

Nineteen political parties to date have registered for this year's general election in Burma; however, the leading parties say they will not compete.

Nineteen political parties to date have submitted applications to the Union Election Commission to take part in the Burmese general election later this year. However, most of the leading parties from the previous election, in 1990, have said they will not compete.

Of the 19 political parties that have registered, 16 are new parties, while only three are existing parties—the Mro or Khami National Solidarity Organization (MKNSO); the National Unity Party (NUP); and the Union Karen League (UKL).



The seven other existing parties—including Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD)— have either not registered to date or have announced that they will not compete in the election due to the recent election law and the 2008 Constitution, both of which are regarded by observers as serving only to entrench military rule in Burma.

The notable exception is the NUP, formerly known as the Burma Socialist Programme Party, led by late dictator Gen Ne Win. In the 1990 election, the NUP came fourth with 10 seats and to date is the only major party to register.

In 1990, the MKNSO won one seat; the UKL won none.

The leading parties ahead of the NUP in 1990 were the NLD with a landslide 392 seats, the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) with 23 seats, and the Arakan League for

Democracy (ALD), which won 11 seats. None are expected to register before the deadline on May 6.

Speaking to The Irrawaddy on Monday, Aye Thar Aung, the secretary of the ALD, said, "Most of the existing parties have not registered because they cannot accept the 2008 Constitution. The election will go ahead, I'm sure, but I don't think it will be free, fair and inclusive."

Aung Naing Oo, a Burmese political commentator living in exile, said that the existing political parties did not register with the Election Commission because most are allied with the NLD. Some parties, such as the SNLD, have had their leader arrested and so will not compete. Others believe the election will not be free and fair, he said.

"The parties that have registered to date are not allied with the NLD," he added.

Of the 16 newly formed parties that have applied for registration, seven are ethnic minority-based parties: the Kachin State Progressive Party, led by Dr. Tu Ja; the Kayin People's Party, which is headed by well-known Rangoon physician Dr. Simon Tha; the Shan Nationals Democratic Party, led by Sai Ai Pao Eik Paung; the Pa-O National Organization, led by Aung Kham Hti, a former monk and a politician who had a close relationship with former premier Gen Khin Nyunt; the Chin National Party; the Wa Democratic Party; and the Taaung (Palaung) National Party.

Rangoon-based parties to register include: the Union of Myanmar Federation of National Politics, headed by Aye Lwin, a former university student leader who took part in the 1988 uprising; and the 88 Generation Students Union of Myanmar (GSUM), led by Ye Htun, the brother of Aye Lwin.

The GSUM is distinct from the original 88 Students Generation group, led by prominent former students—including Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi—who are now in prison.

Aye Lwin, a 46-year-old former political prisoner, started his own political group in 2005. His close contacts with regime officials (he had a meeting with Rangoon's mayor, Maj-Gen Aung Thein Lin, five months ago) have made him unpopular with young activists, who accuse him of accepting substantial financial support from them.

The remaining registered parties include the Democratic Party, which is led by Thu Wai, a former political prisoner. After the 1990 election, the Democratic Party was abolished.

Also registered are: the Union Democratic Party, headed by Shan leader Shwe Ohn; the Difference and Peace Party, led by Nyo Min Lwin; the New Era People Party, which is led by Tun Aung Kyaw; the National Political Alliance Party, led by Ohn Lwin; the Wunthanu NLD (the Union of Myanmar) party; and the Myanmar New Society Democratic Party.