

The Fifty-Third Anniversary of the Independence Day of the Union of Myanmar



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Myanmar Preparing for Disciplined Democracy

by A Commentator

MYANMAR is blessed with abundant natural resources and its geo-strategic location has attracted foreigners in developing diplomatic and economic relations. Interestingly enough Myanmar is sandwiched between the two most populous nations in the world - China and India.

Myanmar and its capital Yangon are not new names. In fact these two names are the original names but were renamed Burma and Rangoon by the colonial administration. The SLORC administration reinstated the original names with two main purposes of providing a feeling of release from the colonial past and giving a previously divided country a sense of national unity under the banner of "The Union of Myanmar."

After regaining independence from Britain in 1948 a civilian government ruled the country. The then government in power neglected the needs and requirements of the ethnic races. The proclamation of Buddhism as State religion created rebellion among the ethnic races professing other religious faiths and automatically led to armed insurrection in the country. The Myanmar armed forces together with the people of the country fought and pushed back the armed groups.

The present government under the inspiring leadership of Senior General Than Shwe, Prime Minister and Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council has fixed following political, economic and social objectives.

- **Stability of the State, Community peace and tranquility, prevalence of law and order.**
- **National reconciliation.**
- **Emergence of a new enduring State Construction.**
- **Building of a new modern developed nation in accord with the new constitution.**
- **Development of agriculture as the base and all-round development of other sectors of the economy as well.**
- **Proper evolution of the market-oriented economic system.**
- **Development of the economy inviting participation in terms of technical know-how and investment from sources inside the country and abroad.**
- **The initiative to shape the national economy must be kept in the hands of the State and the national peoples.**

- **Uplift of the morale and morality of the entire nation.**
- **Uplift of national prestige and integrity and preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage and national character.**
- **Uplift of dynamism of patriotic spirit.**
- **Uplift of health, fitness and education standards of the entire nation.**

The present administration under the State Peace and Development Council launched a war against narcotic drugs and succeeded to a great extent. It dismantled the narcotic ring and now drug peddlers have been eliminated. Since Myanmar regained her independence she chose to pursue an active and independent foreign policy from very inception. She left the British Commonwealth and adopted a neutral and later a non-aligned policy throughout the cold war period. Myanmar is one of the founding members of the non-aligned movement (NAM) left the organisation in 1979 considering that the movement strayed from its original course. She later rejoined the movement in 1992. The strict neutrality which she has displayed in the region during the difficult times has been widely appreciated and has now gained confidence in the neighbourhood as well as in the region.

The ruling State Peace and Development Council is keen to give a new Constitution to the country. The country has gone through bad times because of the way the political parties acted in the past and also due to the weaknesses embedded in the former Constitutions. Today, to keep the country perpetually stable and to have a functioning democracy Myanmar must have a strong and everlasting constitution which will keep the country on the proper track. The present military transitional government is meeting her commitments while expecting the political parties especially the NLD meet theirs so that Myanmar becomes a functioning democracy within a reasonable time frame.

Human rights for a third world country like Myanmar mean the right to enjoy the basic human requirements such as security, food and shelter. Myanmar is at the moment trying to fulfil these basic essential requirements and after meeting them will move to another set of necessities such as health and education followed by economic develop-

ment. In Myanmar today security in the cities is fully guaranteed and tranquillity prevail even in the border areas. Myanmar today is implementing the project called "From Huts to Proper Houses Scheme." The government is also promoting the economy for the benefit of her people.

The government after achieving national reconciliation with its different national races is prioritising community rights at this stage of her development rather than giving priority to individual rights like the developed countries. Myanmar believes that the citizens must enjoy the essential basic rights such as security and safety of their lives and properties, a decent job which will provide enough food for their families and also a decent place to live in. In reality, the overwhelming majority of the people in Myanmar are not obsessed with politics. They do not see freedom solely in terms of the right to vote periodically and demonstrate and express political views publicly. The freedom to exercise full political rights will come when Myanmar reaches a more mature stage where the unity of the 135 ethnic groups living together in the country becomes stronger and when the fundamental needs of the population have been fulfilled to a much higher level.

