

What does Myanmar mean?

by Naing Tinmyuntpu



What does "Myanmar" mean? (Part I)

by Naing Tinnyuntpu

"Myan" | မြန် | myan2 | means fast.

"Mar" | မာ | ma2 | means hard, firm, robust, or tough.

Another meaning for "Mar" | မာ | ma2 is 'healthy' as in ကျန်းမာ | kjan3-ma2.

For a country and its people, the more appropriate word is 'strong' as in သန်မာ | thun2-ma2. Therefore, "Myanmar" | မြန်မာ | myan2-ma2 | is 'Fast and Strong' people.

"Myanmar zaga" | မြန်မာစကား | myan2-ma2 za1-ga3 | meaning Myanmar language is the language spoken by those people, and "Myanmar Pyi" | မြန်မာပြည် | myan2-ma2-pyi2 | or MYANMAR when used as a reference to the country can be translated as 'The Land of the Fast and the Strong'.

To English speakers, it may sound odd, and grammatically incorrect to use both the name of the people and the country as MYANMAR. To a Burmese speaker, it does not seem that way. People in this country are used to seeing soccer scores in the Burmese language newspapers such as this:

မြန်မာ | MYANMAR: 0

အင်ဒိုနီးရှား | INDONESIA: 0

No Burmese had raised the eyebrows and debated -- at least not from a pure language standpoint -- as it seems nothing grammatically wrong with this usage in the Burmese language.

Reference to the word "Myanmar" as a language appears to have dated back to the 11th

Century Bagan Civilization. In Mya Zedi | မြေစေတီ | Mya1 Zay2-De2 | Pagoda in Bagan, Prince [Yazakumar](#) | ရာဇကုမာရ် | Ya2-Za1-Ku2-Ma2, the son of [Kyansittha](#) | ကျန်စစ်သား | [Kjan2-Sit-Tha3](#) | had erected what is now a tourist attraction known as [Mya Zedi Pillar Script](#) | ရာဇကုမာရ်ကျောက်စာ | [Ya2-Za1-Ku2-Ma2 kjout sa2](#) | engraved in မွန်၊ မြန်မာ၊ ပါဠိ၊ ပျူ | Mon, Myanmar, Pali, and Pyu scripts.

The usage of the word မြန်မာ | "Myanmar" as a reference to the people or civilization can be seen in [a traditional saying](#) that goes back to generations. It says:

မြန်မာအစ တကောင်းက | myan2-ma2 a-sa1 da1-goun3 ga1 meaning the origin of "Myanmar" is a place called "Dagaung". It is not clear if the saying refers to the [Rakhine ethnic people](#) | ရခိုင်လူမျိုး | [Ya1-Khine2 lu2 myo3](#) | with their version of history dating back to 3325 BC starting from King Marayu, and the migration that took place in the present day [Chittagong](#) by the [Mranma or Marma people](#) in the same region. (According to Royal Chronicle of the Konbaung Dynasty, legendary [Tagaung Kindom](#) was founded in 850 BCE.)

The third edition of Burmese to Burmese dictionary published in 2013 by the [Myanmar Language Commission](#) in Naypyitaw gives two definitions of the word "Myanmar". One refers to all the ethnic people in general who have been living in this land for generations. The second definition refers to "Bamar", which is further defined as one of such ethnic people who speak Tibetan-Burmese language. See the exact words below:

မြန်မာ / မျန်မာ၊ ဗမာ / န-ဝ၊ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတွင် အစဉ်အဆက် နေထိုင်ခဲ့ကြသော တိုင်းရင်းသားများကို ခြုံခေါ်သောအမည်။ ။ ဗမာ။

ဗမာ န - တိဗက်မြန်မာ အုပ်စုဝင် ဘာသာစကား တစ်မျိုးကို ပြောသောမြန်မာတိုင်းရင်းသား တစ်မျိုး။

Although [the United Nations \(UN\)](#) recognizes the name "Myanmar", some English-educated Burmese living abroad and a handful of foreign governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as [Human Rights Watch group](#), as well as some foreign media prefer to use the colonial name "[Burma](#)" that the British gave when they colonized the country for more than 100 years. The reason is mostly political, and partly because for people like the English-educated Burmese living abroad, they are so used to the name "Burma" without any association of the word with the colonial past; "Burma" certainly sounds more modern and Westernized than "Myanmar".

Unlike in the Western countries, names carry significant meaning and pride for the Burmese people. It is not unusual for the Burmese people to change their personal names with the advice of the astrologers to bring health, fortune, and good luck. The official [name change of the country from "Burma" to "Myanmar" in 1989](#) was not recognized by the Western powers and English speaking countries such as the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. [The main opposition party \(NLD\)](#)¹ did not support the change.

For unbiased perspectives, historians should take note that it took place after the [1988 mass demonstrations and unrest](#), but before the [1990 general elections](#). The refusal to use the name "Myanmar" was justified by some non-supporters with the argument that the military government known as [SLORC](#) that came to power on 18 September 1988 and still in power after the 1990 elections was not "official" and a legal entity. Today, NLD leader [Aung San Suu Kyi](#) is a member of the parliament.² Politics still exist but more amicable, and there is an increasing trend towards the usage "Myanmar" in English speaking countries.

