



The chairman of the newly formed Democratic Party gives his views on the proposed election, the military government's role and the party's activities.

Thu Wai, the chairman of the Rangoon-based Democratic Party, newly formed to participate in this year's election, talks about the military government, the election and his party's activities. The party was jointly formed in September 2009 with Than Than Nu, Cho Cho Kyaw Nyein and Nay Yee Ba Swe, the daughters U Nu, Kyaw Nyein and Ba Swe, Burma's late prime ministers during the parliamentary era. Thu Wai led the Democracy Party and stood for election in the 1990 general election.

Question: *Snr-Gen Than Shwe said "plans are underway to hold elections in a systematic way," and he urged the population to make the "correct choices" in his Independence Day message.*

Answer: It will be good if he does what he says. But for candidates who want to participate in the election, so far we can't do anything. There are no election laws and the political parties registration law hasn't been announced so we can't legally organize. These laws should be enacted immediately to ensure we have sufficient time to organize our activities.

Q. *Some analysts speculate the election could be postponed. What's your assessment?*

A. First, we have waited for the election law since July or August of last year. The latest rumor said the law will be announced in March, on Resistance Day (Armed Forces day), and the election will be held in November. I think under the circumstances, it can't be postponed. I don't know what the difficulties or considerations are on their side. When we see the election law, we can believe the election will be held.

Q. *What has your future party been doing?*

A. What I can say is that we just formed a political party. Even though we are not allowed to organize, we formed our party. And we have been forming executive committees and branches of women and youth in different towns and divisions. We work among ourselves as much as we can, but discreetly. We can't organize big meetings or mass rallies. We extend our networks through our personal friends and contacts.

Q. *What is your relationship with the authorities?*

A. I think we are under their nose. And I think some agents follow us and report back to higher officers. Sometimes, they come and question us. What are we doing now? We are acting carefully and legally because they are watching our activities.

Q. *What have you been doing since you announced that you will form a political party?*

A. We don't want to over play our hand. I think we are allowed some low-key activities, because we have said publicly that we will take part in the election. We go on outreach trips to different townships, but not on a large scale. We try to bring four or five people to a meeting. We have been doing things like this for two or three months. People are concerned about their safety and security. They are struggling to make ends meet. But there is interest.

For instance, in the recent NLD gatherings, almost twice the number of people took part than in previous events. It seems that more people are interested in politics.

On our outreach trips, we can explain our reasons for taking certain positions. But many people still want to wait until the election law is passed, because they are afraid of harassment. They want to do something relating to politics, but they don't want to take unnecessary risks without any apparent reason. There are many people who agree with us, and they are willing to cooperate with us, but they ask us to wait until the election law is announced.

With the authorities, we have no formal relations, just some agents coming and inquiring for information. Once, me and Amyotharye U Win Naing were summoned by authorities, and they warned us that we must have prior permission for a gathering of more than five people. During that time, I was asked to sign an agreement.

Q. *What was behind your decision to form a party and participate in the election?*

A. First, our country's situation is deteriorating, and we want to help fix the problems we have. Just talking from outside isn't very effective, and demonstrations aren't very effective. We think we can compete in the election and some of our people will be elected. We can work on reform from within the parliament. This is the first point.

Second, our assumption is there are a lot of people in our country who have never voted in their lives. Some were around 17 years old during the last election. Now they are nearing their 40s. The number of people may be half of the population. If our country's population is 56 million, these people number about 28 million. The election is decision-time for them, and they will want to use the new power that's in their hands.

If there is an election, we assume the military government will eventually end, and there will be a civilian government.

Then if we try hard, that civilian government could be a powerful democratic civilian government, if the government gets popular support. We could reach the path of democracy very quick. That's it.

Q. *Some analysts suggest the election and formation of a parliament will not lead to democracy, but just more military control of the system.*

A. There are differences of thought about the coming election, based on the 2008 Constitution. They say the Constitution is undemocratic, and of course, we can't accept that at all. Some people think there will be no change even after the election under this Constitution.

I don't think like that. When I heard they are preparing for the election, I thought differently. This military government has tried their best. They also love the country. But the way they are going about things is wrong, their system is wrong, and it wastes a lot of time for the country. The country has been left far behind the rest of the world.

The military government knows that. They worked, and they tried. But it wasn't successful. They also are not popular. They finally may be trying to make some reforms. The reform, as they see it, is to hold the election. Some say they will be in power even after election because of the Constitution they have written.

I don't think so. I think they will withdraw, since they say they will hold an election and adopt the new Constitution.

I don't think the army is moving forward, but rather it's in retreat. I see their reasoning from their point of view, as that of a good commander. For a good commander, a retreat of your forces must be in an orderly and systematic way. Now the junta is withdrawing, but they are withdrawing by taking a role under the Constitution. Our position is to work in this new environment and create an orderly civilian government.