

The National Unity Party, a spin-off of the former Burmese Socialist Programme Party, is interviewed by *The Irrawaddy* on the upcoming national election.

The National Unity Party (NUP) has applied to the Election Commission for registration as a political party. The Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP)—which was established by late dictator Ne Win in 1962 and controlled the country under one-party for 26 years—changed its name to the NUP in 1988, following a nationwide uprising led by students. The NUP won 19 constituencies in the 1990 general election. The Irrawaddy correspondent Saw Yan Naing interviewed Han Shwe, central executive member of the NUP, on the current political situation.



Question: *When did your party register with the Election Commission?*

Answer: We sent in our application on March 29th. According to the existing laws, when the Election Commission allows our party to stand as political party, we will be recognized as a legal political party. That is second step. We have shown that we are willing to work as political party within the given time period of 60 days [in which to register].

Q: *How many constituencies will your party contest?*

A: There are three different ways of contesting. In the Lower House, there are 330 seats and 168 seats in the Upper House. For division and state levels, there are two constituencies per township. In Burma, we have more than 300 townships. So there will be more than 600 seats at the division and state level. Totally, more than 1,000 representatives will be elected.

We would like to contest in all constituencies, but we may not be able to contest for all seats. We will contest in those townships where the situation is favorable to us. I can tell that we will be able to contest in many townships. At the moment, we are collecting data on various townships. I reckon that we will be able to contest in more than 200 constituencies. For each of the assemblies, we will contest in half of the constituencies.

Q: *How will you campaign in these constituencies?*

A: We have finalized our party's manifesto. For election campaign activities, we will officially release our plan when the time comes.

Q: *Do you have sufficient funds for your party? How do you seek funding?*

A: According to the law, every candidate has to deposit 500,000 kyat (US \$500). It's a lot of money. We want clean money for our party's funds. So we are legally seeking funds as much as possible. Our party members pay membership fees every month. We are also publishing some printed material for fund raising. Financially, we are likely to rely on those funding sources. By using a combination of donations from concerned persons and the party's current existing funds, we hope that we are able to tackle those financial matters.

Q: *What do you mean concerned persons? Are they party members? Or business people?*

A: Any person who trusts our party can donate money for our funds. It depends largely on our members. Many business people are our party members too. For the time being, we haven't announced which are our constituencies. We have to wait for legal instruction and the rules and

regulations. After that I can tell more precisely.

Q: *Have you written your party platform yet?*

A: We have had our own party platform since 1988. It is still valid.

Q: *What's the party's political platform?*

A: We are decedents of the Burma Socialist Program Party. In 1988, when we formed the NUP, we had to change our political platform according to the multi-party democratic system. In those old days, we had only a one-party system. Generally, our political platform is structured for the benefit of the majority of the population. Our practical approach is based on a middle way. In 1992-1993, we published and distributed books which reflected our political platform both in Burmese and English.

Q: *What does the party flag look like?*

A: The color of the flag is red with three white stars resting on the left-top corner.

Q: *Who are the leaders of your party, and how many members do you have?*

A: Our party leader is U Htun Yee. The general-secretary is U Than Tin. The joint general-secretary is U Khin Maung Gyi. We have 23 central executive members. During the time of the BSPP, we had 3 million members countrywide. In the 1990 election, we had about 500,000 members.

Q: *Do you have confidence that you will do well in this election?*

A: Yes, we believe we will win in this election. That's why we registered.