

Myanmar national day

Myanmar progresses on democratic path

Khin Maung Tin
AMBASSADOR OF MYANMAR

Jan. 4, 2014, is the 66th anniversary of Myanmar's Independence Day and this year marks the 60th anniversary of Myanmar-Japan diplomatic relations. On this auspicious occasion, allow me to extend to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, and the Imperial family best wishes of good health and happiness. My greetings are equally extended to the Japanese government and the people of Japan, and to all the friends of Myanmar and readers of The Japan Times who are joining us today in marking this auspicious date.

Myanmar had a glorious history with its monarchs and sovereignty for thousands of years. The people of Myanmar are simple and honest, living in a nation based on peace and unity. All nationalities have been living in amity and intimacy, respecting each other's traditions and cultures since time immemorial. However, Myanmar had bitter experiences such as being under colonialism. The colonialists encroached upon Myanmar's sovereignty by waging three aggressive wars during the period from 1824 to 1885. Though the people fought back, they were no match for the heavily armed colonialists.

After annexing Myanmar, the colonialists systematically governed the people of Myanmar. They exploited Myanmar's rich resources in various ways. What's more, the imperialists adopted a divide-and-rule policy, discriminating between the hill regions and plains, and casting doubts among the national brethren with the intent to destroy national unity. Under colonial rule, the Myanmar people had to live

in dire poverty. However, due to the political awareness, growing public strength and strong anticolonialism of the brilliant, patriotic youths, Myanmar was able to drive the imperialists out of the country.

Gen. Aung San, who was not only educated but also a patriotic youth, persuaded and recruited the people to join the People's Tatmadaw, risking their lives. Although the colonialists could be driven out with the strength of the Tatmadaw, the Myanmar people suffered the severity of fascism that was later resisted by the Tatmadaw side by side with the people. After that, colonialists re-entered the country and Gen. Aung San together with Myanmar leaders had to fight for independence through political means. To be able to enjoy complete independence, all the nation's people took part harmoniously in the fight against the colonialists.

Our national brethren, in unity, shed their blood and sacrificed their lives in the struggle for liberation. The lives, blood and sweat of the people were sacrificed. Myanmar regained independence and national sovereignty Jan. 4, 1948. Japan played a significant role in our struggle. In the post-independence era, Japan assisted economically in our nation-building efforts.

Multiparty democracy general elections took place in November 2010 in our country. Today, elected representatives are exercising their democratic rights in the Hluttaw, the legislative body, to discuss state affairs. The first regular session of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) was convened March 30, 2011. The new government headed by H.E. President U Thein Sein pledged to improve and promote socio-economic welfare, and the fundamental rights of citizens. The main priorities of our new government are good governance,

clean government, upholding the fundamental rights of citizens, economic reform and conservation of the environment.

Since March 2011, the government, parliament, judiciary, armed forces, all races in the nation, political parties, civil societies and the people at large have been taking tangible and irreversible steps forward in our democratic transition and reform process. Leaving behind an authoritative government in which the executive, legislative and judicial powers were centralized, Myanmar is endeavoring to install a democratic rule, and a strong, viable parliament based on a system of checks and balances.

Since the government led by reform-minded President U Thein Sein took office in April 2011, it has initiated reforms, such as political reform, economic and social reform, public administrative reform and private-sector reform. As these reforms reflect the desires of the people, the government has laid down objectives to fulfill these desires. Now, Myanmar is on the path of democracy and moving forward. We have introduced more and more transparency in terms of political, economic and social policies.

Political reform

Regarding political reform, the government took the initiative of holding peace talks with interethnic groups, which were very successful. Despite the challenges encountered, significant developments and progress have been made. These include the granting of amnesty to prisoners; the dignified return of exiled political forces; the successful convening of 2012 by-elections in a free, fair and transparent manner; the abolition of censorship of the media, freedom of Internet access; the establishment of workers' and employers' organizations; and the increased involvement of the people in the



Governance: (Right) The Pyidaungsu Hluttaw complex in the capital Naypyitaw is the seat of Myanmar's legislative body. (Above) President of Myanmar U Thein Sein (left) meets with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Dec. 15 in Tokyo on the sidelines of the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit, which was held from Dec. 13 to 15. MYANMAR EMBASSY

political process. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is now participating in the Pyithu Hluttaw (parliament) not only in her capacity as a member but also as the chairperson of the Rule of Law and Liability Committee.

The United States and the European Union lifted the sanctions that they imposed on our country for many years, and began to upgrade diplomatic relations with Myanmar. Myanmar continues to pursue an independent, active and nonaligned foreign policy based on the five principles of peaceful coexistence.

Myanmar places a high priority on achieving a lasting peace in the country with the aim of cessation of all armed conflicts. We are working hard to bring an end to the long-lasting difficulties in the regions of our ethnic people. Cease-fire agreements with 10 armed groups have been achieved. Further confidence-building measures and peace talks are taking place. Political progress and legitimacy have facilitated stability, paving the way to the economic and social transformation necessary to grant a higher living standard

to the people.

