

Dr. Ba Maw

Chapter 1

Before the University strike of 1920, Dr. Ba Maw was teaching the students of Rangoon University as a Lecturer in English. (The writer first saw Dr. Ba Maw when the latter was thus teaching.) At the time, he was not yet Dr. Ba Maw but plain U Ba Maw.

Because of his specific enunciation and intonation in teaching English, the students whispered behind his back that he was an ostentatious teacher.

What made his outward appearance distinguished was the way he wore his *gaung paung* (Myanmar ceremonial turban). He was the only lecturer wearing a different style of *gaung paung* so the students remarked that he was unconventional.

Because of these two characteristics, Dr. Ba Maw was a well-known university lecturer. I realized from that time that he was one of those kind who would always strive for excellence.

I also realized that a person as spirited as he was would not take anyone's blame or criticism to heart. He did not have the common man's tastes and he would not follow the trodden path. He was the odd one out.

Just before the 1920 University strike, he left Rangoon University to pursue further studies abroad. He studied for some time at the Cambridge University in England and then left for France to continue his studies at the University of Bordeaux. He was awarded a doctorate with the highest honours by that University.

After acquiring the doctoral and barrister degrees, he returned to Burma. He had a brilliant scholastic record since high school. In the academic field, he could be deemed as a true son of Burma.

After his return from Europe, he made his name as a barrister in Rangoon. But he was not satisfied to be just a barrister. He had his eye on politics as well.

At the time in Burmese politics, there already were well-known figures such as U Ba Pe, U Pu, U Thein Maung, U Chit Hlaing and U Paw Tun. To shine out from amidst these great men was no easy matter. If he joined a party of any of these men, he would become a mere follower. To make his name like they did, he would have to wait a considerable number of years.

Dr. Ba Maw was not one to wait. And he was definitely not a follower. He was a sharp man. He tried to find a shortcut to politics.

He found one. It was the Separation issue. GCBA (General Council of Burmese Association) members U Ba Pe and U Thein Maung had urged separation for several years and the public was quite in favour of the advocacy.

If he took the side of the separationists, he would automatically become a follower of U Ba Pe and U Thein Maung. So with the intention of setting up a different party instead of joining the separationists, he made an alliance with U Kyaw Myint and set up the Anti-Separationist League. All of a sudden, his name was in the newspapers and the whole country knew him by name.

The period Dr. Ba Maw embarked on his political career was an opportune one. The GCBA of U Ba Pe and U Thein Maung had newspapers like *Thuriya* under their influence. Therefore, these newspapers advocated separation. But only townspeople and certain villagers from considerably big villages who got to read the newspapers learned of the issue. There still remained plenty of small and distant villages where newspapers were not available.

The 21-member-GCBA had never won the hearts of true villagers. U Chit Hlaing's *Wun Tha Nu athin* had once been well-received by villagers. But because of the misdemeanour of certain of his followers, the association was under the shadow of a bad name. Villagers were very disappointed with matters concerning contributions to the association.

At a time when the 21-member-GCBA could not entice villagers and U Chit Hlaing's *Wun Tha Nu* association was also fading out, Dr. Ba Maw set foot on the country's political scene. He saw how members of the *sangha* could influence villagers and laymen and therefore, he enlisted the help of the *sanghas*.

No matter how the newspapers advocated separation, Dr. Ba Maw gradually gained popularity in villages and village tracts. Before long, he came abreast with the likes of U Ba Pe and U Thein Maung who had been in politics for a considerable number of years.

Not long after the dispute between separationists and anti-separationists had arisen, the Burma Round Table Conference was held in London. Delegates recognized at the time as Burmese leaders were invited to the London meeting. Dr. Ba Maw was one of them. At the Conference, the British Governor Mr. MacDonald laid down his view that separation was a matter to be decided by the country's own people and therefore, the leaders returned to Burma with the aim of holding an election to decide the separation issue.

Thus, four parties arose. The 21-member party including U Ba Pe and U Saw, and the Shwe Taung Gya party including Sir J. A. Maung Gyi were the separationists. The *Wun Tha Nu athin* led by U Chit Hlaing, and the party led by Dr. Ba Maw and U Kyaw Myint were the anti-separationists.

Two or three months before the election, the leaders visited towns and villages and held relevant campaigns in favour of separation as well as of anti-separation. Regular readers of newspapers assumed that separationists would clearly win the election. They deemed that Dr. Ba Maw's anti-separationist league was not strong enough to win. When the election was over and

the anti-separationist representatives had scooped up the majority of seats, members of the separationist parties were astounded. This was the first triumph of Dr. Ba Maw.

Because they became cabinet members, when the assemblies were held, the elected representatives shifted from one party to another and things came to a head when they aspired to win the position of Chief Minister.

When the leaders were elective candidates they represented the anti-separationist parties but when they became cabinet members, they switched over to the separationists side if they deemed it probable to bring them closer to Chief-Ministership. It was no strange phenomenon in Burmese politics.

