

Political Situations under King Mindon (1853 – 1878)

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Myanmar Foreign Relations of Yadanabon Period (1853 – 1878), Yangon, Myanmar

ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to reveal the political situation of Myanmar during the reign of King *Mindon*. He ascended the throne only after the kingdom faced with two aggressive wars launched by the British imperialists. Because of those wars, the kingdom suffered deteriorations in terms of political, economic and social aspects. As a result of those wars, some parts of Myanmar territory also fell in the hands of the British imperialists. In this context, King *Mindon* had to endeavour to achieve the political stability and economic development in his kingdom. At first, he conducted administrative reforms with the aim of restoring internal stability and followed flexible policies in external relations with the aim of avoiding conflicts with the British in the future as well. He sent envoys to foreign countries with the aim of widening the horizons of his court officials. He also sent Myanmar youths to foreign countries to study modern sciences and technologies in order to establish factories which were installed with modern machines. Thus he tried to transform his kingdom into an industrialized nation. While standing side by side the British occupied Lower Myanmar, he did not fail to utilize the diplomatic means in dealing with other countries in order to gain international recognition to his kingdom as a sovereign nation. Because of his far-sighted outlooks and wisdom, King *Mindon* could transform his kingdom into a semi-modernized nation to some extent. Though he could not endeavour to regain the already lost territories, King *Mindon* was able to maintain the sovereignty of the rest part of the kingdom steadfastly. This paper tries to expose the political situations of Late *Konbaung* period during the reign of King *Mindon*.

KEYWORDS: *Konbaung; Mindon; political; affairs; autonomous; Second Anglo-Myanmar war*

INTRODUCTION

Myanmar kingdom faced with two aggressive wars against the British imperialists during the reigns of *Sagaing Min* and *Bagan Min* during the second half of *Konbaung* period. As a result, rulers of the kingdom had to give up *Rakhine* and *Taninthayi* to the British after the First Anglo-Myanmar War and *Bago* of Lower Myanmar to the same trespasser after the Second Anglo-Myanmar War. When King *Mindon* ascended the throne, therefore, jurisdiction of Myanmar Court encompassed only half of the country: the Upper Myanmar. In fact, Prince *Mindon* and his younger brother Prince *Kanaung* dethroned King *Bagan* during the course of the Second Anglo-Myanmar War and the former ascended the throne on 17 February 1853.¹

As soon as he gained the throne, King *Mindon* tried his best to cease the war with the British as early as possible and his attempt bore fruit. In fact, the King and his courtiers were well aware of the fact that the kingdom had to be industrialized if they wanted to compete with the British. Moreover, they were well aware that it is necessary to conduct the administrative reforms for modernization and internal stability in order to maintain the kingdom's sovereignty. They also understood that the kingdom had to

establish peaceful diplomatic relations with the British. While buying time in pursuing such peaceful means in dealing with the British, they thought that they would get chances to make efforts for strengthening the kingdom. Hence King *Mindon* sent *Kalawun* (minister who had to deal with the alien affairs) *Mackertich* who was honoured with the title of *Maha Mingaung Thihathu* and *Amyaukwun* (minister in-charge of artillery) *Minhla Thiri Minhtin U Shwe Zin* to *Pyay* where the British military chiefs stationed. The assignment for two ministers was to negotiate with the British for ceasing the Second Anglo-Myanmar War.² In the meantime, King *Mindon* released the European captives captured by his predecessors in order to lower down tension with the British. He also sent Italian fathers *Abbona* and *Domingo* to the British authorities with the message that the King would like to send envoys to them for the peace talk.³ Consequently King *Mindon* sent Myanmar envoys led by *Kyaukmaw Wungyi U Kya Oo* together with 3,000 soldiers to negotiate with the British.⁴

² U Maung Maung Tin, *Great Chronicle of Konbaung Period*, Vol. III, Yangon, Ledi Mandai Press, 1968, p. 136 (Hereafter cited as *Konbaung Period*, Vol. III)

³ A.G. Bannerjee, *Annexation of Upper Burma*, Calcutta, A Mukherjee and Bros., 1946, p. 150 (Hereafter cited as Bannerjee, *Burma*)

⁴ *Konbaung Period*, Vol. III, pp. 151-2

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¹ Bo Kyaw Tint, *Myanmar Foreign Relations of Yadanabon Period (1853 – 1878)*, Yangon, Dobama Press, 1975, p. 15 (Hereafter cited as Kyaw Tint, *Yadanabon*)

At the meeting with the British, Myanmar envoys conveyed the message of King *Mindon* for peace and his request to the British to give back *Bago* area to Myanmar. Though the British agreed to accept the part of peace negotiation, they did not comply with the request of King *Mindon* for giving back *Bago* to its original owner. Instead, they demanded Myanmar envoys to demarcate the borderline between their occupied territory and Myanmar King's jurisdiction by marking along the latitude line from the top of *Rakhine Phoe Khaung* Mountain to the due east six miles north of *Myayde* Town. Thus they claimed the whole Lower Myanmar including *Sittaung* and *Karenni* areas for their possession. They also demanded Myanmar envoys to give consent to their claim by signing an agreement within twenty-four hours. On this occasion, *Kyaukmaw Wungyi* replied that he was not authorized by the Court to sign such agreement. Instead he urged the British to accept the expenditures for war like First Anglo-Myanmar War and to retreat their troops from Myanmar territory.⁵

