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Burma profile

President: Thein Sein

Thein Sein was sworn into office in March 2011, officially launching a nominally civilian government to replace almost 50 years of military rule.

He had been hand-picked by Senior General Than Shwe, the country's paramount leader since 1992, to succeed him as Burma's head of state.

The new cabinet lineup, announced on the same day as Mr Thein Sein's swearing-in, included several ex-military men, many of whom were ministers in the military junta.

State television said the junta's State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) had been dissolved. The SPDC, previously known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council, or SLORC, seized power in 1988, but Burma has been under military authority since 1962.

Mr Thein Sein, who held the rank of general and who was prime minister in the previous administration, competed in parliamentary elections in November 2010.

The elections were marred by the absence of the National League for Democracy party which won the previous election of 1990 by a landslide and which is led by Aung San Suu Kyi, who was under house arrest at the time of the election. The NLD opted to boycott the vote.

Mr Thein Sein had long been seen as the relatively untainted face of the military government, and it is thought that Senior General Than Shwe regarded him as the most suitable frontman for Burma's democratic transition.

He is generally considered to be a moderate and a reformist, and since he became president, there have been undeniable moves towards political liberalisation.

Aung San Suu Kyi, who was freed from house arrest soon after the 2010 election, has been allowed to resume her political activities.

Mr Thein Sein is evidently not opposed to engaging with the veteran opposition leader, and had a landmark meeting with her in August 2011. In November the NLD agreed to re-enter the political process and contest parliamentary by-elections due early in 2012.

A visit to Burma by Hillary Clinton in December 2011, during which the US Secretary of State met both Mr Thein Sein and Aung San Suu Kyi, was hailed by the Burmese president as a "milestone" in the country's history and its relations with the wider world.

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