



Myanmar Politics & People in 2015





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In November 2015 Myanmar is due to hold a nationwide parliamentary election, and in the following year leading military figures including the Commander-in-Chief are due to retire. The coming 12 months will mark a pivotal point in the country’s reformation process so far and a litmus test for the foundations of a new nation.

Myanmar’s economic performance and potential as an investment destination will remain closely linked to its political reformation program and shifting power structure. For those looking to understand the country’s long term stability, the coming elections are key.

While we expect the country to make these transitions of power peacefully and steadily, there will be new prominent names and issues rising to the surface over the coming months. The following report aims to familiarise readers with these issues and provide an overview of the political grounding on which 2015’s elections will take place.

1. Background

Over the past 4 years the military-backed USDP party coupled with the humble and diplomatic negotiations of President Thein Sein have improved Myanmar’s international image immensely. From an economically isolated and shunned nation, Myanmar has become an attractive destination for tourism, international conglomerates, development funding, and frontier capitalists. But the journey has been long and arduous.

Following an uprising in 1988 against the leadership at the time, a general election was held in 1990 in which Aung San Suu Kyi’s new National League for Democracy (NLD) won 52% of the seats. This result was overruled by the military, however, who formed their own system of government, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), to lead the country through a controversial constitution in 2008.

In protest to these decisions the NLD boycotted elections in 2010, leading the military’s party to secure another 4 years’ leadership. However with the dissolution of the SPDC in 2011, Aung San Suu Kyi took part in the 2012 by-elections to win seats in parliament for the first time. In 2015 they have the chance to take many more from the military-backed USDP party that has dominated Myanmar politics for decades.



Figure 1 - Background Timeline



2. Political Structure

Come November 2015 Myanmar citizens will cast 3 votes in total, in line with the 2008 constitution. This will elect representatives for:

1. **The House of Nationalities**, Upper House, or “Amyotha Hluttaw”, which holds 224 seats.
2. **The House of Representatives**, Lower House, or “Pyithu Hluttaw”, which holds 440 seats.
3. **Regional Government**, State Government, or “State Hluttaw”, of which there are 21 assemblies based on regional and ethnic divisions.

MILITARY - Through the three votes above, citizens will be able to fill only 75% of the seats available. One in every four seats will be directly appointed by the Armed Forces Commander-in-Chief.

THE PRESIDENT AND VICE-PRESIDENT - The head of state and his deputy will be elected by the Presidential Electoral College, a committee formed in proportion with the representatives of the two parliament Houses and the Military.

The parliament’s last session is expected to end in June before the government is abolished and campaigning begins. Voting is due to take place one day in the last week of October or first week of November. These are the estimated timings:

