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## **An Analysis of the Parliamentary Democracy System in Myanmar (1948-62)**

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### **Abstract**

After regaining independence in 1948, AFPFL, the strongest political force in Myanmar, formed the first parliamentary government with U Nu as the Prime minister. Between 1948 and 1962, Myanmar in effect had one-party dominated rule within a democratic framework. Political process of Myanmar at the time was a sad story of conflicts, internal strifes, split and upheavals. The first split was between Clean AFPFL and Stable AFPFL. Although there had been minor differences on ideology among the AFPFL leaders, it was personal dislike, rivalry and envy that broke up the AFPFL. The newspapers of the time were full of charges and counter charges of corruption, maladministration, and unfaithfulness of the politicians. Factionalism, that had originated in the AFPFL and survived through the period of the Clean AFPFL, was carried over into the Pyidaungsu party (Pa Hta Sa). The political tranquility was also seriously disturbed by the Prime Minister U Nu's program of making Buddhism the state religion in 1960. It led to the political confusions in the country. On the other hand, U Nu pledged for new Rakhine and Mon autonomous states in the campaign for the 1960 elections in order to broaden his political backing. The ethnic minorities especially the Shans also tended to secede from the Union under the mask of federalism. In this way, there arose increased difficulties related to national unity.

Key words: AFPFL, Pa Hta Sa, multi-party democracy, Factionalism, Buddhism, secession

### **Introduction**

After Myanmar regained independence on 4 January 1948, the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), the strongest political force, formed the first parliamentary government with U Nu at the helm. Between 1948 and 1962, Myanmar in effect had one-party dominated rule within a democratic framework. The confused state of affairs that prevailed in Myanmar since independence was an expression of the weakness inherent in the State. The AFPFL itself was not one united whole as it was only by means of organizing various mass groups that the AFPFL became the dominant political organization. Within the AFPFL itself, the abuse of power and mistrust among the leaders came to ahead since 1958. The AFPFL and the government also suffered in popular esteem from the defects of the power so wielded.

Finally, the armed forces led by General Ne Win staged a coup d'etat on 2 March 1962 and announced over the air that the armed forces had taken over the responsibility and the task of keeping the country's safety owing to the greatly deteriorating conditions in the Union. And the parliamentary democracy system failed soon after independence. In this paper, the author analytically discussed and explained why parliamentary democracy system failed in Myanmar in the first years of independence. There were major developments precipitating to the fall of parliamentary democracy system. These were mainly personal rivalries within the ruling AFPFL government; factionalism within the Union Party (Pa Hta Sa); enactment of Buddhism as the state religion; increasing demands for statehood within the union; the issue of federalism and endeavours to apportion state sovereignty; and the impact of Federal issue on the military.

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### **Personal rivalries within the ruling AFPFL government**

As the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) was a coalition of mass organizations, ethnic groups, independent members and socialist party, the dissensions within the league arose partly from different ideologies but mainly from personal rivalries and jealousies. The dissensions could no longer be concealed and erupted openly on 27 April 1958, when U Nu told U Kyaw Nyein and his colleagues that it was no longer possible to string along together and that it would be best to part peacefully. U Nu laid down a 7-point formula by which the peaceful separation of the AFPFL was to be made. He sided with the Thakhin Tin and Thakhin Kyaw Tun group. Ba Swe joined up with the Kyaw Nyein faction. The Nu-Tin faction became the "Clean" AFPFL while the Swe-Nyein faction was named the "Stable" AFPFL (Sein Win, 1989, 25). Ideology played little or no role in the split, as all were committed to vague socialist goals. The Clean and Stable factions competed with one another for supremacy in the parliament and their rivalry had ripple effects on the states as the leaders of both sides wooed the leaders of the states. As U Nu had promised to fulfill the states' needs, the leaders of the Shan, Kayah, and Kachin states expressed their support for U Nu-led Clean AFPFL.

