

## CHAPTER VI

### LOCATION, EVOLUTION AND URBAN CHARACTERISTICS OF PYINMANA NAYPYIDAW

When analyzing capital relocation, particularly in contemporary circumstances, one should not overlook the urbanization and physical landscape of the new capital. This chapter aims to study the location, evolution and urban characteristics of Pyinmana based on a geographical approach. Moreover, an analysis of city planning and urban settlements in Pyinmana Naypyidaw is also employed to provide a clearer understanding about the motives of current capital relocation.

#### **6.1 Location and Geographical Configuration of Pyinmana**

Pyinmana is geographically located on the southern edge of the dry zone which is different from the centre of the dry zone in the Irrawaddy valley and has special geographical characteristics because it is situated in the upper Sittang valley and surrounded by the Pegu Yoma range to the west and the Shan plateau to the east. The terrain comprises river basins, sloping highlands and mountainous areas with abundant mineral deposits. The mixture of river plains and mountains covered by thick forests is an excellent geographical location which offers every advantage of beauty and peace that a city-builder could desire. Moreover, it is strategically suitable in military terms with mountains as defense fortifications. The fertile area is suitable for agriculture and the mountains have hydroelectric energy development potential and mineral deposits which give a self-sufficient ability to the city naturally.

In terms of water drainage systems, although the area around Pyinmana is situated in the upper Sittang valley, it is geographically close to the Irrawaddy valley through networks of tributaries and canals. "Because of the relatively low elevation, both regions have enormous catchment ratios, accumulating a large volume of water, while their geology and vegetation, run-off pattern, effective average and subsurface

flow of water, all allow water to remain in the area long after the rains have ceased.”<sup>1</sup> Water rises rapidly after the rains begin in and outside the dry zone, blocked at the lower extremities of the constricted river channels by a natural “bottleneck”.<sup>2</sup> Since water is well retained in such areas, blue-green algae and photosynthetic bacteria allow nitrogen fixation, contributing to the land’s fertility. When the dry season approaches, the floodwaters slowly drain, and normally water would remain in the main rivers and their tributaries.<sup>3</sup>

The dry zone in the Irrawaddy and Sittang valleys consists of six main irrigated areas. First, the plains of Kyaukse, which lies south of Mandalay and west of the Shan hills, is watered by four perennial rivers; the Zawgyi, the Panlaung, the Samon, and the Myitnge. Second, the plain of Minbu is located on the west bank of the Irrawaddy River, south of Pagan, across from Magwe and north of Prome. Third, the valley of the Mu River is located on the bank of the Irrawaddy in ancient Shwebo region. Fourth, the area of Tomplon is located on the east bank of the Irrawaddy, just north and east of Mandalay. Fifth, the area of Meikthila in general slopes west to east, towards the Samon River<sup>4</sup>, and lastly, Yamethin which is the most important area of the upper Sittang valley and the location of Pyinmana.

According to geographical surveys conducted by Michael Aung-Thwin, Yamethin may be divided into three main strips running north and south. The eastern strip is generally hilly from where the Panlaung River that irrigates Kyaukse rises. The middle strip, about twenty miles wide, has the richest lands in Yamethin: low lying, fertile, and watered by tanks and streams. The western strip contains both jungle and barren hills, interspersed with fertile valleys.<sup>5</sup> The Sittang River emerges and flows through Yamethin region by receiving water from many canals and creeks running from

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Michael Aung-Thwin, *Irrigation in the Heartland of Burma: Foundations of the Pre-Colonial Burmese State*, Northern Illinois University, Occasional Paper No. 15, 1990, p. 5.

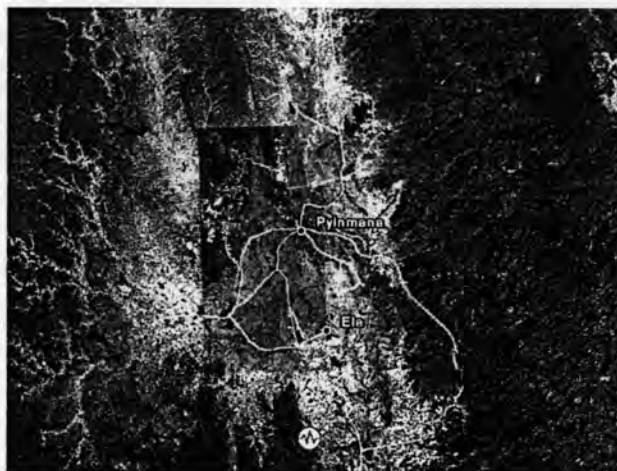
<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., P. 31.

the Shan plateau and Pegu Yoma range. The main rivers and streams, besides the Sittang, are the Panlaung, Paungloun, Ngawin Chaungmagyi, and Ngalaik.



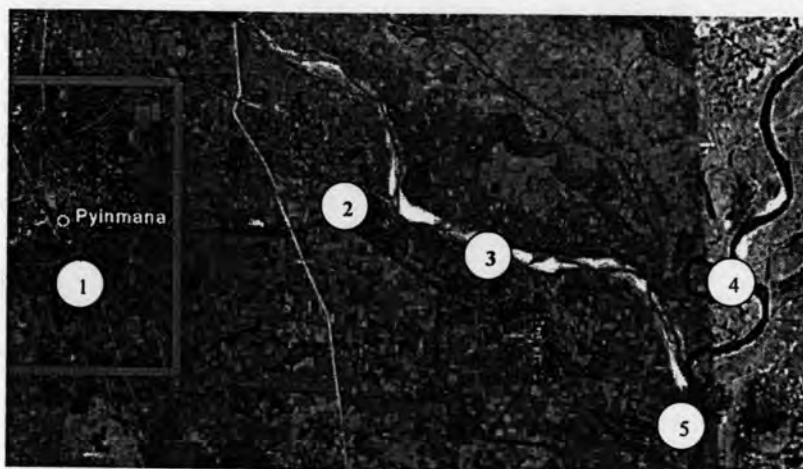
**Map 13:** Pyinmana is a city surrounded by the Pegu Yoma Range to the West and the Shan Plateau to the East. It is located in Upper Sittang Valley of Yamethin Region and has connecting routes in all directions.

