



Following the conclusion of the candidate registration process on Friday, Burma's political parties expect the leaders of the junta's proxy Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) to give up their positions in the government.

Prime Minister Thein Sein is the chairman of the USDP, whose leading members are also ruling government ministers.

“We have no objection about them competing in the election as citizens, but they should consider whether they should do so without giving up their authority and status,” said Dr. Than Nyein, the chairman of the National Democratic Force (NDF). The NDF, led by former members of the disbanded National League for Democracy, registered 161 candidates, making it the third largest party contesting the election.

Despite the election rules prohibiting government employees from holding party membership, the regime media has stated that the prime minister and government ministers are not required to give up their cabinet posts.

While Thein Sein is no longer referred to in the official media as a member of the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), the junta's third-and-fourth ranking officials, Shwe Mann and Tin Aung Myint Oo, who gave up their military positions last month, are still described in the official media as SPDC members. Tin Aung Myint Oo is described as the SPDC's Secretary (1).

Despite the completion of the candidate registration, it is still not clear whether Shwe Mann and Tin Aung Myint Oo will participate in the election as USDP candidates. According to earlier reports, they will stand for election in two townships in Naypidaw.

Both were seen accompanying the junta leader Snr-Gen Than Shwe on his visit to Beijing last week, indicating their undiminished status in the regime leadership.

“Since they have quit their military positions, they cannot get themselves elected in the parliament by the army,” said Dr. Than Nyein. The Constitution guarantees the army one quarter of the parliamentary seats.

Meanwhile, a group of individual candidates running in the November polls announced at the weekend that they will cooperate with opposition parties during and after the election.

The eight-member group announced that they have reached an understanding with the Democratic Party (Myanmar) to cooperate with each other.

“It would be stronger for us to participate in the election by negotiating with the democratic forces even though we are individual candidates,” the group said in a statement.

Yuzar Maw Tun, 46, whose paternal grandfather was Chan Tun, the architect of Burma's 1947 Constitution, and whose maternal grandfather was Dr. Baw Maw, the head of the Burmese provisional government during the Japanese occupation, is one of the group's members and will stand in Rangoon's Hlaing Township as an individual candidate.

“We will work together with all the democratic forces,” she said. “But for now, we have joined the Democratic Party since we share similar political ideas.”

Another group member is her husband, Phone Win, who will run in Kamaryut Township as an individual candidate. The couple leads a local non-governmental organization called Mingalar Myanmar in Rangoon.

“They join us because they like us and they also have a clean background,” said Nay Yee Ba Swe, the Democratic Party (Myanmar) secretary.

Political parties are still waiting for the election commission to announce the approved list of candidates so that they can start campaigning, although public interest in the election appears to be very low.

“I see no election campaigns of any other political party except by the government's party,” said Nay Yee Ba Swe. “People don't want to come out. They are so afraid. But I know their heart is with us.”