When the partition eventually took place within the AFPFL, one or two organizations supported the Clean, the rest siding with the Stable. The campaigns for the control of Parliament were fought bitterly, with charges, counter charges and vituperation hurled from the platform or splashed across the columns of newspapers (Nu, 1975, 325). On 4 June 1958, all the ministers and parliamentary secretaries of the Swe-Nyein faction resigned from office. On 9 June they introduced a *no-confidence motion* in the lower House of the Parliament against the government headed by U Nu. But the motion was defeated by 8 votes (119 votes for and 127 votes against) (*Second Pyithu Hluttaw Congress*, File N. vi, Meeting N. ii, 1958, 139). This was made possible only by the extreme left bloc — the National Unity Front (NUF) — which abandoned its opposition role and supported U Nu. U Nu had to endeavour to broaden the base of his political support and he made such an obvious bid for backing from the left. It had been seen that many of those who came to occupy government posts during the Nu-Tin's Clean AFPFL period were persons U Nu would have called bad hats in the past (Poe Kyaw San, 1975, 94). Thus, many of the policies of the Clean AFPFL government were ambiguous.

Since U Nu had barely won the no-confidence vote of June 9 by only eight votes, the security of his support in the Chamber of Deputies led directly to a major constitutional wrangle in August 1958. On the other hand, as Myanmar's official fiscal year approached its end, U Nu needed a new budget, but defeat in the legislature on one or more sections of his budget would not serve U Nu or his party well in the anticipated elections. The National Unity Front that wished U Nu's dependence on its support, tried to avoid dissolution of the Parliament, and proposed an all-party compromise budget. On 28 July 1958, U Nu made a surprise announcement that the Chamber of Deputies would meet in budget session on August 28, and the Chamber of Nationalities, the less important house, on September 15 (*Pyidaungsu Daily*, 29 July 1958, 1). Even more surprisingly, he declared on August 19 that the budget session had been cancelled and that the budget would be passed by presidential ordinance (Nu, 1975, 325-6). It showed that U Nu felt his loss in parliamentary majority. On September 22, U Nu announced that the Parliament would be dissolved on September 29, the budget proclaimed by ordinance on September 30, and elections held in November 1958 (*Mandaing Daily*, 21 August 1958, 5). Although the Stable AFPFL charged his actions to be unconstitutional, these were probably constitutional, despite

possibly not in keeping with the democratic spirit of Myanmar basic law. Thus, U Nu undoubtedly endangered the values he cherished for his political survival.

The AFPFL split had strong repercussions on the "Tatmadaw" (the Army). Except for General Ne Win, most of the high-ranking military officers and commanders were said to have sided with the Swe-Nyein faction (Myint Kyi and Naw Angelene, 1991, 96). These personal allegiances for U Ba Swe and U Kyaw Nyein and political sympathies for the Stable AFPFL made them suspicious of every move of the Clean AFPFL which they construed as steps to build up the strength and stability by U Nu of his own party. U Nu remained anti-communist, and the anti-communist army leaders realized this. However, many top military figures suspected the wisdom of U Nu's policies toward the communists. Many army men believed that U Nu's concessions to the insurgents only encouraged the communists to demand more concessions (*The Nation*, 1 September 1958, 1). It was an open secret in Yangon that the army was disturbed by the latitude of the amnesty order of 1 August 1958. The army's mounting distrust of U Nu's attitude toward the National Unity Front (NUF), the People's Comrade Party of surrendering rebels, and the Communist insurgents following the AFPFL split were matched by the growing fear on the part of the Clean AFPFL that the military leaders were sympathetic to its Stable rival. The second echelon of leaders of the Clean AFPFL, clearly infiltrated by some individuals with communist leanings, sought actively to discredit the military in order both to reduce the importance of an alleged Stable ally and to increase the likelihood that some of their political sympathizers still in revolt would regain legal status. Indeed, the army was labelled "Public Enemy Number One" at a Clean Convention in U Nu's official compound in early September 1958 (Sein Win, 1989, 72-4, *NLM*, 6 September 1958, 1), a label that U Nu subsequently denied in a radio broadcast. The Swe-Nyein faction was declared "Public Enemy Number Two" and the insurgents as a poor third (Sein Win, 1989, 75). In response to the complaint of the army leaders, U Nu gave an explanation speech on the air on 4 September 1958 to the people of Myanmar. However, the relations between the army and the Clean AFPFL politicians eventually turned from bad to worse.

