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Myanmar moves its capital city

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Contents

| | |
|----------------------------|----|
| The Article | 2 |
| Warm-ups | 3 |
| Before Reading / Listening | 4 |
| While Reading / Listening | 5 |
| Listening Gap Fill | 6 |
| After Reading | 7 |
| Discussion | 8 |
| Speaking | 9 |
| Homework | 10 |
| Answers | 11 |

8 November, 2005

THE ARTICLE

Myanmar moves its capital city

In a surprise move, the military junta ruling Myanmar, formerly Burma, has announced that the country's capital city will move from Yangon, formerly Rangoon, 320 kilometers north, to the town of Pyinmana. The regime has already transferred nine different departments to the new location and others are due to follow shortly. The new administrative center is a sprawling ten-square-kilometer complex, which will house all government ministries. Spokesman Kyaw Hsan said Yangon had merely been a "headquarters" and a relic of British colonial rule, which ended in 1948. He attributed advances in communications and infrastructure to facilitating the move to Pyinmana, which he described as "the most appropriate place for the seat of a new city".

International speculation is rife over motivations behind the move. Mr. Hsan explained: "The authorities have chosen Pyinmana because it is centrally located and has quick access to all parts of the country." Some observers speculate that Myanmar's strong-arm dictators fear a US seaborne invasion and preferred a location less vulnerable to attack than coastal Yangon. The US has branded Myanmar an "outpost of tyranny". Another theory is that the military junta wishes to further suppress attempts at democracy. In 1990, opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi won democratic elections but the ruling dictatorship has refused to relinquish power. Pyinmana is a former communist stronghold. It is also closer to the Kachin, Karen, and Shan ethnic minorities, who have waged separatist insurgencies against the central government for decades.

WARM-UPS

1. MY CAPITAL: In pairs / groups, talk about the capital city of your country. Is it the best choice to be capital? What is the history of that city being capital? Are the people from the capital different from those outside the capital? Do other cities in your country have legitimate claims to be capital?

2. WORLD CAPITALS: Look at the capital cities below. Talk about them with your partner(s). Rank them in order of those you would most like to visit. Explain your ranking to your partner(s).

| | | | |
|-------|---------------|-------|------------------|
| _____ | Washington DC | _____ | London |
| _____ | Tokyo | _____ | Jerusalem |
| _____ | Paris | _____ | Beijing |
| _____ | Brasilia | _____ | Riyadh |
| _____ | Nairobi | _____ | Papeete (Tahiti) |

3. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Surprises / military juntas / Myanmar / Burma / government ministries / colonialism / motivation / dictators / invasions / tyranny / Aung San Suu Kyi / ethnic minorities

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

4. MYANMAR: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with Myanmar. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

5. MOVING: Do you like moving? In pairs/groups, talk about where you would move to (and why) in the situations below:

- A different room in your house
- A different part of your town/city
- A different town/city of your country
- A different country
- A different school
- A different job
- A different company
- Other

6. MYANMAR OPINIONS: How far do you agree or disagree with these opinions? Talk about them with your partner(s).

- a. The terrible situation in Myanmar is largely ignored by the world.
- b. The US should turn its efforts to overthrowing Myanmar's military dictators.
- c. Burma is a better name than Myanmar.
- d. The world should rescue Aung San Suu Kyi, a true hero of democracy.
- e. Myanmar is too insignificant, politically and economically to bother with.
- f. The UN should act on the large-scale human rights abuses in Myanmar.
- g. Democracy will come to Myanmar. We just have to wait.
- h. The real war on terror should be focused on regimes like that in Myanmar.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- a. Myanmar's rulers have touched the hearts of residents in the capital. T / F
- b. The former name of Myanmar is Burma. T / F
- c. A sprawling administrative center will house the new government. T / F
- d. British colonial rule ended in Myanmar in 1988. T / F
- e. Myanmar's capital has relocated to be more centrally positioned. T / F
- f. Analysts speculate Myanmar fears a seaborne invasion by the U.S. T / F
- g. Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi is Myanmar's president. T / F
- h. Ethnic minorities have waged separatist insurgencies for decades. T / F

