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# FACT SHEET

*Mutual  
Security  
in  
Action*



**B**URMA is one of the newly independent South-east Asian nations, but in terms of history it is an old country—the Burmese had been on the land they call home for nearly a thousand years.

The country was first unified in the 11th century by King Anawrahta. In 1287 the hordes of Kublai Khan swept into Burma, destroying political order and ushering in 450 years of chaos.

The British entered Burma in 1755 and by 1885 had assumed complete control. After having been administered as a province of India, Burma in 1937 became a separate unit of the British Empire and was granted some autonomy.

Soon after Pearl Harbor, Japan invaded Burma in order to stop supplies from reaching China over the famous Burma Road. By 1942 Japan had occupied the whole country, and the years of war which followed brought severe damage to Burma. After the war Britain reoccupied her colony.

Meanwhile the Burmese were developing a strong desire for independence. In 1947 Burma declined the opportunity to join the British Commonwealth. It became an independent nation—the Union of Burma—on January 4, 1948, with its capital at Rangoon. This was the first Southeast Asian land to gain independence after World War II.

## ***The Government***

Burma's form of government is essentially a parliamentary republic. The parliament consists of the Chamber of Nationalities—the upper house—and the House of Deputies. The president, elected by both chambers, serves a 5-year term. He appoints the prime minister, who is the chief executive.

During the first decade of its independence,

Burma's non-Communist coalition government was rather stable. In 1958, however, the ruling coalition, the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), split into factions. Political stability deteriorated as a result, and for a time the Government was headed by a military leader who was able to restore a large measure of stability. In 1960 power was returned to an elected civilian government.

Since 1948 Burma's army, police, and government have been concerned with armed insurgents inside the country. Some of these are disgruntled ethnic minority groups, while others include members of two rival outlawed Communist parties. Within recent years many of the non-Communist insurgents and a few Communist elements have surrendered, but the insurgency problem remains a major impediment to law and order and to the country's economic development.

The Burmese Government is committed to the democratic process by law and inclination. Burma has taken firm steps against internal communism, but the Sino-Soviet bloc is exerting strong pressure to induce Burma to disassociate itself from the free world.

Burma supported the U.N. action in Korea in 1950 but did not contribute troops. It is a member of the Colombo Plan, which is organized for the development of Asian and Pacific countries.

## ***The People***

Most of the 20.8 million Burmese citizens are members of the Burman ethnic group. In addition, there are a number of indigenous minorities such as Kachins, Karens, and Shans, as well as many Indians, Pakistanis, and Chinese. About 80 percent of the population are Buddhist.



**Burmese girl in a class conducted under a Government program which brings knowledge and culture to rural families.**

Approximately 70 percent of the people make their living from farming—about 88 percent live in rural areas. The average per capita income of the Burmese is about \$59 a year. Life expectancy is estimated at 35 years. There is one physician per 8,400 people, contrasted to about one per 740 people in the United States.

The Burmese literacy rate of 60 percent is increasing. Between 1954 and 1957, for instance, primary and secondary school enrollment increased 100 percent. College education is available in three cities. There are one medical school and several specialized schools of technical and artisan training.

The English language is used by almost all educated Burmese. In addition, there are 11 main languages and about 126 dialects.

## *The Country and Its Economy*

Burma, covering 262,000 square miles or an area about the size of Texas, constitutes an important part of the peninsula of southeast Asia. Facing east and south to the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea, Burma's back touches the land areas of Thailand, Laos, China, India, and Pakistan.

Despite its many neighbors, Burma throughout history had been cut off from them by high mountain barriers. Along the China border, Burma's peaks reach up to 10,000 or 15,000 feet, while on the Indian border the highest are 8,000 feet. In addition to the north-south mountain ranges and hills, Burma's rivers and dense forests also have discouraged east-west movement of her peoples.

Most of the Burmese live in the valleys and deltas of the Irrawaddy, Chindwin, and Sittang Rivers. The eastern coastal strips also are fertile areas. Upper Burma and the Shan Hills, or the highland plateau covering east central Burma, are least productive because of a lack of rainfall.

Burma's chief industry, agriculture, is centered in the productive areas where the country's tropical monsoon climate favors crops. About 13 percent of the area is used for farming; another 11 percent could be brought into cultivation.

Rice is by far the most important crop, making up about 77 percent of Burma's total exports. Other crops include peanuts, beans and peas, tobacco, rubber, sugar, sesame, and cotton.

About 58 percent of Burma's total area is covered with valuable forests which supply teak and other woods. However, postwar insurgent and bandit activities in the outlying areas have restricted work in the teak forests and reduced output of this important export.