On the other hand, Bo Min Gaung and Thakhin Pan Myaing of the Nu-Tin faction became suspicious of the true intentions of the Swe-Nyein faction's alliance with certain high-ranking military officers. The political situation deteriorated almost daily throughout September 1958, reaching seemingly explosive proportions. The tension increased when the pro-Clean units of the Para-military Union Military Police (UMP) were transferred from Mandalay to Yangon while U Nu himself was significantly on tour of Upper Myanmar (Sein Win, 1989, 77-81). The UMP elements fell within the jurisdiction of the ambitious Bo Min Gaung, and he was primarily responsible for the troop movements. By mid-September, the Army was visibly more partial to the Stable party and Bo Min Gaung and some other second-line leaders wanted pro-Clean armed personnel in the *Yangon* area (Myint Kyi and Naw Angelene 1991, 107). On September 28, 1958 the city of *Yangon* was almost completely encircled by army units and in turn they were surrounded by pro-Clean units of the UMP. And then, a formal exchange of letters between U Nu and General Ne Win took place and that evening U Nu made a public announcement of the transfer of authority to a caretaker government under General Ne Win, Commander-in-Chief of Myanmar's Armed forces (*Pyidaungsu Daily*, 27 September 1958, 1). In this way, the life of the Clean AFPFL government was terminated at 3 months and 17 days and General Ne Win's Caretaker Government stepped in and remained in power for more than one year, supposedly to "clean the mess" in the country.

### **Factionalism within the Union Party (Pa Hta Sa)**

In February 1960, the Caretaker Government of General Ne Win held general elections. The Clean AFPFL won sweeping victories. On 17 March 1960, holding a nationwide convention of the party, the Clean AFPFL Chairman U Nu, to highlight the fact that the establishment of democracy in Myanmar was the main cause of his party, declared that from then on the name of his party would change to the Pyidaungsu party or the Union Party (Pa Hta Sa). But factionalism, that had originated in the AFPFL and survived through the period of the Clean AFPFL, was carried over into the Pyidaungsu party. The Union party composed of three groups: the Thakhins, the Bo's, and the U's. The Thakhins, who took their name from *the Dobama Asi-ayone* of the 1930s, were the professional politicians and the least educated faction of the party. They were greatly influenced by Marxist literature and most of them were either leftists or had left leanings in politics (Hla Myo, 1961, 45). The Bo's were some of the political survivors of the "Thirty Comrades" and those who had subsequently associated themselves with the one-time resistance fighters and their heirs. The U's included most of the professional persons among the top party leaders, and were, on the whole, the most administratively experienced elements. Being pro-American or pro-British in their political leanings, they were mostly opposed to the leftist political ideas of the Thakhins (Kyaw Win and Others, 1991, 9-10). But they were on friendly and close terms with Prime Minister U Nu and members of the Advisory Council of the Government. All these diverse groups were inherited by the Union party (Kyaw Win and Others, 1991, 2). In this way, although the Union party was no longer a federation of mass organizations, it was still clearly a coalition of diverse and un-reconciled personalities and interests.

Later, the U's and the Bo's joined forces, so that there were really only two factions: the Thakhins and the U-Bo's. Each group claimed to be superior to the other in political competence, patriotism, education, and other factors. This inherent diversity in the composition of the Clean AFPFL, with each group assuming a different nature and background, and embracing a different political ideology and attitude, was the root cause of the split into the U, Bo and Thakhin factions in the Union Party. The split at the party headquarters became more apparent as the party came to assume more and more of the characteristics of a people's party in its political philosophy, basic organization and structure. The democratic nature of the party constitution also encouraged rivalries and frictions among the party leaders. The most serious political feud within the Pa Hta Sa party was that between Thakhin Kyaw Tun and Bo Min Gaung for leadership in the party. U Nu was almost helpless to end this feud. The feud started with Bo Min Gaung's unwillingness to step down from his post as the Acting First General Secretary of the party (Hla Myo, 1961, 63). The Thakhins in the party accused the Bo-group of building their own strength in the party by taking advantage of Bo Min Gaung's general secretaryship. Factional strife and struggle for positional advantage weakened the party and the government. Even if the military did not take over the power in March 1962, however, the Union Party might have collapsed of its weight because of its own fighting within the Party.