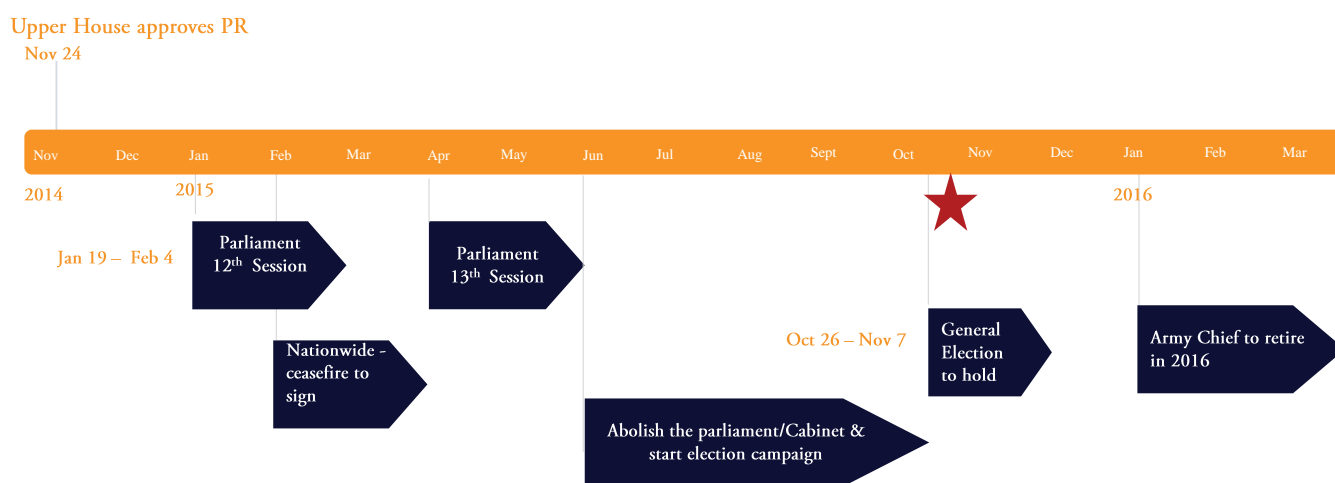


Figure 2 - Election Timeline

3. Political System

The Republic of the Union of Myanmar is organised into the following territories:

- 7 States, mostly occupied by ethnic minorities
- 7 Regions, mostly occupied by ethnic Bamar
- 6 Self-Administered Zones and Self-Administered Divisions
- 1 Union Territory containing the capital Nay Pyi Taw and surrounding townships.

Currently, the President appoints a Chief Minister for each State and Region. Each State/Region has a unicameral legislative assembly (Hluttaw), but laws passed by the Union Legislative Assembly (Pyidaungsu Hluttaw) are superior to those passed at the Regional/State level.

Before the new Government came to power in 2011, regional military commanders had absolute authority in their areas, as they served both as military chiefs and as heads of regional governments.



Currently serving military generally play no formal role in Region/State administration other than on security issues. However, of the 14 Region/State Chief Ministers, most are former military officers.

The scope for the President to block the enactment of a bill passed by the Union Legislative Assembly is very limited. Under the Constitution, the President is obliged to enact into law any bill passed. If the President withholds signature, the bill is deemed to become law on the day after the end of the period prescribed for the President to sign the bill.

