

The Irrawaddy's Ba Saw Tin interviewed Vice-Chairman Dr. Min Hla Aung of the All Mon Region Democracy Party (AMRDP) about the party's political goals, objectives and activities.



The AMRDP was founded to contest the election this year. It is based in Moulmein [Mawlamyaing], the capital of Mon State.

Min Hla Aung lives in Taranar Village in Kyaik Ma Yaw Township in Mon State. He was a central committee member of the Mon National Democracy Party which participated in the 1990 election.

Question: Please tell us how your party was founded.

Answer: We believe that there should be a political party to represent all Mon and other ethnic nationalities living in Mon State. We first took advice from patriotic and venerable monks. Then we gathered and consulted patriotic individuals, veterans, intellectuals and youth. Finally, we decided to form a political party. With majority agreement, we preliminarily elected 15 representatives with the sole responsibility to apply for official party registration. That was how the AMRDP was founded.

Q: What are the party's aims and objectives?

A: Today's political atmosphere suggests that the coming 2010 election is a path to democracy

that all ethnic nationalities in Burma, including the Mons, have to go through. In this political process, we, as Mon, are willing to take part alongside other nationalities. We also hope to raise political consciousness and knowledge among many of the young Mon generation who live in the darkness. Furthermore, we aim to achieve political rights for Mon people through democratic ways and to work in cooperation with other ethnic nationalities in the establishment of a genuine democratic federal union. Mainly, we want democracy, human rights and equality to prevail.

Q: Who are your key party members?

A: The AMRDP was formed with mainly educated persons such as retired senior officials, and young and older intellectuals. The party has also recruited patriotic persons from different villages and townships. As for the party's leadership, Nai Ngwe Thien (Nai Ja Nu Mon) is chairman; I am the vice-chairman and Dr. Min Nwe Soe is the secretary. Nai Ngwe Thein is a retired managing director of the Basic Education Department (Upper Burma), and Dr. Min Nwe Soe is a retired director of the Department of Health in Mon State.

Q: Where will you campaign? Only in Mon State?

A: Our party doesn't solely represent Mon living in Mon State, but it will represent and organize Mon and other nationalities living in different divisions and states. Our main focus areas will be Rangoon Division, Pegu Division, 10 townships in Mon State, Ye Pyhu, Kaukhaung, Margwe, Boatpyin and Palaw townships in Tenessarim Division, and Kawkareik, Hpa-An, Kya-in Seikgyi, Myawaddy in Karen State.

Q: How is your party campaign going so far?

A: We believe it has been successful. When we meet with people, we see that they want to see a change on way or another. They are very ardent in pursuit of change.

Q: According to the Political Parties Registration Law, if a party plans to conduct campaign activities and contest the election nationwide it must have at least 1,000 members within 90 days after it has been approved by the Union Election Commission (EC). How is your party membership? Have you been able to meet the EC's requirement?

A: Currently, we have between 3,000 and 4,000 members, which is already far beyond the EC requirement.

Q: The New Mon State Party (NMSP), which plays a key role in Mon politics, has repeatedly rejected the regime's order to transform it into a border guard force under the control of the military junta. Apparently, there is tension between the NMSP and the regime. Tell us your thoughts on the NMSP.

A: Since the NMSP has clearly voiced its position, I don't think we need to make any comment on that matter. I just want to say that they are working with their own stance and belief.

Q: The upcoming election will be held based on the 2008 Constitution. What do you expect from this Constitution?

A: Everyone knows about the Constitution. What our party believes is that from what we are given, we can work to extend our rights and mandates for ethnic affairs.

Q: Do you think that the upcoming election can bring prosperity to all nationalities including the Mon?

A: Democratization has to go through the election process. We hope that the changes our people hope to achieve will gradually come through the election process. Change will not come overnight. It takes time. What I believe is that this election will be beneficial to Mon people.

Q: What obstacles are you facing?

A: The main obstacle is money. We are in a difficult financial situation for our party and party candidates.

Q: What did you think about the 1990 election?

A: In my opinion, the 1990 election was genuine, but transferring power was another story. I don't think it will be the same this time.

Q: We've learned that ethnic-based parties are being treated differently. Have you experienced such discrimination?

A: No. Nothing in particular.

Q: How is your campaign going?

A: I don't know about other parties. For the AMRDP, our movement is going well.

Q: What message would you like to convey to the people of Burma who want democracy?

A: I'd like to ask people to participate in the election process by showing up at the polling stations to vote for the parties and candidates who can truly work for good people in their respective areas. I also would like to urge all political parties to take part in the election. I would like to urge all ethnic nationalities living in Mon State to vote for the Mon party. Likewise, people living in other states should vote for ethnic parties representing their states.

The 2010 election is a chance for change. It doesn't matter if the Constitution is good or bad, and whether we accept it or not. We, the people of Burma, should take part in the election in our respective regions. Then, if we cooperate and work collectively either in the central or state government, we will accomplish our goals in a time.