The Article writer of London Time Richard Cobden censured, in his article that included in the press on 16 March 1853, the Governor General of British India, Lord Dalhousie as the one who wanted to colonize the other country by giving reason for 920 Pounds Stalin. At the Senate of the United States of America, moreover, some elements led by General Lewis Cass denounced the high-handed manners of British to Myanmar.⁶ Under such pressures, the British military authorities pushed Myanmar envoys to sign the agreement hastily. But King *Mindon* and his envoys rejected the British demand.⁷ In this context, the British conducted the works for demarcation one-sidedly in order to occupy the *Bago* area. In fact, King *Mindon* was ready to pay compensation to the British and to sign the agreement if the latter withdrew from Lower Myanmar though he knew that such manner would affect his dignity. Hence he proposed that he would hand over the *Bago* area to the British if he could not pay reparations within two years. But the latter did not accept the offer. Thus the Second Anglo-Myanmar War ended without signing any agreement between two warring factions and without acknowledging the British's territorial occupation by the Myanmar Court.⁸

In fact, the *Bago* region had the area of over 300,000 square miles. The area had the population around 600,000 people. Formerly, it served the Myanmar kingdom as an area of economic importance. By relinquishing this area, Myanmar kingdom was cut off from the sea ports and became a landlocked one.⁹ Anyway, King *Mindon* who was well aware of his military weaknesses had to follow the policy of friendship with the British imperialists. He was also well aware that his kingdom needs to conduct reformations and to follow expansive international relations for its

rehabilitation. Hence he tried to implement administrative modernization in his kingdom. For the central administration, King *Mindon* utilized the traditional mechanism which was composed of *Hlyuttaw* (council of ministers in monarchical time), *Byedaik* (privy council organized around the four junior councilors), *Yazawut Yone* (law court that deals with the cases against the king and his throne), *Tayama Yone* (law court that deals with the other cases) and *Nauk Yone* (law court that deals with the cases related to the queens, concubines and female courtiers). At the provincial administration, he appointed *Myo-wun* (mayor), *Sit-ke* (second-in-command of a military unit or civil officer attached to the mayor), *Myo-sa-yay* (clerk of the mayor), *Myo-thu-gyi* (headman of a town) and *Ywa-thu-gyi* (headman of the village). They had to follow royal orders and laws prescribed by the Court.¹⁰

Under the absolute monarchism, orders of the king became laws and no one could make excuses of those orders. But King *Mindon* reversed this tradition. He used to consult with his ministers in administering the kingdom. He allowed the Court officials to submit their opinions and to give advices to him. It was the distinguish feature of King *Mindon's* administration. Moreover in 1870, he divided the administrative works into four departments for *Hlyuttaw* Ministers. Then he assigned *Khanpak Wungyi* to deal with public works' department, *Myotha Myowun* with defence department, *Kanni Atwinwun* with agricultural department and *Bagan Wundauk* with finance department.¹¹ Thus King *Mindon* practiced the decentralization of the absolute monarchical power to some extent.

Traditionally, kings used to grant queen, princes, princesses, ministers and secretaries (*Atwin-wun*) the posts of the town and village headmen and headmistresses. They had the right to collect taxes and revenue from townspeople and villagers, and to pay prescribed percentage of those taxes to the king. The rest could be enjoyed by themselves. Under this system, the official concerns only laid stress on getting taxes and revenues as much as possible. Consequently they levied several kinds of taxes from the people. As King *Mindon* did not want such situation sustained, he abolished the system of appointing town and village headmen and headmistress in 1857. Then he initiated the salary system for the officials. According to the new system, the salary for a minister was 1,000 kyats, a secretary was 660 kyats, a superintendent was 550 kyats and a judge was 300 kyats.¹²

King *Mindon* also invented new taxation system in his kingdom. Formerly, there was no clear cut taxation system in Myanmar. Hence the tax collectors could levy several kinds of taxes on the people with coercive manners. With the aim of eradicating such bad practice, King *Mindon* initiated the system of collecting *Thathameda* tax (one tenth of one's income or produces) in 1857. According to this system,

⁵ *Konbaung Period*, Vol. III, pp. 151-2

⁶ Dr Maung Maung, *Burma in the Family of Nations*, Amsterdam, Djambaton Ltd., International Educational Publishing House, 1956, p. 44 (Hereafter cited as Maung Maung, *Burma*)

⁷ D.P. Singhal, *The Annexation of Upper Burma*, Singapore, Eastern University Press, 1960, p. 23 (Hereafter cited as Singhal, *Burma*)