The name given by the British during the colonial days was neither "Bamar" nor "Myanmar". Here is an experiment and make your own conclusions. Randomly select at least 30 samples of English educated Burmese, and see if they can pronounce "Burma" correctly the way the British or the Americans do. For a Burmese, "Burma" is a difficult word to pronounce as it has unnatural "r" sound in it. The closest spelling in Burmese is Baa-Maa | ဘားမား | [Ba3-Ma3](#).

But then, history, including the name of the country, is written by the winner of wars -- [Anglo-Burmese wars](#) in this case, and not according to Burmese [King Mindon](#) |

မင်းတုန်းမင်းတရားကြီး | [Min3-dome3-Min3 ta1-ya3 ji3](#) who ruled the Kingdom of Myanmar (yes, Myanmar in Burmese language) that included the ethnic people. The Burmese version of Myanmar history was recorded in [Royal Chronicles](#) known as "Myanmar Yarzawin Kyan Mya" | [မြန်မာရာဇဝင်ကျမ်းများ](#) | [Myan2-Ma2 Ya2-Za1-Win2 Kjan3 Mya3](#), as well as in Ayedawbon chronicles known as [Myanmar Min Mya Ayedawbon](#) | [မြန်မာမင်းများအရေးတော်ပုံ](#) | [Myan2-Ma2 Min3 Mya3 A-yay3-dau2-bone2](#) and in [Hmannan Yazawin](#) | [မှန်နန်းမဟာရာဇဝင်တော်ကြီး](#) | [Hmun2-Nun3 Ma1-Ha2 Ya2-Za1-Win2 Dau2 Ji3](#) with records dating back to periods earlier than [King Pyinbya](#) (817-876 CE) | [ပျဉ်ပြား](#) | [Pyin2-Bya3](#) | of Bagan civilization.

In those days, the British were known for their exploits and [divide and rule](#) strategies in [the empire where the sun never sets](#). It is not inconceivable that the colonial masters had intended on dividing the "Bamar" from the rest of the "Myanmar" ethnic races. Although the British could have initially adopted the name from Burma's (Myanmar's) neighbor Indians or from the Portuguese mercenary [Filipe de Brito e Nicote](#) | [ငဇင်ကာ](#) | [Nga1-Zin2-Ka2](#) (who made an earlier contact and was executed in 1613 by the Burmese) with variations closer to "Bamar" than "Myanmar", no correction was made after establishing diplomatic relations with Myanmar Kings. "Myanmar" to "Bamar" could be analogous to "Soviet Union" to "Russia".

A number of Burmese people including Burma's Independence Hero [General Aung San](#) | [ဗိုလ်ချုပ်အောင်ဆန်း](#) | [Bo2-joat Oun2-Sun3](#) who grew up in the British Burma casually used the word "Burma" in English and "Bamar Pyi" | [ဗမာပြည်](#) | [Ba1-Ma2-Pyi2](#) in Burmese. After all, college student Ko Aung San was the editor of the English Newspaper "*New Burma*". As an author, AUNG SAN referred to the Burmese ethnic race as "Burman" in English and "Bamar" | [ဗမာ](#) | [Ba1-Ma2](#) in Burmese language.

During his struggle for independence, General Aung San used the term "Independence of Burma" | [ဗမာ့လွတ်လပ်ရေး](#) | [ba1-mah1 loot-lut-yay3](#) | in his speeches and writing. The army he led to fight the British at the age of 27 was known in English as [Burma Independence Army \(BIA\)](#) in English and [ဗမာ့လွတ်လပ်ရေး တပ်မတော်](#) | [ba1-ma1](#)

loot-lut-yay3 tut-ma1-dau2 in Burmese.

However, Bogyoke Aung San was careful to use the word "Myanmar" in 1947 [Pinlone \(PangLong\) Conference](#) | ပင်လုံညီလာခံကြီး | pin2-lone2 nyi2-la2-khan2 ji3 when he met with the ethnic leaders and persuaded them to join the Union. Here is the excerpt of General Aung San's Pinlone Conference dinner speech.



ကျွန်တော် သည်ကိုရောက်လာတဲ့ကိစ္စ နားလည်တာ တခု ရှိပါတယ်။
ဘာလဲဆိုရင် မြန်မာပြည်ကြီး လွတ်လပ် စေချင်တယ်၊
ညီညွတ်စေချင်တယ်၊ ကြီးပွားစေချင်တယ်၊ သည်ဟာပါဘဲ။
တိုင်းပြည် လွတ်လပ်အောင်၊ ညီညွတ်အောင်၊ ကြီးပွားအောင်
ဘယ်လိုလုပ်ရမလဲ ဆိုတာကို လွန်ခဲ့တဲ့ ၁၀ နှစ်လောက်က စပြီး
ကြိုးစားလာပါတယ်။ နောင်လဲ ကြိုးစားပါဦးမယ်၊ လုံးလုံး လွတ်လပ်
တဲ့ကိစ္စ ပြီးပြတ်သည် အထိ ကြိုးစားပါမယ်။

Reference: ဗိုလ်ချုပ်အောင်ဆန်းမိန့်ခွန်းများ၊ (၁၁-၁၈၈) ၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ စာပေဗိမာန်၊ ၁၉၇၁။

When the [Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League \(AFPFL\)](#) Party | ဖက်ဆစ်ဆန့်ကျင်ရေး ပြည်သူ့လွတ်လပ်ရေး အဖွဲ့ချုပ် (ဖဆပလ) | Pfa1-Hsa1-Pa1-La1 led by Aung San was drafting the constitution for the independent sovereign state just a few months before he was assassinated, a formal name for ဗမာပြည် | Ba1-Ma2-Pyi2 known as "Pyi-Htoun-Su Myanmar Naing-Ngan" | ပြည်ထောင်စုမြန်မာနိုင်ငံ | Pyi2-Htoun2-Su1 Myan2-Ma2 Nine2-Ngan2 | in Burmese was conceived for the first time. From the Burmese language standpoint, "Pyi-Htoun-Su Bamar Naing-Ngan" with the use of "Bamar" | ဗမာ | Ba1-Ma2 would not have been acceptable, as it would have excluded the ethnic people.

