

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION KEY DOCUMENTS

BURMA (MYANMAR)

4 APRIL 2007

Contents

	Page
1. PREFACE	3
2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT BURMA.....	5
Geography	5
Recent history	5
Recent events and political developments	6
Economy	8
Human Rights	9
3. INDEX TO KEY SOURCE DOCUMENTS	10
Key facts and geography.....	10
Map	10
History	10
Politics and recent developments	11
Human Rights – general	12
Human Rights – specific issues	13
Abuses by Non-government forces	13
Arrest and detention – legal rights	13
Children	14
Citizenship	15
Corruption	15
Death Penalty	16
Employment rights	16
Ethnic groups	16
Forced eviction	17
Freedom of movement.....	17
Freedom of religion.....	17
Freedom of speech and media	18
Human Rights institutions, organisations and activists	19
Internally displaced persons (IDPs)	20
Judiciary.....	20
Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons	21
Medical issues	22
Military service	23
Political affiliation	23
Prison conditions	24
Security forces	24
Terrorism	25
Trafficking	25
Women	26
4. REFERENCES TO SOURCE MATERIAL	27

1. Preface

- i This Country of Origin Information (COI) Key Documents has been produced by Research, Development and Statistics (RDS), Home Office, for use by officials involved in the asylum/human rights determination process. It provides general background information about the issues most commonly raised in asylum/human rights claims made in the United Kingdom. The COI Key Documents includes information available up to 27 March 2007.
- ii The COI Key Documents is an indexed list of key reports, papers and articles produced by a wide range of recognised external information sources. It does not contain any Home Office opinion or policy.
- iii For Home Office users, the COI Key Documents provides direct electronic access to each source referred to in the document, via a link on the source numbers in the index and list of sources. For the benefit of external users, the relevant web link has also been included, together with the date that the link was accessed.
- iv As noted above, the documents identified concentrate mainly on human rights issues. By way of introduction, brief background information on Burma (Myanmar) is also provided. Please note, this background material is not intended to provide a summary of the material contained in the key documents listed.
- v This COI Key Documents and the documents listed are publicly disclosable.
- vi Any comments regarding this COI Key Documents or suggestions for additional documents are very welcome and should be submitted to the Home Office as below.

Country of Origin Information Service

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Apollo House
36 Wellesley Road
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Website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/country_reports.html

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It is not the function of the Advisory Panel to endorse any Home Office material or procedures. In the course of its work, the Advisory Panel directly

reviews the content of selected Home Office COI documents, but neither the fact that such a review has been undertaken, nor any comments made, should be taken to imply endorsement of the material. Some of the material examined by the Panel relates to countries designated or proposed for designation for the Non-Suspensive Appeals (NSA) list. In such cases, the Panel's work should not be taken to imply any endorsement of the decision or proposal to designate a particular country for NSA, nor of the NSA process itself.

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[Return to Contents](#)

2. Background information on Burma (Myanmar)

Full Country Name: The Union of Myanmar

Britain's policy is to refer to Burma rather than 'Myanmar'. It is the form preferred by the leaders of Burma's democracy movement, the legitimate winners of the 1990 elections, who do not accept that the unelected military regime has the right to change the official name of the country.

Area: 677,000 sq km (419,740 sq mi)

Population: 52m

Capital City: Rangoon (Yangon) (population 3,598,980)

People: Bamar (69%), Shan (8.5%), Karen (6.2%), Rakhine (4.5%), Mon (2.4%), Chin (2.2%), Kachin (1.4%), Karrenni (0.4%), other indigenous (0.1%) and foreign nationalities (including Burmese Indian & Sino Burmese people) 5.3%

Languages: Burmese is the official language. There are numerous other ethnic minority languages.

Religion(s): Buddhism is the predominant religion. The other main religions are Christianity, Islam and Animism.

Currency: Kyat

Major Political Parties: Burma is ruled by a military junta known as State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). The main democratic opposition party is the National League for Democracy (NLD).

Government: Military junta - State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)

Head of State: Military junta - State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)

Prime Minister/Premier: General Soe Win

Governor: N/A

Foreign Minister: U Nyan Win.

