

Myanmar National Day

Working together to ensure continued sovereignty

U Thuraing Thant Zin
AMBASSADOR OF THE EMBASSY OF
THE REPUBLIC OF THE UNION OF
MYANMAR

Jan. 4 is the 68th anniversary of the Independence Day of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.



On this auspicious occasion, I have the great honor to convey the warmest greetings of H.E. President U Thein Sein and the people of Myanmar to their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, H.E. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the government and people of Japan.

Myanmar, governed by its own monarch, had long been standing as a sovereign nation. However, in the 19th century, Myanmar fell under colonial rule and lost her sovereignty. In 1948, Myanmar regained her independence through union spirit, sacrifice spirit and the national spirit of all people during the independence struggle. Taking the lessons of past events, all our people are to uphold our national duty: non-disintegration of the union, non-disintegration of national solidarity and the perpetuation of national sovereignty to be able to continue standing as a sovereign state.

The Republic of the Union of Myanmar is officially made up of 135 ethnic groups. The main national groups are the Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Bamar, Mon, Rakhine and Shan. Myanmar is also a multireligious country where freedom of religion is guaranteed in the state constitution. Religious buildings of different faiths stand side by side across the country where different communities share the same neighborhood.

The present government led



Above: Myanmar President U Thein Sein and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe meet in Tokyo on July 4 on the sideline of the Seventh Mekong-Japan Summit Meeting. Right: Bagan, once the capital of several ancient kingdoms, has some 2,000 pagodas and temples. EMBASSY OF MYANMAR



by President U Thein Sein has been participating in a multiparty democracy system since 2011. In order to perform the unprecedented wide-ranging political, economic and administrative reforms for the nation, President U Thein Sein set up the objectives and a strategic three-wave reform process.

The first wave was the peaceful transformation from a military government to a multiparty democratic system where all political forces are working together to overcome differences through dialogue

at the Hluttaws (parliament). An all-inclusive political system has been established, bringing in all stakeholders into the process through national reconciliation. The first wave of reform has brought about national reconciliation, granting a series of amnesties and greater political space, as well as freedoms of media, expression, association and peaceful assembly.

It was followed by the second wave of reform that included unleashing an array of political, economic, administrative and private sector de-

velopment reforms.

The third wave of reform has been launched, aiming to lay down a firm foundation for a new democratic state, delivering benefit to the people by fulfilling their socioeconomic needs.

Peace and stability is a prerequisite for political balance and socioeconomic development of the country. Strengthening the national reconciliation is an integral part of the reform process. With this strong conviction, the government has been working together with all the

ethnic armed groups in good faith to reach a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. On Oct. 15, the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was successfully signed with eight ethnic armed groups. This occasion was a critical first step in the process of achieving a comprehensive and lasting peace in Myanmar.

Since its inception in 2011, the government has taken pragmatic approaches to national development by laying down the framework for national projects. In the first five-year National Plan from fiscal

2011-12 to 2015-16, the Myanmar Project Commission (MPC) chaired by President U Thein Sein prioritized the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter for the public in line with changing trends of the country and the MPC performed the envisioned tasks admirably.

The second five-year National Plan from 2016-17 to 2020-21 is aimed at boosting economic growth by encouraging investment in the public and private sectors to ensure higher local productivity through the process of indus-

trialization. Furthermore, the government in partnership with the U.N. Development Programme, the Asian Development Bank and the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia has launched the framework of the 20-year National Comprehensive Development Plan (NCDP) of 2011-31 for ASEAN and East Asia. The NCDP is aimed at increasing the country's GDP to \$180 billion in 2030-31 and per capita GDP to \$3,000.

The government has also taken steps to strengthen the

economy by liberalizing and amending rules and regulations, promoting foreign trade and investment, placing the private sector as the prime mover of the market mechanism and paying great attention to socioeconomic development. All-out efforts are being made to encourage the active participation of the private sector in foreign trade by giving full support from every angle.

To be in line with the current situation, the new Foreign Investment Law and the new Special Economic Zone (SEZ) Law were enacted in 2012 and 2014 respectively. To further facilitate foreign direct investment, the Myanmar Investment Commission was established and is comprised of government ministries, experts and representatives from civil societies.

With new visions, new policies and new rules, the first phase of the Thilawa SEZ opened on Sept. 23, becoming Myanmar's first operational SEZ. The Thilawa SEZ is located 20 km southeast of Yangon, spans 2,400 acres and is jointly owned by Myanmar and public and private sector investors from Japan. Following the inauguration ceremony of the first phase, officials from Myanmar and Japan signed a memorandum of understanding on setting aside an area ranging between 500 and 700 acres for the second phase of the SEZ.

