar in protest at the detention of Aung San Suu Kyi, who was re-arrested in May. On 25 August, General Khin Nyunt was appointed prime minister.

2004 In January, the government and the Karen National Union, the most significant ethnic group fighting the government, agreed to end hostilities. In May, the constitutional convention began, despite a boycott by the NLD, whose leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, remains under house arrest. On 19 October, General Khin Nyunt was replaced as prime minister by Lt General Soe Win.

Political structure

Constitution

From November 1997, the principal organs of power are the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), headed by a chairman, and the 40-strong military-dominated cabinet. Politically, Myanmar is spread over seven divisions where the ethnic Burmans are in the majority, and seven states where the non-Burmans, the ethnic minority groups, are in the majority.

On 17 May 2004, the government said it would reconvene the country’s National Convention, in order to reopen negotiations on a constitution; this should result in a referendum on a new constitution and fresh elections. The National Convention was established in 1993, but it was adjourned in March 1996 following the withdrawal of the National League for Democracy (NLD), protesting against the undemocratic proceedings.

Last elections

27 May 1990 (parliamentary)

Results: Parliamentary: a Pyithu Hluttaw (People’s Assembly) with 489 members elected on 27 May 1990 was not allowed to constitute itself.

Political parties

Ruling party

State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) (19-member military junta since Nov 1997)

Main opposition party

National League for Democracy (NLD)

Population

52.81 million (2004)

Ethnic make-up

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

Religions

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

Education

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

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

Literacy rate: 85.3 per cent total; 81.6 per cent female, adult rates (World Bank).

Compulsory years: Five to 10.

Enrolment rate: 121 per cent gross primary enrolment of the relevant age group (including repetition rates); 30 per cent gross secondary enrolment (World Bank).

Pupils per teacher: 46 in primary schools.

Health

Government spending on health and education combined is less than 1 per cent of GDP – among the lowest in the world. Annual total expenditure on health is about 2 per cent of GDP, of which government spending is approximately 18 per cent. Access to clean drinking water is available to over 68 per cent of the population. Malaria and TB are widespread. HIV/AIDS

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

The military government appears to have awakened to the problem of HIV/AIDS in Myanmar. While the junta refused to see the need for education and treatment international donors were helpless, however a new government and UN endorsed initiative there is now a three-year HIV prevention programme using international donations totalling US$48 million. Aid workers have to scale up their programmes to cover this large country that has a poor infrastructure and diverse ethnic and linguistic groups.

Life expectancy: 57.2 years (World Bank).

Fertility rate/ Maternal mortality rate:

2.8 births per woman; maternal mortality 230 per 100,000 live births (World Bank).

Birth rate/Death rate:

10 deaths to 26 births per 1,000 people (World Bank 2001).

Infant mortality rate:

77 per 1,000 live births (World Bank).

Head of population per physician/bed: 0.3 physicians and 0.6 hospital beds available per 1,000 people.

Welfare

The department of social welfare (DSW) under the ministry of social welfare, relief and resettlement implements social welfare services in eight different areas of social needs by both direct and indirect means covering the aged, children, youths and women welfare services. There is provision for the rehabilitation of ex-drug addicts and the disabled. It provides grants-in-aid to voluntary organisations. In Myanmar, all government servants retire at the age of 60, and are entitled to gratuity and pension.

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

Main cities

Yangon (formerly Rangoon) (capital, estimated population 4.5 million in 2004), Mandalay (1.2 million), Mawla Myaung (formerly Moulmein, 395,900), Palaine (formerly Bassein, 212,600), Bago (198,000), Monywa (161,000), Sithwe (formerly Akyab, 159,200), Meiktila (157,900), Taung-yu (149,600).

Languages spoken

English is used in business circles.