Myanmar is at its nascent stage of her development where assistance, cooperation and encouragement from the international community are required to expedite her transformation peacefully, successfully to the path of sustainable democracy. Myanmar's present leadership is rebuilding a new nation from a war torn country where in 1988 the military unavoidably took over the state power and inherited a country with a single digit in federal reserves and over 65 per cent of industrial base in the capital city had been destroyed or plundered. It was only in 1992 that the dramatic changes in all round development, especially in the sector of national reconciliation, started to take place.

Today, Myanmar is passing through a development stage and despite sanctions by some nations, the commitment and determination of the ruling State Peace and Development Council remains unchanged and overcoming all hurdles in the way of building of a new modern developed nation in accord with the new State Constitution.



Senior General Than Shwe
Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council and Prime Minister of the Union of Myanmar

Prospects of Economic Cooperation between Bangladesh and Myanmar

by Syed Mahmudul Huq

THE geographical proximity between Bangladesh and Myanmar has made the two countries logical and ideal partners for harnessing natural resources to their mutual advantage. The two countries stand on the borders of two regional blocks must be taken into account. The two countries can make the most out of the proposed ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA).

A general Trade Agreement between Bangladesh and Myanmar was signed on August 3, 1973 which is renewable every year. On June 1 1989 three MOUs were signed on border trade, economic cooperation providing for joint ventures (government to government, government-private and private-private) and cooperation between private sector (FBCCI and UMCCI). Building on these, the Border Trade protocol was signed on May 18, 1994. However, border trade formally began on September 5, 1996.

Areas of cooperation and opportunities are plenty between the two neighbourly countries. For the moment the focus is on border trade. But the important element is infrastructure and administrative machinery being put in place will also take care of normal trade across Teknaf and Maungdaw. Single country exhibitions in Yangon in 1995 and 1996 helped a lot in obtaining demand for Bangladeshi products. Based on the feedback from the Yangon exhibitions, it was clear that getting to know each other, particularly each others products, remained the key, which led to the idea of setting up permanent display cum sales centres of the two countries' products in Maungdaw and Teknaf.

Bangladesh export products, pharmaceutical products, rubber, fertiliser, cosmetics etc. Imports from Myanmar include rice, pulses, maize, betel nuts, pulp, logs, minerals etc. Myanmar's imports from Bangladesh are generally consumer goods. In order to optimise the benefits of bilateral trade, a special economic zone at Teknaf is the best option. Such a zone offers unique opportunities for joint venture manufacturing units based on raw materials from Myanmar. Exports will find third country destinations. A new prospect also lies in BIM-STEEL, the latest grouping that brings together Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

Myanmar's liberal policy on leasing out lands or mutual beneficial basis for agro-based industries is really tempting and attractive. On a commercial basis, cultivable, fallow or waste land is available up to 5,000 acres for plantation crops, 3,000 acres for orchard and 1,000 acres for seasonal crops. For aquaculture, the limit is 2,000 acres. For livestock, there are three categories: 5,000 acres for buffalo, cattle and horse, 1,000 acres for sheep and goat, 5,000 acres for poultry and pig. Depending on the type of ventures, exemption from land tax is also offered for a period from two to eight years. There are also provisions for income tax waiver for a minimum period of three years from the date of commercial operation. For processing industries, the proposed special zone offers the right environment.

The cement industry of Bangladesh depends on imported clinker. The vast stone deposit in the Rakhine state of Myanmar provides the raw materials for joint venture clinker factories in Myanmar with a ready market in Bangladesh where most factories only grind it into cement.

The boost economic cooperation telecommunication link between Maungdaw and Teknaf, the two key points should be given top priority. A joint business promotion council with private sector representatives should be set up to monitor and help bilateral trade and investment.

There are immense opportunities for expansion of tourism between the two countries. This is another area where joint ventures are quite safe. Both the countries have a lot of macro-economic complementarities which strengthen the case for bilateral cooperation.

