

Myanmar (Burma) one pager for 5 February Dinner



Area: 261,228 sq. miles (39th)
Population: 53.6m (25th) Burman 68%,
Religion: Buddhism 87%, Christian 6.2%, Islam 4.3%
GDP: \$359b (51st) per capita: \$6,797 (128th)
Exports to US: \$17m Imports from US: \$127m
U.N. Human Dev. Index: .584 *medium* (145 out of 188)
Government: Unitary Parliamentary Constitutional Republic
President: Win Myat; State Counselor (PM) Aung San Suu Kkyi
Memberships: UN, ASEAN, Non-Aligned Movement
Official Name: Republic of the Union of Myanmar

Building on successful political and economic transformation, Myanmar is emerging as a prosperous nation. The country possesses abundant natural resources, a strategic location at the crossroads of Asia, a young population and a sizable market with wide-ranging investment opportunities.

Myanmar is the largest of mainland Southeast Asian states by area. Its capital city is Naypyidaw and its largest city is Yangon (Rangoon). The majority of Myanmar's population lives in the Irrawaddy River Valley. Forests, including valuable teak, cover 49% of the country. Wildlife includes tigers, leopards and elephants, which are used as work animals.

Following the establishment of the Pagan Kingdom in the 1050s, the Burmese language, culture and Theravada Buddhism slowly became dominant in the country. In the 16th century, the country was for a brief period the largest empire in the history of Mainland Southeast Asia. In the 19th century, the country became a British colony. Myanmar was granted independence in 1948, as a democratic nation. U Thant, a former Secretary to the Prime Minister, became Secretary General of the United Nations. One of his staff was Aung San Suu Kyi.

From 1962 to 2011 the country was under military rule. In May 1990, the government held its first free election in almost 30 years. Following signs of liberalization, the US reactivated diplomatic ties with Myanmar in 2012. In the 2015 general elections, the National League for Democracy (NLD) won an absolute majority of seats in the national parliament. In March 2016 the NLD appointed Htin Kyaw as the first non-military president since 1962 and in April 2016 Aung San Suu Kyi, who had been released from house arrest, assumed the newly created role of State Counselor, a role akin to a Prime Minister.

Like many countries, Myanmar has experienced difficulties with its minorities – most recently the Rohingyas. Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi was recently at the International Court of Justice in the Netherlands to discuss this issue and possible solutions.