Official language/s

Myanmar

Media

Press

Dailies: In Yangon, The New Light of Myanmar, the multi-language official daily newspaper of the military junta was previously called The Working People’s Daily. Other newspapers in Myanmar include Burma Daily, Loktha Pyithu Nesin, Kyemon (The Mirror), Myotaw (evening tabloid) and Yadanaoban (Mandalay).
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Energy
The country is doing its best to develop its considerable hydroelectric generating potential, but is severely limited by the cost factor. In Rangoon, power shortages are increasing and in many parts of the country severe shortages are the norm.

Financial markets
Stock exchange
The Myanmar Securities Exchange Centre opened in 1996.

Banking and insurance
Since 1995, the government has allowed foreign banks to operate in Myanmar which have opened representative offices, to set up joint ventures with private local banks. Myanmar is on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Financial Action Task Force (FATF) list of non-co-operative countries on money laundering. In early 2003, there was trouble in the financial sector with the collapse of some private finance companies, which had taken deposits from the public. The problem spread to some private banks and large amounts of cash were withdrawn by depositors. A stronger regulatory framework for the banking system and a strategy to identify and resolve the problem banks are necessary to restore confidence in the sector.

Central bank
Central Bank of Myanmar

Time
GMT plus six and a half hours

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

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

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

Entry requirements
Passports
Required by all. Must be valid for six months.

Visa
Required by all. Tourist and business visas, applied for well in advance of arrival, are valid for 28 days; business visas may be extended for a further 28 days. An application form can be downloaded from www.myanmartourist.com. When completed, it can be submitted to the consulate section of the nearest Myanmar Embassy. For a business visa a letter of introduction should also be included, with a full itinerary.

Currency advice/regulations
There is no limit on the amount of foreign currency which may be imported, but any amount over US$2,000 must be declared on entry, including American Express cards. Myanmar currency may not be exported or imported. Exchange controls are strictly enforced, and it is best to retain all foreign exchange receipts. The Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank handles all foreign exchange transactions.

Customs
Personal effects are allowed duty-free, but customs regulations are restrictive and it is best to travel light. All jewellery must be declared on entry.

Health (for visitors)
Mandatory precautions
Yellow fever certificate if arriving from infected area.

Advisable precautions
It is advisable to be ‘in date’ for polio (within 10 years), tetanus (within 10 years), hepatitis A and B, rabies (within one to three years, depending on exposure to risk), Japanese B encephalitis (within three years if travelling June to September), tuberculosis (children should be immunised at any age; less important for adults; skin test available if in doubt about immune status), diphtheria (within 10 years). Dengue fever occurs intermittently, especially in the northern Mandalay division. The most recent outbreak was in 2002.

Small enterprises predominate. Manufacturing industries include food processing (sugar, tobacco, palm oil, rice), cement, textiles, beverages, cigarettes, aluminium products, paper and nails, steel, cotton yarn, soap, pharmaceuticals and fertilisers. Textile and jute production is being expanded. There are 20 industrial zones. Foreign direct investment (FDI) is weak.

Tourism
Some liberalisation of the tourist industry has occurred. Tourists may now stay in licensed private hotels and travel on specially licensed buses from which they were previously prohibited.

Tourism revenue, which stands at more than US$300 million a year, is the country’s second largest legal source of foreign exchange. Most tourists come from Taiwan, Japan, Thailand and France. Tourist arrivals increased by 6.21 per cent in 2003, compared to 2002.

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

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

Hydrocarbons
Myanmar had proven reserves of oil estimated at 50 million barrels in 2003 and produces four million barrels of oil every year. However as oil production does not meet demand Myanmar relies on oil imports. Proven reserves of gas totalled 353 billion cubic metres in 2003 and production is estimated at eight billion cubic metres of gas every year. Around five billion cubic metres of gas is exported annually, earning the country around US$500 million. In early 2003, the Gas Authority of India (GAIL) reported that Myanmar’s Block A-1 had 625 billion cubic metres of recoverable natural gas reserves which could sustain production of around 60 million cubic metres per day for 20 years. The A-1 Block is being explored by a joint venture, which includes GAIL (which has a 10 per cent interest), Korea Gas (10 per cent) India’s ONGC Videsh (20 per cent) and South Korea’s Daewoo (60 per cent), which acts as the operator of the project. GAIL announced in January 2003 that it was conducting a feasibility study into a 600km pipeline from A-1 traversing Bangladesh to India. The A-1 Block would satisfy growth in India’s energy demand. The Yadana gas field in the Gulf of Martaban is estimated to have reserves of 189 billion cubic metres. In 2002, France’s TotalFinaElf, US’s Unocal and the Petroleum Authority of Thailand (PTT) were constructing two gas pipelines to link Myanmar’s gas fields to Thailand. There has been some controversy over the project since it is rumoured that forced labour is being used to construct the pipelines. Human rights groups were trying to encourage the firms to abandon the project. In early 2004, a natural gas discovery was made by a joint Korean-Indian-Burma venture off Rakhine state. Myanmar produces a small quantity of coal for its domestic consumption.