And it was no strange matter if they gave lame excuses to switch over to the other party for their own personal interests.

After the election, when the matter of separation was discussed for resolution at the meetings, there was dissension and a variety of alterations were presented.

Dr. Ba Maw himself proposed that Burma should remain together with British India but must be in a position to separate when the Burmese public willed it so. The British Governor rejected Dr. Ba Maw's proposal stating that if Burma were to be with India, it should be for always and if separation was desired, it had to be soon.

Because of countless excuses, discussions and alterations, the issue of separation cooled down. The Burmese people were indifferent whether the country was to be separated from British India or not. They resigned themselves to whatever the leaders thought fit to do.

At this time, the actions of Dr. Ba Maw called for criticism. Some accused that he tricked the country, that he did not really desire anti-separation but that he established the anti-separationist league only to gain the leader's position. Whether this allegation was true or not, we were none the wiser than Dr. Ba Maw himself.

Hence, the issue of separation or anti- separation faded out and how to win the Chief Minister's position was the only thing that mattered. There were two openings for Chief Minister and the leaders aiming for that position were far more numerous.

Thus the position altered between one cabinet member and the next until Dr. Ba Maw became Education Chief Minister and U Ba Pe, Forestry Chief Minister.

The country was astounded when Dr. Ba Maw was appointed Education Chief Minister. He came onto the political scene not so long ago and he was the youngest of the politicians and yet he was selected to be Chief Minister. In the minds of the Burmese public, only veterans such as U Ba Pe, U Chit Hlaing, U Thein Maung, Sir J.A. Maung Gyi, M.A.U Maung Gyi and 'yes' men were eligible to become Chief Minister. They never thought a newcomer like Dr. Ba Maw

would become Chief Minister. So when he was appointed Education Chief Minister, the country realized for the first time that any educated person with the right abilities could become Chief Minister.

They learned gradually that it was not absolutely necessary to have political experience or educational qualifications to become Chief Minister. All that was needed was a few faithful followers and the right kind of intelligence. (Readers are aware of the circumstances today. Prime Ministers are no longer a special breed. The position of Prime Minister is no longer a rarity since it can be acquired by any intelligent layman.)

During the Education Chief Ministership of Dr. Ba Maw, the University boycott materialized. The year was 1936. The causes giving rise to the boycott were the expulsion of Thakin Nu by the Principal Mr. Sloss who also tried to expel Thakin Aung San. The boycotting students strengthened gradually and their demands became numerous.

Dr. Ba Maw faced a crisis. But in the end, the matter subsided. The government gave way to a lot of the demands of the students. A Committee headed by Sir Mya Bu was formed to enquire into the University Act. An enquiry commission was also formed to enquire into the students' allegations of immorality concerning bursar U Tin. Not long after the enquiry commission concluded its enquiry, bursar U Tin had to resign from his post.

A Committee was also formed to review the education system of high schools and middle schools. Because the committee was headed by a Mr. Campbell, the committee was known as the Campbell Committee. In the report by Mr. Campbell, there were many suggestions pertaining to the benefit of the country. The government tried to implement some of the appropriate suggestions put forth in the report.

These were the two big changes implemented during the Premiership of Dr. Ba Maw. Ministers succeeding Dr. Ba Maw continued to implement the plans but none of them initiated important education schemes. They only carried out normal day-to-day functions as Ministers.

Chapter 2

The first election in accordance with the new Burmese legislature was held in November 1936. Just before the election, a meeting was held for the re-unification of various groups into

which GCBA had dispersed. Not long afterwards, an association known as *ngar-pwint-hsaing* (five groups together) came into being.

Dr. Ba Maw who wanted to strengthen his league, founded the *hsin-ye-tha party* (the Poor Man's Party). When the party's principle was announced in the newspapers, the latter denounced him. They held meetings and argued among themselves. Before long, the name *hsin-ye-tha party* spread throughout the country.

When the election drew near, the only 2 associations which were well-known by the public were the *ngar-pwint-hsaing* and Dr. Ba Maw's group. Sir J.A., U Chit Hlaing and Thakin groups were not popular. People did not discuss much about those groups. There even were words to the effect that Sir J.A. and U Chit Hlaing had outlived their terms ; that the Thakin group was not yet strong; that the latter was just an up-and-coming group.

The election results favoured the *ngar-pwint-hsaing*. Nevertheless, representatives of Dr. Ba Maw and U Chit Hlaing's groups won a lot of seats. The Thakin group also won a few seats. Sir J.A.Maung Gyi's group was packed off as the public foretold. Even Sir J.A.Maung Gyi did not get elected.

According to the results of the election, most people assumed that the *ngar-pwint-hsaing* would form the government. The Governor himself gave directions to the group's leader U Ba Pe to form a new government. But there were confusions amidst the party. There were frictions concerning the reorganization of the higher civil services.