### **Enactment of Buddhism as the state religion**

The political tranquility was also seriously disturbed when the Prime Minister tried to make Buddhism the state religion in 1960. After the AFPFL split, at the All-Myanmar Clean AFPFL Conference held at Kaba-Aye from August 31 to September 2, 1958, U Nu promised publicly on behalf of the Clean AFPFL that if the Clean should be returned to power he would

continue to implement the promise he had made for the first time as President of the AFPFL and as Prime Minister before 2500 monks and a huge crowd of laymen convened to celebrate the successful completion of the Sixth Great Buddhist Council and the 2500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Sasana (*Burma Journal*, V. X, N. iv, October 1961, 29). During the campaign, the colour of his ballot box was yellow, the shade of monks' robes. On 4 April 1960, when he returned to power, in keeping with that promise, U Nu organized the State Religion Advisory Commission to advise in making Buddhism the state religion. This created much dissension among the members of other religions. On 5 May 1960, the Islamic Religious Affairs Council stated a declaration in which the Council's most vital objection to the state religion proposal was that it would lead to the creation of two classes of Myanmar citizens — first class Buddhist citizens and second class non-Buddhist citizens. Although the rights of non-Buddhist citizens were protected by law, in reality, they thought that there would be discrimination in economic, political, and religious matters.

Moreover, this long-promised state religion action gave rise to much suspicions and dissensions within some of the minority groups, especially the Christian Kachins. Unlike the Karens, Karennis, Paos, Mons and Rakhines who had been in rebellion virtually since independence in 1948, the Kachins and Shans were signatories to and keen supporters of the Panglong Agreement. In 1961, this state religion issue undoubtedly served as a rallying cry for the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) cause. Thus, the KIO's demand for secession became a very popular cause at that time. Demonstrations also occurred in the Chin Hills. In December 1960, the Chin Affairs Council unanimously approved the proposal opposing the government's move to make Buddhism the state religion (*The Nation*, 6 December 1960, 5). The state religion problem further estranged others, such as the Karens. It intensively antagonized the ethnic and religious minorities.

There arose possible deals that if the Kachins, Chins, and Karens supported absolutely for the federation proposal of the Shans in Parliament, the Shans and Kayahs would join in opposing state religion bill (*The Nation*, 27 July 1961, 1). In order to protect these deals, U Nu declared in a cabinet meeting that if the Rakhine and Mon representatives in parliament opposed the state religion bill, he would revoke his promise of separate statehood for them. And if the Shans and Kayahs used the state religion issue as an instrument of bargaining to achieve their ends for federalism, the government would not consider the federalism proposal any further (*Third Pyithu Hluttaw Congress*, File N.v, Meeting N. iii, 1961, 468). In this way, U Nu's programme of making Buddhism the state religion had paved the way for political confusions in the country.

On 17 August 1961, the Prime Minister proposed the motion of *the Constitution Third Amendment Bill* "Promulgation of Buddhism as the State Religion" in the Chamber of Deputies (*Burma Weekly Bulletin*, 31 August 1961, 37). Tensions gradually mounted, and when Parliament assembled to vote on the constitutional amendment, heavy security measures had to be taken in the city and around the chambers. The Bill, however, was passed separately by both Houses of Parliament with overwhelming majority (*Burma Weekly Bulletin*, 31 August 1961, 140). The act was only a symbolic affirmation of reality; however, as Buddhism was already the religion of 85 percent of the population and U Nu personally was tolerant of all religions. Moreover, in the Chapter II, Paragraph 21(a) of *the 1947 Constitution of the Union of Myanmar* it had been acknowledged that:

“The state recognized the special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens of the Union.”

