

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,  
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND  
AT THE INDIAN COMMUNITY RECEPTION IN YANGON**

**Yangon, December 12, 2018**

1. Thank you for your warm and special welcome. The depth of Gandhiji's favourite bhajan is ever more uplifting, and the melody of Bollywood always more enjoyable, and more so when it celebrates our togetherness and our familial ties.
2. I bring you greetings from the land of Lord Buddha. May his noble teachings and wisdom continue to guide us through daily life, and lead us on the path to enlightenment.
3. I also bring you good wishes of 1.3 billion citizens of the world's largest democracy, and of friends and families in India. Myanmar has embarked on an exciting but challenging journey. I am here to reassure Myanmar that India is always ready to help it fulfill its aspirations for a brighter future.
4. I am delighted to be among so many people of Indian origin and Indian expatriates. All of you, through your hard work and dedication, have made a mark for yourself. You are proud citizens of this nation and are contributing to its nation-building and progress. And you have upheld your culture, values and ethos, while adapting to local customs. In doing so, you have enriched the cultural fabric of this beautiful country and its special people. In preserving your traditions, you have been a torchbearer of Indian culture and values. You have, indeed, nurtured India's relationship with this country, sometimes by connecting people, sometimes by facilitating businesses and sometimes by guiding the pious on a spiritual journey to India.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. This is my first visit to Myanmar. It is both a pilgrimage and a homecoming. This country has a proud, millennia-old tradition of Buddhist thought and philosophy. It is home to one of the leading schools of Buddhism.
6. At the same time, Myanmar, like India, is an enormously diverse country, with different ethnicities and faiths coexisting here. And our shared civilizational ethos shows us that all faiths share fundamental truths, which guide all of us. We have always understood, as a philosopher of religions said, that "It is possible to climb life's mountain from any side, but when the top is reached, the trails converge".

Ladies and Gentlemen,

7. Myanmar is today undergoing multiple and simultaneous transitions towards democracy, peace and economic development. Success here under the courageous leadership of State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, is important for this country, for South Asia and the ASEAN family and for the world.
8. As a sister democracy and a civilizational friend, India is fully conscious of the challenges Myanmar faces. Over 70 years, we have put in place systems and structures of governance that have enabled diversity to serve the cause of national progress. And since this is based on our civilizational ethos, we have made significant strides in this regard.
9. It is in this spirit of good neighbourly cooperation that we are ready to offer Myanmar any assistance in addressing the challenges of national reconciliation, reconstruction and economic development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. Today, we are all faced with a daunting combination of traditional and non-traditional threats. Terrorism and violent extremism are among the biggest dangers to humankind.

Democracies, especially diverse ones, are particularly vulnerable.

11. The world is also faced with threats to its energy and food security, climate change, pandemics and recurring humanitarian disasters. Global commons, such as outer space, the high seas and cyber space, witness more competition.
12. No country is immune to these challenges. Equally, no single country can address them by itself. We must all share capacities and choose cooperation over confrontation. We must transcend differences that divide us. And we must recognize that the values of humanity, equality and kindness unite us and lead us toward meaningful cooperation.
13. These values are the essence of Buddhist thought, and are part of our shared cultures. They resonate in the Mahabharata, which asks us to conquer anger by calmness, evil by good, and falsehood by truth. In India, this ancient wisdom was channelized by Mahatma Gandhi into "satyagraha", which inspired our nonviolent struggle for freedom. Gandhiji, whose 150th birth anniversary celebrations we started recently, demonstrated how nonviolent means can drive political change. Indeed, independent India built its foreign policy on this idea, underlining the centrality of peace, friendship and renunciation of violence.
14. Today, the central tenets of our foreign policy are guided by recognition that the road to development runs through the region. It is for this reason that both the "Act East" and "Neighbourhood First" policies are key aspects of our foreign policy. Both prioritize our immediate environment, and Myanmar is a focus country in both. These policies have helped India adjust to a world where our country is not only one of the leading economies, but is also enabling its neighbours to engage in partnerships for growth and development. Such opportunities have expanded beyond

trade and investment to energy and electrical grids, communications and transport, and people-to-people ties.