At a time when there was a rift between the *ngar-pwint-hsaing*, the Burmese journalists association was urging the country's leaders in the newspapers not to accept the governmental positions. Not satisfied with just writing in the newspapers, these journalists went to U Ba Pe and Dr. Ba Maw and urged them not to accept the posts. How this matter arose nobody knew for sure but the journalists said it was for the country's own good.

When they approached U Ba Pe, the latter frankly declared he would accept the posts. Dr. Ba Maw gave a clever answer saying if the majority refused to accept, he would refuse too. His words had a dual meaning. In a country where everyone was clamouring for titles, saying he wouldn't accept his post if others did not accept theirs meant the same as he would accept his. Instead of giving this shrewd response, it would have been better to give a frank response like U Ba Pe.

Not just this time but in later issues too, he had the habit of saying he would succumb to the majority's wish. But saying such words in a country where titles were sought after was a believe-it-or-not circumstance or saying the impossible. It was a chink in his armour. For saying such words, the Burmese people accused him of tricking the country. And although he said such words, he never once gave up his position voluntarily.

In spite of the fact that the Governor gave time to U Ba Pe to set up a government, the latter could not form one because the *ngar-pwint-hsaing* members were so divided among themselves. The cabinet members had no qualms about switching over to another party as they saw fit for their personal advancement. It was the same old political story of the country and a truly disgusting situation.

Some members gave lame excuses for the switching-over but some did not even care to give excuses for their fickleness.

When the *ngar-pwint-hsaing* did not come up with the proposal for a government, the governor asked Dr. Ba Maw to do it. The latter tried to form a new civilian power and within days, the *Nyunt Paung* government sprang up. The groups under this government had no particular principles concerning the country's political future. Their intention was merely to secure the important posts in the government. They had yet no specific objectives or aims for the country. As for Dr. Ba Maw's group, they still upheld the *hsin-ye-tha* scheme.

The parties in the *Nyunt Paung* government were the Karen group, The Rakhine group, the Indian group, Dr. Ba Maw's group, U Chit Hlaing's group and the disintegrated-group from *ngar-pwint-hsaing*. Once the *Nyunt Paung* government came into being, Dr. Ba Maw got together a strong team. Sir Paw Tun (U Paw Tun at the time) from U Chit Hlaing's group was Home Minister. U Tun Aung Gyaw from the Rakhine group became the Finance Minister. Saw Pe Tha from the Karen group, U Tharawaddy Mg Mg from Dr. Ba Maw's group, U Pu and Dr. Thein Maung from the disintegrated *ngar-pwint-hsaing* all became Ministers. Dr. Ba Maw became Chief Minister.

At the time, there was no such designation as Premier, only Chief Minister. Dr. Ba Maw wrote to the Burmese Secretariat in London expressing that the term Chief Minister was inferior and that Premier should be used. Afterwards, Premier was used in place of Chief Minister.

The groups or *wagons* which were formed to avail the top positions came into motion when they latched on to Dr. Ba Maw the railway engine. The latter had so much ambition to press forward and to invent new ways.

Not long after the *Nyunt Paung* government was formed, personal income tax and *thathameda* tax were reduced and were scheduled to be abolished within the next five years. The taxes were a big burden on the poor. Those who were living from-hand-to-mouth, how could they settle the annual tax dues?

When the time for tax settlement arrived, the majority had to borrow money at high interest rates. Those that could not borrow had to leave home and hearth and run away. Everybody knew how awkward it was to levy tax on poor folk. But so long as the Governor did not abolish the taxes, one imperatively had to collect the tax payments.

The public voiced time and again for the abolition of these taxes. They occasionally stood up by not paying the taxes. Some said that one of the causes of the Tharrawaddy rebellion was this taxation.

No matter how hard the public tried, they did not succeed. So when the taxes were abolished under Dr. Ba Maw's *Nyunt Paung* government, it was a total feat. The country owed its thanks to the government. In writing Burmese history, it would surely be mentioned that the taxes were abolished during the time of the *Nyunt Paung* government. Therefore it was a history-making accomplishment.

But the opposition party leaders and their supportive newspapers were reluctant to thank the *Nyunt Paung* government saying they would have done the same if they had had governmental authority.

But those words were like the maxim :‘Only if the school got to be built, one would become its patron’. Whoever abolished the taxes should be duly praised. And since the deed was done by Dr. Ba Maw's government, the people should be grateful for it.

If any group did something for the good of the country, that group should be thanked and praised. It would be wrong not to.

Another thing accomplished by the *Nyunt Paung* government was returning the security deposits the government had collected earlier from newspapers and magazines. By doing thus, it showed that the government recognized the freedom of newspapers and magazines.

But some people accused Dr. Ba Maw of taking this step to entice the newspapers and magazines to stand on his party's side. If it was true that Dr. Ba Maw had had this intention, then he had taken the wrong step. The same newspapers and magazines attacked the *Nyunt Paung* government and called for its downfall.

