

The Burmese Election Commission has yet to approve the Kachin State Progressive Party (KSPP) to contest in the election. Irrawaddy correspondent Ko Htwe interviews KSPP leader Dr. Manan Tuja.



***The Kachin State Progressive Party (KSPP), based in Myitkyina in Kachin State, was founded in March 2009. The KSPP has applied to register at the Union Election Commission (EC) to contest the election in Burma, which is scheduled for later this year. However, the EC has yet to approve its registration. Some former leaders of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), an armed organization that has had cease-fire agreement with the military regime, are involved in the KSPP. Ko Htwe, an Irrawaddy correspondent, interviewed KSPP leader Dr. Manan Tuja, a former KIO vice chairman, on why his party's registration has not been approved by the EC.***

**Question:** The KSPP has applied for party registration but the EC has yet to respond. What do you think about this?

**Answer:** We are still waiting for the EC's approval. We were asked to wait.

**Q:** Have you thought about what you will do if your party's registration is rejected?

**A:** We have yet to think about that because we are certain that our registration will be approved. The regime's leaders told us to wait for a moment. We are working sincerely so I don't think there will be any reason to refuse us. I think authorities will equally consider the applications of different ethnic groups and that we won't be left out alone. That's why we are still waiting to hear from the EC with our utmost hope.

**Q:** We have heard people say that the delay in the EC's approval of the KSPP's registration is related to the connection between the KSPP and the KIO. Do you have any opinion on that?

**A:** It is groundless. People just speculate. I am not sure if some of the regime's leaders believe it as well. For us, it is not a cogent criticism that we have a connection with the KIO. The KSPP was founded in accordance with the law. We know we can't form a political party if we don't follow the law. So, we have nothing to do with the KIO. And we can't. We have no connection. People just come up with different opinions on our relations with the KIO. There may be some people who are opposed to our registration. Who knows, there may be those who are trying to make the authorities suspicious about us. At the end of the day, I think the authorities will understand.

I feel like something that shouldn't have happened in the first place is now happening. Anyway, we have to be patient and wait. There are many people with good hearts in the EC and the regime, who I believe are sympathetic with us. I think they will do as much as they can for us to be able to move forward in the very near future.

**Q:** Most of the political parties that have not been approved by the EC are Kachin parties. Why do you think the EC has restricted those parties?

**A:** As far as we have heard, the EC's restrictions are somehow related to the transformation of the KIO to become a border guard force (BGF) under the command of the regime, and if that plan goes well we all will be approved. The KIO is doing its job, and we are doing what we have to do. We are not quite pleased with the fact that the KIO's transformation pertains to our party registration. According to what the KIO has agreed, it will accept the transformation plan and take care of the process by itself. So, I believe the KIO will act accordingly. This alleged relations between the KSPP and the KIO really affects our party, our supporters and local people.

**Q:** You mean your party will be approved by the EC only after the KIO has become a BGF?

**A:** If we have to wait for the KIO's transformation it may take a long time. It could take the KIO many months to realize that plan. Anyway, when the level of trust increases and the regime can believe that the KIO is actually transforming then it's attitude toward our party could also be changed.

**Q:** Most of the parties that have applied at the EC have now been approved. Some parties have even begun their activities already. As for the KSPP, it will not have much time for campaigning simply because of the late approval. What have you arranged to implement during the short campaign period?

**A:** Of course, we will only have a little time to campaign. It is beyond our control. We can't do anything about it. We will try our best to implement our campaign activities within the given time.