

Burmese Prime Minister Thein Sein's Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) was approved by the Election Commission to contest in the upcoming general election, the state-run newspaper *The New Light of Myanmar* reported on Tuesday.

Thirty-two of the 33 new parties which have applied for registration have been approved, and the remaining party is under consideration, said the report.

The USDP was founded by Prime Minister Thein Sein along with 26 ministers and senior officials on April 29. All are members of the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), a junta-backed civic group.

The USDA was formed by the Burmese military regime in 1993. It claims to have more than 24 million members across Burma.

On Monday, the USDA pulled down its branch office signs in several townships in Rangoon Division, according to sources.

The removal of the signs was witnessed by residents in at least five townships including Kyauktada, Mingalar Taung Nyunt, Yankin, Ahlone and Tamwe.

There was no official explanation over the removal of the USDA signs. One source in Rangoon, however, said that the association had planned to remove its signs after approval by the Election Commission of the USDP.

According to a recent survey by *The Irrawaddy*, many people believe that the USDP will win a majority of seats in the upcoming election. That view was supported by 418 out of 450 people surveyed; the survey included government workers, military officers, army veterans, university students and civilians.

The majority of people said, however, said the USDP would be unlikely to win if the election were free and fair.

The USDP is now engaged in voting campaigns in many townships that include “incentives” such as lending money, drilling water wells, arranging for citizen ID cards, free tuition classes, and free medical treatment to people who agree to vote for party candidates, according to sources.

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