Source: Google Earth Program Version 4.0.2736

Pyinmana is situated in the southern part of the middle strip of Yamethin region and is geographically connected to the mountainous areas in Shan, Kayin and Kayah states. The Yangon-Mandalay highway and railway pass through the city south-north and many routes connect to other cities in the Shan plateau and Pegu Yoma mountains to the east and west. The Ngawin and Sinthe creek merge together in Tatkon Township north of Pyinmana and become the Sittang River (still called Sinthe creek) which flows directly southwards to Pyinmana. After that, the Ngalaik creek which passes through the city of Pyinmana joints with Sinthe creek and then the Paungloun stream running from the Shan plateau flows directly to Sinthe creek east of the city. The water from these tributaries forms the main Sittang River which flows directly southwards to Toungoo, Tantabin, Wingan and finally to the Gulf of Martaban.

The fertility of the upper Sittang basin combined with numerous forests and mineral deposits in mountainous areas support Pyinmana as the centre of agricultural and energy development in central Myanmar. Many dams, weirs and sluices have been constructed in Pyinmana Township while many agricultural research stations and

factories for forest products and sugar cane refineries have expanded throughout the city. The current government realizes the geographical significance of Pyinmana as the watershed of the Sittang River and the strategic connection between the river plains in the dry zone and the mountainous regions in the eastern frontier.



**Map 14:** Pyinmana and Geographical Configuration of Upper Sittang Valley

**Symbol:** 1 = Pyinmana City 2 = Ngalaik Creek 3 = Sinthe Creek (Sittang Creek) 4 = Paungloun Creek 5 = Main Sittang River

Adapted from Google Earth Program Version 4.0.2736

Furthermore, the atmosphere and panorama around Pyinmana can also be pleasant for government officials and city dwellers. Mountains covered with green forests symbolically represent stability and security which are the main concerns of the army, while many creeks and canals flowing through green fields with mountains as a natural background are symbols of beauty, peace and prosperity of the city or even nation. Therefore, Pyinmana is not only an important city for security strategy and future development but its physical landscape is also attractive for urban construction.

## 6.2 Evolution and Urbanization of Pyinmana in the Past

Archeological excavations in the southern edge of the dry zone reveal ancient communities from the Paleolithic, Neolithic and Chalcolithic period. The pattern of urban settlements discovered in Pyinmana and Yamethin Township shares similar characteristics, for example, the shape of weapons, ornaments and household materials

with other urban settlements throughout the dry zone, especially the well known archeological sites of the Samon Valley.

After the collapse of Pagan Empire and the penetration of the Shan into the dry zone, hundreds of Burmese refugees fled southwards to Toungoo in the Sittang valley via the area of Pyinmana and during the formation of Toungoo dynasty, the entire communities located along the routes from Yamethin to Pyinmana were recruited under the power of the second Burmese Empire.

During the Konbaung dynasty, Pyinmana was popularly called “Ne Kyang” meaning “the excepted land” because Pyinmana was not located on the strategic warfare routes throughout the Konbaung period and was also excluded from tax collections because of the geographical obstacles comprised of mountains, thick forests and stagnant swamps. Another name of Pyinmana at that time was “Nin Kyang” which means “the crossing bridge” because the major port of Pyinmana had a bridge crossing Ngalaik canal to contact with “Ywa Kauk Yat” which was a trade market situated in the opposite side north of the canal.<sup>6</sup> In 1876, King Mindon officially built Lawkamayazein Pagoda in Pyinmana as the spiritual centre of the city and then in 1883, local people led by bureaucrats from the royal court of Mandalay built Lowkayanhein Pagoda, meaning “suppress global threats” at a nearby compound.

During the colonial period, the British surveyed the irrigation networks in Pyinmana and Yamethin for agricultural planning in the Sittang valley. “The British gazetteers for nearby Pyinmana reported many small tanks there as well, though no figures on acreage are provided.”<sup>7</sup> The total area irrigated by the sixty-six weirs and tanks maintained by the British government in 1896 in the Meiktila, Yamethin and Pyinmana areas was estimated at 106,591.64 acres.<sup>8</sup> In this period, the importance of

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<sup>6</sup> Aoranut Niyomdham, *Back to the Past “Pyinmana”: the New Royal Capital of the Union of Myanmar* (translated from Myanmar encyclopedia, seventh volume, 1963), Knowing Myanmar, 23 April 2006, Myanmar Studies Centre, Naresuan University, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Michael Aung-Thwin, *Irrigation in the Heartland of Burma: Foundations of the Pre-Colonial Burmese State*, p. 32.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Pyinmana gradually increased and in 1888, the British upgraded the status of Pyinmana to municipal level by constructing official buildings, a local court and factories on the slopes to the west of the city.<sup>9</sup>

Pyinmana served as the military headquarters of Burma's resistance movement, led by independence hero Gen Aung San, during the country's Japanese occupation in World War II.<sup>10</sup> The Burmese army conducted effective guerrilla warfare by using the geography of Pyinmana, especially the thick forest to ambush and counterattack the enemy and the Japanese army in Burma was finally defeated. In 1954, the Burmese government established an agricultural university which developed from the school of agriculture built by an American missionary B. C. Ke before World War II. The government also built a national agricultural park situated around two miles west of Pyinmana as an agricultural development station for the dry zone.<sup>11</sup>

During the socialist period, Pyinmana was a sub-district under the administration of Yamethin Township but in the 1970s, it was transformed as a stronghold of Burma's communist insurgency because of its strategic access to Chin, Karen, Karenni and Shan states. After the fall of the communist movements in Burma, Pyinmana gradually developed into an autonomous township during the SLORC period because of its agricultural significance and increasing population (nearly 100,000 inhabitants, with a Burman majority and Muslim and Chinese minorities<sup>12</sup>).

In summary, Pyinmana first emerged as a small community on the southern edge of the dry zone and gradually developed into the city with strategic and agricultural significance. It was under the power of Toungoo which was the centre of the Burmese military state and the great military stronghold of Burmese independence movement.

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<sup>9</sup> Aoranut Niyomdham, *Back to the Past "Pyinmana": the New Royal Capital of the Union of Myanmar*, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Aung Lwin Oo, *Rangoon Moves Ministries to Pyinmana*, 7 November 2005, Available from: [www.irrawaddy.org](http://www.irrawaddy.org)

<sup>11</sup> Aoranut Niyomdham, *Back to the Past "Pyinmana": the New Royal Capital of the Union of Myanmar*, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Pyinmana was also considered important for agricultural development from the colonial period to the present. It has been constantly developed by governments as the agricultural heartland in the upper Sittang valley. Nevertheless, the urbanization of Pyinmana has been rather slow when compared with other Burmese cities in the dry zone such as Mandalay, Sagaing, Meikthila and Yamethin. The turning point in its evolution was in 2005 when the military government officially established Pyinmana as the new capital instead of Yangon. After that, the roles and functions of Pyinmana have dramatically increased with its new status as Myanmar's capital.

