



New Internationalist

The people, the ideas, the action in the fight for global justice

Other countries

New Internationalist Easier English

Ready Pre-Intermediate Lesson



This lesson:

Speaking – about other countries

Reading – to find information

Grammar – comparing countries

Vocabulary – information
about countries



Where are these countries? What do you know about them?



They are **North Korea** and **Myanmar/Burma** – find them on the map:

Myanmar:



North Korea:





Find out :



1) What's the population?

2) What does the average person earn?

3) How many religions are there?

4) What are the main exports?

5) What are 3 problems?

a) North Korea b) Myanmar/Burma

Country profile: Burma Fact File	
Leader	President Thein Sein (from March 2011). Before, he was a military commander.
Economy	GNI per person \$3,998, one of the lowest in East Asia (Thailand \$13,364, UK \$35,002). Money: Myanmar Kyat (MMK). Main exports: Oil and natural gas; minerals and gems; agricultural products. Economic changes since 2011 have increased private business and foreign investment. The economy grew by 8.3% in 2013-14, mostly because of construction, manufacturing and services but also agriculture.
People	51.4 million (in 2014). People per square kilometre 76 (UK 260). Population growth per year 1990-2013 1%.
Health	Infant death rate 40 per 1,000 (Thailand 11, UK 4). Lifetime risk of maternal mortality 1 in 250 (UK 1 in 6,900). HIV 0.6%. Burma spends only 2% of GDP on healthcare. Malaria is the biggest cause of death; people get TB three times more often than the world rate.
Environment	Major problems include deforestation, overcultivation of arable land, overfishing, and environmental destruction because of oil, gas and mineral extraction.
Culture	Burma has more than 130 ethnic groups. The main ones are Burman 68%, Shan 9%, Karen 7%, Rakhine 4%, Chinese 3%, Indian 2% and Mon 2%. Since 1948, the government has been fighting all the time against some minority ethnic groups.
Religion	Theravada Buddhist 89%, Christian 4% (Baptist 3%, Catholic 1%), Muslim 4%, Animist 1%, other 2%.
Language	Burmese (official), but many ethnic groups have their own language.

Country profile: North Korea Fact File	
Leader	Kim Jong-un
Economy	GDP per person \$621 (South Korea \$26,482 – UN estimates 2013).
Monetary unit	Won (KPW). Official rate 109 to US\$, black market rate 8,300. The markets often use the Chinese yuan. People rely more on foreign currencies than the KPW.
Main exports	Minerals eg. coal and iron ore. About 70% of trade is with China; and 24% is with South Korea (light manufactured goods from the joint Kaesong Industrial Complex).
People	24.9 million. Annual population growth 1990-2013: 0.9%. People per square kilometre 207 (South Korea 517).
Health	They were successful at first, but then suffered from famine and lack of money. Infant mortality got worse (9 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 26 in 2008) then improved a little to 22 by 2013 (South Korea 3).
Environment	Most of Northern Korea is mountains - not suitable for agriculture. Storms often wash away the terraces. A lot of trees have gone. Kim Jong-un wants to plant more.
Religion	There are a few churches and Buddhist temples – but they are only for show. People follow other religions in secret. But the only official religion is worshipping the Kim family.
Language	Korean. Both South and North Koreas only have one ethnic group. This is not common. The North stopped using Chinese characters. They only use the Korean alphabet; they also stopped using many words that came from Chinese.
Human	

Now find this information:

