

## **AS IT IS** | Economies Rest on Elections in India and Burma

From VOA Learning English this is As It Is. I'm Anna Matteo in Washington.

On this Saturday's show we will hear about issues affecting the economy in India and social reform in Burma. We will also explore how upcoming national elections could affect both countries.

Social reform in Burma seems to be slowing. And experts wonder how the upcoming election in 2015 will affect foreign investment there. Keep listening to learn more in the second half of our show.

But first, Mario Ritter reports on some possible good news for India's slow-growing economy.

### **Hopes Rise That India's Economy Will Improve**

India is hoping its economy will improve. In the last two years, economic growth dropped to its lowest levels in ten years. But there are few signs that the economy could return to the high growth rates that once made India one of the world's fastest-growing economies.

Gurdet Singh grows crops on about 40 hectares of fertile land in northern Punjab state. The area is financially successful because of farming. Mr. Singh says he plans to buy a new and bigger tractor to make his work easier. Mr. Singh is so successful that he hopes to buy a car after he pays the loans for his new tractor.

India's automobile manufacturers have suffered severe financial problems during the past two years. Industry officials are hoping that people like Mr. Singh and others in rural areas will begin buying cars again.

Vishnu Mathur is the head of the Society of Automobile Manufacturers of India. He says there is weak demand in urban areas for passenger cars. But, he says economic gains in India's rural areas could help carmakers.

Good feelings about the car industry may be a sign that the worst could be over for the Indian economy. But, they say the country's agricultural industry will show better growth. The Indian currency, the rupee, lost more than 20 per cent of its value compared to the dollar last year. That should help India's exports, which are increasing.

Rafique Ahmed is the head of the Federation of Indian Export Organizations. He says exports are growing because of the devalued rupee and better global economic conditions.

While growth is widely expected to increase, economists say it is unlikely to reach levels seen in 2011, for example, when growth was nine percent.

Economists say confidence among investors -- both in India and in other countries -- must return before the Indian economy can improve. Private investment has slowed because investors are concerned by the lack of reform and government barriers to business. Many investors and businesses are waiting to see whom voters will choose to lead the country in national elections to be held by May.

Finance Minister P. Chidambaram has said growth will increase to more than six per cent in 2014.

I'm Mario Ritter. And I'm Anna Matteo in Washington. You are listening to VOA Learning English.

Now on to Burma. When military rulers began reform policies in 2011, most nations ended their restrictions against Burma. But experts now fear that reforms are slowing as Burma nears its 2015 national elections. Here is Faith Lapidus with more.

### **Experts Fear Burma's Reforms Stalling**

Some experts fear that rights reforms in Burma are slowing ahead of national elections planned for 2015. The Asian Development Bank has said that Burma, also known as Myanmar, can become a middle-income country

2030. To do so, however, the economy must continue to grow at more than six per cent a year.

Burma's military rulers began reforming its economic and political systems in 2011. These reforms led most nations to end restrictions against Burma.

John Hancock is an Australian lawyer and expert on Burma. He says Burma has made strong progress in the past six to seven years. He adds that foreign investors see opportunity for profits in Burma.

However, Mr. Hancock says that Burma must rebuild government operations and complete land reforms. He says the government must increase spending on education and roads and power systems.

More than 25 per cent of Burma's 61 million people live below the national poverty level. Many of the poor live in rural areas.

Aung Zaw is the editor of the Irrawaddy newspaper. He says many in Burma fear the reform efforts will not be enough. He says poor supervision of land records leaves people in danger of losing their land.

Aung Zaw says there is evidence that the Burmese army has forced villagers out to make room for foreign investment. He says foreign investors have shown interest in new Special Economic Zones. But, he says, these new economic areas come with huge social and environmental costs. He says often villagers are forced from their homes without fair payment.

The government of Australia has warned investors that people and companies with close ties to Burma's military influence many areas of the economy including the oil, gas and wood industries.

Sean Turnell is an economist at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia. He says agriculture reform has slowed in Burma although a majority of Burmese make a living through agriculture.

Mr. Turnell says that without land rights farmers have limited opportunity to borrow money at fair rates.

Experts say some who fear changes in Burma are trying to slow reforms by creating ethnic and religious conflict ahead of the planned 2015 elections.

I'm Faith Lapidus.

I'm Anna Matteo.

You can share your thoughts and practice your written English by leaving us a comment! You can also connect with us through Facebook, Twitter, iTunes and LinkedIn. And join us next time for another As It Is on VOA Learning English!