

At least seven political groups, including one established pro-government party, are preparing to register to take part in the upcoming election, according to the leaders of the groups.

"I've learned that seven political parties are going to register with the election commission," said Kyi Win, a leader of the National Political Alliance, a Rangoon-based party consisting of nine smaller pro-government groups.

The National Unity Party (NUP), the Democratic Party, the Union of Myanmar National Political Force and the 88 Generation Students Union of Myanmar will register within days, Kyi Win said.

The NUP was formed during the era of former dictator Ne Win, and was backed by the current regime when it called elections in 1990.

In addition, the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), prominent Shan leader Shwe Ohn and the National Political Alliance are also preparing to formally register their respective parties as a step toward participation in the election, said Kyi Win.

According to sources in Rangoon, the USDA may be planning to register as many as three parties to contest in the 2010 election.

"We've heard the USDA will form three parties," a source told *The Irrawaddy* on Friday. "But so far we haven't seen them campaigning like the NUP, which started campaigning in Hlegu Township [in Rangoon Division] a month ago."

The source said that the parties formed by the USDA were likely to use names unrelated to the group, which has grown increasingly unpopular since it took part in a crackdown on protesting monks in September 2007.

"It doesn't matter how many parties they found," said a retired government official. "They won't win any seats in the election, unless it is rigged by the election commission."

The USDA was founded in 1993 by the Ministry of Home Affairs as a social organization. Although it claims to be apolitical, it has long been actively involved in implementing the ruling regime's policies.

In 2002, Minister of Home Affairs Maj-Gen Maung Oo signaled the regime's plans for the group when he said that the USDA must be able to play a role in politics alongside other political parties.

Meanwhile, the Democratic Party is also holding daily meetings to discuss registration with the election commission. The party, led by former political prisoner Thu Wai, was unofficially formed late last year, but has yet to formally register as a political party.

"We're meeting every day now to discuss our plans to register with the election commission before the end of this month," said Mya Than Than Nu, a leading member of the party.

The other two parties that are believed to be close to registering for the election, the Union of

Myanmar National Political Force and the 88 Generation Students Union of Myanmar, are actually closely affiliated.

Aye Lwin, who is currently the chairman of both parties, told *The Irrawaddy* on Friday that the Union of Myanmar National Political Force decided in principle at its last meeting to form the 88 Generation Students Union of Myanmar. He added that both parties would soon be ready to register with the election commission.

Aye Lwin's younger brother, Ye Htun, is expected to be named chairman of the 88 Generation Students Union of Myanmar.