Membership of International Groupings/Organisations: UN, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Co-operation (BIMSTEC). (FCO Country Profile: Burma, 11 December 2006) [4a]

[Return to Contents](#)

GEOGRAPHY

"The Union of Myanmar (formerly Burma) lies in the north-west region of South-East Asia. In 1988 the army seized power and established a State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). In 1990 the National League for Democracy (NLD) won an outright majority of seats in a new assembly. However, the SLORC remained the de facto Government. In 1997 the SLORC was replaced by a State Peace and Development Council. Since 1988 NLD founder Aung San Suu Kyi has been at the forefront of democratic opposition to the ruling juntas. Yangon is the capital. The administrative centre is Pyinmana (Nay Pyi Taw). The official language is Myanmar (Burmese)." (Europa World Online: Burma (Myanmar)) [1a]

[Return to Contents](#)

RECENT HISTORY

"Military governments have ruled Burma since 1962. In 1988 pro-democracy protests were brutally crushed by the military. In 1990 national elections were held in Burma for the first time in 30 years. The National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK), won the elections with an overwhelming majority. The military regime

refused to recognise the results claiming a new constitution must be passed before power could be handed over. However, democratic groups such as the National League for Democracy have remained resolute in their opposition to the regime.” (FCO Country Profile: Burma, 11 December 2006) [4a]

[Return to Contents](#)

RECENT EVENTS AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

“On 30 May 2003, supporters of the military authorities, including the Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA) attacked ASSK [Aung San Suu Kyi] and her convoy of NLD supporters in Depayin, central Burma. ASSK was taken into 'protective custody' by the regime and held incommunicado until September 2003, when she was moved to house arrest where she remains. Over 100 NLD members were arrested and detained in prison, although most have since been released. U Tin Oo, NLD Vice Chairman, was held in prison until February 2004 when he too was placed under house arrest. NLD party offices, except the Rangoon headquarters, remain closed.

“On 30 August 2003, General Khin Nyunt of the governing State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) announced a 7-step road map to build a 'modern, democratic, prosperous state'. The National Convention, the first step of the road map, was reconvened in 2004, after a recess of 8 years, to draw up the basic principles for a new constitution for Burma. The NLD decided not to participate in the Convention because the SPDC refused to meet their conditions, including the release of ASSK and U Tin Oo and the re-opening of NLD offices. On 19 October Khin Nyunt was arrested and replaced, as Prime Minister, by Lt Gen (later General) Soe Win. (FCO Country Profile: Burma, 11 December 2006) [4a]

IPS News Agency noted on 26 March 2007 that “The National Convention, tasked with drawing up the new constitution, has been postponed until the end of the year [2007], according to senior government officials.” [41]

The FCO Country Profile for Burma noted:

“Most independent observers continue to consider the process a sham, intended to produce a constitution that will ensure power remains concentrated in the hands of the generals, possibly in civilian guise. Most of the 1080 delegates have been handpicked by the regime and have little independence. The NLD, and other parties who won the majority of seats in the 1990 elections, have not participated. ASSK, other NLD leaders, and many ethnic minority politicians remain in detention.

“The situation in many of the ethnic minority border areas remains unstable. Armed conflict continues in parts of Shan, Karenni and Karen States. Despite ceasefire discussions between the SPDC and the major Karen armed group (the KNU), 2006 has seen some of the worst fighting and population displacements in Karen State, and neighbouring areas, in recent years.

“In September the UN Security Council voted to add Burma to its agenda. UN Under Secretary General Gambari has visited twice, most recently in November [2006], for discussions with the regime and opposition groups.” [4a]

“In November 2005, the government suddenly moved its seat of administration to a site near Pyinmana, 250 miles north of Rangoon, now referred to as Nay Pyi Taw. The UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, has noted reports of forced relocation of villages and the alleged use of forced labour in the construction of the new city.” (FCO Human Rights Annual Report 2006) [4b]

[Return to Contents](#)

ECONOMY

GDP: \$8.8 billion (estimate at August 2006 market rate).

Annual growth rate: 2.9% (2005 estimate); the military claimed the official 2005 rate was 12.2%.

GDP per capita (2005 est.): \$174.

Natural resources: timber, tin, antimony, zinc, copper, tungsten, lead, coal, limestone, precious stones, natural gas, hydropower, and some petroleum.

Agriculture: Products: rice, pulses, beans, sesame, groundnuts, sugarcane, hardwood, fish and fish products.

Industries: Types: agricultural processing, knit and woven apparel, wood and wood products, copper, tin, tungsten, iron, construction materials, pharmaceuticals, and fertilizer.

Recorded trade (IMF 2005): Exports: \$3.6 billion (official statistics: natural gas – 38.8%, teak and forest products 16%, agricultural products 14.1%, garments 8.2% and marine products 6.8%. Major markets (IMF 2005) - Thailand 45%, India 11.5%, P.R.C. 8%, Japan 5.1% and Malaysia 3%. Imports (IMF 2005)--\$3.6 billion (official statistics: machinery and transport equipment, oil & diesel 13.8%, artificial and synthetic fabrics 12.1%, base metals and manufactures 7.2%, and plastic 4.6%). Major suppliers (IMF 2005) - P.R.C. 30%, Thailand 22%, Singapore 18.3%, Korea 6%. (USSD Background Note: Burma, last updated September 2006) [2c]

“Despite substantial natural resources, Burma is a poor country. It is also the second largest producer of illicit opium in the world and has developed into a major supplier of methamphetamines.