### 6.3 Process of Construction in Pyinmana Naypyidaw

Pyinmana Naypyidaw is under the administration of Pyinmana Township in the southern part of Mandalay Division. The ruling government officially set up the Naypyidaw Development Committee, like the YCDC in Yangon, for effective administration. The mayor of the Naypyidaw is said to be Maj Gen Thein Nyunt, who was previously the Minister for Progress of Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs.<sup>13</sup> The administrative scope of the new capital covers Kyappay region, Pyinmana, Lewe, Ela, Ywadow and Tatkon urban areas.

Pyinmana has been the pet project of the military government for many years.<sup>14</sup> But construction is thought to have begun in earnest only two to three years ago. Even though the establishment of Pyinmana began abruptly in November, 2005, the ruling junta had expanded the networks of hinterland development such as dams, agricultural factories, hill stations and transportation throughout Pyinmana and the dry zone around ten years ago.

There are several pieces of explicit evidence for the formation of Pyinmana as a new capital. In January 2001, Senior General Than Shwe inspected agricultural and forestry development at Thandaung Hill Station in Kayin state, bordering Pyinmana in

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<sup>13</sup> *Naypyidaw*, see in [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regional\\_military\\_commands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regional_military_commands)

<sup>14</sup> Kylie Morris, *Burma begins move to new capital*, BBC News, Bangkok, Available from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4412502.stm>

the north.<sup>15</sup> In April 2001, Than Shwe inspected the Meiktila-Pyinmana section of the Yangon-Mandalay Highway and the bridge on it and proceeded to Pyinmana.<sup>16</sup> In March 2005, an International Labor Organization report alleged the forced conscription of at least 2,800 villagers in Pyinmana used in the construction of army camps that would later provide security for the project.<sup>17</sup> In June 2005, civil servants of five government ministries, including the Ministry of Information, received the first official notice that they will have to move to Pyinmana.<sup>18</sup>

On 6 November, 2005, Myanmar began relocating government workers from Yangon to the new capital. In February 2006, Senior General Than Shwe moved to his new residence on the east side of the new capital, a sprawling structure reportedly built into a hillside.<sup>19</sup> The city is dubbed Naypyidaw, meaning “royal city”. In March 2006, Armed Forces Day was held for the first time in Naypyidaw and more than 12,000 troops participated in the de facto inauguration of the new capital. In December 2006, Maj Gen Khin Aung Myint of the Defence Ministry confirmed that a new military administration, Naypyidaw Command, has been established.<sup>20</sup>

Construction of the new capital is still very much in progress and the burden of capital relocation on the country’s human resources is predictably heavy. Construction at Pyinmana, believed to cost hundreds of millions of dollars, began over two and a half years ago in an area of about 400 square miles, and it is still incomplete.<sup>21</sup> Compared to other capital relocations, “the limited progress in Naypyidaw after more than two years of effort is unsurprising. Brazil took 41 months to relocate its capital inland from Rio de

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<sup>15</sup> *Thandaung, Another Resort of the Nation*, Myanmar Today, May, 2001, Volume 4, No.2, p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> *Senior General Than Shwe’s Inspection Tour to Upper Myanmar*, Myanmar Today, May, 2001, Volume 4, No.2, p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> *Naypyidaw’s Capital Progress*, the Irrawaddy, October 2006, Vol. 14 No. 10, p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 21.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Naypyidaw : a Dusty Work in progress*, the Irrawaddy, October 2006, Vol. 14 No. 10, p. 20.



Janeiro to Brasilia in 1960, and even then, despite years of planning, the new city was hardly able to accommodate its new residents – the city’s first shopping mall arrived 11 years later. Similarly, when Pakistan moved its capital from Karachi to Islamabad in 1967, the last civil servants were not relocated until well into the 1980s.”<sup>22</sup>



Picture 15



Picture 16

Picture 15-16: City Hall and Lotus Roundabout of Naypyidaw in the Future

Source: Naypyidaw Development Committee, *The Map of Naypyidaw*

Ed Schatz, a political scientist from the University of Toronto who specializes on the subject of capital relocation explains that tremendous financial resources must be available for the move to Naypyidaw. The costs are not simply those of construction which are always considerable and rarely under-budget but the relocating of civil servants, citizens, foreign embassies and companies makes a capital move all the more expensive. Although the lack of transparency over the building of Naypyidaw makes any realistic cost estimate impossible, a look at other recent capital city moves offers some idea of the financial scope of such an undertaking. When Kazakhstan shifted its administration northwest from Almaty to Astana in 1997, initial estimates put the price tag at \$ 400 million. The actual cost was much higher.<sup>23</sup>

Even if all 80,000 construction workers in Naypyidaw were paid the minimum 1,500 kyat a day (and they are not), the total annual labor cost for the project would come to 43.8 billion kyat (\$32.32 million).<sup>24</sup> Data from the Economist Intelligence Unit shows that by the end of the 2005-2006 fiscal year last March, the Central Bank’s claim

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> *Naypyidaw : a Dusty Work in progress*, Irrawaddy, October 2006, Vol. 14 No. 10, p. 22.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

on the government had escalated to more than \$1.7 billion, up from \$960 million at the end of 2003. Burma has nearly doubled its domestic borrowing since the construction of Naypyidaw began.<sup>25</sup>

Apart from the unskilled local labor, all construction hardware was imported. Burma does not even have foundries that can produce huge metal frames for construction. In the past, the military rulers imported most of the materials from China to build the new bridges across the Irrawaddy and Salween Rivers.<sup>26</sup> As early as 1998, Burma was looking for funding from overseas to develop the new capital site. It secured a loan of \$160 million from the China Exim Bank to fund the Paunglaung hydropower project in Pyinmana. The Yunnan Machinery and Equipment Import and Export Company built the hydro plant, which is thought to provide Naypyidaw's reliable electricity supply.<sup>27</sup> "China has been well aware of the development in Pyinmana," said Aung Kyaw Zaw, a Burmese military analyst. "Unlike other countries, it shows no surprise about the government's sudden move to Pyinmana."<sup>28</sup>

The construction programs in Pyinmana can also distribute some profits to the Myanmar private sector which has close political and economic ties to the military government. Big construction companies – Asia World Company, Htoo Trading, Eden Group, Max Myanmar and Shwe Thanlwin – have also seen some profits, but the government's reported inability to pay for services has required companies to be offered concessions in the place of cash. Max Myanmar has the most sharing government concession, the Royal Kumudra hotel, located in Naypyidaw's new guest accommodation zone along an unfinished stretch of two-lane highway, and the busiest of the city's new hotels, while Air Bagan, owned by Htoo Trading chief Tay Za who has close ties to Than Shwe, became the first private airline to offer services to Pyinmana's Ela Airport.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Chiang Mai News, *Off-limits: Asia's secret capital*, June 6, 2006, Available from: [http://www.chiangmainews.com/ecmn/2006/jun06/42\\_43\\_limits.php](http://www.chiangmainews.com/ecmn/2006/jun06/42_43_limits.php)

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Aung Lwin Oo, *A Capital Error*, Irrawaddy, May 2006, Vol. 14 No. 5, p. 22.