⁸ Kyaw Tint, *Yadanabon*, p. 24

⁹ Kyaw Tint, *Yadanabon*, p. 26

¹⁰ D.G.E. Hall, *A History of Southeast Asia*, London, Macmillan, 1969, p. 588 (Hereafter cited as Hall, *Southeast Asia*)

¹¹ Yaw Atwinwun U Poe Hlaing, edited by Maung Htin, *Thesis on the Ruling of Kings with Righteousness and Good Relations*, Yangon, Htein Win press, 1960, p. 69 (Hereafter cited as *Thesis on the Ruling of Kings*)

¹² J.G. Scott, *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan State*, Vol. II, p. 483 (Hereafter cited as Scott, *GUBSS*)

mayor, town and village headmen except for Chief Queen and Crown Prince did not have rights to manipulate the taxation system on their respective areas anymore. To supervise tax collecting works systematically, he appointed four revenue officers throughout the kingdom.¹³ After losing rice cultivating areas of *Bago*, King *Mindon* also paid attention to construct dams and canals in Upper Myanmar with the aim of avoiding famine for his people. Annually he used to hold the ploughing ceremony at *Nayoun* month with the aim of encouraging agriculture. He also used to meet with and talk to the commoners. Moreover, he went out of the palace into the city to listen to the submissions of his people twice a year.¹⁴ Moreover he laid stress on industrialization with the aim of modernizing his kingdom.

He built over fifty factories between 1858 and 1874. As a result, rice mills, coin casting mill, indigo mill, weaving mills, military weapons factory, saw mills, iron melting mill and dockyard could be established at the capital. In order to build those mills and factories, King *Mindon* sent delegates to Bengal in 1854 and 1863 - 64, and to France in 1867. Those delegations were assigned with the tasks of buying ships, machines and spare parts. They also had to deal with the tasks of hiring foreign technicians and experts for setting up factories and mills at *Yadanabon* Capital.¹⁵ The ones who took charge of King *Mindon's* industrialization were Prince *Kanaung*, *Myadaung Wungyi*, *Bamaw Atwinwun* and *Yaw Atwinwun U Phoe Hlaing*, etc. Especially the Crown Prince *Kanaung*, *Myadaung Wungyi* and *Bamaw Atwinwun* supervised the setting up and running the factories and mills. Later Prince *Kanaung* assigned the Prince *Makkaya* with the task of supervising the factories. But the latter was discharged from the task in 1873 as the Crown Prince dissatisfied with his performance.¹⁶

In order to purchase machineries to install in the factories and mills, the king sent *Thandawsint* (officer who received and transmitted the king's orders) *U Shwe Bin* together with mechanic *U Tun* to Bengal in 1863. Crown Prince *Kanaung* built a factory to produce canons in 1862 and assigned a French mechanic to supervise the factory. In 1864, the factory could repair old canons and produce new ones together with several kinds of bullets. Moreover Prince *Kanaung* built a factory to cast coins with the aim of standardizing the currency system throughout the country as well as comforting external trade. The factory could produce five kinds of coins with gold, silver, copper, bronze and tin. The standard of *Yadanabon* coins could compare that of English East India Company's coins.¹⁷ In order to build ship in the country, he also set up a dockyard at the eastern river bank of *Ayeyawady* near *PyinpanSAT* bridge in the west of the capital city in 1864.¹⁸

¹³ Taik Soe, *King Mindon*, Yangon, Bagan Book House, 1972, pp. 60-61 (Hereafter cited as Taik Soe, *King Mindon*)

¹⁴ Kyaw Tint, *Yadanabon*, pp. 64-65

¹⁵ Dr Toe Hla, *Konbaung the Golden Land of Alaungmintayagyi*, Yangon, Aung Okkala Press, 1993, pp. 58-59 (Hereafter cited as Toe Hla, *Konbaung the Golden Land*)

¹⁶ Toe Hla, *Konbaung the Golden Land*, p. 60

¹⁷ Daw Kyan, "Factories of Yadanabon", *Journal of Literature and Social Science*, Vol. I, No. I, January, 1968, pp. 142, 148, 157 (Hereafter cited Kyan, "Yadanabon")

¹⁸ Kyan, "Yadanabon", p. 153

King *Mindon* and the Crown Prince *Kanaung* sent Myanmar youths to India, France, Italy and England to study applied sciences and technologies. Prince *Kanaung* also selected over ninety youths and sent them abroad to learn modern military techniques.¹⁹ In attempting to modernize his kingdom, King *Mindon* set up telegraphic communication as well as published a newspaper of his own. He could set up telegraph cable communication between Mandalay and *Myayde* as the very first one of his kingdom in 1869. With the permission of the British India Government, the king also sent Myanmar youths to India on 19 May 1868 to study telegraphic communication techniques. He could also negotiate with the British authorities on 28 May 1873²⁰ to communicate Lower and Upper Myanmar with telegraphic cable.²¹ As King *Mindon* was well aware of the importance of newspaper in public communication, he enacted a law for publishing Press and then published a newspaper of his own with the name of *Yadanabon* newspaper.²²