MESSAGE

The Union of Myanmar will celebrate the 53rd Anniversary of Independence on 4th January, 2001. On this glorious and momentous occasion I extend my heartfelt greetings to the government and friendly people of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

It is gratifying to note that Myanmar and Bangladesh have maintained warm and cordial relationships between the two Governments. In addition, goodwill and strong bonds of links existed between our two peoples.

The ruling State Peace and Development Council is strenuously working for the socio-economic progress of all the national peoples including 135 national races for building a modern developed nation with the main objective of attaining self-reliance in all spheres of national life.

Our valiant armed forces are safeguarding the national interests and inculcating the spirit of national cohesion for the sake of speedy progress in all directions. Anti-national and divisive forces are trying to disrupt the economic gain so far achieved. But the patriotic fervour and dedication of the armed forces ushered in a new era of national

unity and thwarted the evil designs of the neo-colonialists.

The objectives of the 53rd Independence Day spell out by The State Peace and Development Council under the dynamic leadership of Senior General Than Shwe, Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council and Prime Minister of the Union of Myanmar are: For all the national people to maintain and safeguard independence and sovereignty of the State for their perpetuation as a national duty. For all the national people to implement the task to build a new modern and developed nations. For all the national people to be united to ensure non-disintegration of the Union and non-disintegration of national solidarity and for all the national people to strive for the emergence of an enduring Constitution.

Our country is firmly pursuing an independent and active foreign policy, maintaining friendly relations with all nations of the world, especially with the neighboring countries. Despite attempts by inimical forces within and outside the country, Myanmar has been integrated into the regional

grouping - the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Myanmar has already been admitted to BIMST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand-Economic Cooperation) - which is a solely economic block.

The Union of Myanmar has achieved remarkable progress in international relations, intensified bilateral cooperation with the nations in the region and adhering to the UN Charter and fulfilling international obligations.

With Bangladesh sharing common border, our bilateral relations have been very friendly since the inception of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Myanmar was one of the first countries to recognise Bangladesh and established diplomatic relations with Bangladesh in March 1972. Since then these bonds of friendship and mutual cooperation are getting stronger through exchange of visits between the two countries at different levels.

As we celebrate the 53rd Anniversary of Independence let us rededicate ourselves to fulfil the objectives set for the occasion to become a strong and self-reliant nation.

On this auspicious occasion I take this unique opportunity to extend my best wishes for the progress and prosperity of the people of Bangladesh and for consolidating the existing warm relations between Myanmar and Bangladesh.

I wish my colleagues, friends and people in all walks of life of Bangladesh a happy and prosperous new year and into the millennium.