In addition, Japan, Thailand and Myanmar signed a memorandum of intent on Dec. 14, to build the Dawei SEZ in Myanmar as part of the "New Tokyo Strategy 2015 for Mekong-Japan Cooperation,"

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

Congratulations
to the People of the Republic of
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on the 68th Anniversary of
Their Independence



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Mandalay Royal Palace EMBASSY OF MYANMAR

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THE PROJECT FOR IMPROVING LOIKAW
GENERAL HOSPITAL IN KAYAH STATE
AND
THE PROJECT FOR URGENT IMPROVEMENT
OF WATER SUPPLY SYSTEM IN YANGON CITY

Myanmar National Day



Inle Lake, one of the most famous touristic sites in Myanmar EMBASSY OF MYANMAR

Excellent progress seen on economic and political fronts

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

adopted during the Seventh Mekong-Japan Summit on July 4. The Dawei Special Economic Zone will include a deep-sea port surrounded by an economic zone covering some 200 sq. km, an expressway and heavy industry facilities. The development of the Dawei SEZ is expected to benefit not only Myanmar and Thailand, but also other countries in the region.

Despite the challenges typical to a young democracy, economic sector reform has proven successful. Myanmar is aiming to be removed from the U.N. Least Developed Country (LDC) list at an early date. This goal is feasible if Myanmar could maintain this average annual growth rate over the coming years. The Framework for Economic and Social Reforms launched in 2013 for sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction is a solid platform for the country's LDC graduation ambition. It is encouraging to learn that the International Monetary Fund evaluation on Myanmar's economic prospects remains strong.

Although Myanmar and Japan established diplomatic relations on Dec. 1, 1954, the relations between our two countries date back to historic times, with strong relations also in cultural and religious ties. The relations have become stronger since the current democratic government and Japan announced a review of their economic cooperation policy in April 2012 and extended economic cooperation focusing on various areas in order to support Myanmar's efforts for reforms toward democratization, national reconciliation and sustainable development.

Last year was vital for Myanmar as the most meaningful and significant general elections were successfully held on Nov. 8. In corporation with local stakeholders and international partners, the government provided every possible means under its authority to ensure the elections were free, fair and transparent. For the achievement, the international community has congratulated the government led by President U Thein Sein. Being able to hold a general election peacefully and successfully also highlighted the fact that Myanmar's democratic reform process is gaining momentum and moving in the right direction.

The government of Japan

also supported the free and fair election by dispatching an election observer mission headed by Special Envoy of the Government of Japan for National Reconciliation in Myanmar Yohei Sasakawa.

In order to carry out the delicate transition, President U Thein Sein gathered 86 political parties from all over the country on Nov. 15 in Yangon to explain and discuss the reform process carried out by the current government and the preparations that will have to be undertaken in the interval.

Moreover, the president and the commander-in-chief met the Leader of the winning party, National League for Democracy, Aung San Suu Kyi on Dec. 2 to discuss cooperation between the current and the future government to accomplish a smooth and peaceful transfer of power and to ensure stability, the rule of law, unity and the development of the country. Through this, the transition to the new Myanmar government will occur in the gentle and peaceful manner expected.

Myanmar is not only known as a land of great potential and opportunities for investors, but also a land with numerous beautiful places for foreign tourists to explore. Myanmar's first site inscribed to UNESCO's World Heritage list is the Pyu ancient cities — Hanlin, Beikthano and Sri Khsetra — that reflect the Pyu Kingdoms that flourished over 1,000 years between 200 B.C. and 900 A.D.

With the support of the governments of Italy, Japan and Switzerland, the Ministry of Culture of Myanmar has launched the process for Bagan, which was the capital of the Kingdom of Bagan from the ninth to 13th centuries, to be nominated as a World Heritage site.

Myanmar warmly welcomes visitors to see the picturesque and amazing sites for their relaxation and pleasure. On this auspicious occasion, it is my honor to forward my best wishes to their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko for good health and happiness and to the government and people of Japan for their success and prosperity in the years to come.

In closing, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to The Japan Times for giving me this excellent opportunity to address its esteemed readers.

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on the 68th Anniversary of Their Independence

Association of Japan Myanmar Mutual Cooperation (AJMMC)

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