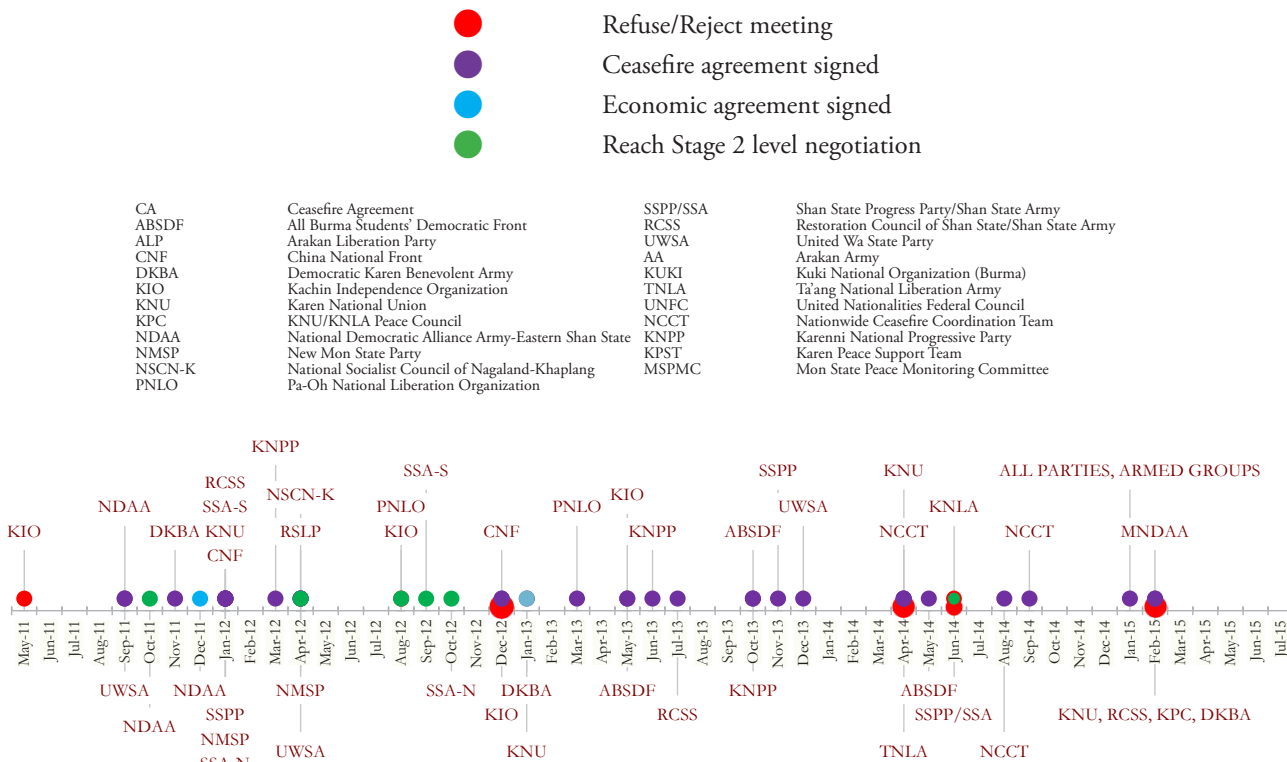
4. Issues

Political rhetoric has shifted gear in Myanmar since 2011 as press coverage builds to a crescendo of praise and blame from an ever increasing number of sources. Added scrutiny from both within and outside the country will highlight campaigning stances, and with Myanmar’s highly literate, news-hungry population political figures will be treading carefully through the issues below.

4.1. Peace

Myanmar’s 1990 election was mired with controversy as the military postponed any transfer of power on the grounds it must first “restore peace”. Since then the signing of ceasefire agreements with the country’s myriad armed groups and ending the country’s on-going civil conflicts has been a primary focus for all parties looking to build the support of peers and voters. The issue is still considered a prerequisite for the stability democracy needs to thrive.

From independence in 1948 to the present day a number of major ceasefire agreements have been signed, but in the last 3 years drawing together these agreements under one Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) has been a top priority.





4.2. Economy

Since 1962 the state has played a dominant role in all aspects of the formal Myanmar economy, sharing the country’s resource riches and lucrative commercial licenses with only a very select few individuals through policies under the “Burmese way to Socialism”.

A liberalisation period in the 1990s saw a range of international businesses begin operations in the country and an effort was made to build a tourism industry following Thailand’s successes. But renewed protests and domestic political unrest, continued reports of the regime’s oppression, and the Asian Financial Crisis delayed these plans.

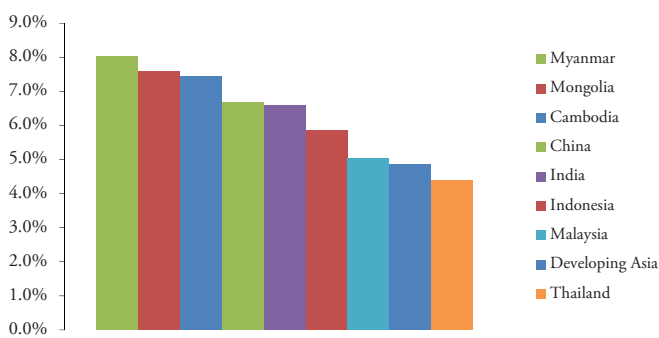
From 2011, Myanmar began to radically alter this outlook, engaging foreign investors and businesses in a re-invigorated attempt to set the economy on track. Myanmar’s GDP growth soared to a projected 8.5% this year as FDI topped USD 3.3Bn on the back of giant and unprecedented deals in Telecoms, Banking, and Energy.

The steep trajectory has already been set with regards to Myanmar-bound investment, but still many international firms are treading cautiously as election year begins. Myanmar’s primarily political reforms of the past few years have begun to translate into economic opportunities, but only with persistent domestic reassurance alongside proven, repatriated returns will investors truly begin to risk the large amounts of capital needed in Myanmar. Politicians will be competing with their peers domestically as well as internationally to win the favour of global capital in an ever more competitive and risk-averse environment.