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| a. ruling | spread out |
| b. sprawling | carried out |
| c. house | abundant |
| d. relic | give up |
| e. appropriate | remnant |
| f. rife | authoritarianism |
| g. tyranny | governing |
| h. relinquish | fitting |
| i. waged | uprisings |
| j. insurgencies | accommodate |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| a. the military | British colonial rule |
| b. a sprawling | a US seaborne invasion |
| c. a relic of | of a new city |
| d. advances in communications | over motivations behind the move |
| e. the seat | and infrastructure |
| f. speculation is rife | to relinquish power |
| g. Myanmar's strong-arm dictators fear | junta ruling Myanmar |
| h. US has branded Myanmar an | ten-square-kilometer complex |
| i. the ruling dictatorship has refused | separatist insurgencies |
| j. waged | "outpost of tyranny" |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

Myanmar moves its capital city

In a _____ move, the military junta ruling Myanmar, formerly Burma, has announced that the country's capital city will move from Yangon, _____ Rangoon, 320 kilometers north, to the town of Pyinmana. The _____ has already transferred nine different departments to the new location and others are due to _____ shortly. The new administrative center is a _____ ten-square-kilometer complex, which will _____ all government ministries. Spokesman Kyaw Hsan said Yangon had merely been a "headquarters" and a _____ of British colonial rule, which ended in 1948. He attributed advances in communications and infrastructure to facilitating the move to Pyinmana, which he described as "the most appropriate place for the _____ of a new city".

seat
regime
sprawling
surprise
relic
follow
house
formerly

International speculation is _____ over motivations behind the move. Mr. Hsan explained: "The authorities have chosen Pyinmana because it is centrally located and has quick _____ to all parts of the country." Some observers speculate that Myanmar's strong-arm dictators fear a US _____ invasion and preferred a location less _____ to attack than coastal Yangon. The US has branded Myanmar an "outpost of tyranny". Another theory is that the military junta wishes to further _____ attempts at democracy. In 1990, opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi won democratic elections but the ruling dictatorship has refused to _____ power. Pyinmana is a former communist _____. It is also closer to the Kachin, Karen, and Shan ethnic minorities, who have waged _____ insurgencies against the central government for decades.

access
separatist
vulnerable
rife
relinquish
seaborne
stronghold
suppress

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Myanmar moves its capital city

In a surprise move, the military _____ ruling Myanmar, formerly Burma, has announced that the country's capital city will move from Yangon, _____ Rangoon, 320 kilometers north, to the town of Pyinmana. The _____ has already transferred nine different departments to the new location and others are due to follow shortly. The new administrative center is a _____ ten-square-kilometer complex, which will house all government ministries. Spokesman Kyaw Hsan said Yangon had merely been a "headquarters" and a _____ of British colonial rule, which ended in 1948. He attributed advances in communications and infrastructure to facilitating the move to Pyinmana, which he described as "the most appropriate place for _____ a new city".

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AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'ethnic' and 'minority'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the gap fill. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "MYANMAR" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about Myanmar, democracy and human rights.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- | | |
|------------------|--------------|
| • formerly | • rife |
| • transferred | • strong-arm |
| • sprawling | • outpost |
| • relic | • suppress |
| • infrastructure | • relinquish |
| • seat | • waged |

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. What do you think of Myanmar?
- c. What do you think of the idea of a country moving its capital city?
- d. Are you happy with your capital city or would you like a new one?
- e. What problems do you think are created when a capital city moves?
- f. Which name do you prefer, Myanmar or Burma?
- g. Do you think the capital should move back to Yangon (Rangoon) after democracy arrives in Myanmar?
- h. Why do you think George W. Bush talks about the importance of freedom but does so little to help the people of Myanmar?
- i. Do you think the United Nations should use force to expel dictatorships from power and encourage democracy?
- j. Do you think it's right for the US to call other countries "outposts of tyranny"?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Do you like moving?
- d. Do you think the capital of your country is a great city?
- e. What do you know about Myanmar?
- f. What do you know about Aung San Suu Kyi?
- g. Do you think the US or UN should invade Myanmar and remove the military dictatorship?
- h. What do you know about the ethnic minorities in Myanmar?
- i. What difference would democracy make to the people in Myanmar?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What question would you like to ask about this topic?
- b. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- c. Was there a question you didn't like?
- d. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- e. What did you like talking about?
- f. Do you want to know how anyone else answered the questions?
- g. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

WORLD CAPITAL: You are head of the newly created “World Capital City Council”. In pairs / groups, decide on the issues below relating to the new capital of the world.