The adoption of Buddhism as the state religion did not make the end of religious controversy. To gain the confidence of the religious minorities, U Nu made effort to push through *the Constitution*

*Fourth Amendment Bill*. It intended to establish new legal safeguards for non-Buddhist in the form of the *Constitution fourth Amendment Act, 1961* (*Burma Weekly Bulletin*, 5 October 1961, 181). In reality, in Chapter II, paragraph 20 of the *1947 constitution of the Union of Myanmar* had already stated that:

“All persons were equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess and practice religion subject to public order, morality or health and to the other provisions of the Chapter II of the constitution” (Chapter III, Paragraph 20 of the *1947 Constitution*, 1947, 4).

Despite the vigorous opposition of the Buddhist monks, the amendment was passed in both Houses of the Parliament by a unanimous vote on September 25, 1961. The next month came a more forceful demonstration of the monks' antagonism toward the government and the minorities. On 29 October 1961, serious anti-Muslim riots occurred in *Yangon*. Subsequently, 1500 monks demonstrated against the detention of the arrested persons and U Nu was accused of being a bogus Buddhist and urged to resign (*The Guardian*, 15 November 1961, 1, Chit Maung, 1969, 45). Each amendment created a vocal opposition and trouble multiplied. It showed the dimensions of the divisive force U Nu had caused by his championship of the cause of the state religion.

### **Increasing demands for statehood within the union**

The most common and probable explanation for the 1962 coup and its timing was the increased difficulties related to the minorities. Under the Pa Hta Sa rule, the demands for statehood by the Rakhines, Mons and Chins intensified. The movement for statehood found itself an ally in the demand by the Shans for a federal form of government in Myanmar. The demands for statehood flared up in 1958 at the time of the AFPFL split. Taking advantage of the split, the Rakhine National Unity Organization (Ra Ta Nya) declared that it would support whichever faction that would agree to statehood for Rakhine. The Swe-Nyein faction was only prepared to accept the creation of a Rakhine Affairs Council, fashioned after the Chin Affairs Council. The Nu-Tin faction, however, took a more democratic stance by promising that if it was proved that the people living in this area really wanted it, it would give statehood to Rakhine (*U Nu's Speech on 24 June 1958*, 1958, 31-2). In return for this promise, the Ra Ta Nya decided to side with the Nu-Tin faction in the AFPFL split (Sein Win, 1989, 37). Thus U Nu barely won it by gaining minority political support because of his promise to work for new Mon and Rakhine States when Stable AFPFL leader U Ba Swe proposed a vote of non-confidence in parliament on 9 June 1958.

In the case of the Chins, the demand for statehood was first made at the meeting of the Chin Affairs Council on 6 March 1961 by the Chin Affairs Minister U Zahre Lian. The meeting decided that the demand for statehood would be complied with if all the Pa Hta Sa and Stable AFPFL members of Parliament (MPs) of the Chin Special Division put their signature to that effect (*The Nation*, 8 March 1961, 1, *Ahtauktaw*, 1 March 1961, 4). On the other hand, the *1947 Constitution of the Union of Myanmar* provided the establishment of new states in the Union. Section 199 of the Constitution stated that:

“the Parliament might by an act admit to the Union a new state upon such terms and conditions, including the extent of representation of the State in the Parliament, as might be specified in the Act” (*The 1947 Constitution*, 1947, 55).

So in accordance with the Section 199 of the Constitution, the Rakhines and Mons were agitating for separate states or autonomous regions. They felt that the Union government discriminated against them in administration, education, and appointments to office.

U Nu had reiterated the pledge for new Rakhine and Mon autonomous states in the campaign for the 1960 elections after 18 months out of office during the Caretaker Government in order to broaden his political backing. When U Nu returned to power again on 4 April 1960, Rakhine and Mon leaders demanded the fulfillment of these promises, and the question of how many States to create and what powers they should be given produced more discontent than satisfaction. On 22 February 1962, the Mons demonstrated in *Mawlamyine* in favour of Mon State (*Hanthawaddy*, 23 February 1982, 1). The Rakhines and the Chins also had demanded autonomous states from time to time. U Nu sought to be as democratic as he could in dealing with the demands of the minorities. However, some of the minorities resorted to force. The Karens continued their rebellions, driven apparently to join forces with the Communist rebels.

