

SUPERSTITION AND SAND PAGODA

Burma regained Independence on January 4, 1948 at the most auspicious time, 4:20 AM, the time preferred by the Government of the Union of Burma, the newly emerging country out of the British Empire. Astrology plays an important role to some Burmese, if not to most of the Burmese. The famed astrologers of Burma calculated the auspicious time for the independence to be documented. The early wee hour of 4:20 AM was selected according to their second calculation. U Kyaw Nyein, Bo Let Ya and their close associates who were very important *dramatist personae* of Burma's politics of the time brought up the '*auspicious timing*' business for the second time. But, it was Premier Nu who, as the *ex officio*, had to inform the British Government the changed of timing. However, he was accused of as a believer in astrology and stigmatized as though he would not do a thing without consulting astrologers, which was, in Burmese parlance considered derogatory and condescending.

Premier Nu's colleagues, cagey foxes of Burmese politics, made such a derogatory remark just to stick a stigma and disparaged his reputation as a backward and superstitious person. Premier Nu believed only in the Lord Buddha's teaching and he always referred to *Pubarna Sutta*, and time and again mentioned '*any occasion is auspicious if the deed to be done is virtuous*'.

A Western journalist who understood none and could not cope with the beauty and the intricacies of the Burmese language, but had a typewriter criticized and justified the ensuing *coup* in 1962. He quoted the Burmese proverb of "*16,000 problems*" and wrote an article to the effect that "*Burma has so many problems where its own Prime Minister had admitted there were 16,000 problems*"; and he lamented "*how the Prime Minister counted was unknown*". If that journalist encountered another proverb: "*84,000 rubbish*" or in Burmese "*pau' kaja. shi' thaun: lei: htaun*" the menial western journalist would drop dead. These journalists of the west dubbed Premier Nu as superstitious.

A few months before the 1962 *coup* U Ba Saw, as the Minister of the Religious Affairs built several *the: boun zei di*, stupa made out of sand, through out the country much to Premier Nu's surprise. It is general believe that once a pagoda is built it must stay. The sand used, which had become sacred, would be washed or winded away, and, people might unknowingly step on it. That was what Premier Nu, being a staunch Buddhist abhor regarding the building of sand pagodas. He ordered to stop the project as soon as the matter got to his knowledge. U Ba Saw might have done in collusion with Ne Win as a *jadaja* [done in keeping with an astrologer's advise to avert impending misfortune or to realize what one wishes] to pave a way for the success of the *coup*.

Ne Win as well as others after returning from Japan as Thirty Comrades, most of the Comrades, became the highest officers of the Army under the tutelage of the Japanese Army. They had tried their best to woo Kitty Ba Than [a.k.a.] Khin May Than, the eldest daughter of Dr. Ba Than. Bo Ne Win, as was not well verse in English, had but to gawp from afar, unlike Bo Set Kyar, etc. In Dr. Ba Than's household, according to a source, English was the median of language.

Kitty was later married to Dr. Taung Gyi, stationed in England. Kitty had three daughters from this marriage. Bo Ne Win's interest in Kitty was just like a red ember under ashes. Kitty came back to Burma from time to time. Bo Ne Win could not miss out again and he charmed her up. While she remained married to Dr. Taung Gyi, Bo Ne Win eloped Kitty Taung Gyi to Bangkok, Thailand, on a Burma Air Force plane. Some said she was pregnant already at the time of their marriage, and to some, who cast doubt that it could also be Dr. Taung Gyi's cake she was baking in her oven.

Whose cake she was baking was not the issue but the seriousness of the matter was that the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of Burma had committed adultery. Everyone thought Bo Ne Win was the Commander in Chief, but in fact, he was a mere *Seducer in Chief*.

The very pious Prime Minister could not stand an adulterer as his Chief of Staff and thereupon decided to fire Bo Ne Win. He introduced the resolution to fire Bo Ne Win and the Cabinet had supported it. Bo Aung Gyi, the Vice Chief of Staff of Army and his wife Daw Kyu Kyu led a company of officers and their wives, wailing loudly in objections to the adulterous marriage of

Bo Ne Win and Kitty Taung Gyi. Bo Ne Win and Kitty Taung Gyi played the darkest adulterous drama of the century uninterrupted until she passed away as the *Dictator's Wife*.

A Cabinet minister from Arakan, U Ba Saw leaked the Cabinet resolution to Bo Ne Win that he was being sacked. Bo Ne Win, first went with full of tears to Thakin Chit Maung [*Myan Aung*], Parliamentary Secretary for the Ministry of Defense and asked for assistance to deter the resolution of the Cabinet from being implemented. Thakin Chit Maung brought the case to Deputy Prime Ministers U Ba Swe, who was also the Minister of Defense and U Kyaw Nyein, who was the Minister of Interior, the two most influential ministers. Bo Ne Win, according to the sources, was very good at lamentation. He cried as though he was about to die. He was practically at the feet of U Ba Swe and U Kyaw Nyein. The Deputy Prime Ministers begged for mercy to the Prime Minister and pointed the situation of the country that the threat of the communists was still eminent. After all, Bo Ne Win was their Socialist candidate for the Minister of Defense portfolio against Bo Zay Ya, the Communist candidate at the immediate post-independence months. The Prime Minister reluctantly ignored the issue of firing Ne Win.

Bo Ne Win, acknowledged his debt of gratitude to Minister U Ba Saw by releasing the minister within an hour with personal apology as the Chairman of the Revolutionary Council on March 2, 1962 when he staged *coup d'etat* against U Nu's government. But, grudgingly for other reasons, put U Ba Swe, U Kyaw Nyein, and Thakin Chit Maung under solitary confinements for several years.