

Political parties contesting the Nov. 7 election in Burma need sufficient monitors to ensure transparency, the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) said on Tuesday.

Election regulations permit the contesting parties to send two monitors to each polling station. But some opposition parties and individual candidates say they are having difficulty recruiting enough monitors. International observers are banned.

“The eyes and ears of the international community are the political parties themselves and their agents,” said senior political analyst B.D. Prakash.

Prakash said it was important for the competing parties to have monitors in at least the most important polling stations to observe whether election officials were performing their tasks efficiently. In some parts of the country, however, election officials lacked training and some hadn't even read the instruction manual, Prakash said.

“If poll officers don't know how to count and conduct the election properly according to the guidelines then there could be a chance of cheating,” he said.

ANFREL, based in Bangkok, is a nongovernmental agency formed in 1997 as Asia's first regional network of civil society organizations.

A leading Democratic Party official said most candidates were having problems engaging monitors. “The authorities can say all the votes went to the USDP [Union Solidarity and Development Party] and NUP if the other parties have no monitors present,” said Cho Cho Kyaw Nyein.

Independent candidate Kaung Myint Htut, who will challenge Rangoon Mayor Aung Thein Lin, a leading USDP member, said he had experienced problems recruiting monitors within the set time-limit.

He said that when he presented his list of about 70 monitors on October 31 he was at first told he had missed the deadline. But Election Commission officials had later relented and he had been able to register his monitors, who would observe the voting in South Okkarpa Township, where there are 203 polling stations.

Parties were reluctant to share monitors, Kaung Myint Htut said. “If I win by a landslide my problems are over, but I have to be worried if it's neck and neck.”

Ye Tun, leader of the 88 Generation Student Youths (Union of Myanmar) Party, said his party was also reluctant to rely on the monitors of other parties. “I don't believe them,” he said.

Nay Myo Wai, the leader of the Peace and Diversity Party said one of its two allotted monitors per polling station would observe the voting and the other would join the sub election commission as a community elder.

About 44 members of the National Democracy Front (NDF) will serve as monitors in Sanchaung

Township where there are 55 polling stations, said an NDF leader, Soe Win.

Aye Maung, chairman of the Rakhine (Arakan) Nationalities Development Party, said his party would make post-election surveys in the constituencies where it was competing.