“Fundamental problems in the economy remain unresolved, and the macroeconomic situation remains unstable. A serious banking crisis in early 2003 led to reduced consumer confidence and spending power with some retailers noting a 30-40% drop in sales. The banking sector remains fragile, and the crisis continues to have knock on effects throughout the economy.

“The rate of inflation, which fell following the banking crisis, has increased rapidly in recent months. Unconfirmed estimates suggest a rate of approximately 50% in 2006... Despite inflation, structural rigidities, weak economic policies, and low investment the Burmese economy is thought to be growing (although at a much lower rate than the SPDC claims) largely due to growth of gas exports.” (FCO Human Rights Annual Report 2006) [4a]

[Return to Contents](#)

HUMAN RIGHTS

The United States Department of State Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2006, 6 March 2007 noted:

“The government's human rights record worsened during the year, and the government continued to commit numerous serious abuses. The following human rights abuses were reported:

- abridgement of the right to change the government
- extrajudicial killings, including custodial deaths
- disappearances
- rape, torture, and beatings of prisoners and detainees
- arbitrary arrest without appeal
- politically motivated arrests and detentions
- incommunicado detention
- continued house arrest of National League for Democracy (NLD) General Secretary Aung San Suu Kyi and NLD Vice Chairman U Tin Oo, and the continued closure of all NLD offices, except the Rangoon headquarters
- imprisonment of members of the United Nationalities Alliance, including Hkun Htun Oo and Sai Nyunt Lwin, both leaders of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy
- infringement on citizens' right to privacy
- forcible relocation and confiscation of land and property
- restriction of freedom of speech, press, assembly, association and movement
- restriction of freedom of religion
- discrimination and harassment against Muslims
- restrictions on domestic human rights organizations and a failure to cooperate with international human rights organizations
- violence and societal discrimination against women
- forced recruitment of child soldiers
- discrimination against ethnic minorities
- trafficking in persons, particularly of women and girls for the purpose of prostitution and as involuntary wives
- restrictions on worker rights
- forced labor (including against children), chiefly in support of military garrisons and operations in ethnic minority regions.” [2a]

The same source continued:

“Ethnic armed groups including the Karen National Union (KNU), the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), and the Shan State Army South (SSAS) also allegedly committed human rights abuses, including killings, rapes, and forced labor, although reportedly to a lesser extent than the government. Some cease-fire groups, including the United Wa State Army and the Karenni National Peoples Liberation Front also reportedly committed similar abuses against civilians in their home regions. Armed groups and cease-fire groups also practiced forced conscription of child soldiers.” [2a]

The FCO Country Profile for Burma, updated 11 December 2006, stated:

“Burma's human rights record remains a cause of grave concern. Respect for the basic rights of freedom of speech, the press, assembly and association are severely limited.

Ian McCartney summoned the Burmese Ambassador to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 15 June to set out HMG's concern about a number of human rights issues. This meeting was followed up with a letter to the Burmese Foreign Minister.

"Successive resolutions co-sponsored by the UK at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) have drawn attention to arbitrary detentions, extra-judicial killings, rape, torture, the large number of political prisoners, abuse of women's and children's rights and the complete absence of democracy. The latest EU co-sponsored UNCHR resolution passed in April 2005 expressed our grave concern on these issues, with particular concern over the continued detention of political prisoners and the human rights abuses in the ethnic minority areas of Burma." [4a]

Amnesty International's (AI) 2006 Annual Report, covering events from January – December 2005, noted:

"Over 1,100 political prisoners were arrested or remained imprisoned. They included hundreds of prisoners of conscience, held for peaceful political opposition activities. At least 250 political prisoners were released. The army continued to commit serious human rights violations, including forced labour, against ethnic minority civilians during counter-insurgency activities. The International Labour Organization (ILO), other UN agencies and international aid organizations faced increasing restrictions on their ability to assist vulnerable populations. [11a]

Human Rights Watch in their 2007 report covering events of 2006 noted:

"Burma's international isolation deepened during 2006 as the authoritarian military government, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), continued to restrict basic rights and freedoms and waged brutal counterinsurgency operations against ethnic minorities. The democratic movement inside the country remained suppressed, and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other political activists continued to be detained or imprisoned. International efforts to foster change in Burma were thwarted by the SPDC and sympathetic neighboring governments." [5a]