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If travelling through the country it is advisable to be vaccinated against cholera. Only Yangon (Rangoon) city and areas above 1,000m are malaria free; if in doubt, take malaria prophylaxis. It is advisable to carry a pack of sterilised needles or ‘Aids’ kit, and to take any medicines required – they are in short supply. Water should be boiled and filtered before drinking. It is advisable to drink bottled water. There is a rabies risk.

Hotels
Accommodation has been described as ‘decrepit almost to the extent of charm’. There is no official rating system. Main Yangon (Rangoon) hotels can arrange an interpreter or translation services if necessary. Some Yangon hotels require payment in foreign currency. A 10 per cent service charge is usually added to the bill, and a 5–10 per cent tip is usual.

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

Public holidays
Fixed dates
4 Jan (Independence Day), 12 Feb (Union Day), 2 Mar (Peasants’ Day), 27 Mar (Armed Forces Day), 1 May (May Day), 19 Jul (Martyrs’ Day), 19 Nov (National Day), 25 Dec (Christmas).

Variable dates
Full Moon of Tabuang (Mar), Thingyan (between 13 and 16 Apr), Myanmar New Year (Apr), Full Moon of Kason (May), Full Moon of Waso (Jul), End of Buddhist Lent (Oct), Taungdaing Festival (Nov), Karen New Year (Dec or Jan), Eid Al-Adha, Diwali.

Getting there
Air
National airline: Myanmar Airways.
International airport/s: Yangon (RGN), 19km from city centre, with duty-free shop, bar, restaurant, buffet, bank, post office and hotel reservations. From airport to city centre the journey time is by taxi is 45 minutes, by bus 30 minutes.
Airport tax: A US$10 international departure tax is applicable for tickets purchased in Myanmar only; excluding transit passengers not leaving the aircraft.

Surface
Road: There are some overland entry points on the borders with China. Getting about
Not all parts of the country are open to visitors, and some are subject to guerilla or bandit activity.

National transport
Tourists are required to keep to officially designated tourist areas and all arrangements for internal travel must be made well in advance via Myanmar Travel and Tours. Travel outside Yangon (Rangoon) is difficult to arrange. No attempt should be made to travel to restricted areas.
Air: Flying to the numerous internal destinations is the only efficient method of traversing the country. However, the carriers have a less than perfect safety record. Charter flights are available. For tickets contact Myanmar Travel and Tours.

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

Social customs/useful tips
Shoes and socks must be removed before entering any religious building, and visitors should not wear shorts.
The title ‘U’ (pronounced ‘oo’) is the equivalent of ‘Mr’ in English. When addressing people always use the appropriate prefix and family name. Many people do not have a first name.
The head is considered the temple of the body and should not be touched by other people. It is also considered the ultimate in bad manners to put one’s feet on the table or cross one’s legs so that the sole of the shoe points at someone. This is because the feet are considered to be the least clean part of the body.
The code of standard behaviour is referred to as ‘bama-chin’. According to this mode of conduct, people are expected to respect elders, exhibit discretion in dealing with the opposite sex, be aware of Buddhist sayings and have an ability to recite some Buddhist verses. Additionally, one should maintain a reserved and indirect approach to another person and not be direct at all. This can lead to misunderstandings, especially in business dealings.