In terms of the city's amenities, the military junta plans that when the construction is completed, the new capital will house government ministries, residences of the ministers, staff living quarters, a new assembly hall meant to be the future house of parliament, three airports - one for civil aviation and two for the military - a six-lane highway connected to Yangon and two golf courses. Moreover, "a new hydro-electric power station was constructed – a project again involving the destruction of several villages – in order to meet the needs of a rapidly expanding Pyinmana."<sup>29</sup> The city's small airfield was enlarged and modernized to take inter-city flights; a railway line was diverted and new roads driven into the area.<sup>30</sup>

The Pyinmana relocation project has had a positive impact on the city's development. Local companies have benefited from the influx of new business, notwithstanding their allegations of government confiscation of land. New shops that offer mostly construction materials and furniture have sprung up in old Pyinmana.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Pyinmana's central Myomo market is packed with shoppers, and new shops, mini-markets, hotels and guesthouses open for business every day, according to the local press.<sup>32</sup>



Picture 17



Picture 18

Picture 17-18: Burmese Folkways in Pyinmana Myomo Market

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Chiang Mai News, *Off-limits: Asia's secret capital*, June 6, 2006, Available from: [http://www.chiangmainews.com/ecmn/2006/jun06/42\\_43\\_limits.php](http://www.chiangmainews.com/ecmn/2006/jun06/42_43_limits.php)

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> *Naypyidaw : a Dusty Work in progress, Irrawaddy*, October 2006, Vol. 14 No. 10, p. 23.

<sup>32</sup> Aung Lwin Oo, *A Capital Error*, Irrawaddy, May 2006, Vol. 14 No. 5, p. 21.

Even though the process of construction in Pyinmana Naypyidaw is still incomplete, the urban area has continuously expanded throughout the southern edge of the dry zone. The scope of construction have appeared not only in Pyinmana Township, but also in other neighboring cities, for example, Ela, Lewe and Tatkon, which have been established by the government as satellite cities in the periphery of Naypyidaw. The growth of buildings and infrastructure not only represents an increase in urban settlement and networks, but also the distribution of political and economic interests between the public and private sectors. In this respect, the construction has automatically and directly supported the rise of Pyinmana as the new centre of national strategy and administration and in turn, the rise of the newly established capital has indirectly supported the rise of other cities and communities throughout the southern edge of the dry zone of Myanmar.

#### **6.4 Urban Planning and Characteristics of Pyinmana Naypyidaw**

Pyinmana Naypyidaw can be physically considered as the twin cities comprising the old city (Pyinmana) and the newly established capital (Naypyidaw). Each city has special characteristics in terms of city planning and urban settlements. Pyinmana is basically a compact city with well-ordered planning. The Ngalaik creek flows through the city west to east while the highway and railway from Yangon to Mandalay passes through the city south to north. The line of the railway functions as a clear demarcation which separates Pyinmana into two main urban settlements. The area west of the railway is lightly populated and the geographical terrain consists of slopes and thick forests. This sector is the location of ancient Lawkayanhnein and Lawkamayazein pagodas and the old "Shan Kang" pond which is the city's charming landmark. The ruling government has constructed the highway from Yangon to Mandalay and some government offices and other important buildings in this area, for example, the Mining-Office, Department of Forestry, Department of Information and Public Relations, and Union Solidarity and Development Association's Headquarters.



Map 15



Map 16

### Map 15-16: City Landscape of Pyinmana

**Symbol:** 1 = Shan Kang Pond 2 = City Market 3 = Railway from Yangon to Mandalay 4 = Ngalaik Creek 5 = Highway from Yangon to Mandalay

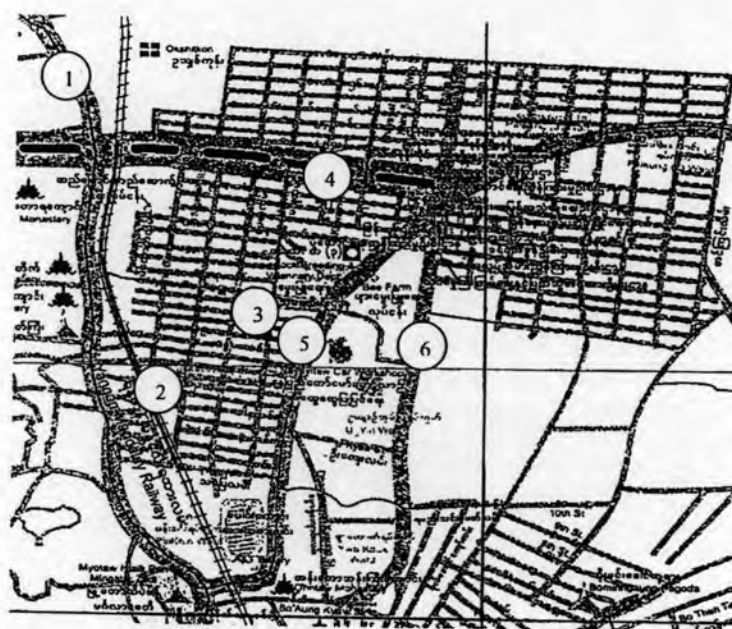


**Map 17:** Pyinmana is a compact city which is crossed by the Ngalaik creek in horizontal line and the railway and highway from Yangon to Mandalay in vertical line.

Adapted from Google Earth Program Version 4.0.2736

The area east of the railway comprises dense populations and a planned urban landscape. The special character in this sector is a square pattern of settlements crisscrossed by a system of connecting roads in chessboard shape. Moreover, it is a strategic location where the main highway from Yangon to Mandalay and the new magnificent road linking with Naypyidaw cross each other. The prominent buildings in this area are Paungloun Stadium, the Department of Immigration and Population, the

Department of Water Resources Utilization, the Department of Transport Administration and the Agriculture Science School. The ruling government has an “Eastern Enlargement” policy in order to increase the network of urban settlements and agricultural areas around Pyinmana. As a result, many self-sufficient communities and plantations have appeared along the shores of the Paungloun and Sittang Rivers. Additionally, a lot of sugar cane factories have appeared throughout the eastern part of Pyinmana



Map 18: City Planning in northeast of Pyinmana

Symbol: 1=Pankhinn Rd. 2= Railway from Yangon to Mandalay 3= Square Settlements 4= Road to Naypyidaw 5= Yangon-Mandalay Rd. 6= Saetaungyoe st.