15. Lately, development cooperation has become an important part of India's relations, especially in our neighbourhood. Today we share our expertise with neighbours and others including by building infrastructure, creating capacity, and setting up institutions. We do so in the conviction that a peaceful, prosperous and stable neighbourhood is in everyone's interest.

16. And while implementing such projects, our approach is based on:

- Ensuring they are in line with the priorities of our partners;
- Ensuring they respect the rule of law and good governance;
- Insisting on transparency, and committing to transfer skills and technologies to local communities;
- Making sure they are environmentally and socially-responsible; and, most importantly,
- Ensuring they do not create unsustainable burdens.

These precepts are essential parameters of responsible project development. I am glad that our bilateral cooperation is designed in accordance with these principles.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

17. During my meetings yesterday with the President and the State Counsellor, I reiterated India's full support for Myanmar's efforts to achieve peace, national reconciliation and economic development.

18. India is a witness to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement; we are in full support of efforts to make it more inclusive. We support a peaceful dialogue between all stakeholders based on justice, equality and dignity. We also fully respect the unity and territorial integrity of the Republic of

the Union of Myanmar. This is based on recognition that in the security of Myanmar lies our own security and the security of the larger region.

19. I also discussed Myanmar's development priorities and India's efforts to execute crucial infrastructure projects. These are progressing well on the ground and we look forward to the continued facilitation of Myanmar authorities to complete them on schedule. The direct and indirect economic opportunities created by these projects will transform these areas into development corridors, creating prosperity in the entire region.
20. Indeed, our North East and Myanmar's North West share strong commonalities of culture, language and traditions. These regions are central to our bilateral vision for growth, prosperity and security. After all, better connectivity increases people-to-people ties, expands trade and creates prosperity. And so, our border regions, far from peripheries, are the advance guard of our partnership.
21. For this to succeed, however, peace on our borders is an essential prerequisite. We must pair hard infrastructure being created with soft infrastructure of legal arrangements, like a motor vehicle agreement, for people to travel legally and easily. This will help realize the full potential of our projects.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

22. Today, 25 years of bilateral effort to renew friendship and rediscover linkages is bearing fruit. Here, an important role has been played by the large expatriate Indian and Indian-origin communities. Among you are many who are fifth or sixth generation PIOs. Yours is a community known for its peace-loving and law-abiding nature. You add value to the development of Myanmar through your hard work.
23. I salute you: for your spirit, pluralism, industry and dedication and, most of all, for your progressive attitude. No matter the country that PIOs are citizens of, and wherever

Indians are, their actions are based on core values of Indianness: of family, fraternity, dialogue, hard work, education, and service.

24. But today in Myanmar, we must do more. Our youth need to celebrate the ties that bind our civilizations together. They need to learn of our struggles against colonialism. They need to be told about Satguru Ram Singh, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai and Netaji Subash Chandra Bose, who were jailed here by the British. They need to learn how Mahatma Gandhi's vision impacted on the independence movement in Myanmar. And they need to be told how Shri Satya Narayan Goenka took lessons from Sayagyi U Ba Khin, before taking *vipassana* to the world.

25. Only when we understand our history can we take full advantage of each other's capabilities. We must turn towards each other with greater resolve to work together. And the rising tide of India's growth increases our capacity to do more. You must connect with the transformational changes happening in India and see how you can bring its energy and value to Myanmar, and in the process help both to grow and develop.

26. In about a month's time, we celebrate the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, where we recognise the great contributions made by all of you. I urge you to participate at this Convention in the historic city of Varanasi to be held from 21<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2019. Today, India is full of opportunities for business, social enterprise and cultural links. India is at the cusp of transformative change. I invite each one of you to join us in this journey, and to make this partnership more meaningful.

Chezu tin bade! Thank you.