

The PaO National Organization becomes the seventh group to submit an application to register as a political party in the upcoming national election.

The PaO National Organization(PNO) submitted an application to the Burmese Election Commission on Friday to register as a political party, according to a state-run newspaper.

The PNO is the seventh group to seek to form a political party after the Burmese regime announced the party registration law.

Officials in the party office based in Taunggyi in Southern Shan State declined to be interviewed when contacted by The Irrawaddy.

In an interview in the Myanmar Times in October 2009, PNO leader Aung Kham Hti, a former monk and a politician who had a close relationship with former Gen Khin Nyunt, said that if it forms a party, it would be based in Taunggyi and Loilen districts.

In the interview, he was supportive of the 2008 Constitution and viewed the 2010 election as positive for the country's progress.

The PNO signed a cease-fire agreement with the junta on April 11, 1991. The PNO controls Special Region-6 in southern Shan State and has been granted a number of business concessions.

The PNO operates the Jade Dragon (Gems) Co Ltd, the parent company of Ruby Dragon Jade & Gems Co Ltd; Ne Win Tun operates the business, which has enterprises in Mong Hsu in Shan State, Pha Khant and Tawmaw in Kachin State, Kawlin and Khamti in Sagaing Division and Mogok in Mandalay Division, in addition to a hotel on Inlay Lake near Rangoon.

It is widely believed that high-ranking Burmese generals are shareholders in Ruby Dragon Jade & Gems Co Ltd, the largest company of its kind in Burma. In the early 2000s, the company donated a massive 3,000-ton slab of jade to the junta.

In the 1990 election, the PNO won three constituencies, in Hsi Hseng, Ho pong and Pin Laung townships. The organization took part in the national convention which was held in 1993.

The seven parties that have applied for registration are the Kayin People's Party (KPP), the National Unity Party (NUP), the Democratic Party (DP), the Union of Myanmar National Political Force (UMNPF), the 88 Generation Students Union of Myanmar (GSUM), the National Political Alliance (NPA) and Pa Oo National Organization(PNO).

The KPP is led by well-known Rangoon physician Dr. Simon Tha; the NUP is led by Tun Yi, the former deputy commander in chief of Burma's armed force; the DP is led by veteran Burmese politician Thu Wai; and the NPA is led by Ohn Lwin, a Rangoon-based politician who was a candidate in 1990 election.

The UMNPF is led by Aye Lwin, a former university student leader who took part in the 1988 uprising, and the GSUM is led by Ye Htun, the brother of Aye Lwin.

The PaO, also known as the Taungthu, are found throughout eastern Burma. They form the second largest ethnic group in Shan State and are descendants of Tibeto-Burmese who settled in the Thaton region in Mon State around 1,000 BC.

PaO dispersed from Thaton with many moving to southwestern Shan State. Up to two million PaO are believed to live in Mon, Karen, Karenni and Shan states, particularly along the Salween River.