Adapted from Naypyidaw Development Committee, *The Map of Naypyidaw*

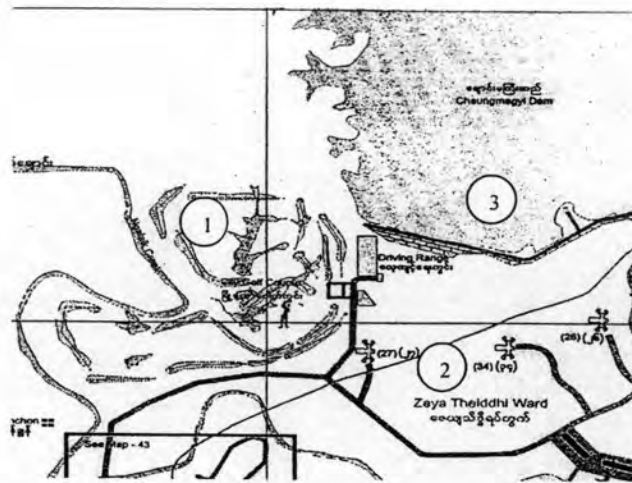
In this regard, the pattern of construction is related to city planning and the agricultural significance of Pyinmana. The Department of Transport Administration and Department of Immigration and Population are clearly located in the hub of connecting roads and the densest urban settlements of Pyinmana while many agricultural communities and factories are located along the Sittang and Paungloun Rivers – the important sources of the city’s hydroelectric and irrigation system. Therefore, Pyinmana is a reflection of harmonious design between human settlements and environmental

characteristics. The city plan can effectively function as a firm foundation for building the new capital.

The whole pattern of construction, of Naypyidaw is artificial, like Ankara, Canberra and Brasilia. The SPDC has set up new transportation networks and residential settlements systematically in order to provide an effective control and administration. The geographical terrain of the city comprises of green fields along the Ngalaik canal and high slopes with small hills surrounded by Pegu Yoma range to the west. The city's location lies around 11 miles west and north-west of Pyinmana. The ruling government has artificially transformed the landscape of Naypyidaw into a beautiful and magnificent capital by grouping bureaucratic buildings, building new roads, roundabouts and shopping complexes and digging many artificial lakes, like Kandawgyi and Inya Lake in Yangon City.

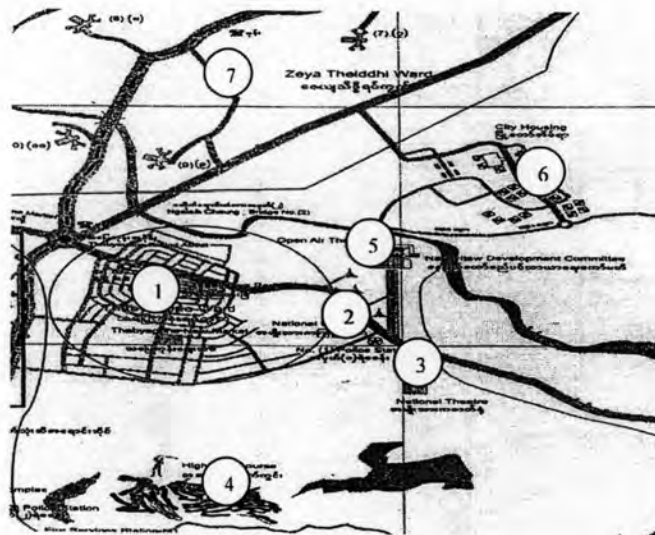
Naypyidaw can be roughly divided into three main sectors. The northern area is an administrative and irrigated sector with many ministries, for example, the Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Construction, Ministry of Cooperatives and Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries, and Chaungmagyi dam, the source of the city's water supply. The City Golf Course with a large driving range has also been built near the dam reflecting its multi-functional design for both water supply and recreation of military leaders.

The central sector is considered the urban core of Naypyidaw. The ruling government has renovated National Herbal Garden as an agricultural research centre and park in the middle of Naypyidaw. Many civilian buildings include a 1,000-bed hospital, shopping complex, Naypyidaw Myomo Market, Thabyegone Ward, the National Library, Ministry of Energy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Information, Police Force Headquarters and Naypyidaw Development Committee Headquarters.



Map 19: City Planning of the Northern Sector

Symbol: 1= City Golf Course 2= Chaungmagyi Dam 3= Zone of Ministries



Map 20: City Planning of the Central Sector

Symbol: 1= Thabyegone Ward (a division of a city for local activities) 2= National Library  
3= National Theatre 4= High Golf Course 5= Naypyidaw Development Committee 6= City Housing  
7= Zone of Ministries

Adapted from Naypyidaw Development Committee, *The Map of Naypyidaw*

The southern sector, popularly known as Mingalartheiddhi Ward, comprises of small blocks in a grid pattern which will be rented for businesses and enterprises. The prominent buildings in this sector are the Gems Museum, Yanaungmyin dam, Shwe Zedi Pagoda, the Diplomatic School, and the Reserved Area for foreign embassies and



private investments such as the Aureum Palace Hotel (Htoo) and Royal Kamudra Hotel (Max). This area is designed to function as complex for local businesses and diplomatic missions, while the northern and central areas above are designed to function as centers of political administration and development. Significantly, the ruling government has mostly designed the urban landscape of Naypyidaw in systematic square pattern with clear demarcations between each sector and settlement for an effective command and control over bureaucratic officers.