During his tenure, Dr. Ba Maw aimed to uproot the ills of rural administration, the country's financial and agricultural administration, and taxation principles.

To put it into practice, he formed the Rural Act Enquiry Commission, the Financial Enquiry Commission, the Agricultural Enquiry Committee and the Taxation Enquiry Commission. These Commissions were the offspring of *Nyunt Paung* leader Dr. Ba Maw.

He himself heartily called them his *sons* at meetings and assemblies. These Commissions were the pride of *Nyunt Paung* and Dr. Ba Maw. But the country did not give due recognition to them.

When the financial report came out, the public got to read the many recommendations for financial reform.

Among the recommendations, there was this proposal to reduce the salary of high-ranking government officials. The report agitated the public. Those that favoured the report and those that did not favour it loudly voiced their views in the newspapers. After a while, everything subsided.

No matter how some people protested against it, it could not be denied that the recommendations of the Committee would be beneficial for the country. But the recommendations were still under discussion, still under query. No recommendation had yet been taken up for implementation.

Other Committees did not gain as much popularity as the Finance Committee. Where those others were heading was not yet made public.

Besides the above-mentioned Committees, an Enquiry Committee with regards to freedom of speech and freedom of writing was also formed. The Committee held its meetings and discussions but the public did not learn of its progress.

Before the young *sons*, the Committees, grew up, Dr. Ba Maw and the *Nyunt Paung* government faced their downfall due to attacks of the opposition parties.

The young *sons* were in a vulnerable position thus needing to depend on their *stepfathers* : the second *Nyunt Paung* government headed by U Pu and the third *Nyunt Paung* government headed by U Saw.

They were in the palm of their hands. If the reports were shelved by the Secretariat of the second and third *Nyunt Paung* governments, the Committees would just pass away into oblivion.

A decade ago, several scholars were sent to England for further studies. But due to the decline in the price of rice and taxation charges, the country's finances became tight and the number of scholars had to be reduced.

When Dr. Ba Maw and his *Nyunt Paung* government came into power, the number of scholars was increased.

Scholars were sent not only to England but also to Japan and other countries. Sending of scholars to countries other than England was a major step taken by Dr. Ba Maw and his *Nyunt Paung* government. It was a significant accomplishment.

And just before its demise, the *Nyunt Paung* government added a new advancement in the education system. For years, the government had offered scholarship allowance to outstanding matriculates. Fifteen or twenty years ago, the scholarship was granted to 15 or 20 students in the whole of Burma.

Afterwards when the country's financial situation became restricted, the scholarship was granted only to 4 or 5 students. In 1938, quite a number of students received scholarship grants. The monthly subsidy was raised from 25 kyats to 35 kyats. But the eligible sons and daughters of rich folk and senior government officers did not receive the scholarship allowance. They were regarded as scholarship holders only in name. They were not entitled to receive the subsidy.

Although this arrangement was fair in a way, discontent arose. Disgruntled persons aired and whispered their views that whether rich or poor, if the student was outstanding and eligible, he or she should be entitled to receive the scholarship allowance.

They opined that the government should not differentiate between rich and poor. The important thing was academic performance. If a student was outstanding, he should be rewarded on a similar scale regardless of his parents' wealth or poverty.

They argued that if the rich men's offspring were not rewarded for their achievement, they would lack enthusiasm and no longer try as hard in their studies. That was why U Pu and the second *Nyunt Paung* government abolished the scheme introduced earlier by Dr. Ba Maw and his *Nyunt Paung* government. The former announced that scholarship grants would be awarded to any outstanding student rich or poor.

Rich folk were satisfied. Poor folk did not object, did not even care. Dr. Ba Maw and *Nyunt Paung* government's scheme was not appreciated by the poor but criticised by the rich. Not all good deeds receive due recognition.

Whether the scheme was right or not can be determined by the future public. Dr. Ba Maw was implementing his *hsin-ye-tha* principle, true to his words.

During the administration of Dr. Ba Maw's *Nyunt Paung* government, the amount of postage on letters to India was raised. Since it would lead to increase in the country's revenue, it was a beneficial scheme. But the Indian nationals who trembled to the core if race or money was harmed, protested raucously. They held meetings and objected. They sent letters of protest to the Assistant Governor and the Governor.

The Burmese people, although the scheme was beneficial for the country, stayed neutral. They did not organize meetings to support the scheme, they neither sent in any letters of support to the Assistant Governor or the Governor.

The *Nyunt Paung* government of Dr. Ba Maw could not ignore the Indian nationals' protests since it was dependent on the votes of the latter. So when the protests got louder, the government had to withdraw the scheme. The protest of Indian nationals had its triumph.

No one knew when the matter would be taken up once more since it was nipped in the bud during the time of Dr. Ba Maw's *Nyunt Paung* government.

In addition to the above-mentioned well-known endeavours, other changes were made by the *Nyunt Paung* government. If at the time you went to the Secretariat, you would see Indian office peons wearing *pinni* jackets. It was initiated by the government.