Burma's lakes, ponds, and other bodies of water also are important since they furnish fish for the

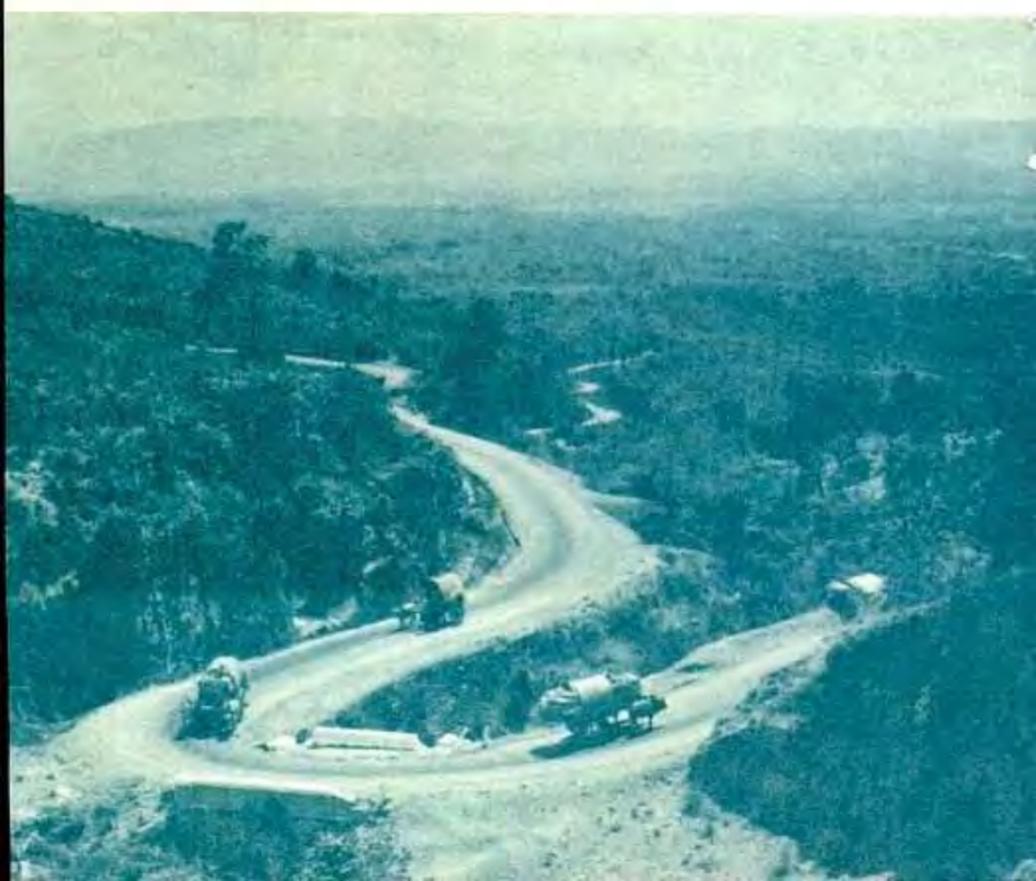
Burmese diet. As yet, coastal fishing has not been developed. Together, farming, forestry, and fishing account for about 45 percent of the gross national product.

Ores also figure in Burma's exports, and the country is considered rich in minerals. Its deposits include tin, tungsten, lead, silver, and petroleum. Burma also has gems. Mining activities, especially the petroleum industry, were severely damaged during the war and have not been fully rehabilitated. Thus, current production is low.

In addition to petroleum, wood and rice husks are used as fuels. One deposit of coal is known to exist, but it is undeveloped. Similarly, the country's waterpower could be further harnessed. Electric power, now concentrated chiefly around Rangoon, is being expanded. It more than doubled between 1953 and 1958. Use of diesel generating facilities has begun to spread the use of electricity to many towns and villages.

The mainstay of Burma's transportation system traditionally has been its inland waterways. Its

**Lashio road and the rugged terrain characteristic of the country.**



5,000 miles of navigable rivers include a 900-mile all-season route from north Burma to the chief port of Rangoon.

Second in importance for transportation are the railroads, totaling about 1,850 miles, or somewhat less than the prewar total. The war damage has not been completely repaired because guerrillas have hampered operations. Modernization, however, is taking place, and diesel engines are being introduced.

For a country of its size, Burma does not have a large network of highways. The total road mileage is about 9,000. Most of the roads run north-south, paralleling the mountains and rivers.

There are a few industries in Burma, most of them recently established. The chief products are agricultural commodities, petroleum, cement, sugar, and textiles. The Government is encouraging new industries, such as a steel mill and a jute mill which produces jute bags.

Presently Burma's chief exports are rice, ores, cotton, timber, rubber, and oilcakes. Three-fourths of the exports go to Asia—to Ceylon, Communist China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaya, and Singapore. Imports—chiefly textiles, machinery, and transportation equipment—come from the United Kingdom, Japan, and India. For some time Burma has been involved in considerable trade with the Communist bloc, and the volume, especially with neighboring Communist China, can be expected to remain high in future years.