While there have undoubtedly been positive, visible changes as a result of foreign investment in Myanmar there is still a core group of voters that see the majority of wealth accumulated into the hands of the few, state- or military-linked individuals. Combating this image will be high on the list of campaigning priorities.



Expectations are high. The latest data predicts Myanmar to be the fastest growing country in the region for the coming 5 years even as China’s growth slows.



Myanmar’s total investment over the coming 5 years is expected to grow faster than any other regional player. Large developments in extractives such as oil and gas, as well as consumer facing sectors such as telecoms will fuel this growth.



4.3. Constitutional Amendment

The country's first constitution was formed after independence in 1947 but was abolished only 15 years later with the rise of General Ne Win in 1962. His replacement was again abolished in 1988 after widespread protests to clear a path for the latest and acting constitution enacted in 2008.

Myanmar's 2008 constitution was approved by the military-backed party of the time as part of its "Roadmap to Democracy", the regime's overarching plan currently underway. Since the constitution's formation there has been opposition to many of its articles, and although nothing will be altered until after the elections, the articles to be considered will be selected this year by parliament. As such these topics will feature in the run-up to elections as MPs begin to vie for votes.

- Section 59f - Bars any citizen with close family "subject to a foreign power", including being married to a non-citizen or with non-citizen children, from becoming President. This is thought to be aimed directly at Aung San Suu Kyi and has been opposed vehemently.
- Section 436 - Bars amendment on main sections of constitution without 75% approval from MPs and a countrywide referendum. Given the automatic 25% of seats assigned to military representatives this gives the military final say on amending the document and ultimate decision-making ability with regards to the constitution.

4.4. Land



Camped outside Yangon's city hall in the centre of the city, protesters can often be seen and heard demanding the return of land they claim has been seized illegally by the government or military. Many ethnic groups rally around this issue, and it has become another core protest topic against the established government.

To combat some of these concerns, a Land Confiscation Investigation Committee was formed, but few cases have been solved and issues remain unaddressed. The Investigation Committee has reported that the government has confiscated more than is fair and must return a total of over 300,000 acres, only half of which has been granted so far.

4.5. Sanctions



Myanmar has been subject to a number of sanctions from the US and EU nations since the widely condemned military crackdown on protests in 1988, known as the '8888 Uprising'. Relations with Western countries, especially the United States, were tense up until 2011 when some of these sanctions were eased and Hilary Clinton made the first senior US official visit to the country in over 50 years.

President Obama has now visited the country twice during his time in office, most recently hailed by cheering students eager to see their country re-join the world forum as a peer. The EU lifted all sanctions on Myanmar in 2012 whereas the US has both added and removed certain restrictions. Communal violence in towns such as Meiktila since 2012 as well as accusations of human rights abuse in Rakhine state have increased international pressure and highlighted the threat of nationalism in certain areas of the country.



Myanmar political candidates may use foreign policy successes and challenges to re-engage the electorate this year. Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD have been supported fervently by Western democratic nations for decades, but President Thein Sein has made some confident strides into this spotlight over the past few years. The easing of sanctions and relations with Myanmar's 'third neighbours' is a powerful and popular issue with much room for improvement.

5. Political Figures

The political figures below are those that ostensibly lead the decision making and legislative bodies in Myanmar, or may attain a leadership role after the 2015 elections. They are a selection of those that are expected to compete for high positions in the upcoming elections. The figures have been divided into their party alignments:

5.1. Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)

- Thein Sein (President)
- Dr. Sai Mauk Khan (Vice President)
- Thura Shwe Mann (Party Chairman & Lower House Speaker)
- Khin Aung Myint (Upper House Speaker)

5.2. Myanmar Armed Forces

- Nyan Htun (Military Appointed Vice President)
- Senior General Min Aung Hlaing (Armed Forces Commander-in-Chief)
- Vice Senior General Soe Win (Armed Forces Deputy Commander-in-Chief)
- Lieutenant General Mya Htun Oo (Armed Forces Rank No. 6)

5.3. National League for Democracy

- Aung San Suu Kyi (Party Chairwoman)
- Ko Ko Gyi ("Generation 88" Leader)

5.4. Other Influential Leaders

- U Thein Nyunt (Chairman of New National Democracy Party)



5.1. Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)



The USDP, formed in 2010, is the latest iteration of Myanmar's military-backed political party and currently holds the majority of seats in all regional governments save one, as well as 52% of the two parliament Houses.