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

Base: Owing to an ongoing privatisation programme, there is a fleet of privately-operated air-conditioned buses which accept payment in Kyat and US dollars. The main routes are from Yangon (Rangoon) to Meiktila, Pyay, Mandalay and Taunggyi.

Rail: Myanmar Railways operates services to main centres, with sleeping accommodation available on the recommended Yangon (Rangoon)-Mandalay express service. The Mandalay-Lashio-Myitkyina service is also rated ‘good’. Restaurant or buffet car facilities are generally not available, and second-class travel is not recommended.

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

City transport
Taxis: Within Yangon (Rangoon) the government operates blue taxis with standard fares; otherwise, fares are by negotiation. Taxis can be shared or hired on a time basis.

Buses, trams & metro: There are antiquated and overcrowded bus services in all cities; they are not recommended for visitors.

Trains: Yangon (Rangoon) has a circular rail system.

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

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

Telephone area codes
The international direct dialling (IDD) code for Myanmar is +95 followed by area code:
Bassein 42  Maulmein 32
Mandalay 2  Pyame 53
Monywa 71  Yangon (Rangoon) 1

Useful telephone numbers
Ambulance: 192, 71-111
Red Cross: 295-133
Police (emergency): 199
[headquarters]: 282-541, 284-764
Telephone enquiries: 100
Booking (inland): 101
Booking (overseas): 130, 131, 667-444, 667-555, 667-601/2
Airport Security: 662-677
Customs: 284-533
Immigration: 286-434
Chambers of Commerce
Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce & Industry, 504 Merchant Street, Kyauktada Township, Yangon (tel: 243-150; fax: 248-177; e-mail: id@umfcci.com.mm).

Banking
Asia Wealth Bank, Ahlone, River View Housing Project, Olympic Tower II, Yangon (tel: 212-701; fax: 212-704).
Karnawaw Bank Ltd; 1st Floor, Lannmadaw Condo Centre, No. 02/06, 02/07 Lannmadaw Street, Latha T/S, Yangon (tel: 212-780; fax: 212-778).
Myanmar Investment and Commercial Bank, 170/176 Bo Aung Kyaw Street, Botataung Township, Yangon (tel: 250-509; fax: 281-775).
Myanmar May Flower Bank Ltd, Yadana Housing Project, 9 Mile, Pyay Rd, Mayangon T/S, Yangon (tel: 661-261; fax: 661-262).
Yama Bank Ltd, 1 Kun Gyan Road, MIngalar Taung Nyunt Township, Yangon (tel: 703-493; fax: 246-548).

Central bank
Central Bank of Myanmar, PO Box 184, 24/26 Sule Pagoda Road,KTDA, Yangon (tel: 83-665).

Travel information
Eva Air, 345 Ba Aung Kyaw Road, Kyauktada Township, Yangon (tel: 240-399, 240-997; fax: 278-701).
Highway Bus Terminal (Sin-ma-lite) (tel: 286-588); (Saw Bwa Gui Gon) (tel: 665-545).
Hotel reservations (24 hours) (tel: 62-701).

National tourist organisation offices
Myanmar Airways, 104 Strand Road, Kyamanuy Tsp., Yangon (tel: 273-505, 267-800(Airport); fax: 289-583).
Myanmar Railways (enquiries) (tel: 274-027).
Tourist information (tel: 282-075).

Ministries
Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, Thiri Myat Mon Settlement, Theinbyu Street, Botahtaung Tsp, Yangon (tel: 292-019).
Ministry of Industry, 56 Kaba Aye Pagoda Road, Yangon (tel: 661-140; fax: 400-156).
Ministry of Information, 365-367 Bo Aung Kyaw Street, Kyauktada Tsp, Yangon (tel: 245-631; fax: 289-274).
Ministry of Labour, Theinbyu Street, Botataung Tsp, Yangon (tel: 278-320; fax: 256-185).
Ministry of Livestock Breeding and Fisheries, Theinbyu Street, Botataung Tsp, Yangon (tel: 280-298; fax: 289-711).
Ministry of Mines, 90 Kanbe Road, Yankin Tsp, Yangon (tel: 277-316).
Ministry of Rail Transport, 88 Theinbyu Street, Botataung Tsp, Yangon (tel: 292-769).
Ministry of Science and Technology, 6 Kaba Aye Pagoda Road, Yangon (tel: 665-868).
Ministry of Sports, Office of the Ministers, Yangon (tel: 553-958).

