



Early this month, six pro-democracy parties formed a political alliance to win the election and to work together in parliament. However, a few days after its formation, the alliance was shaken by a dispute over a donation to the National Democratic Force (NDF), the leading democratic party. The Myanmar Post, a local journal, reported that Hla Maung Shwe, a Rangoon-based businessman who is close to the ruling generals and an executive board member of the Union Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI), gave financial support to some candidates who will run under the flag of the NDF.

Htet Aung, chief reporter of The Irrawaddy's election desk, interviewed Dr. Than Nyein, the chairman of the NDF, about the donation and the resignation of Party for Democracy and Peace (PDP). □

He also interviewed Aung Than, the chairman of the PDP and a supreme court lawyer, about the PDP's resignation from the alliance.

Interview with Dr Than Nyein:

Question: *According to the Political Party Registration Law, parties are allowed to receive donations from individual citizens or organizations and to set up a business of their own in order to raise party funds. Why did the dispute over the money that your party received from a businessman occur?*

Dr Than Nyein: A party can operate its activities only if they have funds. We received the money in accord with the law issued by the Election Commission. We can't do anything which is outside the legal framework. In this case, only those who criticized us will know why they targeted us.

Q: *Taking the example of elections in Burma and in the world, an election-related financial dispute among political parties usually happens only after the election. What do you think of the timing?*

A: [Laughing] If it's a real problem that needs to be tackled, we don't hesitate to do it. But we don't need to solve it if someone is just trying to make trouble for us on purpose.

Q: *Hla Maung Shwe is a businessman widely known as having a close relation with the ruling generals, as well as one of the founders of Myanmar Egress, a social organization working in the field of education. What do you think his intention was when he talked to the media about his financial support of political parties?*

A: He wrote a personal letter to apologize to us for what happened. In the letter, he explained that he didn't give an interview to the Myanmar Post regarding his financial support, but he did talk to one of his friends about that. The journal got this information through his friend. Therefore, we don't think that he had any intention to harm our party.

Q: *Aung Than, the chairman of Party for Democracy and Peace (PDP), said the reason their party resigned from the six-party alliance is that from the legal point of view, the NDF can't accept the money from Hla Maung Shwe who currently has a position in the UMFCCI, which is a junta's institution, and it [the donation] can't be in accord with the law. How do you respond to that?*

A: The candidates that Hla Maung Shwe helped are less than five, and as far as I know, there may be two or three candidates [who received money from him]. In fact, he helped only a few candidates who are friendly with him. We can't bar our candidates from receiving such financial support. However, we didn't know about that in advance. Regarding the issue that U Hla Maung Shwe has a relation with the junta and has a position in a government institution, it is better to ask him directly and for me not to answer on his behalf.

We tried to increase our strength through an alliance of the democratic parties that have a vision that we can do work together for the betterment of the country. We took the responsibility to explain what we were doing honestly. The PDP secretary attended the meeting in which we explained the dispute to the alliance members. After accepting our explanation, the PDP secretary himself gave an interview to the media, saying that it was just a [his party's] concern. But later, the party changed its mind and sent us a letter of resignation from the alliance. It is up to them, but we will continue to work for the unity of the democratic forces in the future.

Q: The current five-party alliance will contest the election in about 220 seats, or nearly one-third of the total 664 seats of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (a combination of the upper and lower assemblies). Do you see any effort to weaken the democratic alliance through the financial donation?

A: At this time, we see no indications of efforts to weaken our alliance. But we want to avoid such cases in the future.

Q: *Do you plan to expand the alliance membership from the current five parties?*

A: We have ongoing discussions. Currently, as the election is so close, we are busy with election campaigns, but in the post-election period we will continue to work at forming a democratic alliance in parliament.

Interview with Aung Than:



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