

Months after applying for party registration, ethnic Kachin political parties say they have still not received permission from Burma's election commission to contest this year's election, leading some to believe that the Kachin will be excluded from the country's first polls in two decades.



Speaking with The Irrawaddy on Tuesday, Tu Raw, secretary of the Kachin State Progressive Party (KSPP), said: "We feel upset. We feel that we don't get equal rights. There is no equality."

He said that the party applied for registration more than two months ago, before other parties, including other ethnic parties, that have already been granted permission to contest the election.

So far, 33 parties, including ethnic Karen, Mon, Palaung and Pa-O parties, have been allowed to register, out of 36 that applied, according to the state-run New Light of Myanmar newspaper.

Tu Raw said that even if the KSPP is belatedly allowed to register, it would adversely affect the party's ability to campaign, putting it at a disadvantage to other parties.

On June 16, a KSPP delegation went to Naypyidaw to ask the election commission to prioritize the party's application for registration after confirming that permission had not yet been granted.

However, the election commission simply told the delegation that it had not yet reached a decision on the party's registration request.

Some observers in Kachin State said the election commission would probably not grant the KSPP or other Kachin parties permission to contest the election until shortly before it was to take place, in order to prevent them from carrying out campaign-related activities.

Kachin sources also claimed that the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), a junta-backed civic organization, has been actively campaigning in Kachin State on behalf of the newly formed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), led by Burmese Prime Minister Thein Sein, which intends to contest the election.

Lapai Naw Din, editor of the Thailand-based Kachin News Group, said the Burmese regime is worried that the KSPP would win major constituencies in Kachin State if the party had enough time to campaign.

Many sources in Kachin State also said the KSPP would enjoy strong support among the Kachin people, whose only other options are parties dominated by ethnic Burmans.

Some observers said, however, that the delay in granting permission to the KSPP may be due to suspicions that the party is in contact with the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), a cease-fire group that refused to transform its troops into a border guard force.

The KSPP is led by Tu Ja, the former vice chairman of the KIO. He formed the KSPP in March 2009 and officially unveiled the party in July. The party applied for registration in April.

Awng Wa, a Kachin observer on the Sino-Burmese border, said that the Burmese regime may be reluctant to allow NSPP to contest the election because of its connections to the KIO.

In addition to the KSPP, there are two other Kachin-led parties—the United Democracy Party

(Kachin State) (UDPKS) and the Northern Shan State Progressive Party. So far, none of these parties have been given permission to run in the election.

Leaders of the UDPKS are former members of New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K) who resigned from the organization after it decided to transform its troops into a border guard force.

Tu Raw denied that his party had any ties to the KIO. He added that KSPP party leaders have already sent all required documents to the election commission, including resignation letters from the KIO.

“If the election commission links us to the KIO, it is because they don't want to grant permission to our party,” he said. “Or perhaps they are just trying to make trouble for us by giving us insufficient time to prepare for the election.”