Many years back, let alone office peons wearing *pinni* jackets, if office clerks wanted to buy *pinni* jackets to wear to the office, they had to be wary of senior officers.

Such matters were considered not important but in actuality, they were.

(There may be other schemes the author may not be aware of. Therefore such schemes cannot be included in this article).

Chapter 3

While the government was implementing constructive tasks for the country, there arose the Yenangyaung petroleum workers issue. The issue was the precedence of the 1938 Burma rebellion. The petroleum companies did not give in and the workers were adamant. The *Nyunt Paung* government was at its wits' end. The Commerce and Trade Minister and Chief Minister Dr. Ba Maw carried out arbitration tasks between the petroleum companies and the workers but the endeavour was not successful.

The Yenangyaung revolt spread to Syriam B.O.C. Both sides were relentless and the matter was not resolved. Finally, the government had to form enquiry committees. At first it looked as though the matter was cooling down a bit ; instead, resentment and indignancy were burning like slow fire.

Before the *yenana myay* crisis was over, the problem of Ko Shwe Hpi from Myay-du, Kant-balu township, Shwebo district arose. The book called Mawlapi Yogi Aw-warda bible, published seven years ago, was discussed at the time in newspapers. In this book certain passages criticised the Buddha.

When the book was first published, nobody took any notice of it. But after seven years when at the end of a novel a passage from the book was quoted, newspapers picked it up and made scorching reviews. Perhaps it was Shwe Hpi's turn of fate for the worse.

As the indignation about the Yogi Mawlapi Aw-warda bible grew in the newspapers, Burmese muslims called up meetings and apologized to the Burmese public through newspapers or other means.

Shwe Hpi himself apologized for his misdeed through the newspapers. The government was advised to confiscate the books. But action was not taken promptly. Not long after the book was discussed in newspapers, senior monks from the Rangoon Thathana-Marmaka association

began to take action. At the time the monks from that association were very influential. The *Tet-Hponegyi* book published by Thakin Thein Pe was also criticized and requests were made to the government to confiscate it. But the government did not take action. In the end, they besieged the Publishing house *Myanma Ahlin* which gave in to their demands. Why the *Nyunt Paung* government did not confiscate Thakin Thein Pe's book could have been because it had wanted to encourage freedom in writing. That was why the book was left on the market. The reason must have been the same for Shwe Hpi's book.

In the end, the townspeople held a meeting on the platform of the Shwedagon pagoda to protest against the Shwe Hpi book. The day on which the meeting was held was 26 July 1938.

At the meeting, the people admonished the book in various ways and marched along Shwedagon Pagoda Road towards Theingyizay. The procession was halted by the metropolitan police and hence there were clashes leading to deaths and wounded.

The next day it seemed as though the situation had cooled down but the Indian-Burmese skirmish started in Rangoon. Because the photographs of one or two monks wounded and lying on the road were seen by the public, everyone was shaken and the clashes began. The whole country was shocked.

(This article is about Dr. Ba Maw so I will drop the subject of the Indian-Burmese conflict here. I will focus only on issues concerning Dr. Ba Maw).

Some people accused that the conflict arose because of Dr. Ba Maw. Even at the legislative council meeting, the opposition parties accused him thus. Their accusation was that Dr. Ba Maw had allowed his compatriot monks and citizens to hold the said meeting at the Shwedagon Pagoda, that the planned confiscation of Shwe Hpi's book was awaiting the outcome of this meeting since the motive of the *Nyunt Paung* government was to earn the people's gratitude.

Dr. Ba Maw accused in return that the opposition parties fuelled the conflict. Which side was in the right, the writer does not know for certain. But the Enquiry Committee on the Indian Burmese conflict came up with the decision that the accusations against Dr. Ba Maw were wrong and unjust.

Since the advent of the Indian Burmese conflict, the country faced one skirmish after another. The conflict itself did not cool down totally until three months later.

While the Indian Burmese conflict was still in chaos, the petroleum workers rose again. The workers on strike led by Thakin Hpo Hla Gyi marched on foot from Yenangyaung to Rangoon. The District Commissioner and the Magistrate in Magwe issued Criminal Procedure Code Section 144 to stop them. The strikers paused at a school in Magwe and vacillated whether to continue or to retreat.

About that time, Rangoon University Students Union secretary Maung Ba Hein and group, while going to Yenangyaung to resolve the national schools issue, stopped in Magwe en route. When they met up with the strikers in Magwe, they gave speeches to the petroleum workers.

Since Section 144 was in force in that area, the Union leaders were arrested by the Magwe police. Afterwards they were tried and sentenced.

That started the students' protest. Students in the whole country went on strike against all the schools. The political situation changed its course.

The students incited the strikes. Declarations were made through the newspapers. Processions circled the city and slogans were chanted.