In fact, Myanmar industry sustained even after the death of Prince *Kanaung*. The king continued to manage in importing machines and spare parts, hiring foreign experts and sending Myanmar youths to study technologies. He also encouraged the opening of missionary schools that would teach science and technologies at the capital city. Hence in 1870s, the capital city of Myanmar kingdom had about forty factories in running conditions. Some of them were four military weapon factories that could produce cannons and guns, a weaving mill that had eighty looms, a dockyard that initiated to build riverine steamers, saw mills, blacksmith workshops, iron and metal melting mills, sugar mills, indigo mills and rice mills.²³

King *Mindon* was also well aware the fact that it is necessary to make reforms in judicial system. Hence in 1866, he opened the law courts at the capital as well as in the remote areas with the aim of making judgments without delay. He also managed to classify the cases that could be judged by those law courts. Under this judicial system reformation, it can be seen that the administrative officers got more time to manage the affairs of their respective towns and villages. Previously, the cases that occurred between the British citizens and Myanmar people used to be judged by Myanmar officials. But the British complained that the Myanmar judicial system and customary laws were too harsh to apply on foreigners. In 1867, the British envoy Colonel Albert Fytche asked the king for extra territorial rights. But the king did not comply with the demand. As a result, the relations between the British and Myanmar became intense.²⁴

With the aim of reducing the tension, however, King *Mindon* allowed to open a British-Myanmar joint law court at the capital on 2 August 1869. At this joint law court, *Kalawun Manu* of Myanmar Court and British representative Captain Sladen served as joint judicial officers. Myanmar and English

¹⁹ Shwe Gaing Tha, *Centennial Mandalay*, Mandalay, Kyepwayay Press, 1959, p. 129 (Hereafter cited as Shwe Gaing Tha, *Centennial Mandalay*)

²⁰ ME 1235, 2nd waxing day of *Nayoun*

²¹ Toe Hla, *Konbaung the Golden Land*, p. 160

²² Ibid, p. 61

²³ Kyan, "Yadanabon", pp. 140 -167

²⁴ Singhal, *Burma*, p. 24

languages were used as official languages at the joint law court.²⁵ At this court, the British authorities had to judge the cases committed by the British citizens in Myanmar territory. If the cases occurred between the British citizens and Myanmar people, the joint law court had the right to judge such cases. Both countries agreed to transfer the trans-boundary criminals to their respective country.²⁶

In return for accommodating the demand of the British, Myanmar king demanded the right to import machines and machine parts, arms and ammunitions and ships by passing through the British territory with the permission of High Commissioner. On this occasion, the British comply with the demand. The agreement was signed by Colonel Fytche himself. But the Myanmar Court did not get any further information from the Governor-General of British India on that matter.²⁷

While attempting to modernize the kingdom by King *Mindon* and Crown Prince *Kanaung*, they were destined to face with the conspiracy of Princes *Myinkun* and *Myinkhondai*. Prince *Kanaung* and *Myadaung Wungyi* died in action in this incident. Consequently *Padein* Prince; son of *Kanaung* also revolted against the Court.²⁸ Those incidents seriously affected the kingdom in terms of political stability and hindered the tasks of nation building as well. After the incidents, Princes *Myinkun* and *Myinkhondai* took refuge under the British in the Lower Myanmar. Hence King *Mindon* had to pay extra attention to the security of his kingdom. On this occasion, Myanmar Court demanded the English to hand over the Princes to its hand for the sake of national security. But the British neglected the demand.²⁹ According to 1867 agreement, moreover, Myanmar king had to allow a British representative to station at *Bamaw* Town. By taking advantage of this agreement, Sladen tried to find ways for trade route from *Bamaw* to Yunnan Province of China with the encouragement of British traders of Yangon. En route he conflicted with the natives. Moreover, the British representative at *Bamaw*: Captain Strover attempted to persuade the Kachin chiefs to revolt against the Myanmar king and gave them arms and ammunitions as presents.³⁰

In this context, King *Mindon* not only conducted reforms within the kingdom but also found ways for achieving international recognitions. Initially, he tried to maintain cordial relations with a neighbouring country China. The Chinese envoys arrived at Myanmar in June 1853. King *Mindon* warmly welcomed the envoys and also sent a Myanmar delegation to China in their return. The Myanmar envoys led by *Minhla Thandai* left for Beijing together with the returning Chinese envoys on 28 August 1853³¹. But the

Myanmar envoys reached only *Maisel* because the *Panthey* uprising occurred along the journey ahead. With the permission of Manchu Emperor, therefore, they left the presents for him at *Maisel* and returned to the capital city *Yadanabon*.³²