Since its formation the re-vamped party has greatly improved the Myanmar military's political reputation, surprising domestic voters and global onlookers through its drive and ambition in reformations.

The party put forward a new leader and began the decade with a new tone to its rule in 2011. The USDP proceeded to begin liberalising the economy, inviting foreign investors and politicians to aid in Myanmar's development. A series of laws were drafted and enacted with the support of multilateral development agencies, and trade agreements were strengthened with regional peers.

Domestically the party has gathered significant support through its concerted efforts to stabilise Myanmar's civil conflicts in ethnic regions, although conflicts remain as the 2015 elections approach and it has attracted praise as and the shadow of its less popular past looms.

5.1.1. Thein Sein (President)



Thein Sein was known as “Mr. Clean” by officials and as “The Clerk” due to his role as General Staff Officer at the War Office from 1992-95. He is a mild-mannered diplomat and surprised many onlookers when taking the presidency in February 2011 ahead of outranking military figures such as Thura Shwe Mann.

Thein Sein has led an impressive period of change during his term, moulding relationships with numerous countries including the USA, building a surprising level of support for his party amongst voters, and pushing many laws that have encouraged foreign investors to approach his once-closed nation. Many of the past 4 years' achievements can be attributed to his leadership.

Thein Sein was expected to step aside as President after 2015, but was recently quoted as saying “if the people want me and I am in good health, I may run”, casting doubt on current front runners Thura Shwe Mann and opposition Aung San Suu Kyi.

Achievements

- Released many political prisoners under presidential decree
- Welcomed NLD to parliament in 2012
- Led ceasefire talks and built trust with 14 groups, with one major group remaining – the Kachin Independence Army (KIA).
- Suggested as Nobel Peace Prize winner.
- Persuaded many countries including the Paris Club to write off Myanmar debts.
- Conducted a nationwide census after 3 decades.
- Chaired ASEAN
- Saw easing of US and EU sanctions



History

- 20 April 1945 – Born in Ayarwaddy Division and married to Daw Khin Khin Win.
- 1968 - Joined Defense Services Academy in 9th Intake.
- 1988 – Promoted to Major and led Light Infantry Division 55.
- 1992 – Became General Staff Officer at the War Office.
- 1996 – Promoted to Brigadier General and Became Commander of the Triangle Regional Command
- 2003 – Promoted to Major General.
- 2004 - Became 1st Secretary to the previous military-backed SPDC party, answering to Major General Khin Nyunt.
- 2004 - Led the drafting team for new constitution.
- 2007 – Briefly became Prime Minister as Soe Win's health declined.
- 2010 – Resigned from Military to become USDP candidate.
- Feb 2011 – Elected as President of Myanmar with 408 out of 659 votes (62%).

5.1.2. Dr. Sai Mauk Kham (Vice President)



Dr. Sai Mauk Kham (aka Maung Ohn) is an ethnic Shan, the second largest group in Myanmar, and before entering politics was known as a vocal supporter of Shan culture and rights, as well as a close associate of Col. Gunyaed, leader of the Shan State National Army (SSNA).

Dr. Sai Mauk Kham is a physician by profession and has a reputation for being smart, honest and hardworking. His political aspirations are now well noted in representing the Shan people in Myanmar government, urging citizens to “vote for the right person for the future of Myanmar and the Shan State.”

He is now considered the third most prominent Shan person in the history of Myanmar government after Sao Shwe Thaik, the first president of Myanmar in 1948, and Mainpon Saw Bwa Sao San Tun, assassinated together with General Aung San in 1947.

History

- Strong support from Shan people, the most populous region and ethnicity in Myanmar.
- Focus on public services, education, and health reforms.