'Success to the cause' (*Ayay tau pon, aung par zay*) was first chanted at this students' protest. The cause spread to the whole country and there was discontent everywhere. Dr. Ba Maw's government was truly alarmed.

The petroleum workers' army of strikers which had halted previously in Magwe was allowed to proceed to Rangoon. In Thaton too, a peasants' army was formed. In the newspapers, the popular headlines were about the workers' army, the thaton peasants' army and the students' protest.

News on rapes and drownings in which the public was previously interested, disappeared from newspapers altogether. The reporters wrote about the petroleum workers' plight in such a way that the articles made the readers tearful. Members of the peasants' army, petroleum workers' army and students on strike were inspired due to support from the newspapers.

In addition to these causes, the issue of the *yahan pyo* (youthful monks) arose in Mandalay. To take part in the country's affairs actively, the *yahan pyo* association was formed in that city. Other youthful monks from all over the country followed suit and all of a sudden, *yahan pyo* associations sprouted here and there.

Firstly, the *yahan pyo* members forbid the Burmese to buy from Indian shops. They stood guard and admonished those who bought from such shops. Next, they forbid the ladies to wear flimsy blouses and admonished those who wore them.

When the oil workers' army, the peasants' army, student protesters and *yahan pyo* members came together, their strength multiplied. Students were helped by the monks, monks were helped by workers, workers were helped by peasants ; all the groups were in unison.

Because the youthful monks were keeping watch at the Mandalay *zay cho* bazaar, Indian shopkeepers could not stand it and appealed to the government. The government had to issue Criminal Law Amendment Section 7. The monks could no longer keep watch at the bazaar.

Therefore the *yahan pyo* ordered the sellers to quit *zay cho* and set up their shops in the *ain-taw-yar* pagoda compound. The same thing was done in Myinmu, Sagaing, Shwebo and other towns. Bazaars were picketed and shops were set up in pagoda compounds. The *yahan pyo* members kept themselves busy.

In Rangoon too, since the arrival in the city of the peasants' army and the petroleum workers' army, the number of workers' strikes increased day by day.

The whole city was perturbed. Rebellions were rife. Lamp posts were bashed by strikers night after night so there was total darkness in a lot of areas and roads. The country was in an anarchical state.

Nyunt Paung members Dr. Ba Maw and colleagues were at a loss. They could neither give in to the demands nor refuse them. If they gave in to one demand, the strikers asked for another. They wanted more and more. If they issued laws to stop them, the newspapers would criticise them. The latter could incite the public. It was not wise to suppress the newspapers. Dr. Ba Maw himself had returned the security deposits of the newspapers. He had made a wrong move.

Whatever Dr. Ba Maw's party did, the newspapers did not see any good. When the Criminal Procedure Amendment Section 7 was repealed in Mandalay, the newspapers did not thank the *Nyunt Paung* government. They thanked the Mandalay District Commissioner and Township Officer.

Everyday in the newspapers, seething titles such as 'How utterly rude the *Nyunt Paung* government is', 'How cruel the *Nyunt Paung* government is', 'How brash the *Nyunt Paung* government is', 'May the *Nyunt Paung* government deteriorate' were flaunted.

Young students walked the streets chanting 'May Ba Maw die', 'May Ba Maw's government face its downfall', 'Ba Maw, Ba Maw, oh..oh..oh..', 'Ba Maw-worthless person'.

Whenever there were processions or whenever there were meetings, the above-mentioned aphorisms were chanted. One young person walked in front of Dr. Ba Maw's residence everyday and chanted the smearing words. Finally the servants from Dr. Ba Maw's residence came out and beat the young man thus silencing him.

In some towns, strikers walked the streets carrying coffins staging Dr. Ba Maw's funeral procession. That such anger and fury were displayed in a country where Buddhism has flourished is simply inconceivable and should be engraved in history.

Gradually the legislative assembly to be held in February 1939 drew near. A plan was laid down to dismiss Dr. Ba Maw's *Nyunt Paung* government. Young students and *yahan pyo* members went to the homes of assembly representatives and asked for promises not to support

Dr. Ba Maw's government. Verbal promises were not accepted. They wanted the promises in writing.

If they secured the promise, it was alright, but if they did not, they besieged the representative's house. No one from the family could go out. In the end, the representatives had to write down the promise and sign it. There were about ten representatives who were forced to sign this way.

Just before the legislative assembly was convened, some leaders of the Mandalay students' protest were arrested by the police. There was unrest and students demanded the release of the arrested leaders. They besieged the homes of the Mandalay Justice Minister and the Commissioner and demanded the release of student leaders. But the leaders were not released.

When they were thus refused, thousands of monks, students and citizens made a plan to march from *ain-daw-yar* pagoda to the office of the Commissioner demanding the release of the student leaders. Halfway through the said procession, the Commissioner tried to stop them but it was in vain.

Therefore an order was given to the reserve army to shoot and disperse the crowd thus causing the accidental deaths of 17 monks and citizens. The whole country was shocked. The newspapers magnified the incident.