Some might argue that the reason why "Myanmar" was chosen over "Bamar" was because the later was not a formal word, and that the choice had nothing to do with the ethnic people. It should be pointed out that during the Japanese occupation with the puppet government led by Dr. Ba Maw as the head of state (1943-1945), the country was called [State of Burma](#), or simply "Bamar" | ဗမာ | Ba1-Ma2 in Burmese. This should dispel the mistaken belief even among the educated Burmese people today that the word "Bamar" | ဗမာ | Ba1-Ma2 in the Burmese language was never used as a formal word and in an "official" capacity, and that it is just a colloquial equivalent of the word "Myanmar" | မြန်မာ | Myan2-Ma2.

Most people today use "Bamar" as a colloquial word, and since "Bamar" is a subset of "Myanmar", the word is also used interchangeably with "Myanmar" to describe the majority Burmese people. However, the word "Bamar" is never used interchangeably with the rest of the ethnic people such as Kachin, Kayin, Chin, and Shan. They are known as "Myanmar ethnic people" | မြန်မာတိုင်းရင်းသားများ | Myan2-Ma2 Tine3-yin3-tha3 mya3, not "Bamar ethnic people" | ဗမာတိုင်းရင်းသားများ | Ba1-Ma2 Tine3-yin3-tha3 mya3. It is fair to say that the independence movements initiated by the "Bamar" people were joined by some other "Myanmar" ethnic people only in the later time, and there was a need to use a more appropriate term. [The Pinlone \(Panglong\) Agreement](#) on 12th February 1947, for example, included the signatures of the interim Burmese government, Shan, Kachin, and Chin representatives. [Karen \(Kayin\) people](#) only sent observers.

General Aung San who graduated with distinctions in Burmese and Pali in his final year of high-school used both "Myanmar" and "Bamar" in Burmese literary form as a reference to the country. He was the author of the article titled ဗမာ့လွတ်လပ်ရေး အရေးတော်ပုံ | Ba1-Ma1 Loot-lut-yay3 A-yay3-dau2-bone2 (Chronicles of Burma's Independence) in the special issue of ဗမာ့ခေတ် | Ba1-Ma1 Khit (Burma's Age) newspaper on August 1st. 1943. That was the day the Japanese declared the "Independence" of "Bamar" | ဗမာ | Ba1-Ma2. On 27 November 1937 Special edition of *Mandalay Thuriya* | မန္တလေးသူရိယာ | Mun3-da1-lay3 Thu2-ri1-ya1 | paper, he used the term "Myanmar Naing-Ngan" | မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ | Myan2-ma2 Nine2-Ngan2. See Below.

ကျောင်းသားဝတ္တရား

ရေးသူ၊ မောင်အောင်ဆန်း၊ ဘီ-အေ

မြန်မာနိုင်ငံလုံးဆိုင်ရာ၊ သမဂ္ဂအသင်းဥက္ကဋ္ဌ

One can reasonably deduce that if "Bamar Pyi" | ဗမာပြည် | Ba1-Ma2-Pyi2 | refers to "Burma", then the name "Burma" stands for the country of the majority Burmese ethnic people known as "Bamar" | ဗမာ | Ba1-Ma2. It was either an oversight, considered unimportant, or deliberately left untouched by the authors of the first Constitution. The name of the country after the independence on January 4th, 1948 was to be known as "the Union of Burma" in English.

Perhaps, the status quo was because the word "Burma" was the only choice when negotiating for the terms of independence with the British. Moreover, the territories under the British Burma already covered all the ethnic regions (but reluctant by the British to give independence concurrently.) No known historical records existed on the desire and debates coming from Burma's patriots and politicians at that time to introduce a new vocabulary in the English language; such debates would have further delayed the independence.

As for the usage of မြန်မာ | "Myanmar" for the country in the Burmese language, it was less of a controversy. Just as the United States is referred to as 'The Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave' in The Star-Sprangled Banner, 'Myanmar' refers to anything relating to the 'Fast and the Strong' people. On the other hand, the usage of ဗမာ | "Bamar" per the dictionary definition today is limited to the main racial group who speak the Burmese Language as the mother tongue.

As such, လူဝင်မှုကြီးကြပ်ရေးနှင့် အမျိုးသားမှတ်ပုံတင်ရေး ဦးစီးဌာန (လဝက) | Myanmar Immigration & National Registration Department | (La1-Wa1-Ka1)³ identifies the race of a person as "ဗမာ + မွန်" | "Bamar + Mon" if her father is a Burmese and mother is a Mon. If she marries a Burmese, her children will be identified as "ဗမာ + ဗမာ မွန်" | "Bamar + Bamar Mon". In terms of nationality, all of them will be မြန်မာ | Myanmar. In this way, various ethnic groups in this country who speak more than 100 different languages and dialects can maintain their racial identity, and yet still be united in 'The Land of the Fast and the Strong' that they call home.