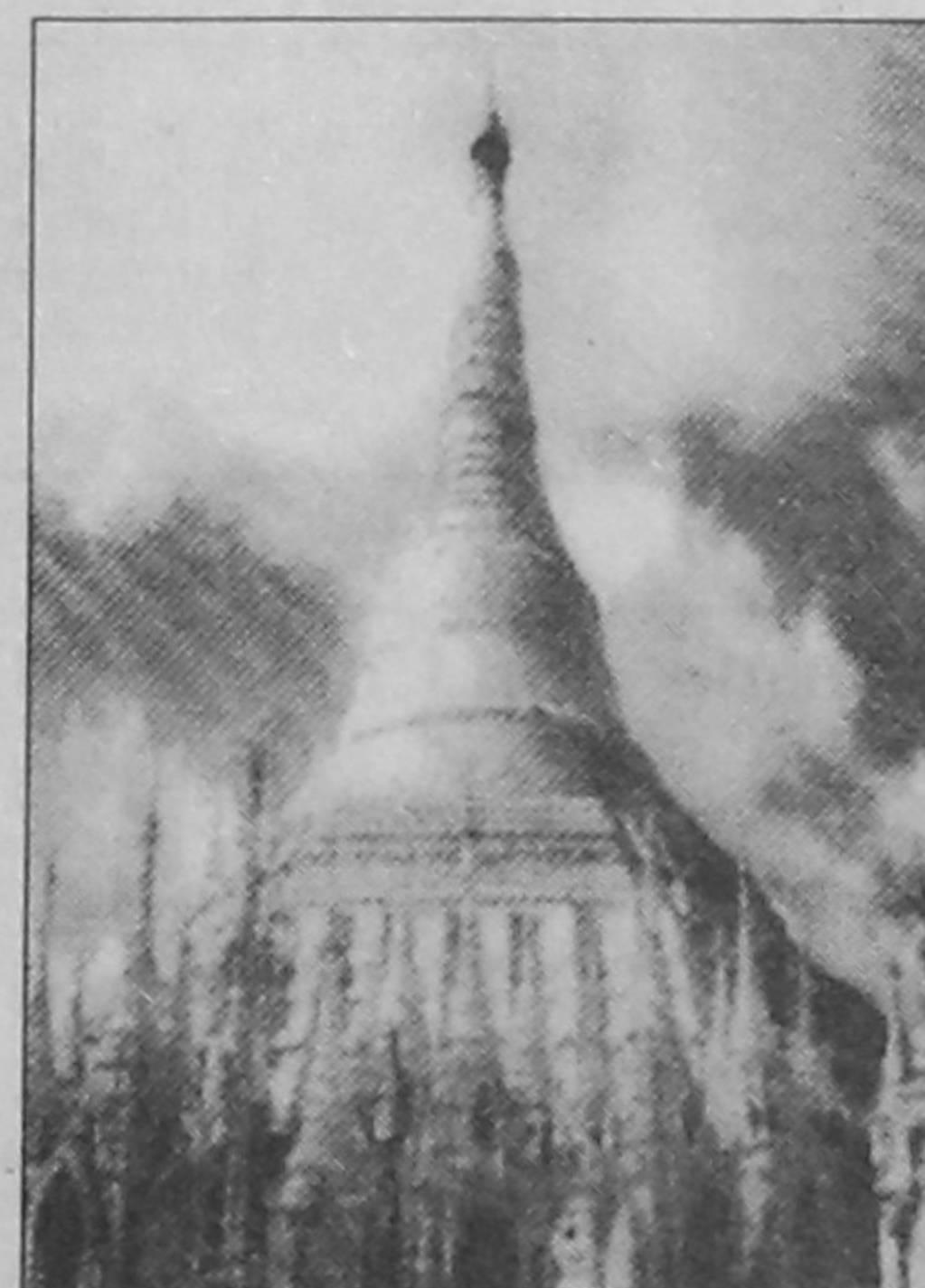


U. Ohn Thwin
Ambassador of the Union of Myanmar in Bangladesh.

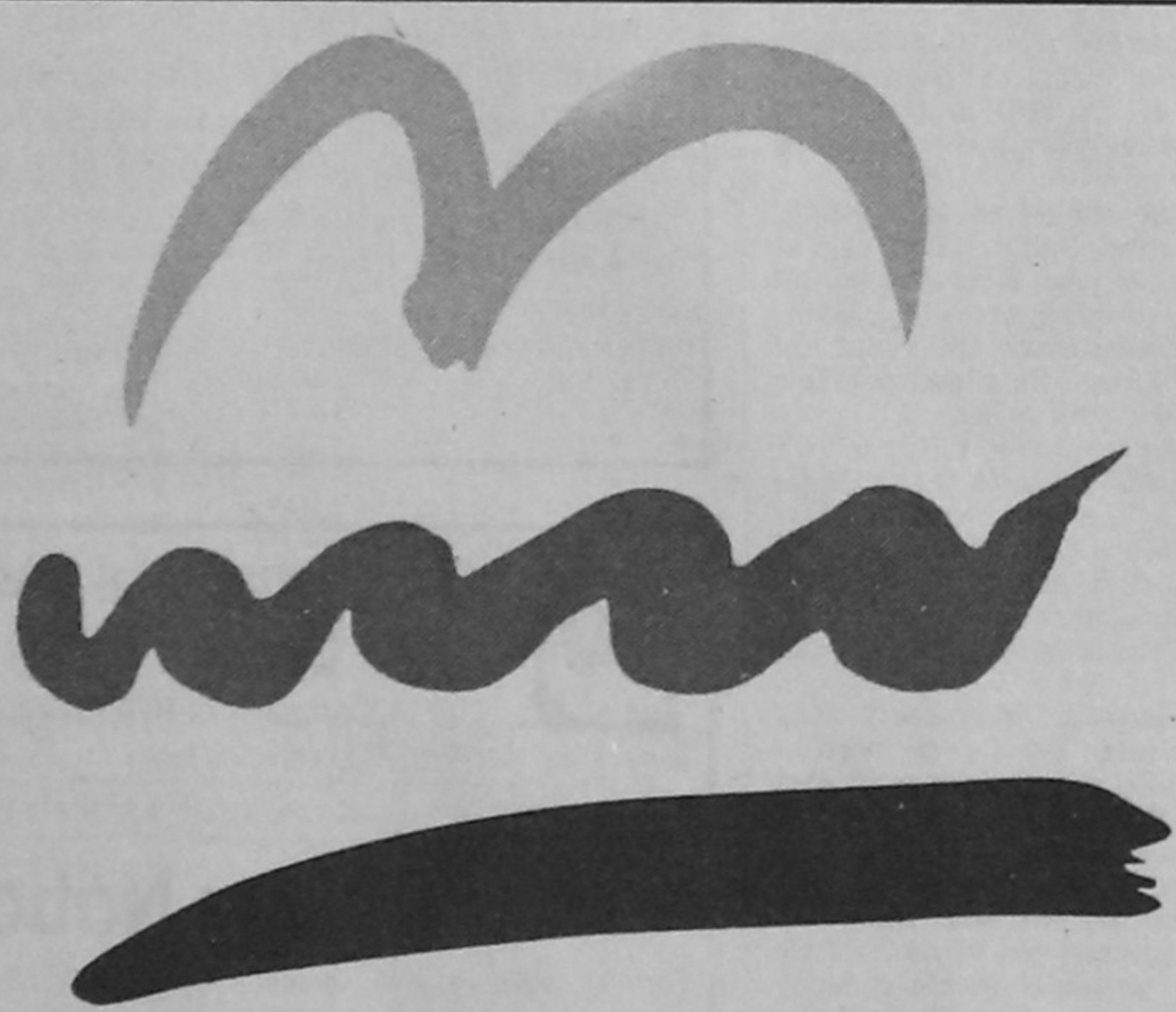
Myanmar at a Glance

Name	The Union of Myanmar
Head of State & Head of Government	HE Senior General Than Shwe
Area of the Country	261,228 Square Mile (677,000 Square Kilometers)
Geographical Location	The Union of Myanmar is geographically situated in South East Asia between latitudes 09°32' and 28°31' N and Longitudes 92°10' E and 101°11' E.
Population	50.13 Million (2000)
Official Language	Myanmar
Literacy Rate	91.6% (2000 estimate)
Major Religions	Buddhism
Community	Yangon (new international airport Mandalay)
Main Airport	Yangon
Main Seaport	Yangon
Climate	Summer: from March to mid May. Rainy: from mid May to end October. Cold: from November to end February.
Currency	Kyat
Exchange Rate (US\$)	US\$ 1-Ks 6.4177 (August 2000)
Per Capita GDP	Kyats 44,424 (1999-2000)
GDP Growth Rate	10.9% (1999-2000)
Major Industry	Agriculture, Fishery, Forest Product
Major Agricultural Products	Rice, Bean Oil crop, Sugarcane
Major Export	Rice, Maize, Matpe, Pedesein, Other Pulses, Sesamunseed, Oilcake, Raw Rubber, Hide & Skin, Marine Products, Teak, Hardwood, Plywood and Veneer, Base Metal & Ores, Minerals & Gems.
Major Imports	Consumer Goods, Power Tiller, Hand Tractor, Fertilisers, Pesticides, Herbicides, Diesel Oil, Dumper, Loader & Spare parts, Water pumps, Hydraulic excavators, Gearbox assembly for Hand tractor, MS rods & Mild steel, Hybrid quality seeds.

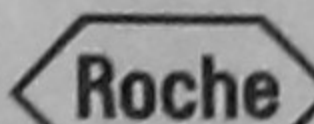
Our warmest greetings to the Government and the People of the Union of Myanmar on the auspicious occasion of their Independence Day



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