

A new Arakan political party, under the name Union of Myanmar National Force Arakan State Party, says it will register to compete in the election, according to party chairman Aye Kyaing.

A new Arakan political party, under the name the Union of Myanmar National Force Arakan State Party, has announced it will register to compete in the election, according to party chairman Aye Kyaing.

The party has already organized in 14 townships in Arakan State, which has 17 townships, said party organizers, who will meet on Thursday to discuss registration procedures. The party will be based in Sittwe and also open an office in Rangoon, Aye Kyaing said. He said the party will field candidates only in Arakan State.

Speaking to *The Irrawaddy*, he said, "We are 90 percent sure to register. Members are studying specifications of the party registration law. We'll try to solve conflicts and different points of view in a positive way."

In 1990, Aye Kyaing served as secretary of the National Unity Party(NUP) in Mrauk-U Township in Arakan State. The NUP was transformed from an authoritarian, socialist party controlled by former dictator Ne Win and was backed by the current regime when it called elections in 1990.

In the 1990 election, among 26 constituencies in Arakan State, 11 constituencies went to the Arakan League for Democracy (ALD); the National League for Democracy won 9; and the National Democratic Party for Human Rights won 4. The NUP failed to win any seats.

Aye Thar Aung, the secretary of the ALD, said that the party would probably not participate in the election this year, citing the unfairness of the 2008 Constitution. However, he said the party would poll its members.

"Once there was a wave to form a party for ethnic Arakanese, but now we haven't heard much about forming a party to represent Arakanese. Party members from Rangoon don't want to compete in the election," said Aye Thar Aung.

In some townships in Arakan State, the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Association(USDA) has begun campaign activities, according to local residents.

Meanwhile, authorities have started issuing foreign registration cards to ethnic Rohingya living in the northern part of the state.

*Khaing Mrat Kyaw*, the chief editor at the Dhaka-based *Narinjara* news agency, said, “They have lived a long time in northern Arakan State and authorities are giving them a chance to vote in the election. In the 1990 election, they also were allowed to vote.”

The Rohingya are the second largest ethnic group in Arakan State, after the Rakhine. Rohingya are in the majority in Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Rathedaung townships, in the northern part of the state. They comprise nearly 30 percent of the state's population of 2.75 million people.

According to the new electoral law, foreign registration card holders, people who being considered for citizenship, or people holding a temporary identification card, may vote if they are 18 or older.