The usage of မြန်မာပြည် | "Myanmar Pyi" in place of the original ဗမာပြည် | "Bamar Pyi" in the National Anthem thus reflects the inclusion of all the ethnic people. Putting aside the politics, "Aung San of Burma", I am sure, would have no objection if he had lived to see the independence of "Burma".

Posted on Asia Pearl Travels website.

http://www.asiapearltravels.com/language/intro_burmese.php#meaning-of-myanmar

February 2015

What does "Myanmar" mean? (Part II)

This article is edited several times for accuracy and to provide informational links.

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1. It would be more appropriate to call NLD either "the main anti-government group" or "group fighting for democracy" than "the main oppositional party" at that time, since some NLD members actually had the chance to sit in the parliament only after President Thein Sein took office. President U Thein Sein | ဦးသိန်းစိန် | U3 Thain3 Sain2 first met with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi | ဒေါ်အောင်ဆန်းစုကြည် | Dau2 Oun2 Hsun3 Su1 Kji2 on August 19, 2011, and again on April 12, 2012 to convince her and NLD to take part in the by-elections. During the interview with Washington Post a few months before becoming a member of the parliament, she said:

“My meeting with the president went well, and I believe he sincerely wants reform. But he is not the only one in government. Our present constitution gives the military far too much power. Although the president is the head of state, he is not necessarily the highest power in the land. The commander in chief can take over all powers of government at any time he feels it to be necessary. That must be very difficult if you are in the position in which our president is. I don’t know how much support he has within the army. He himself is an army man, so I assume there must be considerable support for him in military circles. But that is just an assumption.

I think the president is genuine about reform. I think there are those who support him in the government. Whether all people support him, I can’t answer.”

You referred to the fact that the army could overthrow this president. What is his relationship with the army?

“He is respected in the army, that we know. He is one of the few members of the previous regime who is considered by all to be clean. Not only he, but his family as well, and that is unusual.”

https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/an-interview-with-burmas-democracy-activist-aung-san-suu-kyi/2012/01/19/gIQAfNloDQ_story.html?utm_term=.05bfbd4cc217

2. Boycotting the November 2015 general elections was still an option by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi at least until early April 2015. The clause 59(f) in the 2008 military drafted Constitution disqualifies a person if the person himself, one of the parents, the spouse, one of the legitimate children or their spouses owe allegiance to a foreign power, which effectively disqualifies her from taking the highest office in the government as the President.

This certainly is more restrictive than natural born Citizen requirement in Article II Section 1 of the Constitution of the United States which disqualifies former governor of California Arnold Schwarzenegger from running for the President. Welcome to the intriguing and intoxicating world of power and politics. The fight for power does not involve Buddhist principle of loving-kindness in Myanmar just like any other countries in the world. In the U.S., Donald Trump had once raised his doubt aloud as to whether president Obama was born in the United States. Someone posted in the news comment: Don't bother checking. If he was not, Hillary Clinton would have found that out first. The White House in April 2011 cleared all doubts by releasing [the birth certificate of Barack Hussein Obama II](#).

During the interview with Reuter News on April 3, 2015, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said Thein Sein's "hardline regime" was not sincere and "complacent" about the reforms and might try to postpone the elections. Boycotting the elections was "not the best choice", but was an option.

“Because if he had been sincere about reform, then we would be much further ahead than we are,” she said.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-suukyi-idUSKBN0MU19R20150403>

The outgoing [President Thein Sein](#) made it clear that he could only work from within the framework of the power vested in him by the Constitution. Despite [worst floods in decades that affected more than one million people in 12 States out of 14](#) just a few months before the scheduled elections, his administration oversaw what was generally regarded as the first free and fair general elections in decades. On the economic front, he did a pretty decent job considering he had to start from the scratch, and left behind the economic growth that was recognized as [the fastest growing economy in Asia](#).

In his monthly radio address to the Nation in early 2014, president Thein Sein said:

“I don’t want a situation that limits any Myanmar citizen from the political leadership of the country,” but cautioned that the amendment to the Constitution should include suitable basic principles to protect the country’s sovereignty.

<http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/amendments-01022014151244.html>

"[Thura](#)" U Shwe Mann | သူရဦးငွေမန် | [Thu2-ra1 U3 Shway2 Mun3](#), the Speaker of the Lower House and a political rival who became a close ally of Aung San Suu Kyi, sent an official letter to President Thein Sein urging the president to give leadership in amending the Constitution. The President's Office was quick to respond to the Parliament that the procedure regarding amending the Constitution was already spelled out in the Constitution itself, and it should be done in the parliament. He added that he was ready to support it. Thura U Shwe Mann was higher in the hierarchy than U Thein Sein during the military rule. He was a likely successor to [Senior General Than Shwe](#), the architect of the transitional government and the Constitution. The other possible successor at that time was "[Thiha Thura](#)" Tin Aung Myint Oo.