[Return to Contents](#)

3. Index to key source documents

(KB users - click source number to access document directly)

KEY FACTS AND GEOGRAPHY	[1]	Europa World Online, Location, Climate, Language, Religion, Flag, Capital (accessed on 1 March 2007) http://www.europaworld.com/entry?id=mm&go_country=GO
	[1]	Europa World Online, Country Statistics (accessed on 1 March 2007) http://www.europaworld.com/entry/mm.ss.1
	[2a]	United States Department of State, Report on Human Rights Practices – 2005: Burma, 6 March 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78768.htm
	[2c]	United States Department of State, Background Note: Burma, last updated September 2006 http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35910.htm
	[4a]	Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Country Profile: Burma, last updated on 11 December 2006 http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394365&a=KCountrypProfile&aid=1018965307901
	[7a]	BBC, Country Profile: Burma, last updated on 12 January 2007 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/country_profiles/1300003.stm
	[10a]	Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), The World Factbook Burma, last updated on 2 February 2007 https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/bm.html
	[30]	Department for International Development (DfID), Country Profile, Burma, updated 4 October 2005 http://www.dfid.gov.uk/countries/asia/burma.asp
MAP	[19a]	United Nations Cartographic Section, Map of Myanmar. http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/myanmar.pdf
HISTORY	[1]	Europa World Online, Recent History (accessed on 01 March 2007) http://www.europaworld.com/entry/mm.is.4
	[2a]	United States Department of State, Report on Human Rights Practices – 2005: Burma, 6 March 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78768.htm
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	[11a]	Amnesty International (AI) report 2006: Myanmar, covering events from January to December 2005 http://web.amnesty.org/report2006/mmr-summary-eng
	[26a]	Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2006: Burma (Myanmar) http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2006&country=6932
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	[3]	Constitution of the Union of Burma (1974) http://www.blc-burma.org/html/Constitution/1974.html
	[4a]	Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Country Profile: Burma, last updated on 11 December 2006 http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394365&a=KCountrProfile&aid=1018965307901
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	[7d]	BBC News: Suu Kyi's Detention, 27 May 2006 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/5022626.stm
	[8]	Jane's Sentinel Security Assessments: Country Report – Myanmar, last updated 22 January 2007 http://sentinel.janes.com/docs/sentinel/SEAS_country.jsp?ProdName=SEAS&SentCountry=Myanmar&
	[11a]	Amnesty International (AI) report 2006: Myanmar, covering events from January to December 2005 http://web.amnesty.org/report2006/mmr-summary-eng
	[11b]	Amnesty International (AI), If you live in Myanmar...there is a huge gap between your rights and daily life, 1 March 2007 http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGASA160012007?open&of=ENG-2AS
	[16a]	International Crisis Group: Myanmar: New Threats To Humanitarian Aid: Asia Briefing No. 58 8 December 2006 http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4565&l=1

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	[26a]	Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2006: Burma (Myanmar) http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2006&country=6932
	[32]	Democratic Voice of Burma http://english.dvb.no/index.php (accessed 26 March 2007)
	[33a]	Save the Children: Myanmar Country Brief 2004/2005 http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/cb/Myan.pdf (accessed 27 March 2007)
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	[36]	Relief Web: Myanmar: Country Profile, accessed 7 March 2007 http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/bkg.nsf/doc200?OpenForm&rc=3&cc=mmr&mode=cp
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	[39]	The Nation: Urgent Action Needed on Rights in Burma, last updated 10 November 2006, accessed 7 March 2007 http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2006/11/10/opinion/opinion_30018551.php
	[40]	Asian Human Rights Commission: Burma: The Human Rights Situation in 2006, The myth of state stability and a system of injustice, 21 December 2006 http://material.ahrchk.net/hrreport/2006/Burma2006.pdf
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(IN ADDITION TO GENERAL REPORTS ABOVE, INFORMATION ON THE FOLLOWING ISSUES IS PROVIDED IN THE DOCUMENTS LISTED BELOW)		
ABUSES BY NON-GOVERNMENT AGENTS	[2a]	United States Department of State, Report on Human Rights Practices – 2005: Burma, 6 March 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78768.htm
ARREST AND DETENTION – LEGAL RIGHTS	[2a]	United States Department of State, Report on Human Rights Practices – 2005: Burma, 6 March 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78768.htm
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	[11g]	Amnesty International (AI), Myanmar: Fear of torture/extra-judicial executions/forcible relocation, 9 May 2006 http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGASA160042006?open&of=ENG-MMR
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	[2a]	United States Department of State, Report on Human Rights Practices – 2005: Burma, 6 March 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78768.htm
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CHILDREN CONT'D		m
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