



Burma 2012 Crime and Safety Report

Stolen items; Theft; Bribery; Transportation Security; Riots/Civil Unrest; Elections; Insurgencies; VBIEDs; IEDs; Money Laundering; Floods; Earthquakes; Tornadoes; Drug Trafficking; Travel Health and Safety

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Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Violent crime and other major crimes in Rangoon are rare. That being said, many crimes committed go unreported, making it difficult to estimate correctly levels of criminal activity. Potential for crime against foreign residents and travelers may be higher in some regions outside of Rangoon, particularly in remote areas that lack sufficient police presence. Rangoon has seen cyclical events of bombings throughout the city. This trend was also present in the first half of 2011 in central and northern Burma with bombings near Nay Pyi Taw, Mandalay, and in Kachin State. These bombings often cause few casualties and do not seem to target a specific group or person. Overland travel by foreigners outside major cities may experience problems without a Burmese interpreter to facilitate interactions with non-English speakers.

Crime Threats

The most commonly reported crimes among diplomats and other resident expatriates are non-violent crimes of opportunity such as pick-pocketing and theft of unattended items. Many crimes reported to RSO Rangoon are unverifiable and usually come from third-party sources that are difficult to corroborate.

Criminals (specifically violent criminals) are much less likely to target foreign expatriates and diplomats than Burmese nationals. While such targets are seen as wealthy, there is widespread belief among the local population that the Burmese police are more likely to investigate and prosecute cases where expatriates or foreign diplomats are victims.

There were two reported incidents of crime reported by U.S. Embassy personnel in 2011. The first involved the theft of an Embassy Officer's hubcaps from his personal vehicle that was garaged in an Embassy leased apartment complex. The second incident involved the theft of an iPod from an Embassy officer's personal vehicle. The employee left the item in his car with



the window left down while parked on the street.

Road Safety

Most roadways and vehicles are old and poorly maintained. Public transportation via taxis, bus, and rail is readily available in Rangoon and some other parts of the country. Most trains and buses, however, are often overcrowded and are frequently out of service due to poor maintenance. In Rangoon, taxis are a better method of transportation, but many are unsafe due to poor maintenance and lack of seatbelts.

Burmese traffic police are often inefficient. Enforcement of traffic regulations is haphazard and is almost always used as a means to solicit bribes. Drivers in Rangoon must always be alert for pedestrians and animals walking into traffic. Drivers often do not use headlights at night or during the evening hours, and street lighting is less than adequate. Rangoon's traffic lights are inefficient and often out of service.

Political Violence

Rangoon has not seen any major protests since September 2007 when large anti-government demonstrations were met with a violent response by the government of Burma (GOB). Recent political and diplomatic developments have seen the GOB release many political prisoners from these past demonstrations, and the overall political environment seems to be changing for the better. That said, the possibility for demonstrations remains, and the GOB's response could be severe. In addition, there is still fighting between the Burmese government and several ethnic groups that populate border areas. These groups have been engaged in long-standing armed conflict with the GOB. As of late, many of these ethnic groups have reached cease-fire agreements with the GOB although conflicts and contentious issues remain; hostilities could resume in these areas without warning.

Historical Perspective

Pro-democracy demonstrations in 1988 resulted in a violent response by the GOB. In 1990, the GOB held elections in which the main democratic opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), won overwhelmingly. In response, the GOB refused to honor the election results and instead tightened its longstanding grip on power. An uprising in September 2007 (often referred to as the Saffron Revolution because of the monks that joined the movement) was triggered by a dramatic rise in fuel prices. Again, the GOB violently suppressed the demonstrators. The international community viewed the November 2010 election as fundamentally flawed and orchestrated to ensure the junta could continue to run



the government, now ostensibly by democratic means. The GOB has stated that it will hold by-elections in April 2012, and the previously banned NLD party has registered to participate, an unprecedented achievement in Burmese politics.

Regional Terrorism and Organized Crime

The GOB still considers many anti-government groups to be terrorist organizations, including some peaceful political organizations. Armed ethnic groups in the border regions engage in criminal activities, including narcotics production and trafficking, gem and timber smuggling, and human trafficking.

Burma has experienced cyclical events of car bombings and other explosives-related incidents. Recently, on October 26, 2011, a grenade exploded in a taxicab in the outskirts of Rangoon. The driver was killed, and two passengers were injured. No individual or group claimed responsibility for this incident. Five days later, on October 31, 2011, a live hand grenade was found underneath a car belonging to a Burmese military officer in downtown Rangoon. The hand grenade failed to detonate, and Burmese police explosives teams disposed of it. Again, no one claimed responsibility for the attempted attack, but it is presumed to have been carried out by one of the armed ethnic groups fighting the GOB.

