

The Union Solidarity and Development Party's (USDP) campaign methods have received widespread criticism in Burma and from abroad, with observers citing gross abuses by the regime-backed party which is expected to sweep the election and dominate the new parliaments.



The following summary is based on interviews with USDP members, members of Ward Peace and Development Councils (WPDC), civil servants, politicians and journalists.

Naypyidaw

The Naypyidaw Union Territory is made up of eight townships; Zeyathiri, Pobbathiri, Ottarathiri, Zabuthiri, Dekkhinathiri, Pyinmanar, Tatkong and Laeway. According to a member of the Naypyidaw Election Commission, there are more than 600,000 eligible voters residing in the province.

Former Gen Thura Shwe Mann of the State Peace and Development Council will contest the election in Zeyathiri Township; Prime Minister Thein Sein will contest in Zabuthiri Township; Secretary 1 Thiha Thura Tin Aung Myint Oo of SPDC will contest in Pobbathiri; and former Lt-Gen Myint Hlaing will contest in Dekkhinathiri Township, as USDP candidates respectively.

The National Unity Party (NUP) is the main political party challenging the USDP in Naypyidaw Province, but observers say the NUP lacks the support to defeat the USDP in Naypyidaw.

The majority of the civil servants living in Naypyidaw have been instructed by the regime to vote for the USDP. The identification card numbers, addresses and ballot numbers of other civil servants who work in Naypyidaw but are from other states and divisions have been collected, as a way to put pressure on them to vote in absentee ballots for the regime's candidates.

All pre-votes (absentee ballots) will be sent to the respective ward Election Commissions on Nov. 7, and the commissions will give the absentee ballots to poll station officials who will then will transfer them to "Yes" votes for USDP candidates, according to local authorities.

An official of the Ministry of Finance and Revenue in Naypyidaw told The Irrawaddy: "All civil servants must vote for the USDP. All pre-votes (absentee ballots) must be given to USDP. This was direct instruction from the prime minister. All government departments must abide by it."

USDP candidates have campaigned heavily in the Naypyidaw area, using various financial incentives and other benefits to attract villagers' support. Observers say state funds are being used in their campaign activities.

One of the incentives used was the distribution of mobile telephones valued 1.5 million kyat (US \$1,500).

Local residents reported that CDMA 450 MGz mobile phones were distributed among influential residents, members of sub-election commissions, civil servants from the Ministry of Education who will work in polling stations and ward authorities. Names, ID numbers and the address of those who accepted a phone were recorded, according to sources.

Local educational institutions have also come under USDP pressure, sources said.

The deans of the Yezin Agricultural University, the University of Forestry and the University of Veterinary Science located around Naypyidaw were reportedly instructed to tell teachers to vote for USDP candidates and to advise their students to support the government-backed party.

During a campaign tour in Zeyathiri Township, Thura Shwe Mann reportedly told ward members and leaders of the community: "Everyone should understand the government's good-will, and if the community needs something, tell the USDP. The USDP is the only one party that can work for the betterment of the country. If you all want peace and prosperity in the country, vote for the USDP candidates."

Similarly, former Gen Mying Hlaing who will contest the election as a USDP candidate in Dekkhinathiri Township made a campaign trip in September to 20 villages, where he distributed clothes, rice, cooking oil, salt, money, televisions and furniture.

Civil servants who are receiving training at the Central Co-operative College in Hlaeku in Rangoon, and at the Central Co-operative College in Mandalay were also reportedly instructed to mark their absentee ballots for the USDP, according to people receiving the training.

Rangoon

Rangoon is made up of 45 townships and has 441,8989 eligible voters, according to Hla Myint, the secretary of the Rangoon Division Election Commission.

Under its campaign activities in Rangoon, the USDP has built roads, provided water wells,

opened free clinics, repaired schools and handed out low-interest loan by using funds from the City Municipal Committee, according to sources.

One source described how the USDP uses its special access to state funds. For instance, if a USDP candidate wants to build a road in a ward, a Road Construction Committee consisting of seven influential local residents is formed during a meeting with the appropriate state authorities.

Next, the Ward Peace and Development Council arranges a meeting with the new committee of local residents, who are told to gather the names and support of community members who will vote for USDP candidates. In effect, committee becomes an organizational arm of the USDP at the local level. If 75 percent of the residents living around the proposed road sign up for USDP membership and pledge to support its candidates, the road will be build.

Reports say that the USDP has also collected money from community residents for "labor charges" for road construction. For every 100 feet of road, community members and party members reportedly have to pay 120,000 kyat (\$100) for labor charges.

Many community members are unhappy about forcible recruitment into the USDP and so-called "labor charges," but they can't complain because Ward Peace and Development Council authorities are overwhelmingly loyal USDP members.

For that reason, many forcibly recruited USDP members play along with the process for the betterment of the community.

Mayor Aung Thein Linn, the chairman of the City Municipal Committee, has claimed that 1,050 roads are under construction and 250 roads have been completed by the USDP, according to sources.

He reportedly also said the USDP will build 4,000 roads in the Rangoon area.

All of the campaign activities cited above are in violation of the Political Party Registration Act 12 (A-5) which says a political party shall not be entitled to exist if it is found directly or indirectly using state money, land, housing, buildings or vehicles.

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