The military honor "Thiha Thura" is even higher than "Thura". But it appeared that the leadership at that time felt more comfortable if both the two brave and ambitious gentlemen took the positions as politicians out of uniform rather than leaving either one of them behind to succeed him as the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. It came as a big surprise, perhaps even for Mr. Shwe Mann. Senior General Than Shwe himself and his deputy [Maung Aye](#) were the last to exit. Other senior officers above 60 were permitted to retire first, and much younger General Min Aung Hlaing was appointed as Commander-in-Chief in 2011. ([See new retirement age.](#))

During the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon visit to Myanmar back in early July 2009, Senior General Than Shwe said, by the time the UN Chief next visit after the 2010 elections (which NLD boycotted), “I will be an ordinary citizen, a lay person, and my colleagues will too because it will be a civilian government.” [The UN Chief himself was not exempted from politics.](#) He was criticized by the U.S. and France for his engagement policy with the junta in align with the practice by the members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

“The region and the world are changing fast. Myanmar only stands to gain from engagement -- and from embarking on its own change.”

[Read Ban Ki Moon's message on 4 July 2009.](#)

Mr. Than Shwe, unlike the "lady", or the [Strongman General Ne Win trusted Spy Chief Lieutenant-General turn Prime Minister Khin Nyunt](#) that he disposed of in [2004 power play](#), does not enjoy limelight in front of the camera so much, and seldom gives interviews.

Myanmar has a culture of respecting elders, teachers, monks and superiors. During သီတင်းကျွတ် | [Dtha1 Din3 Kjoot](#) Season around November every year, it is a custom for Myanmar people to visit their elder relatives, teachers, and former supervisors who are now old and retired. Likewise, active military officers, as well as ex-officers who are now serving the country as heads of various government departments by appointment pay homage to their former superiors in the military. Some in the inner circle who are well-connected are quite successful in the business world -- wealthy enough to get listed in the table of U.S. economic sanctioned businesses and individuals. Military also produce other fine individuals like [General "Thura" Tin Oo](#), former Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces and Defense Minister who at one time served as the president of NLD and now the Chairman of NLD.



89 years old NLD Chairman and former Commander-in-Chief and Defense Minister General "Thura" U Tin Oo at 21st Century Panglong Conference on September 1, 2016

Old boys' network(s) of Myanmar, to give a bad comparison, like Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and George Bush Senior and Junior network, have considerable influence and control in politics and in the business world. The power was no longer centered around just one person, but collectively, the "invisible hand" could bring down even people like Thura U Shwe Mann.

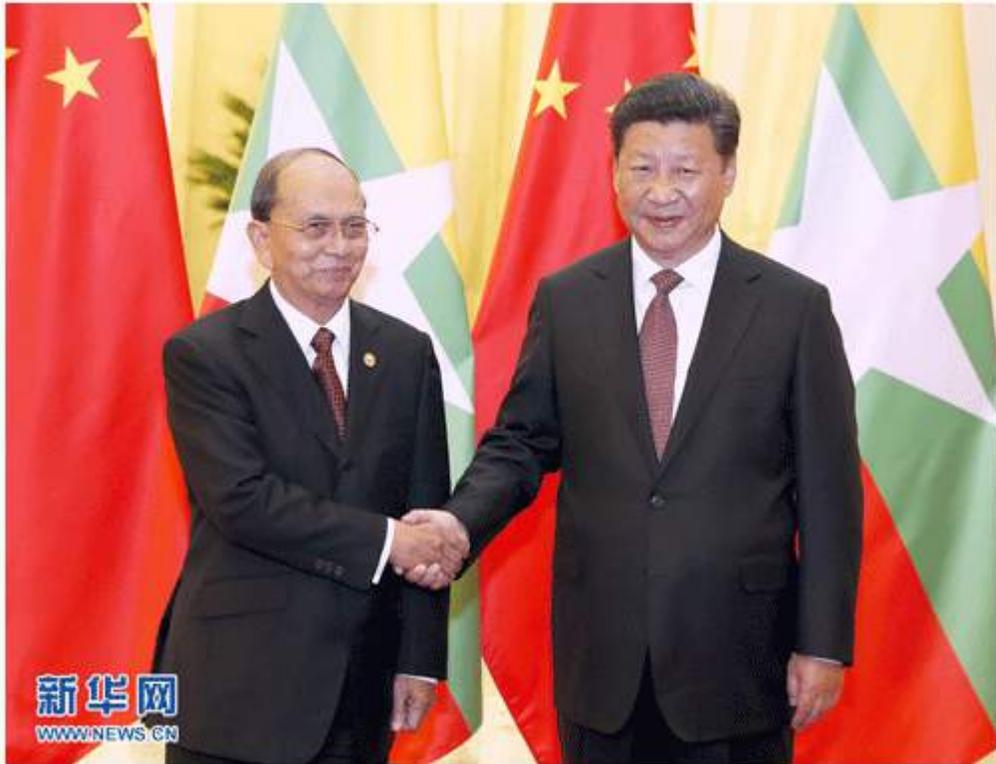
It was impossible for President Thein Sein to grant all the wishes that NLD wanted. Myanmar president in the executive branch does not have the veto power over any bill or amendments to the Constitution submitted by the lawmakers in the legislative branch. Neither could the military get all it's wish list fulfilled without the support of majority in the parliament.