Map 21: City Planning of the Southern Sector

Symbol: 1= Mingalartheiddhi Ward 2= Reserved Area 3= Park and Social Facility 4= Diplomatic School 5= Gems Museum

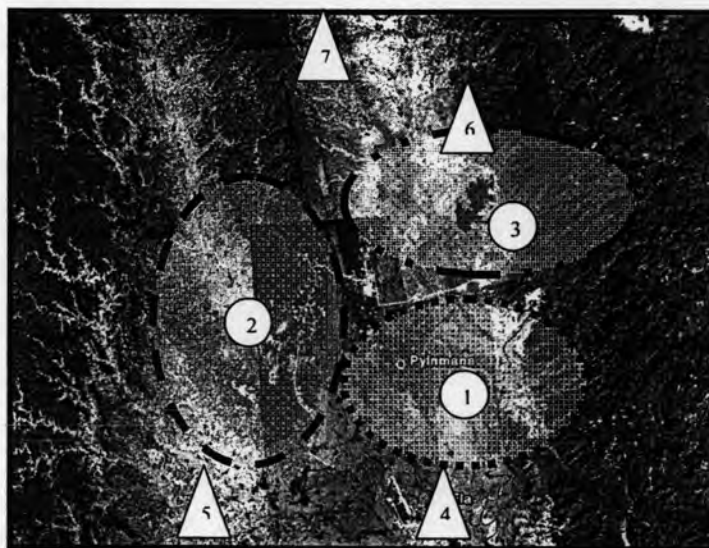
Adapted from Naypyidaw Development Committee, *The Map of Naypyidaw*

Apart from its unique characteristics of urban planning, Pyinmana Naypyidaw has special features of architectural style which explain the motives behind capital relocation. These can be grouped into three main dimensions of politico-military security, inland economic development and spiritual-cultural unity.

#### 6.4.1 Politico-Military Security and Urban Characteristics

Pyinmana Naypyidaw is established as a strategic capital for political and military security purposes. The ruling government has extensively configured the southern edge of the dry zone with the new capital as the command and control centre. The security characteristics of Pyinmana Naypyidaw can be separated into three main dimensions. Pyinmana is the main city situated in the center of the urban network. It is inhabited by the Burmese population, especially local vendors and farmers while

Naypyidaw functions as the official centre for civilian administration and general governmental affairs. Most importantly, the new Naypyidaw Command in Kyappay region northeast of Pyinmana has also been established by the current junta as the main base of the military. This area is strategically important because it where military headquarters and many military bunkers are located. The ruling junta has set up a mini garrison state as the centre of military administration.



**Map 22:** Security Landscape of Pyinmana Naypyidaw and Four Strategic Satellite Cities

**Symbol:** 1= Pyinmana 2= Naypyidaw 3= Naypyidaw Command 4= Ela 5= Lewe 6= Ywadow 7= Tatkon Township

Adapted from Google Earth Program Version 4.0.2736

In terms of the three main urban characteristics comprising residential, civilian and military administrative sectors, Pyinmana Naypyidaw is the physical output of the government's perception towards political and military security strategies.

In the context of political strategy, the clear demarcation of urban settlements can increase the effectiveness of public management and administration while, the division in three main sectors can contain and decrease the power of political and popular uprisings. Deploying military bases in the outer core and the civilian bureaucratic sector in the inner core can effectively reduce the power and strength of

popular upheavals in the capital and its periphery. At times of political emergency, many military garrisons in Kyappay region can repress and expel demonstrators from neighboring towns around the new capital while residents in Pynmana cannot contain or attack civilian officers in Naypyidaw because most strategic buildings are not located inside the core of Pynmana. In another word, if many civilian government officials join the demonstration in Naypyidaw and Pynmana, the military government in Kyappay region can move the battalions quickly and suppress popular uprisings easily and efficiently. Thus, the new capital is concretely designed and established as a political strategic city to securing a seat of power and ensuring the dictatorship's continued existence.

In terms of military strategy, even though the headquarters of Naypyidaw Command is located along the high slopes between Yezin dam and the forested mountains in the Shan plateau, the scope of the military extends far beyond the periphery of the new capital. The military junta has designed a new landscape of military complexes and strategic communities throughout the dry zone of Myanmar with Pynmana Naypyidaw as the strategic centre.

Many garrisons, military bunkers, anti-aircraft missiles and secret tunnels have been constructed in mountainous areas in the Shan plateau near Naypyidaw Command Center, while many military camps have also been sited in towns around the capital, particularly Tatkon in the north, Ela in the south, Lewe in the southwest and Ywadwa in the northeast. These towns are established by the junta as mini-satellite cities guarding the entrance to the capital in four directions. Moreover, Myanmar's government is concurrently developing military, communications and transport infrastructure in a corridor that runs directly north from Naypyidaw to Pyin Oo Lwin, the town where the army's Defense Services Academy (DSA) training facility is situated.<sup>33</sup>

The SPDC plans to establish a network of military complexes throughout Mandalay Division. "In the area around Pyin Oo Lwin, the junta has begun construction on the Yadanabon Silicon Village, a new cyber-city that promises to serve as an integral

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<sup>33</sup> Clive Parker, *Inside Myanmar's secret capital*, 30 October, 2006, Available from: [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/HJ28Ae01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/HJ28Ae01.html)

part of the new capital's communication network. The junta apparently has an eye on concentrating key industry around the region. Old and new military installations line the main road from Pyin Oo Lwin to Mandalay, including the Defense Services Mechanical and Electrical Engineering School, which was built more than a decade ago."<sup>34</sup>



Map 23



Map 24

**Map 23-24:** Naypyidaw Command Center is located in a prominent geopolitical position surrounded by Yezin Dam to the west and the Shan Plateau to the east while military culture in terms of discipline and order can be seen through the pattern of garrisons.

Adapted from Google Earth Program Version 4.0.2736

Almost equidistant between Pyin Oo Lwin and Naypyidaw is the strategically significant town of Meiktila, home to the country's air force. Meiktila has also seen extensive development in recent years coincident with construction of the new capital.<sup>35</sup> "Since 2001, there have been reports that China and Russia have helped upgrade the Shante air base, the country's main military airstrip, a few kilometers northeast of Meiktila. Reports that both countries have recently sold and delivered fighter jets to the base seem to be confirmed by satellite images downloaded using Google Earth, which clearly show a number of olive-green Chinese Chengdu F-7M Air-guard and light-khaki NAMC A-5C military aircraft along with blue Russian MiG-29s - all recent additions to Myanmar's air force. At the nearby Meiktila Airfield, Google Earth images also show a number of what appear to be Russian Mi-17 helicopters."<sup>36</sup> Additionally, South of

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

Meiktila, the road to Naypyidaw has undergone considerable renovation, at least by Myanmar's poor standards. Although many roads in the new capital remain unfinished, an expansive new highway that leads off the main Yangon-Mandalay road to the new Ministry of Defense compound is nearly complete.<sup>37</sup>

According to the exploration above, the military network is not only concentrated in Naypyidaw, but also in other strategic cities throughout the dry zone of Myanmar. The rise of military complexes in this area automatically supports the military capability of SPDC to subjugate or exercise effective control over turbulent regions in Shan, Kayin and Kayah states. Right now, the concentration of ethnic strongholds in Shan plateau cannot compete with those dominated by the ruling military government.