### **The issue of federalism and endeavours to apportion state sovereignty**

The most prominent explanation for the 1962 coup related to the danger of the disintegration of the Union of Myanmar following the demand of the Shans and the Kayahs for the right of secession from the Union under the 1947 Constitution. The issue of federalism and the possibility of trying to apportion state sovereignty began as a result of the decision of Parliament to amend *the 1947 Constitution of the Union* in September 1960. *The 1947 Constitution* had many loopholes. It devised the problem by constructing a system of government which the Union's Attorney-General U Chan Htoon, once described as federal in theory and unitary in practice (*The Nation*, 2 July 1952, 1). According to the 1947 constitution, there were four Union States: Shan, Kachin, Karen, and Kayah (Kareni) states. Among them, two states — Shan and Kayah States — had the constitutional right of secession from the Union (*The 1947 Constitution*, 1947, 56). It was because as early as the time when the National Constituent Assembly was making preliminary preparations to draw up *the 1947 Constitution*, the extreme ethno-nationalist leaders of the Shan and Kayah States insisted upon the right of secession from the Union after independence as a condition for their joining the Union of Myanmar (Pe Khin, 1990, 60). And it was to satisfy the wishes of these leaders and for the sake of all the states getting independence together with Myanmar proper that the demand for the right of secession had to be acceded to.

Chapter X of *the 1947 Constitution* provided the states the right of secession. Section 201 of it stated:

"Save as otherwise expressly provided in any Act of Parliament made under Section 199, every state shall have the right to secede from the Union in accordance with the conditions hereinafter prescribed..." (*The 1947 Constitution*, 1947, 56)

However, Section 202 provided that the right of secession must not be exercised within ten years from the date on which the Constitution came into operation (*The 1947 Constitution*, 1947, 56). The year 1958 was the year when the ten years' time provided in the Constitution was up. Shan and Kayah states were, thus, constitutionally eligible to secede from the Union and some of their leaders talked about secession frequently.

On the other hand, the Section 178 of *the 1947 Constitution* prohibited the Kachin State the right of secession from the Union. Moreover, the Karen state which was formed by *the Constitution Amendment Act 1951* was also forbidden the right of secession (*The Constitution Amendment Act*, 1951, 4). Thus, it was among those who lacked the legal right to secede from the Union that real discontent was harbored. The Kachins and Karens had made their military bid since 1949 to withdraw and establish their autonomous states. The continued existence of guerrilla Karen and Kachin forces called Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO) and Kachin

Independence Army (KIA) gave hope to the dissident Karen and Kachin elements (Chit Maung, 1969, 183). In 1961, as a result of state religion problem, many Kachin youths went underground and the strength of the KIA grew.

After relinquishing their hereditary powers during the Caretaker Government, the chiefs of states, Sawbwas, began to clamour for more rights, more equality, for privileges which they claimed in the name of pure federalism. At first the demands were mild, couched in suggestions for constitutional amendments. Later, there was organized pressure, stepped up in inverse ratio to the decline of the Union government (Maung Maung, 1964, 290). When the Justice Minister Dr. U E Maung proposed *the motion of the Constitution Amendment* on 22 September 1960 and the Parliament decided to amend *the 1947 Constitution*, federalism or Shan state proposals appeared. The Chamber of Deputies was permitted to form a Constitution Amendment Committee to advice in amending the Constitution (*Third Pyithu Hluttaw Congress*, File N. i, Meeting N. xxv, 1961, 2615-20). The All-Shan State Conference met in November 1960 with the aim of getting on, as wide a basis as possible, views, and opinions on Constitutional amendment. The conference appointed a committee of thirty-two and a sub-committee of six to study *the Panglong Agreement* and other documents relative to the subject of States' Rights (*The Nation*, 1 July 1961, 1). The Shan leaders held three meetings in *Taunggyi*. When the All Shan State Conference was held in *Taunggyi* on 25 February 1961, the Steering Committee submitted a paper which laid down the principles, the so-called federalism to incorporate into the amended Constitution. It was adopted by the Shan National Convention representing the whole of the Shan State.