King *Mindon* also made religious relations with other neighbouring countries, viz. *Yodaya* (Ayuthia) and Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Moreover he also found a way to make contacts with an European country; France. On 7 August 1853,³³ a Frenchman named *Dörgoni* arrived at *Amarapura*. King *Mindon* gave him the title of *Naymyo Thiri Zeya* and assigned him as a Myanmar envoy to the King of France.³⁴ With the instruction of *Hlyuttaw* Ministers, moreover, Italian father *Abbona* sent letters to the Ministers of Sardinia King with the aim of establishing trade contacts between two countries. His attempt bore fruit and two countries could draw a draft agreement for trade in 1854. While attempting to make contacts with Italy and France, the king also tried to make contacts with the United States of America. In April 1855, King *Mindon* met with American Baptist missionary father *Kincaird* and medical doctor *Dawson*. The king proposed the latter to lobby the American Press to include Myanmar news, and to persuade the American business circle to trade with Myanmar. He also revealed that he was ready to invite the American traders to settle in Myanmar if the latter wished to do so.³⁵

King *Mindon* also tried to settle down the matter of restoring *Bago* area with the Governor-General of British India. He sent a delegation led by Minister *Maha Minkhaung Raza* to India. In July 1854, the delegation left for India by carrying the king's message together with presents for the Governor-General. Because of the high-handed manners of the Governor-General Lord Dalhousie, however, the delegation gained nothing and on 14 February 1855³⁶ arrived back home.³⁷ Six months after arriving back of the Myanmar envoys, a delegation led by *Bago* Commissioner Sir Arthur Phayre was sent by the Governor-General Lord Dalhousie to Myanmar Court. On 1 September 1855,³⁸ the delegation arrived at the capital.³⁹ In fact, the delegation had special duties for observing several aspects of Myanmar. It was composed of the experts, painters, photographers and engineers who would observe the weather conditions, products, hygienic situations, riverine routes, natural resources and defensive preparations of Myanmar. Hidden agenda of the delegation was to gather information for the next aggressive war against the Upper Myanmar. On 22 October 1855,⁴⁰ the British delegation went back home after failing in negotiating with Myanmar to conclude an agreement.⁴¹

²⁵ Myint Myint Than, "Late Konbaung Period", p. 126

²⁶ Kyaw Tint, *Yadanabon*, p. 102

²⁷ Taik Soe, *King Mindon*, p. 78

²⁸ Kanni Myo Sitke Minhtin Raza, *Great Chronicle of Mandalay Yadanabon*, Mandalay, Tatnaylin Press, 1969, p. 149 (Hereafter cited as Minhtin Raza, *Mandalay Yadanabon*)

²⁹ Taik Soe, *King Mindon*, pp. 65-69

³⁰ Maung Htin Aung, *A History of Burma*, London, Columbia University Press, 1967, pp. 247-248 (Hereafter cited as Htin Aung, *Burma*)

³¹ ME 1215, 3rd waxing day of *Wakhaung*

³² *Konbaung Period*, Vol. III, pp. 155-7, 173

³³ ME 1215, 3rd waxing day of *Wakhaung*

³⁴ *Konbaung Period*, Vol. III, p. 170

³⁵ Kyaw Tint, *Yadanabon*, p. 40

³⁶ ME 1216, 13th waning day of *Tabodwe*

³⁷ Toe Hla, *Konbaung the Golden Land*, p. 108

³⁸ ME 1217, 5th waning day of *Wakhaung*

³⁹ Toe Hla, *Konbaung the Golden Land*, p. 109

⁴⁰ ME 1217, 12th waxing day of *Thadingyut*

⁴¹ Toe Hla, *Konbaung the Golden Land*, p. 109

King *Mindon* sent a delegation led by *Nakhandaw Minhtin Thihathu* together with *Dórgoni* to France in 1856. The assigned tasks of the envoys were to establish trade relations between France and Myanmar, and to request the French government to persuade the British to return *Bago* to Myanmar.⁴² On 16 October 1856,⁴³ *Dórgoni* was acknowledged by the French government as the liaison officer between two countries. The French King and Queen accepted the Myanmar envoys at the Saint Clue Palace.⁴⁴ The Myanmar delegation lived in France until the end of 1856, but it bore no fruit. Hence the envoys returned home with empty hands. Moreover, King *Mindon* assigned *Kincaird* in January 1857 to go to the President of the United States as a Myanmar representative. On 18 February 1857,⁴⁵ *Kincaird* arrived at the port of New York and presented the message of King *Mindon* to the President Buchanan. In return, Buchanan gave back *Kincaird* the precious books as presents for King *Mindon*. However, Myanmar – American did not reach any significant point then.⁴⁶