5.1.3. Thura Shwe Mann - (Lower House Speaker)



Shwe Mann was expected by many to become President in 2011, but instead became Lower House Speaker. His political ambitions have been noted and given his strong support from within the party he is currently a favourite for the Presidency in 2015.

Shwe Mann's family have wide business connections in the country. His son Aung Thet Mann is a director at Ayer Shwe Wah, part of the Htoo Trading Company, one of the country's largest private conglomerates. Another son Toe Naing Mann is married to the daughter of Khin Shwe, president of Zaygarbar Group, another large Myanmar conglomerate.

Shwe Mann is thought to have strong support from his party, but damaged relations with the current military leadership after exposing some of his former colleagues in a corruption scandal in 2012. It is expected he will attempt to rekindle some of these relationships this year in preparation for another run at the presidency. He has also been known to strengthen ties with opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi during his term as Lower House Speaker, predicting that the two may work together after the 2015 elections.

History

- 1947, July – Born
- 1969 – Graduated from the 11th Intake of Defense Service Academy
- 1989 – Obtained title “Thura” for military operations against the Karen National Liberation Army.
- 1991 – Served as operations commander for Light Infantry Division (LID) 66 based in Prome.
- 1997 – Became Commander of Southwest Military Region in Ayeyarwaddy
- 2000 – Promoted to Major General and became member of SPDC.
- 2003 – Promoted to 3rd highest rank in Armed Forces as Joint Chief of Staff.
- 2011 – Become parliament speaker and led the legislation body with U Khin Aung Myint(Upper House Speaker) enacting 133 laws up to now.

5.1.4. Khin Aung Myint (Upper house Speaker)

Khin Aung Myint is known for leading the team that built Myanmar's new capital city, Nay Pyi Taw, and for speaking frankly in parliament, exposing budget inconsistencies and approving a Public Accounts Committee to investigate and take action where needed.



Khin Aung Myint has strong relationships with Thein Sein, Aung San Suu Kyim and the military, and is lauded for passing 58 laws during his term as Speaker of the Upper House.

He is expected to retire in 2015 but his solid reputation will persist.

- 1945 - Born
- 2006 – Director of Public Relations in Ministry of Defence
- 2010 – Minister of Culture



5.2. Myanmar Armed Forces

The Myanmar Armed Forces, known as the Tatmadaw, hold significant decision making powers in the country, not least through its automatic allocation of 1 in every 4 seats in parliament. The modern Myanmar Army was founded by General Aung San, considered the leading force behind Myanmar's independence from the British in 1948 and father of pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi.

5.2.1. Senior General Min Aung Hlaing (Armed Forces Commander-in-Chief)



Senior General Min Aung Hlaing is the highest ranking official in the Myanmar Armed Forces, succeeding Than Shwe, the country's previous military ruler. In 2016 he will retire from the Army and has the potential to enter politics and become the army-appointed vice president.

Min Aung Hlaing is considered the most influential individual in forming the ceasefire agreements of the past few years, especially in the East of the country, and has strong support from the military after raising the defence budget to one of the highest in South East Asia, drafted at USD 2.4Bn or 4.2% of GDP in 2014. He has been responsible for releasing many child soldiers from the Army and could be a preferred candidate for the military-appointed vice president following the coming elections.

- 1956 – Born
- 1972 – Studied Law at Rangoon Arts and Sciences University (RASU)
- 1974 – Admitted to intake 19 of the Defence Services Academy
- 1977 – Graduated as Second Lieutenant in the Myanmar Army
- 2002 – Promoted to Commander of the Triangle Regional Command, operating in the Wa region in Shan state.
- 2008 – Promoted to Chief of Bureau of Special Operations-2, working with the border guard force (BGF) in forming peace agreements with ethnic groups, especially Karen.
- 2010 – Replaced General Shwe Mann as Joint Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces.
- 2011 – Succeeded Senior General Than Shwe as Armed Forces Commander-in-Chief.
- 2013 – Promoted to Senior General.