Not long after the Mandalay crowd was dispersed, a 'no faith' motion concerning Dr. Ba Maw's *Nyunt Paung* government was proposed in the lower parliament session. The motion was approved and so Dr. Ba Maw's *Nyunt Paung* government had to step down.

There were several reasons for the downfall of Dr. Ba Maw's *Nyunt Paung* government. One of the reasons concerned its member Dr. Thein Maung who was Minister of Trade and Commerce. European MPs did not like the way Dr. Thein Maung worked.

Another reason was, the majority believed the government was too soft in handling the country's security matters. That was why the 'no faith' motion was supported by the foreigners.

In the Indian Burmese conflict too, the Indian cabinet members had the presumption that Dr. Ba Maw's government handled it too weakly. Furthermore, when the Indian shops were boycotted, the government did not handle it curtly, they believed.

The Indian traders were in Burma to do their trading but since the country was in turmoil, their trade was disrupted. They assumed that Dr. Ba Maw's government could not handle the turmoil efficiently. Therefore, some Indian members of the cabinet supported the 'no faith' motion.

In the minds of some of the Burmese cabinet members, due to the inefficiency of Dr. Ba Maw's government, students were beaten by the police near the Rangoon Secretariat, members of *yahan pyo* were killed in the skirmishes in Mandalay and the country was in turmoil. Therefore, they too voted for the 'no faith' motion.

Some Burmese cabinet members took the opposition side because of the urging of students and *yahan pyo*. The remaining cabinet members now saw the opportunity to try out for Premiership so they voted against Dr. Ba Maw's government. Insiders knew that these members had a hand in inciting the unrests. Hence the downfall of Dr. Ba Maw's government.

Whatever the government did, the newspapers, monks and students laid the blame on Dr. Ba Maw's *Nyunt Paung* government. Was it fair to lay it all on his party?

Dr. Ba Maw's *Nyunt Paung* party had a hand in some of the actions taken by the government, but some were not ordered by the party. Appropriate action was taken by responsible officers according to the laws in effect.

Dr. Ba Maw's government learned of the actions taken only after these had been effected. So the laying of blame for every action on Dr. Ba Maw's government was totally unjust. If a crisis arose, District Commissioners and responsible officers had to take matters in their own hands and act quickly.

Dr. Ba Maw's government could take action against the district officers only if they did not follow the rules and regulations. The government could not interfere if the relevant officer adhered to the rules. The only way was to abolish the law under question and this would need *hluttaw* decision.

The strikers and boycotters of that time had no idea of the workings of a government and that was why they laid all the blame on Dr. Ba Maw's government. Their vision was distorted.

What they assumed was that since Dr. Ba Maw's government was the authority, they could interfere with the actions whether the latter were in accordance with the law or not. Therefore even for small inconveniences created by the district officers, the public blamed Dr. Ba Maw's government. There really was no justification.

When the students, monks, thakins, workers and newspapers cried out their dissatisfaction, the *Nyunt Paung* government of Dr. Ba Maw was aghast not knowing what to do. They could neither yield nor unyield.

Since it was confusing whether to be yielding or unyielding, the government kept changing its stand and the country headed into turmoil. Therefore the vulnerability of Dr. Ba Maw's government was due to the weak and unassertive handling of issues.

When U Ba Pe and U Saw became Premiers, they did not employ Dr. Ba Maw's sympathetic ways of handling but used harsh means instead thus diminishing upheavals. When the women strikers who were barring the tram-ways by sleeping on the tracks were arrested and sent to Tharawaddy jail together with their milk-sucking babies under the orders of Home Minister U Ba Pe, the agitators were daunted. If effective action is taken, no doubt lawless people are intimidated.

The readers of this article must also have heard that the strikers and agitators who swore at U Saw in Myingyan, Pyawbwe and Pegu were punished by U Saw himself with a bamboo staff.

One can say that Dr. Ba Maw's *Nyunt Paung* government had no guts like that of U Ba Pe and U Saw. Also that its members were not as experienced in governance as the latter rulers. But it could also be said that the *Nyunt Paung* government was sympathetic with the public and strikers. Whatever the excuse, the reason for the downfall of Dr. Ba Maw's government was because their governance was insubstantial and unassertive.

Dr. Ba Maw could talk anyone into liking him. If he was with poor people, he could talk to please the poor and if he was with rich people, he could talk to please the rich.

Even with a stranger he had never met before, he would talk intimately as if he was with a close friend. These persons took a liking to him and had a high regard for him. They admired him. In response to their requests, he made fluent promises.

These requests were sometimes fulfilled, sometimes not. People who went home trusting him to keep his word harboured a low opinion of him when their requests were not fulfilled. Their hostility was roused.

In this way, Dr. Ba Maw bred more opposition members. Giving instant promises was one of his mistakes, a *faux-pas*.