This Shan paper on constitutional amendment condemned that the present Union Constitution failed to include adequate provisions to ensure equality for all national races. In order to ensure that all the States and national races could enjoy equal status, the paper pointed that the Union Constitution should be redrawn on the principle of pure federalism with the following features: Myanmar proper would be reconstituted as one of the federating units; the two houses of parliament would be vested with equal powers; all federating units would have equal representation in the House of Nationalities; the powers of the Union Parliament would be restricted to the following powers such as, foreign relation; defense of the Union; Union finance; minting of coins and printing of currency notes; administration of the postal and telegraphic services; administration of railroad, airway, and communication; administration of justice in the Union; and collection of tax on seaport; and the fair allocation of the Union budget. The residual powers would be transferred to the State governments (*Shan Paper on Constitutional Amendment*, 1961, 1, Tun Myint, 1961, 70-1). They all agreed to hold a special conference of all states under the sponsorship of the Shan and Kayah States to facilitate a thorough and in-depth discussion of the feasibility of a pure federalism as proposed by the Shan State. Moreover, the Hill-tribes Unity Forging Committee which was established since 1947 was revived.

Prior to the holding of the All-States Conference at *Taunggyi*, Prime Minister U Nu urged The Shan leaders to settle problems through peaceful negotiation and not to seek arms aid from outside to solve family problems. At that time, U Nu had got hold of an important secret letter connected with the plot for the secession of the Shan State from the Union. It seeks foreign aid for the cause of Shan State secession from the Union. The secret letter had caused a great alarm within the "Tatmadaw."

The proposed conference of All Union States staged by the Shan leaders was held in *Taunggyi* from 6 to 16 June 1961. Including Kachins, Karens and Chins, 226 delegates attended the conference. Neither representatives from Myanmar proper nor Namkham U Tun Aye of Shan State's Freedom Organization (SSFO) were invited to that conference (*Pyidaungsu Daily*, 11 June

1961, 1). They demanded a looser federalized form of constitution with powers shared equally between the minority states and the Myanmar-majority areas. They proposed that there would now have to be reconstituted as one: a single Myanmar state with powers no different from any of the minority states (*Chit Maung*, 1969, 51). This, they argued, would guarantee both greater self-government for each nationality and prevent the monopolization of all political and economic power by the centre in *Yangon*. Thus the main intention on the agenda of this conference was the pure federalism.

### **The impact of Federal issue on the military**

Any such resolution could not be tolerated by General Ne Win and the Tatmadaw leaders who were in over a decade of constant fighting for preserving the Union. They had come to see themselves as the long protectors of the Union's national integrity and the Federal Movement as merely another guise for the insurgents' separatist demands. Nonetheless, Prime Minister U Nu, always a pragmatic politician who saw little harm in talking, agreed to meet the leaders of the federal Movement in mid-February 1962. Concerning the subsequent requests for a change in existing federal relations, U Nu replied that it was an exercise of democratic right which nobody need object to (*The Guardian Magazine*, October 1961, 9). This attitude of U Nu made the army leaders suspicious that he was going to accede to the demand of the states for federalism.

Especially, the possibility of the secession of the Shan and Kayah states raised the prospect of independent foreign policies for them (*The Nation*, 1 July 1961, 1) and, should they have opted to do so, of their entry into an alliance with an outside power such as the United States. There had been rumours that an anonymous state was conspiring to the extent of seceding from the Union even if the demand for a pure federalism materialized and of joining the U.S led Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) after secession (*NLM*, 26 April 1961, 1). Thus, it would have posed a major threat to the security of the remainder of the states, with the possibility of direct conflict between China and the United States extending beyond Laos and Vietnam to the heart of Myanmar. Such possibilities were not considered fanciful in 1962.