Economic, social reform

As the second stage of reform, which is economic and social reform, the government has been looking forward to people-centered development. The government urges labor-intensive investment while planning for longer-term sustainable economic development. The government is also working to facilitate financial, legal and regulatory measures to create an investor-friendly environment. The government will maintain the stability of macroeconomic reform, and endeavor to achieve long-term sustainability for sectoral and institutional reform. The government is emphasizing quick wins, such as reform of the fiscal and tax system, monetary and financial sector, liberalization of trade and investment, private-sector development, health and education, food security and agricultural growth, governance and transparency, mobile phones and the Internet, infrastructure development, and effectiveness and efficiency of government.

The government has held



many national-level workshops and seminars, and a national development plan, rural development and poverty reduction plan, industrial development plan, investment plan, human resource development plan, financial development plan and regional development plan were adopted. The government is focusing on job creation, sustainable growth and re-engagement of the international economic community.

Various restrictions on foreign exchange, taxation, media and many other sectors were relaxed.

In order to be in line with the current situation, the Foreign Investment Law enacted in 1988, was revised for facilitation and liberalization to attract more foreign investment. It was enacted Nov. 1, 2012.

Administrative reform

Reform in the public administrative and civil service is also taking place to measure the capacity development of the government services. These are the steps toward good governance and clean government that our new government is based on.

There will also be a transparency and accountability mechanism for the better performance of public services. The government called for coordination between the central government and region or state governments to carry out effective undertakings and cooperation. As the first step of its reform, the new civilian government, undertook a series of reforms covering national solidarity, and prevalence of peace and stability, public security, international cooperation and the multiparty democratic system.

Myanmar-Japan relations

Although Myanmar and Japan established diplomatic relations Dec. 1, 1954, the relationship between our two countries started from historic times, also having strong cultural and religious ties. This year, 2014, marks the 60th anniversary of Myanmar-Japan diplomatic relations.

Myanmar-Japan bilateral summit 2012

On April 21, 2012, the Myanmar-Japan bilateral summit was held in Tokyo. The then prime minister of Japan welcomed the measures taken by the government of Myanmar toward democratization and national reconciliation. President U Thein Sein appreciated Japan's commitment to assist Myanmar. Japan reviewed its assistance

policy toward Myanmar and pledged to extend economic cooperation to improve people's livelihood, capacity building, and development of infrastructure and related systems necessary for sustainable economic development. The two leaders welcomed the Master Plan for Thilawa, to dispatch cultural exchange, and to enhance cooperation in the areas of Disaster Management, Information and Communication Technology, Promotion of Japanese Investment, cooperation on energy and assistance.

State visit of prime minister of Japan to Myanmar

Last year at the invitation of H.E. President U Thein Sein, H.E. Shinzo Abe, prime minister of Japan, and his wife, Akie Abe, paid a state visit to Myanmar from May 24 to 26. During the visit, the two leaders shared the view that, in laying a new foundation for taking the relationship between Japan and Myanmar to a higher level, and establishing a lasting, friendly and cooperative relationship, Myanmar and Japan will work together to bolster their relationship.

At their summit in Naypyitaw, Prime Minister Abe expressed Japan's intention to implement assistance totaling ¥91 billion (¥51 billion as yen loans, and ¥40 billion as grant aid and technical

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Progress on democratic path

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assistance) to Myanmar by the end of the current fiscal year. Representatives of some 40 Japanese companies and organizations visited Myanmar together with Prime Minister Abe. The Myanmar-Japan Business Seminar was held May 25. Prime Minister Abe also attended the seminar and a joint meeting, which was held May 26, with private-sector representatives.

Furthermore, the two leaders shared the view as to the importance of Japan's technical cooperation for institution development and capacity-building of the government of Myanmar, and confirmed their intentions to further promote it. Japan is to bolster youth exchange between the two countries. The two leaders also shared their intention to build on the long history of culture and sports exchanges between the two countries, and further enhance these exchanges. Japan committed to support the 27th SEA Games.

• **Establishment of a consortium for the development of the Thilawa SEZ.**

A ceremony was held Oct. 29, 2013, to commemorate the establishment of Myanmar-Japan Thilawa Development Ltd. H.E. Toshimitsu Motegi, minister of economy, trade and industry, and H.E. U Win Shein, Union minister for finance, attended the ceremony.

The Thilawa SEZ is a special zone occupying a wide area of 2,400 hectares of land approximately 20 km southwest of Yangon. The established consortium covers a 400-hectare section of property slated for initial development. Prime Minister Abe decided to provide a loan of ¥20 billion for the development of electricity systems, ports and other related infrastructure.