5.2.2. Vice Senior General Soe Win (Armed Forces Deputy Commander-in-Chief)



Vice Senior General Soe Win rose through the ranks operating in the West of Myanmar, and played a major role in negotiations with ethnic groups in Rakhine, Chin and Magwe.

He is expected to become Commander-in-Chief once Min Aung Hlaing retires, but he himself will reach retirement age three years later in 2019.

- 1980 – Graduated from 22nd intake of the Defence Services Academy.
- 2008 – Became Northern Regional Command Commander.
- 2010 – Became Chief of Bureau of Special Operations-6, which oversees military affairs in Rakhine and Chin States, as well as Magwe Division.
- 2012 – Joined working committee established by Thein Sein to negotiate ceasefires with ethnic armed groups.



5.2.3. Lieutenant General Mya Htun Oo



Lieutenant General Mya Htun Oo is currently ranked number 6 in the Myanmar Armed Forces but is a potential candidate for Commander-in-Chief due to his younger age when compared to other high ranking positions in the military.

Lt-Gen Mya Htun Oo served as commander of the Central East Command and is reported to have improved relations with the Karen armed groups during ceasefire negotiations.

- 1983 – Graduated from the 25th intake of the Defence Services Academy.
- 2012 – Appointed as Chief of Staff for the Armed Forces.

5.2.4. Nyan Htun (Military-Appointed Vice President)



Nyan Tun is the former Navy Commander-in-Chief and a former board member of the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings (UMEH), one of the two giant military business conglomerates.

He has been politically active in the past few years, primarily strengthening military ties with regional neighbours such as India, Bangladesh, Thailand, Pakistan and China, as well as encouraging business cooperation through a primary role in two major Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and during the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Naypidaw.

Nyan Tun retired from the military to take his role as Vice President, and is expected to join the USDP party when he ends his current role, seeking a high position in the party.

His performance and track record in both the military and new political sphere warrant a continued leadership role as the country's new political spectrum emerges.

History

- 1950s – Born.
- 1970s – Graduated from the 16th intake of the Defence Services Academy (DSA).
- 2008, June - Replaced Vice-Admiral Soe Thein as Navy Commander-in-Chief.
- 2008 – Mediated tensions with Bangladesh during a naval standoff in the Bay of Bengal.
- 2010, Feb – Lead Navy in multinational joint exercises with India-led MILAN.
- 2010 – Negotiated purchase of two frigates from China's Navy.
- 2010 - Promoted to Vice-Admiral.
- 2012 – Promoted to Admiral
- 2012, Aug – Appointed Vice President.
- 2013 – Played active role in Myanmar's hosting of the World Economic Forum (WEF).
- 2011-14 – Helped develop Dawei and Kyauk Phyu Special Economic Zones (SEZs).



5.3. National League for Democracy Aung Sann Suu Kyi (NLD Chairwoman)



Aung San Suu Kyi returned to Myanmar in 1988 and founded the pro-democracy National League for Democracy (NLD) to oppose the military regime. Since then she has been a global icon for democratic values, staunchly opposing the established regime in Myanmar through years under house arrest and limitations on her freedom. Her rousing speech after the ‘8888 movement’ – a pro-democracy movement that was met with a fierce military crackdown – is seen as pivotal in the country’s path to change.

In 1990 her party won a majority of votes in the general election but the military postponed any transfer of power until the country “restored peace”. The next election was in 2010, which Suu Kyi boycotted and as a result lost some of her major supporters to new parties such as the National Democratic Force (NDF).

In 2012 Suu Kyi ran in the by-elections and won almost all available seats, herself becoming an MP in the lower house for the first time.

Aung San Suu Kyi has a unique, golden reputation that will be difficult to taint from competing parties, as well as fierce support from Western democratic nations. She is still considered the most popular politician in Myanmar but her party’s weak framework and lagging support from some segments of the Buddhist church may pose problems in the campaigning to come.

While she is constitutionally barred from becoming president, it is currently predicted she will take the second most powerful position in Myanmar government – the lower house speaker.



