

Timeline

1057 - Burma is founded and Buddhism is adopted.

1885 - Burma is annexed to British India.

1937-1948 - Burma is a colony of the British crown.

1942 - Japan invades and occupies Burma using the Japanese-trained Burma Independence Army, which later becomes the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL).

1945 - General Aung San leads the AFPFL and frees Burma from Japan with help from the British.

1947 - General Aung San and members of his government are assassinated by nationalist rival U Saw.

1958-1960 - AFPFL party splits, resulting in the formation of a caretaker government.

1960 - U Nu wins elections. His endorsement of Buddhism and acceptance of separatism antagonizes the military.

1962 - Military coup led by General Ne Win abolishes the federal system and implements the "Burmese Way to Socialism", which nationalizes the economy, forms a one-party state, and bans independent media.

1974 - The new constitution transfers power to the People's Assembly, led by Ne Win.

1975 - The Opposition National Democratic front is formed with minority groups from diverse regions.

1982-1987 - New laws passed restricting the rights of non-indigenous people, and devaluation of currency leads to civil unrest.

1988 - Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of General Aung San, speaks to hundreds of thousands and calls for an end to violence. By mid-September the protests become more violent, thousands are killed, and the State Law and Order Restoration Council is formed (SLORC).

1989 - Thousands of human rights and democracy advocates are arrested. Aung San Suu Kyi is put under house arrest. Burma is renamed Myanmar.

1990 - The Opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) and Aung San Suu Kyi win the general election, but the results are ignored.

1991 - Aung San Suu Kyi receives Nobel Peace Prize.

1995 - Aung San Suu Kyi is released from house arrest.

1996 - SLORC arrests over 200 people who attempted to attend the NLD congress. Aung San Suu Kyi attends the congress, but is not arrested.

1997 - SLORC renamed State Peace and Development Council.

1998 - 300 NLD members are freed from prison.

2000 - Aung San Suu Kyi and other NLD members are given more freedom of movement from the ruling junta and begin secret talks with them.

2001 - About 200 activists are released from prison.

2003 - Clashes between the government and Aung San Suu Kyi's supporters result in her placement under house arrest. Khin Nyunt becomes Prime Minister and vows to draft a new constitution.

2004 - The government and the Karen National Union agree to cease violent conflict. The constitutional convention excludes the main opposition and ethnic parties. Prime Minister Nyunt is replaced and put under house arrest.

2005 - The administrative capital of the government is moved to Naypyidaw by the military junta.

2006 - Constitutional convention talks end without an outcome.

2007 - The junta adds a year to Suu Kyi's house arrest. In reaction to the unexpected rise in fuel costs, Buddhist monks lead anti-government protests. The government kills 13 protestors and arrests thousands of monks in the Saffron Revolution.

2008 - The proposed constitution ensures a quarter of parliament seats to the military and bans Aung San Suu Kyi from running for office. Cyclone Nargis kills as many as 134,000. The government claims 92% voted in favor of a referendum on the constitution despite the humanitarian crisis of the cyclone. Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest is renewed. Activists receive sentences up to 65 years in closed trials.

2009 - Burma denies the existence of the Muslim Rohingya minority. Talks between the military junta and Suu Kyi begin again.

2010 - Election laws pass allowing the electoral commission to be picked by junta. NLD plans to boycott polls, but the National Democratic Front (NDF) gains legal status and plans to run in elections. The junta changes the country's flag, anthem and the name from the Union of Myanmar to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

2011 - In response to Burma's reform efforts, there is a break in diplomatic relations between the US and Burma marked by the visit of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in December 2011.

2012 - Elections are viewed largely as transparent and fair, leading to the release of many political prisoners. Aung San Suu Kyi is elected to parliament, and 43 of 45 contested seats are won by the NLD party. Violence breaks out between Arkanese and Rohingya, leading to government security forces razing Rohingya villages.

2013 - Violence continues in Rakhine state with Buddhist mobs burning Rohingya villages. Government security forces exacerbate the violence, killing and torturing Rohingya. Estimates suggest 139,000 people are displaced in Rakhine state.

2014 - Democratic reform stalls and elections are canceled. Reports of torture by

Burmese security forces persist. There is an increase in Rohingya fleeing Burma by boat.

2015 - Ceasefire deals are signed in March 2015 with all sixteen rebel groups. Rohingya, however, continue to flee Burma in large numbers with estimates between 50,000-100,000 since 2013. Many of those fleeing by boat are turned away by receiving countries and are left stranded at sea.