On the other hand, not only was Dr. Ba Maw tactful in talking to a small group of persons, he had oratorical skill in addressing the public about important matters. The public had nothing but praise when he delivered a speech.

At the time of the coronation ceremony of King George VI, Dr. Ba Maw was in London and he was invited to the Burmese Association dinner. At the dinner, the way he talked among other invited leaders called for praise. He talked lovingly about Burmese *ngapi* (fish paste). He told the English audience if one really loved Burma, one should eat its *ngapi*. The way he said it was so cleverly put that everyone praised him as an accomplished speaker.

Afterwards, he talked about *Time* at the Rangoon government high schools old students' reunion dinner. That night, other Burmese leaders attended the dinner too. They all took turns to

talk. But Dr. Ba Maw's words were so remarkable that the audience applauded him. Later when his speech was in the newspapers, the readers also had nothing but praise for him.

Although Dr. Ba Maw was the Premier, he did not discriminate. He was kind to poor people. If visitors from rural places visited him, he was a good and dutiful host. When he went on tours, he would walk with the poor from the railway station to the *bo-te* (guest house) instead of taking a car-ride. He also paid visits to famous pagodas for worship, and to venerable sayadaws for obeisance.

Therefore, the majority said that he was a true *hsin-ye-tha* representative. But some accused him of caring for the poor only with the motive to win their votes. Which presumption was true, nobody could say. Only Dr. Ba Maw would have had the answer.

One drawback of Dr. Ba Maw's government was that it had no newspaper to support it. During his time as Chief Minister, one newspaper called *Bandoola* supported his party. But the number of readers of *Bandoola* was far less than *Thuriya* and *Myanma Alin*. So how could one say that this was a renowned newspaper.

Leaders such as U Ba Pe and U Saw had supportive newspapers. So one of the reasons Dr. Ba Maw's government met its downfall was because it had no popular newspaper to support it.

The country knew that some of the Ministers had bad reputations concerning money matters. Dr. Ba Maw had heard about his party members practising favouritism but he had no knowledge of their corruption.

It was heard that although Dr. Ba Maw became Chief Minister, he did not make his fortune like some Prime Ministers, that on the contrary, he even became poorer.

Not long after Dr. Ba Maw's government had to step down, their party and some Thakin parties had discussions. Before long, a political party known as *Htwet Yat* (Way Out) Party sprang up. Its members first gave talks in Yangon. Afterwards, they toured other provinces and gradually gained strength.

Those who had chanted '*Dr. Ba Maw, oh..oh..oh..*' now became allies of Dr. Ba Maw. Neither the newspapers nor the students and *yahan pyo* members, used harsh words against Dr. Ba Maw any more.

They even had words of praise for Dr. Ba Maw. The political affairs of Burma are so astounding !

So if you say that those people who chanted slanderous words against Dr. Ba Maw had no idea whatever about the state of affairs in the country, you would not be wrong.

When Dr. Ba Maw learned that the *Htwet Yat* party was gaining popularity in the provinces, he and some of its leaders went up to Mandalay and held a mass rally there. We read in the newspapers that the mass rally was attended by about ten thousand people.

At the rally, Dr. Ba Maw was acclaimed ‘*ar-nar-shin*’ (literal tr: Lord of Power) and the audience listened with attention to his advisory speech. At the same rally, the audience proclaimed him grandly as *Our ar-nar-shin* three times, so the newspapers wrote.

The hailing must surely have been carried up to the *tarvateinsa* heavens. Those people who had been chanting *Dr. Ba Maw, oh..oh..oh..*, now hailed him as their leader. How fickle men’s minds are!

Not long after he became *ar-nar-shin*, Dr. Ba Maw was arrested under Burma Protection Law Section 38. He was taken to Mandalay on the day of arrest and his trial was held there. On 29 August, he was sentenced to one year imprisonment with hard labour.

Dr. Ba Maw did not refute the charge. Some said that he let himself be imprisoned to stimulate public unrest. Nobody can say for certain if it was true or not. But the country did not enter a state of unrest.

Let us wait and see how Dr. Ba Maw will make his future moves.

Conclusion

Although this article is written about Dr. Ba Maw, the writer of this article is no friend of Dr. Ba Maw’s, no party member of Dr. Ba Maw’s and has no blind faith in Dr. Ba Maw. The writer is just someone who has focused his attention on Burma’s political affairs of the past four or five to ten years merely as a watchful onlooker.

The writer has no intention to disseminate Dr. Ba Maw’s propaganda, nor to contribute towards the strengthening of Dr. Ba Maw’s party. Neither does he intend to assist in bringing about the regaining of the Chief Minister position by Dr. Ba Maw.

The sole intention of this article is to let future historical researchers gauge the truth of Dr. Ba Maw’s role in the political history of Burma.

If it is not written now, after some years in the future, one might no longer discern the true state of affairs of this period. The article is written merely as an attempt to offer clues to the past.

Theikppan Maung Wa

22 September 1940, Shwebo