The junta has established its power center at Naypyidaw and transformed the landscape of the Shan plateau with its strategic military communities. In this regard, Naypyidaw Command Center will serve as an important springboard to suppress and subjugate ethnic minority movements. The network of military complexes throughout Mandalay Division will serve as a strategic base to increase the SPDC's military capability during time of warfare with ethnic rebellions and project its power not only in Shan, Kayin and Kayah states but also in Chin, Kachin, Mon and Arakan states. Thus, Naypyidaw is clearly designed to function as a forward defensive capital.

Although there is no evidence that the new established command in Naypyidaw can save the ruling junta from an American sea-borne invasion, the continuous expansion of military complexes supported by Russia and China in Pyin Oo Lwin and Meiktila increases the effectiveness of military movement and consolidation throughout the heartland of Myanmar. The location of the new command and many garrisons surrounded by mountainous areas clearly shows that the junta has decided to conduct a guerilla warfare to counterattack any enemy, while the improvement of military movement and weapon logistics from Naypyidaw, Meiktila to Pyin Oo Lwin can increase the strategic connection between Myanmar and its two powerful allies to resist and expel an American invasion. Even though the construction of military complexes

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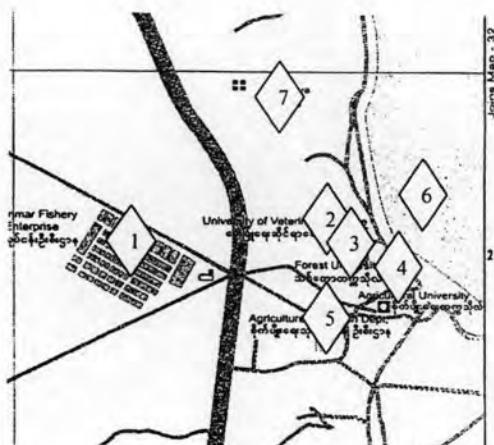
<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

may or may not be able to resist a powerful attack by the US, it is better than struggling in Yangon. Therefore, the establishment of the command and control centre at Pyinmana is apparently a grand security strategy of the ruling junta to strengthening the army and projecting the military movements throughout the heartland of Myanmar.

#### **6.4.2 Hinterland Economic Development and Urban Characteristics**

Pyinmana Naypyidaw is established as a centre of agriculture and energy development. The urban characteristics of Pyinmana in this matter are unique and quite different from other capitals in Southeast Asia such as Bangkok, Jakarta, Manila and former Yangon. By contrast, it shares characteristics with some inland capitals in other regions such as Ankara, Brasilia, Abuja and Lilongwe of Malawi. These capitals are designed to function as centers of inland agricultural development. There are three main sectors concerning economic development in the eastern part of Pyinmana.

The first area is situated between the eastern bank of Sinthe Creek (Sittang River) and the reservoir of Yezin dam in the Shan plateau, northeast of Pyinmana and not far from Naypyidaw Command Center. This sector is considered as the physical heartland of Pyinmana's agricultural development. The current junta has renovated a Forest University, Agricultural University and Agriculture Research Department which were first built in the colonial period. Moreover, the government has also constructed a University of Veterinary Science and the Myanmar Fishery Enterprise to enlarge the scope of agricultural development. Yezin dam is not only an important source of water in the southern part of Mandalay Division, but also of various kinds of freshwater fish. The urban characteristics in this area reflect that Pyinmana is the centre of agricultural knowledge and one of the centers of fishery in Myanmar. The agricultural infrastructure in Pyinmana can also support the effectiveness of military operations during the time of warfare and hence, Pyinmana is physically designed as a strategic agricultural capital for both continental military consolidation and inland development.



Map 25



Map 26

**Map 25-26: the Physical Heartland of Pyinmana's Agricultural Development**

**Symbol:** 1= Myanmar Fishery Enterprise, 2 = University of Veterinary Science, 3 = Forest University, 4 = Agricultural University, 5 = Agriculture Research Department, 6 = Yezin Dam, 7 = Yezin Township

Adapted from Naypyidaw Development Committee, *The Map of Naypyidaw* and Google Earth Program Version 4.0.2736

The second area is located at the confluence of Ngalaik and Sinthe Creeks in the eastern part of Pyinmana. This sector is considered as the centre of Myanmar's energy development. Myanmar Electric Power Labor Housing and Myanmar Electric Power Enterprise have been constructed in the western section to provide electricity throughout the southern part of Mandalay Division. Electricity from the Paunglaung dam in the east is transferred directly to the main substation of Pyinmana (in the compound of Myanmar Electric Power Enterprise) which has been established by the government as the centre of the national grid. Moreover, roads have been constructed from Pyinmana to Paunglaung dam and other hydroelectric reservoirs throughout the Shan plateau and the frontier areas. In this respect, the new capital will not only function as the centre of hydroelectric development in the southern edge of the dry zone, but also as an inland economic stronghold for earning income with neighboring countries to ensure a strong military regime in the future.



**Map 27:** the Centre of Myanmar's Energy Development

**Symbol:** 1= Myanmar Electrical Power Labor Housing    2= Myanmar Electric Power Enterprise (Main Sub Station)    3 Agricultural School (Nyaungbintha)

The last area is situated around the confluence of Sinthe and Paungloun Creek, southeast of Pyinmana. This sector is considered as the hub of Myanmar's sugar cane refineries and agricultural communities. Pyinmana Sugar Mill (Zeyawadi), other sugar refineries and many plantations are situated along the banks of the canals. Many villages such as Sibin, Wegyi and Sinthe have been developed under government projects to become self-sufficient communities in the future. Such projects are not unusual compared to other inland cities. The obvious example is the establishment by Field Marshal Phibulsongkram of Lopburi as a strategic inland city, which not only involved the expansion of military complexes and garrisons throughout the city, but also agricultural areas and self-sufficient communities in the eastern part of Lopburi to increase urban settlements and provide supplies to the city. In the same way, Pyinmana comprises many uncultivated irrigated areas and self-sufficient community projects can open new agricultural frontiers and attract farmers or residents of neighboring cities to settle in a long-dormant region. Furthermore, the ruling government can also utilize many irrigated plantations and recruit farmers to supply the army during the time of fighting with internal or external enemies. In this respect, Pyinmana will be an agricultural and self-sufficient strategic capital of Myanmar in the future.





**Picture 19:** Plantations of Self-Sufficient Communities near Paungloun Creek, southeast of Pyinmana

#### 6.4.3 Spiritual-Cultural Unity and Urban Characteristics

The spiritual and historical significance can also be seen in the pattern of city planning and architecture of Naypyidaw. In this regard, there are two interesting case studies.