Under these circumstances, the British delegation led by *Phayre* arrived Myanmar on 8 October 1862⁴⁷ for the second time. On 11 November 1862,⁴⁸ English – Myanmar trade agreement that included nine clauses could be signed at the *Hlyuttaw* building.⁴⁹ The British got profits from this agreement. Anyway, the British – Myanmar relations revived under the terms of this agreement. After signing the agreement, the British sent Dr. Clement William to Mandalay as their representative.⁵⁰ On 7 October 1867,⁵¹ Commissioner *Fytche* who succeeded *Phayre* came to Mandalay with the reason of amending the agreement that concluded in 1862. Myanmar officials and British delegates discussed several times on thirteen draft proposals submitted by *Fytche*. Finally Myanmar and British concluded a new trade agreement on 25 October 1867.⁵² According to this agreement, Myanmar king had to relinquish the rights of monopolizing oil, teak and ruby trade. He also had to agree to levy only five kyats of tax per ton for imports and exports.⁵³

In the meantime, relations between Italy and Myanmar also increased because of the attempts of Italian father *Abbona*. But the British authorities put restrictions on the Italian companies and traders who concluded commercial agreement with Myanmar.⁵⁴ Moreover the British bitterly

denied for granting King *Mindon* the permission to purchase weapons and import arms and ammunitions by passing through the British territory. In fact, such denial totally violated the clauses of agreement that concluded between *Fytche* and Myanmar officials. Hence King *Mindon* decided not to sign any agreement with the British on later occasions.⁵⁵

Under such circumstances, King *Mindon* relinquished to engage with the Governor – General of British India and sent *Padinwun U Shwe Bin* to England in order to deal directly with the central authorities. On 17 March 1871,⁵⁶ *U Shwe Bin* got a chance to meet with the British Prime Minister *Galdstone*. On this occasion, *U Shwe Bin* claimed that Myanmar Court has the right to protect the sovereignty of its kingdom and the British Premier agreed on that point. Except for that point, however, the Myanmar envoy did not gain any significant achievement from the British government. Thus he returned home by carrying a letter and a gold watch as present from the British Empress to King *Mindon*.⁵⁷

Then the king sent a delegation led by *Kinwun Mingyi U Kaung* to England in 1872. The delegation left from Mandalay on 22 February 1872.⁵⁸ En route, the delegation led by *Kinwun Mingyi* travelled around Italy and France too. Major objective of the delegation was to make direct discussions on Myanmar affairs with the central authorities at London. But they did not even get the chance to meet with the British foreign minister at London. Instead, they had to meet with the team led by the secretary for Indian affairs. At the meeting, the latter did not comply with the Myanmar proposal for accepting its permanent envoy at London. On this occasion, it should be noted that the delegation led by *Kinwun Mingyi* made contacts with Italy and France, but it did not intend to oppose against the British. In fact, *Kinwun Mingyi* just wanted to show the international community that Myanmar is a sovereign nation.⁵⁹

While the Myanmar delegation was in London, a British delegation led by Colonel *Horace Albert Brown* arrived at *Yadanabon* capital city. The delegation arrived at the capital on 15 April 1872⁶⁰ and carried the letters dated on 21 September 1871⁶¹ written respectively by the British Empress, the Primer and the Governor-General to Myanmar king.⁶² During the same year, an Italian delegation led by Captain *Racchia* arrived at Myanmar on 13 December 1872.⁶³ The Italian envoys were met by King *Mindon* himself twice. In fact, the king wanted to buy arms and ammunitions and machines from Italy. The latter agreed to exchange those things with Myanmar products in barter system. On 28

⁴² *Konbaung Period*, Vol. III, p. 232

⁴³ ME 1218, 3rd waning day of *Thadingyut*

⁴⁴ Dr. Khin Mya Kyu, *History of French – Myanmar Relations during Konbaung Period*, Yangon, Sarpay Beikan Press, 1976, p. 63 (Hereafter cited as Khin Mya Kyu, *French – Myanmar Relations*)

⁴⁵ ME 1218, 10th waning day of *Tabodwe*

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⁴⁷ ME 1224, 1st waning day of *Thadingyut*

⁴⁸ ME 1224, 6th waning day of *Tazaungmoun*

⁴⁹ *Bannerjee, Burma*, p. 179

⁵⁰ *Kyaw Tint, Yadanabon*, p. 83

⁵¹ ME 1229, 10th waxing day of *Thadingyut*

⁵² ME 1229, 13th waning day of *Thadingyut*

⁵³ *Kyaw Tint, Yadanabon*, p. 102

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 118

⁵⁵ Khin Mya Kyu, *French – Myanmar Relations*, p. 79

⁵⁶ ME 1232, 12th waning day of *Tabaung*

⁵⁷ Khin Mya Kyu, *French – Myanmar Relations*, p. 79

⁵⁸ ME 1233, *Tabaung* Full-moon day

⁵⁹ Khin Mya Kyu, *French – Myanmar Relations*, pp. 95-97

⁶⁰ ME 1234, 9th waxing day of *Kasoun*

⁶¹ ME 1233, 8th waxing day of *Thadingyut*

⁶² Dr. Than Tun, *Chronicle that collected in Travelling*, Vol. III, Yangon, Natha Press, 1969, pp. 219-221 (Hereafter cited as Than Tun, *Travelling*)

