

The Irrawaddy recently interviewed Dr. Than Nyein, a former leader of the now-defunct NLD who will lead a small group of other former NLD leaders to found a new political party and contest the election.

The Irrawaddy recently interviewed Dr. Than Nyein, formerly a leading member of Burma's main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), which was dissolved by the junta on Thursday for failing to register for the upcoming election.

Than Nyein, 73, and a group of former NLD leaders have announced that they will soon form a new political party, named the National Democratic Force (NDF), to contest Burma's first parliamentary election in 20 years. He was in sharp disagreement with the NLD's decision to boycott the polls, and shares the view with his NDF co-founders that the democratic struggle is not possible without a political party.



Prior to the military coup in 1962, Than Nyein was a student activist. He re-entered the political arena when he joined the NLD in 1988. He was arrested in 1997 for his political activities and jailed until his release in 2008.

Question: *What is the motive behind the founding of the National Democratic Force? Does it mean that you've walked away from opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi?*

Answer: I don't think this conclusion can be assumed. It is she who failed to take action [by her opposition to the NLD registering as a political party and contesting the election]. Anyway, we must try to understand her position because she is internationally recognized as the opposition leader of Burma. We still have a high regard for her. If she said she wants to cooperate with us after she is released, we would welcome her. But instead of just sitting down and doing nothing in the days ahead, we formed a new party because we feel responsible for the people.

Q: *Can you win public support without the leadership of Suu Kyi, especially given that she has opposed this election as unjust and unfair?*

A: We are not a parallel organization to the National League for Democracy [now defunct], and we never opposed Daw Suu before. We desire Daw Suu's participation and support, and our intention is not to go against her. But even though the NLD party no longer exists, politics still continues, and the people need a political party to solve political and economic issues in the future.

Q: *The 2008 Constitution already guarantees the military a quarter of the seats in the future parliament. Now that the regime's prime minister has formed a political party and will contest the election, thus taking more parliamentary seats as military officers in civilian disguise, what do you think your party can accomplish in this environment?*

A: So far, it is hard to say to what extent we can maneuver under this political scenario. We have to wait and see. Regarding the prime minister forming his own party and contesting the polls, we can possibly deduct that that party is under the military influence, but we cannot say point-blank that it is the military's political party. Anyway, we are pinning our hopes on the public perception of us. The public will decide based on what we did in the past. We are not thinking that we will get democracy following the elections. But we cannot afford to stop. We have to continue our politics under the changing circumstances.

Q: *Given the huge financial needs of any political party that wishes to field candidates nationwide, how many constituencies will the NDF be able to contest in the election? Do you foresee any plan to form alliances with other political parties to be able to compete with the current prime minister's USDP party?*

A: We haven't made any decision about that. We will soon contact former NLD members across the country and inform them about the formation of our new party. Depending on their response, we will make our party's decisions, because we cannot say that the NLD decision not to join the elections reflected the views of all its party members. As for working with other political parties, we will not rush to ally with them. We have to observe the situation in coming weeks.