5.4. Other Influential Leaders

5.4.1. U Thein Nyunt (Chairman of New National Democracy Party)



U Thein Nyunt's powerful reputation as an effective and vibrant lawmaker has allowed him to lead an effective splinter group away from Aung San Suu Kyi and run most recently under the banner of the New National Democratic Party (NNDP).

The party includes figures such as Upper House MP Phone Myint Aung and legislators Kyi Myint, U Kyaw and San San Myint from the Rangoon Regional Assembly.

Some voters, especially within legal circles, believe U Thein Nyunt has the potential to compete with Aung San Suu Kyi to become Lower House Speaker. His frank comments on the old regime, opposition, ethnic affairs and the constitution have built a platform of trust on which he may be able to build a strong campaign.

Achievements

- Drafted and proposed numerous laws and amendments on issues including Press Freedom, Labour Rights, Money Laundering, Anti-Corruption Non-Governmental Organizations, and Personal Property.
- Member of the Constitutional Amendment Committee

History

- 2010 – Left NLD to help found the NDF
- 2014 – Left NDF to form NNDP

5.4.2. Ko Ko Gyi (8888 Uprising Leader)



Ko Ko Gyi led the iconic 88 Uprising in 1988, becoming a nationwide protest figure against the regime alongside Aung San Suu Kyi. He was imprisoned for his role in the protests and since his release in 2012 he has been an active voice in the reformation process.

Although not yet a member of Suu Kyi's party, he has expressed his interest in politics and is expected to join the NLD during their campaign this year, potentially becoming the deputy chairman.



6. Regional Comparisons

Over the past few decades many South East Asian nations have been through transformative periods as the military recedes or strengthens in answer to political unrest. Myanmar's progress can be compared to its neighbours in terms of political and military stability.

6.1. Thailand

Since a revolution in 1932, Thailand has been a constitutional monarchy under a parliamentary system, but in practice the country has been ruled by a succession of military leaders after a series of coup d'états. The latest of these in 2014 partly repealed the country's constitution, bringing the National Council for Peace and Order to power. While the military does not automatically hold seats in parliament, it must directly approve all parties that can run for office.

Thailand's current governance system is in some ways reminiscent of Myanmar's old abolished regime (The State Law and Order Council, or "SLORC"), even to the name. For decades Thailand offered a shining example of a South-East Asian nation developing a form of democracy to welcome Western investors, tourists, and corporates, but uncertainty in the country is rising, especially given the concerns over royal succession.

6.2. Indonesia

Under the rule of President Suharto up to the late 90s, Indonesia's Armed Forces had an explicit role as an overseer and arbiter of government policy. To keep stability in an ethnically diverse and sprawling nation and to uphold the regime's strong anti-communist stance, the military took a core role in all aspects of politics.

When Suharto stepped down in 1998, the military retained only 7.6% of seats in parliament and by 2004 all seats were democratically elected. However, the armed forces retained considerable influence in politics behind the scenes. In 2014 Jokowi became the first President of Indonesia since 1998 with no links to the military or Suharto, promising widespread reforms and a change in direction.

The gradual reduction in automatic military parliament seats exemplified by Indonesia is a potential path for Myanmar's path to complete civilian governance.

6.3. Cambodia

Cambodia's modern government has been dominated by Prime Minister Hun Sen, an ex-Khmer Rouge commander who won elections in 1998 and has retained power since, becoming one of the world's longest standing national leaders. Hun Sen and his CPP party have been condemned internationally for rigging elections, suppressing opposition, and controlling many aspects of society such as the media, police, and armed forces. Protests and a strengthening opposition in 2013 saw in a year long deadlock that resulted in a coalition government, but Hun Sen remains the country's undisputed 'strongman' ruler.

6.4. Laos

An entrenched, military-backed communist party has governed Laos since 1975. The one-party state has overseen a struggling command economy that has made the country one of the poorest in the world, despite some advances in metals extraction and tourism. Investment has been dissuaded through allegations of corruption and overspending on the military, which is often used to quell opposition political forces.



Photo Sources

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