### ***U.S. Aid and Accomplishments***

U.S. aid to Burma began in 1950. In 1953, at the request of the Burmese Government, aid was suspended. It was resumed in 1957 under a new agreement signed early that year. U.S. aid has been largely financial, and the Burmese have managed the projects.

Following are some of the major development projects and accomplishments which Burma has achieved with the help of U.S. economic assistance.

### *Land Restoration*

- Reclaimed 1.2 million of 2.2 million acres of farm land abandoned because of World War II and postwar insurrections. Rebuilt flood control facilities and cleared land. Resettled about 350,000 persons who had fled to cities. When complete, the reclamation project will mean 600,000 additional tons of rice annually.
- Diversified agricultural crops by encouraging jute production. Expanded jute cultivation to 20,000 acres, or nearly sevenfold increase, in about 4 years.
- Provided farm machinery for initial plowing of cleared land and for crop diversification programs.

### *Public Safety*

- Increased capability of police to maintain internal security, that is, put down insurgents and make rural areas safe. Acquired about 40 patrol cars, 117 jeeps, 225 three-quarter-ton trucks, and parts for 15 police launches built locally. Equipped nearly a dozen patrol cars with radios. Increased police mobility by 100 percent.
- Provided technical advice in public safety.
- Contributed uniforms, clothing, and personal equipment to police force.
- Drafted plan for nationwide communication system to link police headquarters with district offices.

### *Kabo Diversion Dam*

- In 1959 completed rebuilding of Kabo dam, which had been washed out by floods in north



**Burmese and U.S. officials watch as a U.S.-furnished earth scraper moves into position to begin construction of embankments and sea walls.**

central Burma in 1956. The dam benefits 50,000 families and permits continuation of irrigation of 300,000 acres of land. Avoids loss of 225,000 tons of food and feed crops.

### *Forestry*

- Furnished tractors, graders, loaders, trucks, and other mechanical equipment to move teakwood to market; formerly used elephants almost exclusively. Lowered cost of timber extraction and increased production of teak logs from 20,000 to 30,000 tons annually.

### *Rice Handling and Processing*

- Increased export of milled rice by providing mechanical equipment such as sack-pilers, mobile conveyors, and elevators to facilitate direct loading to ships. Improved rice quality by furnishing cleaning and grading equipment.

### *Industrial Research*

- Established and expanded Applied Research Institute to provide research, experimental and standards laboratories, and other scientific services



**A Burmese technician tests equipment for the recently completed Rangoon-Mandalay telephone-telegraph system financed by a U.S. loan.**

for industry, agriculture, and medicine. Established technical information center with 5,000-book library in fields of science and engineering.

- Conducted studies on new uses of bamboo; began project of utilizing bamboo in manufacture of hard-board. Conducted studies and planned pharmaceutical, processed foods, and ceramics industries.

### *Health*

- Expanding and modernizing Rangoon General Hospital, largest and most important medical institution in Burma. Cleared building site and laid foundations for outpatient clinic and laboratory services building.

### *Education*

- Began constructing Rangoon University's new Intermediate College as replacement for two inadequate junior colleges. New college will benefit at least 7,000 students.

- Provided overseas technical training for about 90 Burmese in various fields.

### *Transportation and Communications*

- Planned improvements of inland waterways transportation.
- Provided safety equipment for airports.
- Restoring Rangoon-Mandalay telephone line, most heavily used communications circuit in Burma.
- Surveyed existing Rangoon-Mandalay Highway, suggesting improvements and offering assistance to enable the road to serve more adequately the needs of the users, mostly trucks and buses.

### *Water and Sanitation*

- Planned improvement and extension of Rangoon's water supply system, which presently supplies only 60 percent of water needed.
- Provided well-drilling equipment to drill 1,300 new wells annually in rural areas.

### *Other Foreign Aid*

Burma has received considerable aid from outside sources. For instance, it receives about \$1.75 million annually from the United Nations and since 1952 has received about \$3 million from the British Commonwealth countries which are members of the Colombo Plan. In addition, Burma receives reparations payments from Japan and has been granted economic assistance by countries such as India, Israel, Yugoslavia, West Germany, and others. The International Monetary Fund has made available \$15 million, which has been repaid; and the World Bank has extended three loans totaling about \$33.4 million.

Aid has also been obtained from several of the Soviet-bloc countries. Early in 1961 the Burmese obtained an \$83 million interest-free loan from Communist China.

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## *Summary of U.S. Aid*

Burma has received a total of \$94.5 million in U.S. economic assistance through 1961. Of this sum, \$2.7 million was in the form of technical cooperation, \$2.1 million was in agricultural commodities donated to U.S. voluntary welfare agencies for relief distribution in Burma, and \$89.7 million was in the form of loans and grants for special economic development projects.

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