LOCATION

- a. New site
- b. Existing city

CONTINENT

- a. Africa
- b. Antarctica
- c. Asia
- d. Australia (and Australasia)
- e. Europe
- f. North America
- g. South America

NAME

- a. Worldia
- b. Worldtown
- c. Globevski
- d. Earthton
- e. Planetville
- f. Other

LANGUAGE OF STREET NAMES

- a. English
- b. Latin
- c. Esperanto
- d. No language – just symbols
- e. No names – just numbers
- f. Other

CITY COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

- a. One representative from each world country
- b. One representative per continent
- c. Just representatives from the G8 country members
- d. A revolving city leadership in country alphabetical order from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe
- e. Other

Change partners and compare your “World Capital City”. Give each other feedback on the choices made. Combine the best of your different proposals to form one “perfect” plan. Show your revisions to your original partner / group.

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on Myanmar's Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest since 1990. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

3. MY CAPITAL: Make a poster describing your choice of capital city for your country. It could be the existing capital or a different city. Make sure you outline the reasons for your choice. Show your posters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

4. LETTER: Imagine you are a citizen of Myanmar. Write a letter to the military dictators and tell them what you think of their decision to move your capital city. Show what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. F b. T c. T d. F e. T f. T g. F h. T

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| a. ruling | governing |
| b. sprawling | spread out |
| c. house | accommodate |
| d. relic | remnant |
| e. appropriate | fitting |
| f. rife | abundant |
| g. tyranny | authoritarianism |
| h. relinquish | give up |
| i. waged | carried out |
| j. insurgencies | uprisings |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| a. the military | junta ruling Myanmar |
| b. a sprawling | ten-square-kilometer complex |
| c. a relic of | British colonial rule |
| d. advances in communications | and infrastructure |
| e. the seat | of a new city |
| f. speculation is rife | over motivations behind the move |
| g. Myanmar's strong-arm dictators fear | a US seaborne invasion |
| h. US has branded Myanmar an | "outpost of tyranny" |
| i. the ruling dictatorship has refused | to relinquish power |
| j. waged | separatist insurgencies" |

GAP FILL:

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In a **surprise** move, the military junta ruling Myanmar, formerly Burma, has announced that the country's capital city will move from Yangon, **formerly** Rangoon, 320 kilometers north, to the town of Pyinmana. The **regime** has already transferred nine different departments to the new location and others are due to **follow** shortly. The new administrative center is a **sprawling** ten-square-kilometer complex, which will **house** all government ministries. Spokesman Kyaw Hsan said Yangon had merely been a "headquarters" and a **relic** of British colonial rule, which ended in 1948. He attributed advances in communications and infrastructure to facilitating the move to Pyinmana, which he described as "the most appropriate place for the **seat** of a new city".

International speculation is **rife** over motivations behind the move. Mr. Hsan explained: "The authorities have chosen Pyinmana because it is centrally located and has quick **access** to all parts of the country." Some observers speculate that Myanmar's strong-arm dictators fear a US **seaborne** invasion and preferred a location less **vulnerable** to attack than coastal Yangon. The US has branded Myanmar an "outpost of tyranny". Another theory is that the military junta wishes to further **suppress** attempts at democracy. In 1990, opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi won democratic elections but the ruling dictatorship has refused to **relinquish** power. Pyinmana is a former communist **stronghold**. It is also closer to the Kachin, Karen, and Shan ethnic minorities, who have waged **separatist** insurgencies against the central government for decades.