

Burma's press censorship board, the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division (PSRD), is strictly censoring political news in weekly journals, causing the Peace and Diversity Party (PDP) to rethink its decision to participate in the coming election.

Col. Myo Myint Maung, the newly appointed joint-director of the PSRD, is strictly monitoring and censoring election and political news, said a Rangoon-based weekly journal editor.

For example, the PDP recently attempted to publish a party member recruiting announcement that read "Candidate Wanted" in The Voice Weekly journal, but the PSRD excluded the announcement, said Nay Myo Wai, the secretary of the PDP.

On Thursday, the PDP wrote an open letter to the PSRD, asking how to proceed if the PSRD continues banning descriptions of their parties policies and activities in journals.

"If we don't have free expression, I feel ashamed to participate in the election," said Nay Myo Wai.

Because the PDP cannot accept PSRD censorship of political party news in the journals, within the next 15 days the PDP will review its decision to compete in the coming election, said Nay Myo Wai. The PDP's final decision will depend on what the PSRD does during that period.

The PSRD announced on March 17 that registered parties can apply to the censorship board to publish material in accordance with the 1962 Printing and Publishing Act.

However, publications must conform to certain rules: they must not "oppose" the ruling State Peace and Development Council, must not make any attempt to criticize the armed forces and must conform to the law, the statement said.

The PSRD requires political parties to register before they publish campaign material, charging 100,000 kyat (US \$100) and a 500,000 kyat (\$500) as a deposit.

Although many registered political parties have permission to publish their own election-related materials such as pamphlets, journals and booklets, a large percentage face severe financial problems and so depend on Burma's weekly journals to publish their party's policies and activities.

The PSRD routinely inspects and censors books, journals and newspapers. Any media criticism of the military junta is strictly forbidden. After the election laws were announced last month, the PSRD began banning comments and analysis, and censoring articles related to the election in local journals.

Burmese media were recently prohibited by the PSRD from reporting news regarding the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), led by Prime Minister Thein Sein, that related to USDP founders remaining in their government posts. Some journals were forced to publish a blank where these stories would have run.

By contrast, the USDP is allowed to run its own journal, the *Nwe Thargi*, without interference, said media sources.

Meanwhile, the PSRD has allowed a private Rangoon journal not to publish a junta propaganda article in the coming week.

A Rangoon-based editor told *The Irrawaddy* on Friday, "We welcome the news. In the past, the PSRD forced us to published propaganda articles without fail. Now we have one more page for a new section. But once a month or so we have to publish propaganda articles if the PSRD pass them to us."

Another Rangoon-based weekly journal editor said the propaganda articles are a burden and nobody reads them.

Despite their strict rules and regulations and draconian censorship practices, the PSRD currently licenses the publication of 326 newspapers, magazines and journals in Burma, and a further 10 are expected to appear. Some selected journals close to key officials are profitable.