⁶³ ME 1234, 13th waxing day of *Nadaw*

December 1872,⁶⁴ they returned home with this agreement.⁶⁵

Thus King *Mindon* tried to open the doors of his kingdom by establishing trade relations with European countries since 1870. In fact, he attempted to get international recognition to his kingdom. On the other hand, however, his attempts made the British worried. While Myanmar tried to establish relations with Italy and France, the British tended to set up cordial relations with Myanmar.⁶⁶ Soon after the return of *Kinwun Mingyi* from London, a twenty member delegation of English led by *Taninthaye* Commissioner Major David Brown arrived at Mandalay. The delegation presented a letter written by Empress Vitoria dated 20 February 1873⁶⁷ and her picture to the king. The delegation negotiated with Myanmar officials to connect telegraph cable between the British territory and Myanmar's. During their stay at Mandalay, Major Brown's delegation toured the weapon factory and dockyard of Myanmar. They commented that the weapon factory of Myanmar was not run systematically.⁶⁸

In this context, a French delegation arrived at Mandalay to confirm the trade agreement that had already approved by *Kinwun Mingyi* and French official concerns at France. The French consul resided at Calcutta claimed that his delegation to Mandalay had no political intention, but just for fun. On 27 December 1873,⁶⁹ the French delegation led by Comte de Rochechouart arrived at Mandalay.⁷⁰ On 1 January 1874,⁷¹ the French presented their President's letter and presents to King *Mindon*. Then the French envoys and Myanmar Ministers discussed thoroughly on the matters of assisting Myanmar by the former and constructing a railroad between French Indochina and Upper Myanmar. After reaching agreement between them, a delegation led by *Kinwun Mingyi* left for Paris on 7 March 1874⁷² to get final confirmation on the agreement.⁷³

In fact, King *Mindon* devised a big plan to make trade relations and establish diplomatic contacts with France. If Myanmar king tried to import arms and ammunitions via the riverine route of *Ayeyarwady*, the British would obstruct such efforts for sure. Hence he hoped to import arms and ammunitions from French Indochina via *Yodaya*. He also promised the French that Myanmar would bare the transportation cost for arm import from Indochina. In this context, King *Mindon* tried to establish railroad, land route and telegraph cable communications from Red River to Mandalay via Shan State.⁷⁴

⁶⁴ ME 1234, 13th waning day of *Nadaw*

⁶⁵ Than Tun, *Travelling*, pp. 222-223

⁶⁶ Toe Hla, *Konbaung the Golden Land*, p. 111

⁶⁷ ME 1234, 8th waning day of *Tabodwe*

⁶⁸ Kyaw Tint, *Yadanabon*, pp. 142-143

⁶⁹ ME 1235, 9th waxing day of *Pyatho*

⁷⁰ Khin Mya Kyu, *French – Myanmar Relations*, p. 98

⁷¹ ME 1235, 14th waxing day of *Pyatho*

⁷² ME 1235, 5th waning day of *Tabaung*

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⁷⁴ Khin Mya Kyu, *French – Myanmar Relations*, p. 107

King *Mindon* endeavoured the modernization of his kingdom by conducting internal reforms and setting up diplomatic relations with other countries with the aim of escaping from the hands of British imperialists. But his ultimate aim was not achieved. The major reasons for his failure were the weakness of his own as well as the hindrances and destructive manners of the British.⁷⁵ Under these circumstances, his attempt to set up diplomatic relations on level ground with other countries did not achieve substantially. The British did not encourage the diplomatic relations between Myanmar and France, and Myanmar and Italy. In this context, the French government treated well the second delegation of Myanmar led by *Kinwun Mingyi*, but the former avoided the manners that would make the British disappointed. According to their professional courtesy, it is impossible for French to disturb the British expansionist activities in India and Myanmar as the latter did not disturb French expansion in Indochina peninsula. Hence the French government did not endorse the agreement that had already approved by both sides at Mandalay. Similarly, the Italy government neglected the Italian – Myanmar agreement for arms dealing as the British ambassador at Rome objected it.⁷⁶

The change of government at London also put more pressure on the attempts of Myanmar king to expand diplomatic relations with other countries. In 1874, Disraeli's Conservative Government replaced the Liberal Government in London. Two years after gaining power, the Conservative Government appointed a colonialist; Lord Lytton as the Governor-General of British India in order to deal seriously with the affairs of India and Myanmar.⁷⁷ Soon after accepting the office, the new Governor-General put the affairs of *Karenni* State forward. In fact, the British authorities worried that Myanmar would get contacts with the French Indochina via *Karenni* State. In the meantime, Myanmar king sent 700 Myanmar soldiers to west *Karenni* State to maintain law and order under the request of *Karenni Sawbwa*. In this context, the British sent troops immediately to the *Karenni* State. Hence the situation led to the state of emergency. On 23 November 1873,⁷⁸ *U Kaung* sent a letter of objection to the British counselor Stoba for the British's action. Finally, the British authorities ordered to retreat some of their troops from the area, but they claimed that Myanmar had no right to occupy the *Karenni* State.⁷⁹ On 6 February 1875,⁸⁰ the king sent his secretary for foreign affairs; *Mingyi Maha Minhla Zeyathu U Cheint*, to India in order to deal with the affairs of *Karenni* State. But *U Chaint* could not solve the problem.⁸¹