In making amendments to the Constitution, the most the President could do would have been to have his input and recommendations for review and reconsideration in the parliament. Although he could have initiated such a proposal to the lawmakers, President Thein Sein was tackling other higher priorities facing the nation such as Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Process, economic reforms, fighting poverty, implementing press freedom (only after reshuffling his cabinet), and resolving mounting religious tensions.

He was playing a delicate balancing act with various factions, parties, and individuals who still have influence over the military, as well as with external powers, particularly between China and the the United States. When [Myitsone Dam project](#) became too hot, he turned in the direction of the U.S. for fresh air, and when he got a little bored with lectures from the United States, he shook hand with Chinese president Xi Jinping.

Xi Jinping Meets with President U Thein Sein of Myanmar

2015/09/04



Grinning Myanmar President shaking hand with the Chinese President. It is not clear if he was amused by the American friends in prior meetings.

Photo source:

http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/jnkzsl70zn/t1294748.shtml

During a separate meeting with lawmakers made up of [Union Solidarity and Development Party \(USDP\)](#) majority on November 26, 2014, President Thein Sein told the country's MPs that they have the responsibility to amend the Constitution.

<http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/constitution-11262014134622.html>

The major amendments to the Constitution did not take place in time for the 2015 General Elections. There were disagreements as to whether to hold four party talk, six party talk, or talks to include major stakeholders such as other ethnic groups. When such a political dialogue took place that included a large number of stakeholders on April 8, 2015, but with the agenda on the upcoming elections and nationwide cease-fire agreement (NCA) process, the Nobel Peace laureate was not too happy, because she could not bring her agenda forward. One of her agenda was to curb the 25% voting power of the military who she believed could stand in the way of reforms and amendments to the Constitution.

Military MPs are not unlike British MPs in the [House of Lords](#) who are not democratically elected. Clause 109(b) allows their numbers to be anywhere from zero to 25% of the maximum total of 440 in the Lower House, and Clause 141(b) fixed their numbers to 25% or 56 out of 224 in the Upper House.

<http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/talks-04062015142023.html>

<http://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-s-thein-sein-holds-rare-42-party-talks-elections-peace-pact>

A separate Six party-talk among Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, President Thein Sein, the two Speakers of the House, Commander-in-Chief of the defense Services, and a representative from the ethnic minorities was held two days later to discuss domestic political issues. At least they all agreed on the scope, format, and the next meeting date.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/myanmar-six-party-talks-agree-on-three-points-115041000929_1.html

<http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/politics/six-parties-agree-amend-constitution>

Amending the Constitution was not something that could easily be done by six key persons meeting behind closed doors and call it a done deal. NLD preferred even less people in calling the shots -- Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, President Thein Sein, Speaker of the Lower House Shwe Mann, and Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing. Clause 436 (a) and (b) state that making amendments require at least 75% approval from the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw | ပြည်ထောင်စုလွှတ်တော် | Pyi2 Htoun2 Su1 Hloot Tau2, which is a joint session of Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) | ပြည်သူ့လွှတ်တော် | Pyi2 Thu1 Hloot Tau2, and Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) | အမျိုးသားလွှတ်တော် | A-Myo3-Tha3 Hloot Tau2. For some specific cases like 59(f) on the qualifications of the President, there is an additional requirement of nation-wide referendum with votes of more than half of those who are eligible to vote. Anyone who understood the country's political realities should have known the outcome of such talks beforehand. In Myanmar, there was no "Ramos" to come on the side of "Aquino" to recommend something more interesting and radical.

Seventy-five percent threshold in voting to the Constitutional Amendments gives the 25% military representatives a kind of veto power to preserve it, but they do not have such power over other bills regardless of whether the proposed bill is for the good of the country or not. To give an example, when [the members of the parliament voted to increase salaries for themselves](#), the military MP's stood up and rejected, and president Thein Sein recommended to go in stages instead, because he had not planned for the budget. It was a notable time when the legislative branch led by Thura U Shwe Mann challenged President Thein Sein's executive branch. The Union parliament went ahead with the proposal with 323 supporting votes (62.9%), 175 objections, and 15 abstained.

<http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/parliament-votes-favor-tripling-lawmakers-salaries.html>

The ruling party Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) acting Chairman Mr. Shwe Mann's closeness to the NLD leader was not appreciated by some. He too, wanted to serve the country as the president if elected. He played his role well as the brave one and a hero who could even get votes from NLD supporters if the Constitution could not be amended in time to elect Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as the president.

The U.S. foreign policy seemed to give him two thumbs up, while still keeping one of his sons (MANN, Aung Thet - c/o Htoo Trading Company Limited) in the sanctioned list. He was removed from the USDP Central Executive Committee on [August 15, 2015 midnight re-shuffle](#), but still remained as a member of the party as well as the Speaker of the Lower House in the Parliament until the end of his term. (He lost his parliament seat later in the elections to a NLD candidate.)

“It is now clear who is the enemy and who is the ally,”

said [Aung San Suu Kyi on August 18, 2015](#) after her ally Thura U Shwe Mann was removed from the post of the acting chairman of ruling USDP party that NLD must fight to win in the elections. Could members of USDP really afford to keep him as a chairman in order for them to win elections? That was a no-brainer which made big news with endless speculations and accusation on President Thein Sein.

