

Your Excellency U Thaung Tun, Minister for Office of the Union Government and National Security Advisor,

Your Excellency U Kyaw Tint Swe, Minister for Office of the State Counsellor,

Senior members of the Tatmadaw, Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies and my dear colleagues in the Diplomatic Corps,

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends.

It is a privilege to welcome you this evening to the lawns of India House as we observe the 69<sup>th</sup> Republic Day of India.

This ceremony, which usually takes place on 26<sup>th</sup> January, is being held about a week behind schedule this year and there is a very good reason for that.

The year 2017 has been a momentous one, not only for the India-Myanmar bilateral partnership, but also for India-ASEAN relations. We have just completed 25 years of the India-ASEAN dialogue partnership and, in celebration of this important silver jubilee, a special India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit was convened in New Delhi on 25 January where we were privileged to welcome all the ten Heads of State and Government of the ASEAN members states, including, of course, Her Excellency State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The Summit, which was based on the theme of “Shared Values: Common Destiny”, was an occasion to reaffirm our civilizational ties and develop common perspectives on a peaceful, stable, secure, prosperous, free and open Indo-Pacific region. The leaders also exchanged thoughts on cooperation in building a liberal, inclusive and rule-based economic and security architecture in our shared region.

It was also a matter of great joy and honour for India that all the ten ASEAN Heads of State and Government also agreed to participate as distinguished Guests of Honour at our Republic Day and witness the annual Republic Day parade in New Delhi on 26 January.

H.E. Daw Suu's presence in Delhi on these days necessitated my absence from Yangon and since I cannot for even one moment think of depriving myself of the pleasure of welcoming personally this large group of friends on this important occasion, we were constrained to push back this ceremony. I am deeply grateful to all of you for having made it convenient to attend this evening.

Dear Friends, I have often been asked during my service of nearly three decades around the world about the emotions Indians experience when observing two distinct anniversaries in the course of one year – Republic Day and Independence Day, which falls on 15 August. And I can perhaps do no better than to paraphrase our President who stated recently that while Independence in 1947 brought us liberty from colonial rule, it was only with the framing and adoption of our Constitution – and the birth of the Republic of India on 26 January 1950 – that we truly achieved the ethic of equality and fraternity amongst all citizens, irrespective of religion, region or community. On Independence Day, we recall the sacrifices of millions of freedom fighters who brought us self-rule and salute their memory. On Republic Day, we not only recall the genius, vision and foresight of the framers of our Constitution but also rededicate ourselves to the continuing task of nation building.

Your Excellencies, Friends, the year gone by has been a busy one for the India Myanmar bilateral relationship. It was marked of course by the first bilateral visit to Myanmar by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, which helped reinforce our existing strong ties and also to expand the scope of our mutually beneficial cooperation. It also gave a strong impetus to our partnership in the field of development cooperation. Our efforts in building infrastructure in Myanmar, in line with this country's priorities and in an open, transparent and financially and socially sustainable manner, are moving ahead and will contribute to bringing greater development for our mutual benefit.

Myanmar has also, in this past year, played a vitally important role in the growing India-ASEAN partnership. Senior delegations from Myanmar participated in many of the more than 50 separate events that were organized during the last twelve months

as part of the Silver Jubilee celebrations around the themes of **commerce, connectivity and culture**. Agriculture Minister Dr. Aung Thu and Industry Minister U Khin Maung Cho were in Delhi this January to participate in sector-specific meetings and Minister U Kyaw Tint Swe led the Myanmar delegation to the last edition of the Delhi Dialogue. Myanmar artists, journalists and musicians participated in a number of joint activities organized in India last year. “The Ugly Band” from Myanmar became a big hit at the ASEAN-India Music Festival in Delhi. Believe me, their music is anything but ugly! Equally popular was the performance just ahead of the Commemorative Summit last week of the Yama Zataw Ramayana troupe sent by the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs. Some of you may have observed that, in the set of commemorative stamps released by leaders at the Summit, the stamp related to Myanmar is a depiction of a classical Yama Zataw performance.

Ladies and Gentlemen, before I conclude, there are a couple of other developments I want to share with you, which have brought me great joy and, I am sure, will be a source of pride also to all people in Myanmar.

First, at the first ever ASEAN-India Youth Awards organized in Delhi on 23 January, Myanmar’s youth leadership power was on full display. Myanmar nominees took joint first place by claiming as many as 3 out of the ten prizes on offer with Singapore and Cambodia being the only two other countries that got as many prizes. The young achievers who brought these honours home are Thein Soe Min of Greenovator, Win Htet Mg Mg of Unique Quality Microfinance and Khine Cho Myint of Earth Trading. If you are here tonight, take a bow. Bravo and well done. Many many congratulations to them. I am sure they will do themselves and their country proud in coming years.

Second, on the eve of our Republic Day last week, the President of India was pleased to confer the Padma Shri, one of India’s highest civilian honours for distinguished public service, on Dr. Thant Myint-U, the noted historian, writer and conservationist. In recognizing Dr. Thant Myint-U, we not only honour his achievements in the field of scholarship and public service, but also celebrate the close ties between India and Myanmar that form the backdrop of so much of his

work. Congratulations, Thant. We look forward to seeing you in Rashtrapati Bhawan in Delhi in March when the President will personally decorate you with the award. I am subject to correction, but you may very well be the first person in a *taikpon*, *longyi* and *gaungbaung* walking up in Darbar Hall to receive the distinction!

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, Myanmar is passing through a challenging phase in its journey of transition. We are all aware of some of the difficulties it faces. While all of us have advice, most of it well-meaning, to offer, it is important to realize that patience and understanding, and assistance and engagement are equally and perhaps more important to proffer at this stage. I am personally of the belief that the people of this country, especially its young leaders to whom I have referred earlier, have the genius to find their way past the problems they are confronted with and lead this country on to a brighter and more prosperous future. In this enterprise, India remains committed to standing by them.

With those words, I would like to thank you all once again for honouring us with your presence tonight. I hope you will enjoy the rest of the evening.

Chezu tin ba de.