

The Mon are to announce a new political party on March 31 after the NLD have announced their election stance.

The Mon will officially announce a new political party on March 31 to represent the Mon people in the election, according to Mon sources, who added that the new party was formed last year in Moulmein and has a name and a written constitution.

Speaking with *The Irrawaddy* on Monday, Min Soe Lin, a committee member of the new Mon political party and an executive member of the Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF), said: "The new party has a five-member advisory board and a 15-member committee that includes three Mon Buddhist monks."

Min Soe Lin was one of five MNDF representatives who won seats when the party ran in the 1990 election. After the election the junta disbanded the party and arrested at least four of the elected representatives including Min Soe Lin, who was sentenced to seven years in prison.

The new party is ready to register and participate in the election, he said, but after a meeting on March 15, they decided to delay making an official announcement until after the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), announces on March 29 whether they will participate in the election.

"If the NLD doesn't join the election, four committee members including myself will not join the new party because we disagree with the 2008 Constitution," he said, adding that 11 committee members would remain.

The new Mon political party currently comprises some former central committee members of the New Mon State Party (NMSP), which is the Mon armed wing that entered a ceasefire agreement with the junta in 1995, the MNDF and other respected community leaders in Mon State.

Two executive members from the MNDF will join the new political party, according to Mon sources.

Mon leaders are divided on whether to participate in the election, meanwhile.

Those who don't accept the 2008 Constitution view the election as a sham and say it will not be free and fair.

Nai Hang Thar, the secretary for the NMSP, told *The Irrawaddy* on Monday that the new constitution denies fundamental ethnic rights and will allow the military to hold onto power.

"The junta are holding an election because their main political goal is to supersede the 1990 election result that gave the NLD victory and legalize their military rule," he said.

Other Mon leaders believe the election could offer an opportunity and they will continue to fight for Mon freedom in the new Burmese parliament even after the junta takes 25 percent of the seats.

The NMSP announced last year that it will not participate in the election. The NMSP leaders believe that they must maintain their armed wing because Burma is controlled by a military government.

To avoid increasing tensions among its members, however, the NMSP leaders said they would allow members to resign and join the new Mon political party if they wished.

Mon leaders believe that letting the NMSP maintain its armed wing to continue the potential for armed struggle while the new Mon political party takes the fight to the democratic stage is the right strategy.

Many Mon observers in Mon State, meanwhile, say they do not trust the junta to hold a free and fair election and they don't believe the new Mon political party will gain any freedom for the Mon people.

Sources in Moulmein said the new Mon political party including former NMSP central committee members are currently working together mobilizing youths in Mon State for the election in 2010.