

The Burmese government's desperate attempt to stifle the emergence of a potential ethnic political force—the Kachin State Progressive Party (KSPP)—will go down in history as another example of brutal suppression of the basic tenets of democracy in Burma.

If the KSPP, which is unquestionably the “people’s party” in Kachin, is not registered as a political party, the election commission will only add to the farce surrounding the proposed election.

A number of things have happened recently—the registration of the Kachin State United Democratic Party (KSUDP), which is backed by the government's Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), the attempt to spark ethnic clashes in Kachin, the alleged move to transport more than 100,000 “Burman voters” to the Hukawng valley. All clearly spell out the game plan of the junta to take over the control of the administration of Kachin State.

But of all the possible impediments put up to block the party from emerging as a political force for the Kachins, the delay in registering the party is highly deplorable and flabbergasting.

If the KSUDP, which was cobbled up with loose factions and individuals who are aligned with the military government, can be registered in just 16 days after filing its application, then what is wrong with the KSPP, which has complied all the legal formalities according to the law?

As things stand today, the fate of the KSPP hangs in the balance, at the mercy of the junta. Legal experts say the junta could twist the law to declare the KSPP an “illegal entity.” Given recent developments, there is every possibility that Section 4 (f) or Section 7 could be used by the junta.

These two sections specify that political parties can face disqualification if they fail to prove that they are not a member of an insurgent organization in revolt against the State, or not a part of an organization designated by the State as committing terrorist acts, or not a member of an organization declared as an unlawful association under any existing law.

One legal expert noted that the election laws have been made by the military, and it would not be difficult to frame false charges against any party that the military does not want, and the KSPP is no exception.

The reason that has been given by the Election Commission for the delay is that the KSPP has links with the Kachin Independent Organization (KIO). That could mean plans are afoot to declare the KIO an “unlawful organization” if it fails to toe the line of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) to convert the Kachin Independent Association (KIA) into a border guard force (BGF).

It is well-known that the Burmese regime is going hammer and tongs to see that the push for the BGF succeeds.

For Kachin observers, the regime's tactics are transparent. “Its clear and simple that if the KIO does not respond to the SDPC’s demands, then the KSPP will be victimized,” said Aung Wa, a political activist in Kachin.

La Rip, young activist, says the political situation needs more domestic and international understanding and support.

“We don’t know how long will we have to wait for the KSPP to be recognized as a legitimate political party. Its leaders have sent appeal letters three times already to the Union Election Commission (UEC) in Naypyidaw, and the UEC’s response has been 'wait.’”

The junta’s agents are reaching out to Kachin-based organizations offering “huge benefits” for supporting the USDP in the next election. In some places, allies of the USDA [Union Solidarity and Development Association] and the USDP are going around promising support to other ethnic groups from the region.

“The government agents are telling some groups that if they form a party which supports the USDP, then they will get monetary and other back-ups,” said an observer in Myitkyina.

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