On this occasion, the British authorities tensely said that they assumed the West *Karenni* State as an independent state. Such attitude of the British paved the ways for strained relations between two countries. Then the British India Government sent Sir Douglas Forsyth to Myanmar to solve the *Karenni* problem. He met with King *Mindon* on 17 June

⁷⁵ Toe Hla, *Konbaung the Golden Land*, p. 64

⁷⁶ Bannerjee, *Burma*, pp. 236-240

⁷⁷ Singhal, *Burma*, p. 26

⁷⁸ ME 1235, 4th waxing day of *Nadaw*

⁷⁹ Kyaw Tint, *Yadanabon*, p. 161

⁸⁰ ME 1236, 1st waxing day of *Tabodwe*

⁸¹ *Konbaung Period*, Vol. III, p. 414

1875.⁸² On this occasion, King *Mindon* did not make any comment on that matter. In fact, India Government had already instructed Sir Douglas to inform Myanmar king that the English Government cancels formerly gave promises to Myanmar on the *Karenni* State. The English Government would take necessary actions to protect West *Karenni* State. ... If the Myanmar Court intervene the affairs of West *Karenni* State, the British Government would assume it as military intervention.⁸³

As King *Mindon* did not want to destroy the cordial relations and peace that had been built for years as well as did not have enough strength to compete with the British, he had to agree to sign the treaty concerning the *Karenni* State on 21 June 1875⁸⁴ under the pressure of British. According to this treaty, both Myanmar and British governments had to acknowledge the autonomous status of *Karenni* State.⁸⁵ Though the British put one claim after another on Myanmar king, they did not even consider of giving the occupied territories back to the latter.⁸⁶ Under such circumstances, ambitions of King *Mindon* became in vain. On the other hand, the British took advantage of the giving in of the Myanmar king. They even claimed to get the right to hang sword and put on shoes in front of the king. Hence King *Mindon* decided not to accept the British presence in front of him since then.⁸⁷

In the meantime, Myanmar throne came to face with the problem of succession. While King *Mindon* was in serious illness, some senior ministers arrested all princes. They gave the reason for such arrest that it aimed at avoiding the revolts of princes to gain throne.⁸⁸ Under such circumstances, two princes: *Nyaungyan* and *Nyaungoak*, who could imagine the plot of ministers took refuge in Lower Myanmar. When the British heard about the instabilities at Mandalay, they began preparation to take actions if something happened badly at Myanmar capital. They sent their troops to the border between their territory and Myanmar kingdom with the reason that it aimed at protecting the British embassy at Mandalay. Vice versa, Myanmar Court also sent troops to the borderline.⁸⁹ On 16 September 1878,⁹⁰ the Court issued an order that appointed the Prince *Thibaw* as the Crown Prince. Though King *Mindon* ordered to form a security council that was composed of Princes *Makkhaya*, *Thoneze* and *Nyaungyan*, some oral history said that *Kinwun Mingyi* did not obey the order.⁹¹ When King *Mindon* died on 1 October 1878,⁹² the ministers

arranged the royal consecration ceremony for *Thibaw*. Thus *Thibaw* became king of Myanmar kingdom.⁹³

By looking the political situation of Myanmar kingdom under King *Mindon*, it can be seen that the king and associates used most of their time to protect the rest part of the country from British invasion. The king could protect Upper Myanmar from the invasion of British imperialists by utilizing the diplomatic means. He also tried to regain lost territory, to get contact with the foreign powers, and to get back the sea port for the kingdom. But his attempts failed because of several hindrances and destructive manners of the British. He also relinquished the rights on West *Karenni* State under the pressure of British. Nevertheless, it can be said that King *Mindon* tried his best to establish stability and peace in Upper Myanmar amongst the destructive manners and difficulties.

⁸² ME 1237, 14th waxing day of *Nayoun*

⁸³ Dorothy Woodman, *The Making of Burma*, London, the Cresset Press, 1962, pp. 211-212 (Hereafter cited as Woodman, *Burma*)

⁸⁴ ME 1237, 3rd waning day of *Nayoun*

⁸⁵ Woodman, *Burma*, p. 212

⁸⁶ Singhal, *Burma*, p. 27

⁸⁷ Kyaw Tint, *Yadanabon*, p. 165

⁸⁸ Khin Mya Kyu, *French – Myanmar Relations*, p. 114

⁸⁹ Singhal, *Burma*, p. 31

⁹⁰ ME 1240, 6th waning day of *Tawthalin*

⁹¹ Khin Mya Kyu, *French – Myanmar Relations*, p. 116

⁹² ME 1240, 6th waxing day of *Thadingyut*

⁹³ Khin Mya Kyu, *French – Myanmar Relations*, p. 117