Which country, **North Korea** or **Myanmar/Burma** is better for:

a) Women

b) Gay people

c) Freedom

d) Literacy

e) Life expectancy



Country profile: Burma ratings in detail

Income distribution	The freer economy is creating a lot more inequality. There is a lot more foreign and local investment in cities. But more than two-thirds of the population live in rural communities. 2005 ★★
Life expectancy	Life expectancy is 65 years. This is more than 57 in 2005 (Thailand 74, UK 81). 2005 ★★ ★
Position of women	Some improvement but cultural barriers to women's participation remain high. Sexual violence and trafficking are significant problems in conflict and border areas. 2005 ★★
Freedom	Human rights remain poor despite some noteworthy reforms. The army has targeted civilians during the ongoing conflict with the Kachin that has killed thousands. 2005 ★
Literacy	According to UNICEF, 92.7% of adults are literate, but the accuracy of this is disputed. Primary education is mandatory but 12% of eligible children are out of school. 2005 ★★ ★
Sexual minorities	Same-sex sexual activity is punishable by prison terms from 10 years to life. Gay pride celebrations took place in several cities in 2012. 2005 ★★

Country profile: North Korea ratings in detail

Income distribution	Not much information. But North Korea pays more money for importance, loyalty and job. And there is a new group of richer people now, only in Pyongyang, because of new freer markets.
Life expectancy	70 years (South Korea 82). This was 73 in 1993, but fell because of the 1990s famine.
Position of women	In 1946, they stopped making women less important than men (based on Confucianism). But men still control North Korea. There are not many women in public life. Women are important in the new market economy.
Literacy	They say literacy is 100%, but this has not been checked. From 1972, they had free compulsory 11-year schooling. This became 12 years in 2012. There are not many subjects at school: basic sciences, few humanities and a lot of stories about how important the Kim family is.
Freedom	North Korea is nearly at the bottom of international freedom lists. In September 2015, the World Bank said North Korea was last of 230 countries in many areas eg. press freedom and rule of law.
Sexual minorities	North Korea says there is no homosexuality or HIV in their country. It is very racist and sexist. They say Barack Obama is a 'wicked black monkey' and South Korean President Park Geun-hye is a 'prostitute' and 'comfort woman'.

Match:

- a) Literacy
- b) Life expectancy
- c) Minority
- d) Infant mortality
- e) Censorship
- f) Famine

- 1/ No food – people can die
- 2/ A small group with not much power
- 3/ Ability to read and write
- 4/ When a baby dies at birth
- 5/ When the government controls the information in news and media
- 6/ How long people usually live in one country

Which country – North Korea or Myanmar / Burma?:

- a) Aun Sang Suu Kyi
- b) Nuclear weapons
- c) 1st elections for 20 years
- d) Supported by USSR / Russia
- e) Famine (not enough food)
- f) Abuse of human rights



Now read quickly (next 2 slides) to check:

Myanmar / Burma

The village of Laing Khin in Nagaland – far away in northwest Burma – has no electricity or running water. But the grandchildren of the Naga headhunters here wear T-shirts with pictures of the Korean popstar Sy on and play football pretending to be David Beckham. Teenagers have \$500 Chinese motorbikes. They carry hunting rifles on their backs and have Huawei smartphones. Globalization has come to every corner of Burma. In less than five years, Burma has changed a lot. In 1989, the military government gave Burma a new name - Myanmar. But democracy movements prefer the name Burma.

In November 2010, the house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi ended. This was after the Union Solidarity and Development Party (supported by the military government) won Burma's first elections for 20 years. Many people said the election was not fair. Suu Kyi's party - National League for Democracy (NLD) won the election in 1990 by a lot. But the military did not accept her win.

In 2011, Thein Sein became president of a new government – they said it was a civilian government. Since then, there has been progress in human rights. For example, they have released thousands of political prisoners; ended fighting with ethnic militia groups; and stopped media censorship before publication.

In April 2012, Suu Kyi was elected to parliament. So the EU and US stopped all non-military sanctions against Burma. President Obama was the first US president to visit the country. The economy has grown a lot, with a lot of foreign investment, a lot more aid, and a lot more export of oil and gas. But there are still many problems for Burma in becoming a democracy. In November 2014, Suu Kyi said the US should not be so optimistic about the changes in Burma. A lot of money from other countries has made prices rise. So many Burmese people don't have enough money to live in Rangoon. There is not much infrastructure (buildings, transport and power) outside the big towns. There has been a lot of building, but basic health and education services are not good.