Torture Methods

FORCED LABOR continues and these camps are reportedly worse than in typical prisons. The food is often rice mixed with stones or rat feces. Proper medical care is almost nonexistent. The feet of prisoners are chained and they typically have to work long hours doing hard manual labor.

STRESS POSITIONS force prisoners to sit, squat, and stand in the same position for prolonged periods of time. The **SEMIGWA DANCE**, based on a traditional Burmese performance, forces prisoners to crawl over gravel on their knees and elbows with feet and hands in the air. The **MOTORCYCLE POSITION** requires prisoners to balance on the balls of their feet, imitating riding a motorcycle, while making engine noises. The **AIRPLANE POSITION** forces prisoners to balance on one foot while holding their arms and other leg out and simultaneously make airplane noises.

BEATINGS with batons, truncheons, rubber cords, bamboo sticks and broomsticks are used during interrogations if the prisoner cannot or does not answer questions to the satisfaction of the interrogator. Some report being tied head down to a seesaw and beaten for hours until the pressure in their head became unbearable. Prisoners report witnessing others being beaten to death.

BURNING with lighters and lit cigarettes has been reportedly used against political prisoners.

SEXUAL ASSAULT, RAPE and the threat of both have been used against both female and male political prisoners. Male prisoners report attempts to use dogs to rape them.

ELECTRIC SHOCK is administered to the feet and genitals of political prisoners.

SLEEP DEPRIVATION is often used during interrogations and beatings.

SOLITARY CONFINEMENT and the denial of books, paper and pens occurs for months at a time. Political prisoners are held in dark cells and unable to tell night from day.

FALSE HOPE OF RELEASE has occurred when individuals and family members are given conflicting incorrect information about a detainee's release.

BLAMING THE VICTIM during interrogation has led to other prisoners being tortured if a detainee does not provide information.

Current Situation

Languages Spoken: Burmese (official), minority ethnic groups have their own languages

Population: 55,746,253

Religion: Buddhist 89%, Christian 4% Muslim 4%, Animist 1%, other 2%

Ethnic Groups: Burman 68%, Shan 9%, Karen 7%, Rakhine 4%, Chinese 3%, Indian 2%, Mon 2%, other 5%

ETHNIC CLEANSING has resulted from ongoing violence since 1948 between the Burmese Army and minority ethnic groups. There are a 135 ethnic groups in Burma often classified into 8 groups. The military campaign targets minority groups such as the Karen, Chin, Shan, Rakhine, Arakanese, Mon, Kachin and Rohingya. Ethnic minority insurgent groups and civilians accuse the military of attacking villagers to assimilate them into mainstream Burman language, culture, and religion. Reports of torture against Kachin people accused of being affiliated with the Kachin Independence Army surfaced in 2014. As of 2015, ceasefire deals have been signed with all sixteen rebel groups. Yet, Rohingya continue to be targeted.

ELECTIONS were held in 2012 and were viewed as transparent and fair, leading to Aung San Suu Kyi being elected to parliament, as well as large scale political prisoner release. However, government reforms have stalled since 2014, when elections were canceled and constitutional reform has yet to be addressed. Discriminatory legislation aimed at disenfranchising Rohingya called the Rakhine State Action Plan, seeks to further segregate Rohingya with restrictions on whom they can marry, how many children they can have, religious freedoms, and freedom of movement.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING of men, women, and children occurs at staggering rates within Burma and from Burma to East and Southeast Asia. Women are trafficked to work in the sex trade as forced domestic servants, and in other labor areas. Children are also forced into labor in shops, agriculture and other industries as well as beggars on the street. Within Burma, civilians are trafficked to work in industrial areas, agriculture, and in the commercial sex industry. Military and civilian officials as well as ethnic insurgent groups use forced labor of adults and children. While the Government of Burma is reportedly making significant efforts to curb trafficking and forced labor and has increased the budget for anti-trafficking, the problems still exist. Many military and civilian officials remain involved in human trafficking.

THE MYANMAR/BURMA NAME DEBATE stems from pro-democracy leaders insistence on "Burma" due to claims that the current government was illegitimate in 1989 when it changed the name from "Burma" to "Myanmar". To some, the use of "Myanmar" equates to sympathizing with the military junta. To the SLORC, the use of the word "Burma" might indicate subversion. Additionally, many ethnic minorities do not identify with Burma or Burmese, and simply refer to themselves by their ethnic minority name.