MYANMAR DILEMMAS AND OPTIONS
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MYANMAR DILEMMAS AND OPTIONS

The Challenge of Economic Transition in the 1990s

Edited by
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ASEAN Economic Research Unit
INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES
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Many rapid and dynamic changes in the political, social, and
economic sectors in the Union of Myanmar have occurred since
the present government, the State Law and Order Restoration
Committee (SLORC), took over power from the defunct Burmese
Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) in September 1988. The most
important change has been the government's decision to switch
the economy from a "socialist" one to free market capitalism by
abolishing the "Burmese Way to Socialism". Furthermore, the
words "Socialist Republic" in the official title of the nation have
been removed so that Burma has become "The Union of Myan-
mar" or "Myanmar Naing-Ngan", and the Union of Burma Foreign
Investment Law which was promulgated has become a symbol
of an "open-door policy". Moreover, border trade with China has
been formalized, and fishing and logging rights have been sold
to friendly nations in Asia. Many joint venture companies are
also being set up in the agricultural, trade and oil sectors.

At the same time, the government has announced that a
general election would be held in May 1990 and all contesting
political parties would be allowed to start their election campaign
three months prior to the election date. This means that the
political parties have to formulate and present their policies for
public discussion and debate in early 1990. Presumably, all the
policies, despite their differences in political and ideological per-
suasions, would mainly focus on various issues concerning the
development of Myanmar.
Although the final shape and outcome of such innovations and initiatives are uncertain, Myanmar is indeed at a critical crossroad in its history and development, and it was accordingly thought appropriate and timely that the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies should get together a group of scholars interested in Myanmar to produce a volume on Myanmar's options in terms of restructuring its economy. It was understood too that such options would have to be set in the context of global as well as regional trends.

The papers in this volume attempt to identify the major issues concerning the role of the state and economic management, the new directions in resource, agricultural and industrial development and the challenges arising from the opening up of the economy to the stimuli of external trade and capital movements.

Contributors to this volume include not only Myanmar economists inside and outside the country but also foreign specialists who analyse the different aspects of economic development in Myanmar from both macro- and micro-level perspectives. However, as in most developing countries, economic data on Myanmar are very limited. Even the scanty official data suffer from weaknesses in terms of accuracy and reliability. Despite these limitations, overall trends may be reasonably accurate and on that basis the contributors have attempted to find a helpful prescription for the development of Myanmar in the 1990s.

Finally, while we encourage all points of view, needless to say, the individual contributors are solely responsible for the facts and opinions expressed in their respective papers, and their interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Institute or its supporters.
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