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Myanmar Today

State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and her colleagues have their work cut out for years to come tackling Myanmar's key problems, not least of which are stopping civil insurrections and securing peace, curbing human rights abuses and rectifying the impact of decades of economic mismanagement and corruption. There are some bright spots: sanctions have been dropped and the ancient city of Bagan may gain Unesco World Heritage status by 2019.

Best on Film

The Monk (2014) Low-key coming-of-age drama about a boy raised in a monastery who has to decide whether to further embrace Buddhism or move into the secular world.

Kayan Beauties (2013) Thriller about four Kayan girls who travel from their village to Taunggyi, where one of them gets kidnapped by human traffickers.

Yangon Calling (2013) Documentary about Myanmar's punk-rock scene directed by Berlin-based filmmakers Alexander Dluzak and Carsten Piefke.

Best in Print

Burma's Spring (Rosalind Russell; 2016) Lively memoir with a broad cast of characters from girl band singers and domestic workers to opposition politicians.

Golden Parasol (Wendy Law-Yone; 2013) An insider's view on key events in modern Myanmar's history; her father, Ed Law-Yone, an influential newspaper editor, was exiled from the country in the 1960s.

River of Lost Footsteps (Thant Myint-U; 2006) Must-read historical review, by the grandson of former UN secretary general U Thant.

21st-century Panglong Conference

Since taking office in April 2016, the National League for Democracy (NLD) government has prioritised bringing about sustainable peace for Myanmar following nearly 60 years of civil insurrections. On 31 August 2016, the 21st-century Panglong Conference (named after the Panglong Agreement of 1947 between Suu Kyi's father Aung San and major ethnic group leaders), convened in Nay Pyi Taw. Representatives of 19 ethnic groups sat with top government and army (Tatmadaw) leaders, as well as the UN Secretary-General, to air their grievances and hopes for the future.

Offended by organisational hiccups and a perceived lack of inclusiveness, the Wa delegation, representing the country's most powerful ethnic armed group, stormed out on day two of what was to be a five-day conference, but which ended up lasting four. Not a brilliant start, but Suu Kyi's achievement of persuading so many rebel and ethnic groups to attend the conference (more than had signed up to the previous government's Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement) was still generally applauded.

Reforming the Army

A key stumbling block for peace is that distrust of the Tatmadaw is ingrained among ethnic minorities following decades of conflict. Although sidelined, the military continues to wield significant political and economic power in Myanmar. In the 2016-17 annual budget, the defence ministry received the largest share, with 1.24 trillion kyat appropriated.

However, there are signs that the military's top brass is adapting to the more democratic times. In September 2016 Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing warned the army to follow the Geneva Convention and respect human rights. Earlier in the month,