

Burma's Union Election Commission (EC) imposed a new regulation on Friday that registered political parties can fly their parties' flags only on their own office buildings and headquarters. The EC sent letters to all parties that stated that they have to follow the political registration laws and other government regulations. It also said that a party cannot set up offices in state-run buildings or religious places under the Political Parties Registration Bylaw chapter 3, article 15.

"If we ever get the opportunity to meet with the commission we will have so many questions to ask," said Thu Wai, the chairman of the Rangoon-based Democratic Party, speaking to The Irrawaddy on Monday. "I can only assume that this is a warning for the political parties."

Many observers said that the restrictions were announced following an apparent campaign by the pro-regime Union of Myanmar Federation of National Politics party (UMFNP), which defied election laws by flying flags emblazoned with its logo on cars and motorbikes recently in Rangoon, Mandalay and other cities.

On June 10, a large crowd gathered near Theingyi Market in downtown Rangoon after seeing the political flags of the UMFNP, which feature a peacock symbol similar to that of the National League for Democracy. Rumors spread that an anti-government protest was taking place, but it was turned out to be a peaceful stand-off between members of the party, the police and a crowd of local people.

Phyo Min Thein, the chairman of the Union Democratic Party, said that many streets in Rangoon are covered in flags and banners belonging to the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA). "They said that they are only USDA flags, but we all know the USDA and the USDP [Union Solidarity and Development Party] is the same thing," he said. "They have no right to fly flags or banners. We are looking forward to seeing how this matter is handled."

Approved political parties have to submit party members lists to the EC within 90 days of registration approval.

Under Political Parties Registration Law chapter 2, 5 (f): "Parties planning to run nationwide must have at least 1,000 members, while those contesting the election in a single state or region need a minimum of 500 members. The parties are required to present their lists within 90 days of registration."

Forty-two political parties have applied for party registration, of which 35 have been accepted to date.