During the [interview with RFA on 20 August 2015](#), the Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing said neither he nor the former Myanmar junta chief Gen. Than Shwe had anything to do with removing Mr. Shwe Mann from the USDP acting chairman position.

“I would say this is impossible. He’s living peacefully by himself in retirement. I sometimes go to see him to pay my respects on religious occasions, but I do this because he’s the father of the Tatmadaw (Defense Services). He gives advice on the betterment of the Tatmadaw, but he won’t say “do this” or “do that.” He often stresses the need for us to maintain unity and to work for the country. We don’t discuss the current political process. The government and the Hluttaw [legislature] are also doing their best within their rights. There is no influence whatsoever being exerted by retired Gen. Than Shwe.”

“The Tatmadaw must stand up for the government, and we are helping Thein Sein’s government in the work of successfully rebuilding our country. Although I am the head of the military, Thein Sein is the head of state, and so I have to work under his leadership. That is my duty. Regarding the recent political changes, this is the business of the [ruling USDP] party. The party is simply doing its work. Some have said that these things happened because of the involvement of senior retired military officers. But they can take any path they choose, because they are retired. Our military is not involved. All this is speculation, I would say.”

[Interview with 60 Minutes \(CBS News\) on October 25, 2015](#)

Bill Whitaker: Do you think that constitution is written specifically for you, to keep you from being president?

Aung San Suu Kyi: “Oh I think so. I dare to say publicly and openly that that particular clause is written with me in mind.”

Bill Whitaker: Would you like to be president?

Aung San Suu Kyi: “What I would like is for our people to feel that we have actually won through, that the struggle for democracy has been crowned. And if the people are allowed to choose freely their head of government and they've choose to choose me, that's fine.”

During a separate interview with President Thein Sein:

Bill Whitaker: What is your relationship with opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi?

President Thein Sein:

“There are no major problems between the two of us. We may not be partners, but we are not enemies. Whether Aung San Suu Kyi or any other party wins, there will be a peaceful transfer of power.”

During the election campaigns, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi made a vow that she would be "above the president". (Refer to Time Magazine on Nov 5, 2015.)

“It's a very simple message...”

“I'll make all the proper and important decisions...”

“I'll be above the president...”

“I'll run the government...”

“The constitution says nothing about being 'above the president.’”



Source: <http://www.businessinsider.com/ap-myanmars-suu-kyi-eyes-post-above-the-president-2015-11>

A check in the Constitution shows that "above the president" is not legally possible since the clause 16 states: **The head of the Union and the Head of Executive of the Union is the President.** Furthermore, clause 58 states: **The president of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar takes precedence over all other persons throughout the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.** That clause is on the same page as 59(f) that bars her from becoming the president.

NLD won the November 8, 2015 general elections with overwhelming majority. The ruling party USDP was shocked by the margin of defeat. President Thein Sein sent his congratulations to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and NLD for "gathering the support of the people." He did not run for a seat in the parliament, but he on at least one occasion in the interview showed his willingness for the second term if it was "the desire of the people."

Under the 2008 Constitution, it is possible to become a president without being elected as a member of the parliament first. Under Clause 60(c), members of the new parliament may select someone from within or outside the legislature for three vice president positions. The second round of selection determines the president. The two professional facebook videos which came out in time for the elections period highlighted President Thein Sein government's achievements, and at least one of his radio message revealed his government's plans for the next phase of reforms, which was met with ridicules from the local press that supported NLD.

“The government will respect and follow the people’s choice and decision, and work on transferring power peacefully according to the timetable”

-- President Thein Sein's message on the facebook after NLD won the elections --

“The president will be told exactly what he can do.”

“I make all the decisions because I am the leader of the winning party.”

“We are not going in for vengeance, and we are not going in for a series of Nurembergs.”

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/12/world/asia/aung-san-suu-kyi-myanmar-elections-military.html?_r=0

-- Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on her plans for the new government --

Threats of [Nuremberg style trials](#) against the previous ruling generals were sometimes heard on foreign-based media. Generals were not quite prepared for it in the 1990 elections. This time around, members of former military government (SLORC/ SPDC) need not worry.

Clause 445 under Transitory Provisions in the 2008 Constitution that is well-protected against amendments states:

All policy guidelines, laws, rules, regulations, notifications and declarations of the State Law and Order Restoration Council and the State Peace and Development Council or actions, rights and responsibilities of the State Law and Order Restoration Council and the State Peace and Development Council shall devolve on the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. No proceeding shall be instituted against the said Councils or any member thereof or any members of the Government, in respect of any act done in the execution of their respective duties.

On March 22, 2016, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi took the positions of the minister of the president's office, foreign affairs, electric power and energy, and education. The effective date for the start of the new government was on April 1st. 2016, but it was not an April fool's joke. She earlier picked her close friend [U Htin Kyaw](#) | ဦးထင်ကျော် | [U3 Htin2 Kjau2](#) to be nominated as one of the Vice Presidents.

With NLD in the clear majority in the parliament, U Htin Kyaw received 274 out of 317 votes to be selected as one of the Vice Presidents in the first round of voting as required by the Constitution. In the second round of voting for the President from the three Vice Presidents, he received the highest vote (360 out of 652) to become the 9th president of the country. The two others including military nominated Vice President [Myint Swe](#) (Chief Minister of Yangon Region during President Thein Sein's Term) automatically became the two Vice Presidents in the new cabinet.