Ministry of Commerce, 228-240 Strand Road, Pabedan Tsp, Yangon (tel: 289-660; fax: 289-578).
Ministry of Communications, Post and Telecommunications, 80 Corner of Merchant St & Theinbyu Street, Botataung Tsp, Yangon (tel: 292-019).
Ministry of Construction, 39 Nawaday Street, Botataung Tsp, Yangon (tel: 283-938).
Ministry of Defence, Theinbyu Road, Yangon (tel: 281-611).
Ministry of Energy, 23 Pyay Road, Yangon (tel: 221-060; fax: 222-964).
Ministry of Finance and Revenue, 26 Setmu Road, Kyauktada Tsp, Yangon (tel: 284-763).
Ministry of Foreing Affairs, Pyay Road, Dagon Tsp, Yangon (tel: 222-844; fax: 222-950).
Ministry of Housing Projects, Thiri Myanma Lane, Kaba Aye Pagoda Road, Mayangon Tsp, Yangon (tel: 289-184; fax: 664-459).
Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, 77-91 Sule Pagoda Road, Kyauktada Tsp, Yangon (tel: 282-075; fax: 287-871).
Ministry of Industry (I), 192 Kaba Aye Pagoda Road Yangon (tel: 566-066).
Ministry of Industry (II), 56 Kaba Aye Pagoda Road, Yangon (tel: 661-140; fax: 667-156).
Ministry of Information, 365-367 Bo Aung Kyaw Street, Kyauktada Tsp, Yangon (tel: 245-631; fax: 289-274).
Ministry of Labour, Theinbyu Street, Botataung Tsp, Yangon (tel: 278-320; fax: 256-185).
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Ministry of Sports, Office of the Ministers, Yangon (tel: 553-958).
Office of the Prime Minister, Minister’s Office, Yangon (tel: 283-742).

Other useful addresses
British Embassy, Commercial Section, 80 Strand Road, Box No 638, Rangoon (tel: 281-700; fax: 289-566).
Department of Health, 36 Theinbyu Street, Botahtaung Tsp, Yangon (tel: 290-038, 290-578; fax: 290-581).
Livestock Foodstuff & Milk Products Enterprise, Pyay Road, 10th Mile, Mayangon Tsp, Yangon (tel: 664-244; fax: 240-109).
Myanmar Embassy (US), 2300 S Street, NW, Washington DC 20008 (tel: 202-332-9044; fax: 202-332-9046; e-mail: thuriya@aol.com).
Myanmar Gems Enterprise, 66 Kabo Aye Pagoda Road, Mayangon Tsp, Yangon (tel: 660-140, 552-714; fax: 660-904).
Myanmar General Industries, 192 Kabo Aye Pagoda Road, Yankin Tsp, Yangon (tel: 660-521, 273-246; fax: 56-066).
Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise, 604 Merchant Street, Pabedan Tsp, Yangon (tel: 282-121, 282-153; fax: 222-964, 222-965).
Myanmar Petrochemical Enterprise, 23 Pyay Road, Lanmadaw Tsp, Yangon (tel: 222-816, 222-822; fax: 222-960).
Myanmar Ports Authority, 10 Pansodan Street, Yangon (tel: 283-122).
Myanmar Post & Telecommunications Department, Aung Thaiddi Kon, Bahan Tsp, Yangon (tel: 549-917, 549-960).

Internet sites
Myanmar Resources: http://www.myanmars.net
Official Website of Myanmar: http://www.myanmar.com
Myanmar Business Information: http://www.myanmarpyi.com