There is now more inequality, because friends of the people in power make money from the new economic opportunities. They force people in the countryside to leave their homes to make space for new developments eg. the Thilawa Special Economic Zone, a Burmese-Japanese project, 24 kilometres away from Rangoon.

The Burmese media no longer has direct censorship, but the authorities check and follow the journalists a lot.

Burma is still number 156 of 175 countries on the 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and other groups say there is still a lot of abuse of human rights in Burma eg. forced labour and making thousands of children soldiers.

The military took control because they said there was too many political problems and ethnic fighting after Burma's independence in 1948.

Our research shows that the military will probably say they need to keep the power because of ethnic fighting again before the elections this year. The government has not tried to stop the growing Buddhist extremism (eg. the actions of the 969 Movement) so there is a lot of violence against the Rohingya, the Muslim minority in western Rakhine State. The government says that because of recent fighting between ethnic groups eg. in Meiktila, Mandalay and Bago, they cannot now stop the stability of military control.

Not many Burmese people would agree with this. They have had decades of corrupt control. And the government did not handle the emergency response to cyclone Nargis in 2008 well.

North Korea

Everyone knows about the Democratic People's Republic of Korea – DPRK or North Korea. Newspapers often write about strange evil things the young leader Kim Jong-un has maybe done. He came to power when *his* father Kim Jong-il died in 2011. And his grandfather, Kim Il-sung, started North Korea in 1948. There are many books published in English about North Korea. And many tour firms that can take you to visit. It does not help to say North Korea is evil. It is not good for a government to have nuclear weapons, but not give its people enough food. North Korea is a threat and has many problems and enemies.

We need to look clearly at North Korea and understand the history. Many years ago they had to protect the country against attack from the outside. Japan took over in 1905, then the US and Soviets took control in 1945. In 1948 they decided to make it 2 separate countries. In 1950 Kim Il-sung invaded the South, and there was a war. Four million people died in three terrible years, but the border stayed almost the same.

The two Koreas were then in competition to develop. The US helped South Korea, and the Soviet Union helped North Korea. The North grew fastest at first with industrialization and growing cities. But they spent too much money on military. So the South then grew more because of exports. The UN now says GDP per person is \$621 in the North, and \$26,482 in the South (43 times higher). Korea today is one country, two planets.

After 1990, North Korea had many problems, when Moscow stopped giving them money. At least a million people died (5% of the population) in the famine in the late 1990s. North Korea did not want to ask for help, but they had to. The UN World Food Programme helped a lot. But there is less help now, because people do not agree with the government (eg. three nuclear tests).

North Korea was different after the famine. People had to create unofficial markets - these are now very important to the economy. The government does not try to stop them, but does not help them. Some people say they will change the markets. But they still force the city people to go to the countryside to plant rice.

North Korea demands total loyalty. The UN investigated a lot of human rights abuse in 2014. But many North Koreans secretly watch South Korean TV, so they know a better world exists. Some people escape to the South, but do not have the right skills so do often do not do well.

Many people have said that North Korea will collapse, but it continues. It does not seem possible that the government will change. And, because they have nuclear weapons, they may not have the problems of Iraq, Syria or Libya. Change must come from inside the country.

Now read about Myanmar and North Korea again to decide which country you would prefer to live in (and why):

Make notes about the positives and negatives:

Myanmar:

+



-

North Korea:

+



-

Use this language to compare:

X is **more Y than Z**

X has **better Y than Z**

X **isn't as good in Y as it is in Z**

X is a **better place to live for Z**



1) Find out similar information about your own

Homework:

country and / or the UK and bring to the next class.

2) Use this map to explore the world and find out about other countries from the country profiles and photo stories:

<https://www.thinglink.com/scene/743076913542594562>