On April 4th, 2016, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi dropped two ministerial positions and became a newly created "State Counselor", as well as the foreign minister. The newly created position circumvented the limitations imposed by the Constitution and gave her the freedom to communicate and coordinate with anyone, group or organization on behalf of the Union government. (This would enable her to exert influence in both the legislative and executive branches as well as communicate with political parties. The president, on the other hand, cannot involve in party affairs.)

Although the Nobel Peace laureate was not too keen, or perhaps too busy to give moral support to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) process during President Thein Sein's term, for the good of the country, she has now taken the leadership position in this process as well.

NLD representative Win Htein attended the [NCA signing ceremonies on 15 October 2015](#) on behalf of the NLD leader who was invited, but did not attend. On that day, Mr. Win Htein declined to sign as a witness because he said the word "nationwide" was not justified, since only eight ethnic armies were participating out of fifteen, and it was not inclusive enough.

The first 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference was held from August 31 to September 3, 2016, a day short of original 5 days planned. It was a good start with more participants including UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon (his 5th visit) and representatives from 20,000 - 25,000 strong [United Wa State Army \(UWSA\)](#) who were persuaded by China to join. UWSA made a truce with the Burmese during Lieutenant-General Khin Nyunt's time. They [walked out on the second day of this Conference](#) due to minor misunderstanding in which they were not given the VIP status of participants to make speeches.

On and off cease-fire agreements with ethnic groups and resuming of fights are not new. Talks alone without solving the root-cause of the problems did not work in the past. Hypothetical question: Would they lay down their arms to accept the status of U.S. territories like Puerto Rico or Guam in which they can get hold of the U.S. passport and enjoy the rights and life of Americans, except the right to vote for the U.S. president? If yes, why? How part of the question: Is there implementation budget for it?

(Those are just hypothetical questions that require honest answers for soul-searching.)



Lieutenant-General Khin Nyunt with Kachin delegates in the 90's.

“I use Burma very often because I am used to using it. But it does not mean that I require other people to do that as well.”

“And I'll make an effort to say Myanmar from time to time so you all feel comfortable.”

— Aung San Suu Kyi, Foreign Minister and State Counselor on April 22, 2016 to the foreign diplomatic corps —

3. NLD government has re-organized လူဝင်မှုကြီးကြပ်ရေးနှင့် အမျိုးသားမှတ်ပုံတင်ရေး ဦးစီးဌာန (လဝက) | Myanmar Immigration & National Registration Department | (La1-Wa1-Ka1) as အလုပ်သမား၊ လူဝင်မှုကြီးကြပ်ရေးနှင့်ပြည်သူ့အင်အားဝန်ကြီးဌာန | Ministry of Labor, Immigration and Population.

[See who is who in the new cabinet.](#)

What now? Myanmar or Burma?

The last check on the [President's office website](#) shows that official name does not revert back to Burma after NLD took power, while a few die-hard fans of "Burma" as well as some who initially rejected the name "Myanmar" as a defiance to the military government still exercise their freedom of speech to use the word "Burma".

On the happy ending note, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi now opts to have a better relation with younger generation of military officers. She somehow managed to recover from psychological wounds inflicted by unceasing and relentless rounds of causes and effects during her struggle for democracy. She was able to cut this vicious circle -- at least in her heart -- and deeply let go after [meeting face to face with the former military leader U Than Shwe](#), who kept her in confinement of her home for many years. 80 years old former general now spends most of his retirement years in his Nay Pyi Taw home doing meditation, passing time with his grandchildren, and pursuing another interest -- astrology. She also met separately with U Thein Sein and the Commander-in-Chief for reconciliations. She said she wants to give မေတ္တာ | myit-ta², Buddhist principle of loving-kindness a try in Burmese politics. For many, hate still runs deep. It will take time to heal.

The current Commander-in-Chief [Senior General Min Aung Hlaing](#) | ဗိုလ်ချုပ်မှူးကြီး မင်းအောင်လှိုင် | Bo² Joat Hmu³ Ji³ Min³ Oun² Hline² was just six years old when [General Ne Win](#) seized power in 1962. He could not be held accountable for actions of the past regimes. The confrontational approach of the past with unfortunate results had gained popular support, sympathy, admiration and praise from the oppressed as well as from observers around the world, but created bitter "enemies" and held back the country from moving forward.

We live in an imperfect world with less than perfect human beings. It's too easy to demonize less than perfect leaders for their human failings, but very often it is more difficult to see the world from their perspectives, and try to understand why they make certain decisions. Everyone, including "military dictators", "[democratic dictator](#)", and those in the "hardline regime" want a prosperous "Myanmar" or "Burma" that can stand proud in the world. While the intention is good, the approach may not necessarily be optimum. Sometimes pride and ego get in the way. Sometimes family and colleagues come first before principles and values. Sometimes party politics take precedence over national interests. Views and personal belief can be distorted due to many reasons. Equally harmful is the view which is correct but incomplete, like seeing the dice from just one side. Very often, people in this country end up in disagreements rather than focusing on the common goals, while the rest of the world move on.

Google search yields 277,000,000 results for "Myanmar" and 92,400,000 results for "Burma" with the US State Department, Human Rights Watch group, and CIA in the top 10 under "Burma". The same search yields 45,300,000 results for Myanmar Language and 13,500,000 results for Burmese Language.