• **2013 Southeast Asian Games**

Myanmar hosted the 27th Southeast Asian Games, which took place in Naypyitaw, the new capital of Myanmar, as well as in other main cities, Yangon, Mandalay and Ngwesauing Beach from Dec. 11 to 22, 2013. Some 4,730 athletes from 11 nations participated in 460 events in 37 sports.

• **Myanmar-Japan bilateral summit 2013**

On Dec. 15, 2013, the Myanmar-Japan bilateral summit was held after the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit in Tokyo. At the meeting, Prime Minister Abe expressed his wish to

further deepen the bilateral cooperative relationship in a wide range of areas. He also stated that Japan and Myanmar will celebrate the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relationship, and Japan would support Myanmar toward the progress of various reforms. And appreciation for the national reconciliation process in Myanmar was also expressed. Myanmar President U Thein Sein expressed his gratitude for the support of Japan in various areas such as the improvement of people's livelihoods, development in the border areas, as well as the development of legal systems, human resources and infrastructure.

The two leaders welcomed the progress of the Japan-Myanmar Joint Initiative, a framework for discussing the investment environment in Myanmar. Prime Minister Abe reiterated the intention of Japan to continue to work with Myanmar toward the opening of the Thilawa Special Economic Zone in 2015. Prime Minister Abe stated that in addition to the ¥91 billion of financial cooperation that he announced during his state visit to Myanmar, Japan would provide a total of ¥63.2 billion of ODA loans for four projects, through which it will provide assistance for the development of railways, water supply and irrigation. Japan also intends to provide assistance for human resources development in the fields of postal services and industries. A memorandum of cooperation on health care was signed. Japan decided to provide multiple visas to holders of Myanmar citizenship from January 2014.

• **ASEAN chairmanship**

ASEAN covers a land area of 4.46 million sq. km and has a population of approximately 600 million people. Myanmar joined ASEAN on July 23, 1997. The ASEAN leaders at their summit in December 1997 decided to transform ASEAN in accordance with ASEAN Vision 2020. At the 12th ASEAN Summit in January 2007, the leaders affirmed their strong commitment to accelerate the establishment of an ASEAN Community by 2015 to transform ASEAN into a region with free movements of goods, services, investment, skilled labor and freer flow of capital.

At the regular summit of ASEAN held in Brunei on Oct. 10, 2013, Myanmar was handed



Holy place: Kyaiktiyo Pagoda on the Golden Rock, which perpetually appears to be on the verge of rolling down the hill, is a major Buddhist pilgrimage site. MYANMAR EMBASSY

over the chairmanship to assume the ASEAN leadership in January 2014. H.E. President U Thein Sein pledged that Myanmar would strive to ensure peace and prosperity in the ASEAN region, including the establishment of the ASEAN community, taking a golden opportunity for Myanmar to show its leading role, and its dignity in the region and the world.

• **Resources, landscape**

There are tremendous investment opportunities in Myanmar. Myanmar possesses a land area of 676,577 sq. km, 50 percent of which is available for plantation of various crops. In the mining sector, ornamental stones and the estimated ore reserves are about 563 million tons. In livestock and fisheries, the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) is estimated at about 1.05 million metric tons per year. In the oil and gas sector a total of 47 blocks and 26 blocks have been demarcated onshore and offshore, respectively. At present 19 industrial zones have been established. Three Special Economic Zones (SEZ) are being developed in Kyauk Phyu, Thilawa and Dawei, and Special Economic Zone laws have been promulgated. Investors are warmly welcome to our resourceful country.

Among the many amazing

sites to visit are the spectacular, shimmering spire of the Shwedagon Pagoda towering over the skyline of Yangon; the magnificent ancient temples of Bagan; the many teak monasteries in and around Mandalay featuring intricate carvings; pristine white-sand beaches; Kyaik Htiyo, the magical Golden Rock pagoda perched on the edge of a cliff; snowcapped Mount Hkakabporazi; and Inlay Lake in Shan state, ringed with mountain ranges that disappear into the far mists in hues of purple and blue, is a haven for waterfowl and other birds. We'd like to invite readers to visit our beautiful land.

• **Turning point in history**

Myanmar regained its independence in 1948 and today, at this very moment, we have reached a turning point in our history. Myanmar is making progress on its democratic path. In the ongoing reform process, challenges and opportunities are surfacing. The people of Myanmar have been able to bring about amazing changes. The government and other stakeholders have fostered a new political culture of patience and dialogue.

To conclude, I would like to underscore the growing importance of the development of Asia in the world. We are confident that based on respect among the countries, and their pledge to abide by just rules and procedures, we will be able to establish mutually beneficial cooperation. Myanmar is ushering in a new era. We will face the challenges of the 21st century in a bold and resolute manner. We are determined to put our greatest efforts toward achieving recognition and respect from our friends across the world as a developed democratic state.

We believe that Myanmar can serve as a model of transition and as an example to others in the region.

Finally, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to The Japan Times for giving me this excellent opportunity to address its esteemed readers, and send my best wishes to all for a happy, peaceful and prosperous new year.

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