On December 12, 2011, a bomb exploded in a public toilet in the Hledan Junction area of Rangoon. The blast killed one janitor and injured another. A second explosive device that failed to detonate was discovered in the same location. Burmese police rendered the second device safe. Again, no specific group claimed responsibility for the attack, but the GOB blamed the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) of coordinating the attack. The KIA is an ethnic group involved in armed conflict with the GOB.

International Terrorism or Transnational Terrorism

There is no evidence to suggest the presence of any terrorist groups targeting American citizens or facilities in Burma. Burma has a minority Muslim population with no history of anti-American sentiment or activity. The GOB is not a state sponsor of terrorist activities and does not permit foreign fighters to transit the country. Money-laundering, although present to facilitate other criminal activities throughout Burma, is not used to support terrorist activities or groups.

Civil Unrest



Although the political landscape seems to be changing for the better, the GOB still has a recent history of violent responses to peaceful demonstrations. Such violent responses, coupled with continued poor economic conditions, leave the potential for unrest possible.

Post-Specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

During the rainy season (May-October), street flooding is pervasive in southern cities without adequate drainage systems. Low-lying villages are also susceptible to flooding, often causing food shortages and other health concerns. Visitors during this time should exercise caution while traveling near lakes, rivers, or the ocean.

Major earthquake fault lines are present.

Burma is also prone to cyclones. Cyclone Nargis in May 2008 caused extensive flooding and damage in the Irrawaddy Delta region and led to thousands of deaths. In Rangoon, the cyclone severely damaged transportation, communication, and electrical systems. Cyclone Giri in October 2010 caused destruction and some deaths in Rakhine State in western Burma.

Industrial and Transportation Accidents

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration has not assessed Burma's compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization safety standards. The safety records of Burma's commercial air carriers are not readily available to the public. There is also no information available regarding the GOB's oversight of commercial aviation within the country. Trains and inter-city buses are old, poorly maintained, and often break down during long journeys.

On December 29, 2011, an electrical fire caused a series of industrial chemical storage cylinders to explode at a GOB-run chemical warehouse in eastern Rangoon. Some 19 people were killed, and over 100 were reported injured in the blast. Initial public opinion hinted at foul play, but the GOB confirmed that the explosion was related to a fast spreading electrical fire and was not caused by arson or other criminal activity.

Approximately one week later, a government secondary school on Inya Road was set ablaze in an apparent arson. The fire raged for several hours before firefighters could bring it under control.



Kidnappings

There were no reported kidnappings of American citizens in 2011.

Drug and Narco-terrorism

Several ethnic groups that occupy the border regions of the country are heavily involved in the manufacture and trafficking of narcotics. Some elements of the GOB's police and military are suspected of also being involved or at least in assisting to facilitate these narcotics operations. Burma's production of opium is second in the world to Afghanistan. Methamphetamines are another major narcotic that are produced in Burma. Some of the ethnic groups involved in the manufacture and transport of narcotics use the proceeds to engage in armed conflict with the GOB.

Police Response

Burma's police services are generally unresponsive, under equipped, and poorly trained. Corruption is prevalent, and some GOB officials have collaborated with criminals or carry out crimes themselves under protection of their official status. Whether this will improve based on the changing political environment remains to be seen. Most crimes go unreported and/or are not investigated at all. The Burmese police apparatus does not publicly issue crime or arrest statistics. Police response times can be long, if at all. Lack of adequate transportation is often cited as an excuse for slow response.

Police will often signal motorists to pull over for a "donation." Always comply with police instructions, identify yourself as an American, and ask to speak to an Embassy Consular Officer if necessary. Most Burmese police officers do not speak English and will not actively pursue a bribe if language is a barrier.

In Rangoon, the central police telephone number is 199. The fire emergency number is 191 or 192.

Medical Emergencies

Medical services in Rangoon are well below even the most basic Western standards. Although the Embassy does not officially endorse specific medical providers, the SOS International Clinic is the only medical service provider in Rangoon with limited local facilities. In the event of a medical emergency, American citizens should ask to be taken to a major



hospital, such as Yangon General, and then request to have the Embassy and SOS clinic notified.

Contact Information for Local Hospitals and Clinics

The SOS Clinic is located at the Inya Lake Hotel
Telephone: 667871 or 667879.

Air Ambulance Services

Air medevac services can be arranged through the SOS Clinic.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

The most common crime reported by expatriates is the theft of unattended items. If individuals take the simple precaution of not leaving personal items unattended or unprotected, the chances of being victimized are vastly reduced. In addition, all visitors should obey all local laws and follow any instructions given to them by local authorities.

Border regions currently engaged in armed conflict, organized crime, and narcotics production should be avoided.

Further Information

The main number to U.S. Embassy Rangoon is (95) 1-536-509. This number is available 24 hours a day.

Other important Embassy phone extension numbers:

Post One: 4014

RSO Office: 4225

Medical: 4480

Consular: 4240

Pol/Econ: 4224

OSAC Country Council

Embassy Rangoon does not have an OSAC Country Council due to U.S. sanctions against Burma.



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