

Junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) candidates are using Cyclone Nargis rehabilitation projects in the Irrawaddy delta and other state projects across the country to campaign for the election.



According to the state-run-newspaper, *The New Light of Myanmar* on Thursday, Burmese Prime Minister Thein Sein who is also the USDP chairman attended the opening ceremony of a hospital and a youth training school in the cyclone-hit area of Laputta Township alongside other USDP key leaders who retired from their military posts in April including Thein Nyunt, the minister of Progress of Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs, and Maung Maung Swe, the minister of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement.

Ahead of the Nov.7 elections, the state-run-media are full of reports that USDP leaders who are also sitting ministers are traveling to state projects and attending openings of completed projects. Observers said the military junta allowed state media to highlight USDP activities but limited publicity to other political parties.

Although Thein Sein seemed to be focusing USDP campaign activities through the state projects in the Irrawaddy delta this week, his election campaign last week focused on the west bank of the Irrawaddy River in the Magway Region, the location of government arms factories as well as alleged work on military missiles and nuclear projects.

Thein Sein appeared in the state media where he was shown Sept. 20 opening the Minhla-Minbu section of the railway line from Kyangin in the Irrawaddy Region to Pakokku in the Magway Region.

*The New Light of Myanmar* also reported on Sept. 25 that Thein Sein opened a hospital in Zabuthiri Township in Naypyidaw. According to the Naypyidaw candidate list, Thein Sein is running for the People's Assembly (Lower House) seat in Zabuthiri Township.

Along with USDP top leaders and senior military officials, the state-run newspapers on Thursday highlighted one of the richest tycoons in the country, Zaw Zaw, the head of the Max Group of Companies and the newly formed Ayeyawady Bank. Zaw Zaw appeared in a front page photo in *The New Light of Myanmar* along with USDP leaders and senior military officers including Maj-Gen Hla Min, the chief of the Bureau of Special Operations-3.

Zaw Zaw and other US-sanction list tycoons including Tay Za, Htay Myint, Khin Shwe and Dagon Win Aung were awarded construction projects in the Irrawaddy delta following Cyclone Nargis in May 2008.

Khin Shwe of the Zay Gabar Company is a USDP candidate for the Nationalities Assembly (Upper House) in Twantay Township in the Rangoon region, which was hard hit by Cyclone Nargis. He told *The Monitor Journal* recently that he had done campaign activities while also working on Nargis work projects.

"For me, I don't need to do election campaigning in the area. Following Nargis, I had worked there for a year doing reconstruction on pagodas and feeding people food. So people tell me, 'Please come here!' I don't need to do any extra campaigning like other candidates," Khin Shwe was quoted as saying in the journal.