

A major opposition party in Burma called on Tuesday for the postponement of the Nov. 7 election in three townships of Arakan State which were devastated by Cyclone Giri.



A fair election could not take place in the affected Myebon, Kyaukphyu and Munanung Townships because of the humanitarian crisis there, said Dr. Aye Maung, chairman of the Rakhine National Development Party.

His party is the only opposition ethnic party in the region competing with junta's proxy Union Solidarity and Development Party and another pro-regime party, the National Unity Party. It is contesting for 44 seats nationwide, including 11 in the three Arakan State townships where he is appealing for a postponement of voting.

"Villages were destroyed and whole houses were carried away in the winds," said Aye Maung. "People have no place to live and no food to eat. So how can people there participate in the elections just a few days from now? It is totally impossible for a fair election to take place as scheduled."

Aye Maung said he would send a letter to the Election Commission on Wednesday requesting a postponement of the election in the three townships, citing an election law allowing for elections to be either delayed or canceled in areas affected by natural disasters.

Thu Wai, chairman of the Democratic Party (Myanmar), said he would support the appeal for a postponement. "The election should not take place in those affected areas because we heard many people died there."

Cyclone Giri, a category 4 high-risk storm, has claimed the lives of at least 84 people in Arakan State, and the toll is expected to rise in the days ahead.

The cyclone came just two weeks before the country's first elections in 20 years and was the worst natural disaster the country has suffered since Cyclone Nargis killed over 130,000 in Irrawaddy Delta in 2008.

Coincidentally, Cyclone Nargis also came just a few days ahead of the 2008 constitutional referendum. The regime postponed the referendum in the cyclone-hit areas for two weeks and later claimed that the Constitution was endorsed by an overwhelming majority of the Burmese population.

“We already had the Nargis Constitution. Now we are going to have the Giri election to legitimize that unfair constitution,” a dissident in Rangoon said.