

Upset by criticism over inconsistency with its own election law, the junta censors reporting on the Union Solidarity Development Party.

Burma's censorship board is keeping a tight control on reporting in private journals about the junta's Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) led by Prime Minister Thein Sein.

Journalists in Rangoon said the censorship board, the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division under the Ministry of Information, does not allow any questioning on the controversial formation of the USDP, which was formed directly from the state mass organization, the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA).



“Any critical questions on the formation of the USDP in journals have been removed by the censorship board,” said an editor with a Rangoon journal who requested anonymity, “But all positive writing is allowed.”

“Indirect mention or quotes in journals that contrast the formation of the USDP under Prime Minister Thein Sein with the election law have been taken out,” he said, adding that journals had published news related to the USDP on both front and inside pages this week.

However, journalists in Rangoon said reporting that the USDP is the prime minister's party was

not allowed in front page reporting. The censorship board also removed any comments about the 2008 Constitution clause that bans government officials' involvement in political parties.

Thein Sein's formation of a political party is controversial because analysts say he broke the junta's own Political Party Registration Law's chapter 4 (D) and chapter 7 (D), which bar government officials from forming political parties and using government property.

Political observers in Rangoon said the junta could practice double standards regardless, and some government sources argue that Thein Sein and other ministers are no longer government officials because they have resigned their military commissions and only play a political role.

Three days before the USDP applied to the Union Election Commission under Thein Sein's leadership on April 29, the war office announced his retirement and that of 22 other military officials.

Despite the controversy over the junta's USDP, the election commission approved its application along with nine other parties on Tuesday, according to an announcement in state-run-newspapers on Wednesday.

"Among the groups that submitted applications to set up political parties, the UEC [Union Election Commission] passed the following parties to set up political parties today as they are found to be in accord with Political Parties Registration Law and Rules," reported *The New Light of Myanmar*

The USDP is expected to contest all constituencies amounting to 75 percent of the total 1,158 seats of the union parliament as well as parliaments of states and divisions in Burma in the coming election later this year.

A quarter of Burma's parliaments will be reserved for military officials appointed by the commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

Thursday is the deadline for the main opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) and other remaining parties in the 1990 elections to prolong their existence by registering their parties with the current election commission.

The international community and Burmese are waiting to see whether the junta will crackdown on the opposition following the deadline for the NLD led by Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, which decided to avoid party registration in late March.

Officials from the Ministry of Information have called local journalists to a press conference in Naypyidaw on Thursday, which could mainly focus on recent bombings in Burma including the New Year festival blast in Rangoon.

The USDP party issue, the fate of the NLD and the junta's other steps toward the election may also be on the press conference agenda.