3. ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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Near Avadum, Kachin State
TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL LANDSCAPES

Long coasts and beaches, extensive lowlands with fertile deltas and partly relatively untouched mangrove forests, dry regions in the interior, and partly undeveloped hills and mountains along the state borders divide Myanmar into different natural landscapes, which can be classified in seven tropical-subtropical natural regions.

1 The narrow strip of the Rakhine coast in the west is separated from the rest of Myanmar by the Rakhine Mountains. The rolling hills are traversed by short, rapidly flowing rivers, cliffs fall steeply to the sea, countless islands lie offshore. The tropical rainforests, bamboo groves and the long narrow mangrove woods along the coast are little developed.

2 The Thanintharyi coast, a long coastal strip along the Thai border in southeast Myanmar, has similar features. As part of the Malayan Peninsula with humid tropical conditions and high precipitation, the natural mountain forests, coastal habitats (including the reefs and sandy beaches), mudflats and mangrove swamps are experiencing increasing pressure from human activities, mainly in the form of rubber and oil palm plantations.

3 The Shan Hills at an altitude between 1,000 and 2,000 m consist of mountain ranges, mostly formed by limestone and granite, and basins. Partly excessive deforestation and intensive agriculture, including fruit and vegetable plantations, coffee and tea cultivation, as well as underused secondary vegetation and grasslands are characteristic of the region.

4 Myanmar’s northernmost region, where the mountain massif of the eastern Himalayas reaches up to 5,881 m around the highest peak of Hkakabo Razi, is very inaccessible. The dense mountain rainforests with oaks, chestnuts, tree ferns and bamboos have been cleared in the valley bottoms to make way for rice and vegetable cultivation.

5 The northwestern mountain area with numerous peaks between 2,000 and 4,000 m contains several parallel mountain chains running north-south. They are extensively covered by rainforests with some precious wood, but mostly oak and pine forests. The area is sparsely populated and mostly cultivated by Taungya and subsistence agriculture.

6 To the southeast lies the central dry zone. At its centre is the almost 1,500 m high volcanic massif of Mount Popa. Because of the low precipitation in this region, dwarf shrubs and succulents as well as various types of acacia thrive here.

7 To the south of this region is the densely populated and intensely used lower Ayeyarwady basin and delta with the most intensively extensive cultivated areas in the country, the “rice bowl” of Myanmar. Only in the nature conservation areas of the Bago Mountains have teak and bamboo forests survived, and the extreme south of the delta region is bounded by mangrove forests.

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