After several delays, a federal seminar began on 24 February 1962. At that time, the parliament was meeting in regular session. At the seminar, head of the Shan State and President of the State's Unity Organization, Sao Khun Hkio, called for a Constitution under which all the states, among which Myanmar proper was also to be one, were to be on equal status, enjoying full autonomous rights with opportunity for them to be able to direct their own affairs for development, and the right to secede from the Union vested in them (*Sao Khun Hkio's Speech*, 24 February 1962). It can be clearly seen that the ethnic minorities especially the Shans tended to secede from the Union under the mask of federalism.

The federal seminar which focused attention on the demands of the minorities was believed by members of the military as well as the society at large generally that in the seminar, U Nu would give into their secessionist pressures. U Nu, however, had later said that in the speech he was preparing to deliver to the federal seminar, he had no intention of giving into any secessionist demands (Mya Han and Others, 1991, 239). But given the scale of the conflagration then enveloping Myanmar's Indo-Chinese neighbours, the break-up of the Union was undoubtedly a powerful motivating fear, which was borne out by the Tatmadaw's immediate actions. Moreover, the federal seminar gave the military an unprecedented opportunity to round up many leaders including minority ones quickly.

The coup of the RC headed by General Ne Win was not seen at the time to be a particularly momentous event. Foreign observers saw the coup as a reassertion of the disciplined

government of the 1958-60 caretaker periods, and therefore, primarily as an attempt to restore order in an increasingly chaotic political situation. It evoked no outward manifestations of public opposition in either *Yangon* or in the central and peripheral regions of the state. It was so swift and effective that no countercoup developed. In the absence of competing leadership and with the weak popular commitment to the Constitution and the institutions of democracy, with the harvest in and society in a state of tranquility, the RC found no need to invoke martial law. Internal newspapers in English and Myanmar wrote their welcome and recognition of the RC without any criticism (Mya Han and Others, 1993, 30-2). Most of them pointed out federalism as the main cause of the coup and blamed federalists.

### **Research Findings**

Myanmar ravaged by the Second World War and insurrection ridden after independence faced with poverty, late industrialization and late economic reconstruction, illiteracy, and cultural traits including the strength of traditional religious and ethnic bases of identification which posed negative effects on party system. Democratization had embarked relatively suddenly with little preparation on the process. Thus, individual personalities dominated parties and campaigns. Party organizations were generally weak due to factionalism.

When we look back on the conditions leading to the fall of parliamentary democracy system in 1962, some factors come to the forefront. They are lack of experience in the working of multi-party democracy; undue attachments for a certain political party, ideology, or racial group; and the lust and struggles for power and self-interests of politicians. The use of religion — the making of Buddhism a state religion — as an instrument for perpetuating power had greatly undermined the unity and friendship among different religions and racial groups in the country and created mutual suspicions between them. The inherent weaknesses and drawbacks in the hurriedly drawn up *1947 constitution* had sown the seeds of discord between Myanmar's minority groups and had led to demands for secession and statehood, threatening the country with disintegration. The party in power had made such political blunders as luring the Mons and Rakhines with promises of statehood as a bait to catch their votes in the election and giving the Shans false hints of permission to secede from the Union. All these had created undue fears of the break-up of the Union on the part of the military leaders, which was the most important reason behind the coup.

Moreover, there was widespread dissatisfaction with the politicians. They failed to learn any lesson even after the Caretaker Government had returned power to the people, to whom it rightfully belonged. As before, they went on bickering, splitting up and shifting alliances and intriguing for power. Things that needed immediate attention and prompt action were left unattended. The administration was in a mess and corruption was rife. It became clear that the politicians would not or could not effectively exercise the power given back to them. This vacuum left by the politicians had attracted the army, which eventually filled it and assumed leadership of the state.

### **Conclusion**

Drawing widely from primary documents and secondary literature, the empirically grounded research argued that Multi-party democracy and federalism had been abused by politicians seeking personal power and wealth rather than public ends and national interest. Politicians' lack of experience in the working of multi-party democracy; personified politics; lust

for power and lack of public spirit paved the way for military take-over in 1962 and the parliamentary democracy system failed in Myanmar.

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