

Burma's Union Election Commission publishes the technical regulations for the registration of political parties, which favors elite candidates.

Burma's Union Election Commission published the technical regulations for political parties on Thursday, which favor wealthy candidates.

Overall, the new electoral laws and registration regulations create significant obstacles to forming political parties and the encouragement of an open, democratic system of government, according to political analysts.

The party registration regulations stipulate that all political parties have until April 15 to register by filing a 300,000 fee (US \$300) and the required documents.

The regulations state that parties may spend a maximum of 10 million kyat (\$10,000) for each candidate running for a seat in parliament. The expenditure can come from either the party's funds or from a candidate's private funds.

The level of a candidate's spending represents a significant increase from the 1990 election, in which each candidate's expenditure was limited to 70,000 kyat (\$70).

Observers noted that the higher limit favors elite, well-off candidates who could benefit by greater access to advertising and organizing meetings with voters. One of the poorest countries in the Southeast Asia region, Burma's average income level is about \$900 per person, according to the UN Human Development Index 2009.

Analysts say that the new Political Parties Registration Law, combined with its registration regulations, in effect categorize political parties as public entities, whose holdings, upon dissolution, would revert to the state.

Article 11 of the law states that a political party can charge each member a registration and annual fee. Article 15 allows parties to raise funds through private donations, business donations, or it may organize a party-owned business, as means to raise party funds.

However, if a political party is dissolved, either by the party's own initiative or based on a ruling by the Election Commission, all party property must be transferred to a government department or organization, as instructed by the government.

This aspect of the law is new. When the military took state power in 1988, the then ruling Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) was disbanded and the property of the BSPP, including office buildings and vehicles, were transferred to the National Unity Party, which was based on the former BSPP.

Likewise, either before and after the 1990 election, the majority of the country's 236 political parties were dissolved by the junta, but their property was not confiscated by the state.

Analysts say this aspect of the law will have a negative effect on the country's party politics. Since the new law allows the government to confiscate a disbanded party's property, it could discourage the formation of political parties.