First, before relocation, the junta emphasized the restoration of Burmese cultural identity and the Union spirit of Myanmar. It later built three enormous statues of Anawrahta, Bayinnaung and Alaungpaya overlooking the military parade ground in Naypyidaw. These represent the spiritual and historical motives behind the capital relocation. The new capital not only reflects the continuity of Burmese traditions but also the pride of the Myanmar military state. Even though monuments to heroes are popular in every capital, the size of these statues is enormous. Interestingly, there are no statues in Naypyidaw of modern heroes such as Gen Aung San and U Thant. Thus, it is conceivable that the three monarchical monuments are the output from the adaptation of SPDC's socio-cultural strategies to escape the influence of their political enemies in Yangon and uplift the image of the current government as comparable to Burmese monarchs in the past.

The military junta constructed these great monarchical monuments to build the nationalism and patriotic spirit of the armed forces and Burmese people by looking back to a glorious past and clinging to historical icons. "These three former kings began their

dynasties from new capitals”<sup>38</sup>: King Anawrahta (1044-1077) was the founder of Pagan and the first Burmese empire, the promoter of Theravada Buddhism and the unifier of the country. King Bayinnaung is regarded as the founder of the Second Burmese Empire and Toungoo-Hamtawati dynasty, a heroic monarch in Burmese history, described as tremendously powerful and master of vast territories.<sup>39</sup> And King Alaungpaya is regarded as the founder of Shwebo and the Third Burmese Empire, the great warrior who suppressed Mon rebellions, recovered the strength of Burmese state and established the powerful Konbaung dynasty.



**Picture 20:** Burmese troops marching on Armed Forces Day in front of Statues of Anawrahta (left), Bayinnaung (Middle) and Alaungpaya (Right).

**Source:** [www.irrawaddy.org/armed\\_forces\\_day/2006](http://www.irrawaddy.org/armed_forces_day/2006)

Additionally, on 27 March, 2006, Senior General Than Shwe became chairman of the Armed Forces Day ceremony. He stood in front of the gigantic statues of the great three monarchs and gave a widely reported public speech in which he said: “Our military should be worthy heirs to the traditions of the capable military established by noble kings Anawratha, Bayint Naung and Alaung Phaya U Aung Zeya,”<sup>40</sup> His words

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Aung Zaw, *Behold a New Empire*, Irrawaddy Magazine, 14 October 2006, Available from: <http://www.irrawaddy.org/aviewer.asp?a=6248&z=102>

<sup>39</sup> Dhida Saraya, *Mandalay the Capital City, the Center of the Universe*, Muang Boran Publishing House, 1995, p. 42.

<sup>40</sup> Shah Paung, *Junta Moves to Pyinmana for Armed Forces Day*, available from: [www.irrawaddy.org](http://www.irrawaddy.org)

show the historical connotation behind the establishment of Naypyidaw and also reflect the connection between the military's world view and historical patriotic icons for building the Union spirit of Myanmar.

Second, acknowledging the significance of Shwedagon pagoda as the spiritual centre of Burmese culture, the military leaders have constructed a near-full size replica of Shwedagon pagoda, called Oakpartathanti, just a foot or so shorter than the original, on a hill outside Naypyidaw, where it will be visible from all main roads leading to the new administrative city.<sup>41</sup> Despite Yangon's various problems, it is still a sacred city and the location of the Shwedagon pagoda. In order to make the new established capital more sacred, it is important to relocate or replicate the spiritual symbol of national culture from the old capital.

According to the Burmese worldview, a pagoda is a symbol of Lord Buddha, peace, and purity, and plays a very significant role in Burmese culture. Pyinmana Naypyidaw significantly has a good foundation to become a spiritual centre because the majority of the population is Buddhist and there are approximately sixty temples and monasteries throughout the city. More importantly, when the leaders designed the city, they have planned bureaucratic buildings close to pagoda compounds.

The most obvious example of this is to the east of Chaungmagyi dam north of Naypyidaw. The government selected Laykyun Mandaing Pyilone Chanthar Zedi pagoda as the spiritual centre for bureaucrats who reside and work in this area. Many ministries, such as Commerce, Cooperatives and Agriculture and Irrigation, have been constructed on the slopes within view of the pagoda. Bureaucrats can see and respect the pagoda from a distance against the background of the Lake of Chaungmagyi dam and green mountains. This offers a warming and holy atmosphere to encourage bureaucrats in their work or even prayers and meditation. In other words, the planning of the capital connects civilian communities and religious activities. Thus, the process of construction in Naypyidaw significantly reflects the SPDC's adoption and adaptation

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<sup>41</sup> Aung Lwin Oo, *Just Like the Real Thing*, Available from: [www.irrawaddy.org](http://www.irrawaddy.org)

of spiritual and cultural heritage to decorate and fulfill the capital's image based on Burmese perception.



**Map 28:** LaykyunMandaing Pylone Chanthar Zedi Pagoda and Ministerial Buildings

Adapted from Naypyidaw Development Committee, *The Map of Naypyidaw*

From the examples above, it can be seen that Naypyidaw is designed to function as an artificial and introduced capital at the same time. It is a new historical centre of Burmese national pride and the Union spirit. The city planning shows that the ruling government has paid special attention to cultural identity and harmoniously combined historical legacy with the military's world view and patriotic spirit.

## 6.5 Conclusion

Pyinmana Naypyidaw, situated in the center of the country, surrounded by mountainous areas and not far from mineral deposits, is strategically placed for the effective conduct of political, military, economic and cultural strategies. It is geographically located not only for the protection of the current military regime from undesirable threats, but also for development of the hinterland and strengthening the Union spirit of Myanmar. It first emerged as a small community in the upper Sittang valley and gradually evolved to an important city because of its strategic and agricultural significance and eventually was established by the current government as the new Myanmar capital.

Although the new capital is generally considered as an artificial capital because the government has set up transportation networks and residential settlements in order to provide a new site for effective administration and development, it is significantly established as a forward defensive capital in order to control chronically turbulent regions in the frontier and consolidate military strength in the heartland of Myanmar. The new capital will also function as an agricultural capital and the centre of inland development to building the economic power of the regime in controlling the whole country. Moreover, it is designed and decorated to be an introduced capital and will serve as a new symbol of Burmese historical pride and the center of Union spirit. Therefore, the new capital will offer every advantage to the ruling government in terms of, politico-military security; inland economic development and spiritual-cultural unity. More importantly, Pyinmana Naypyidaw can geopolitically strengthen the dictatorship's continued existence and ensure the regime's ability to rule the Union of Myanmar in the future.