

The official seal of the National Democratic Force (NDF), the party founded by former leaders of the National League for Democracy (NLD), has been stirring controversy among many Burmese because it is so similar to the NLD's well-known logo, the *kha mauk*, which is a traditional Burmese farmer's hat.



Led by Burmese pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi in the 1990 election, the NLD sailed to a landslide victory with the symbol of the *kha mauk* visible throughout the country during the campaign.

On Wednesday, Burma's Union Election Commission (EC) placed in state-run-newspapers an announcement which included pictures of the NDF's proposed flag and official seal. According to the black-and-white pictures in the newspapers, the flag has two stars, while the seal portrays a *kha mauk* under two stars—though one is inside the other.

Khin Maung Swe, an NDF leader and former executive member of the NLD, told The Irrawaddy on Wednesday that the flag and seal are the new party's own, and are “not related or anything to do with the NLD's election symbol.”

However, responding to a question on whether voters could confuse the NDF's symbol with that of the NLD, he said, “Yes, they could. People could be confused.”

According to Khin Maung Swe, the traditional Burmese hat, which is triangular and usually

made from palm leaves, was chosen as the party seal because it represents the traditional character of the Burmese people. He said that one star denotes liberation while the other star symbolizes democracy and human rights.

Of the controversy, he said that if people disagree over the party flag and seal, they can complain at the EC office in Naypyidaw.

Several NLD members have voiced opposition to the use of the *kha mauk* symbol.

Ohn Kyaing, an executive member of the NLD, said, “The NDF’s seal is a *kha mauk* under two stars. However, a

*kha mauk*

is a

*kha mauk*

, and it was the recognized logo of the NLD in the last election. In my opinion, they must not cause this kind of confusion among NLD supporters. The

*kha mauk*

is the symbol of the NLD's 1990 victory—and it is also the symbol of the people’s victory.”

Ohn Kyaing said the NLD is yet to decide how to respond to the NDF’s use of the controversial symbol, only saying that a response will come in due course.

Observers outside the NLD-NDF grouping also voiced concerns about the use of the *kha mauk* symbol.

“The *kha mauk* is synonymous with the NLD,” said an editor with a private Rangoon weekly who spoke to The Irrawaddy on condition of anonymity. “People still remember the NLD’s campaign slogans and songs, as well as when so many people were wearing the hat.

“The NDF should not copy the logo,” she said. “In particular, those who have disagreed with the NLD’s policy on the 2010 election must distance themselves from the party.”

Ashin Zawana, an abbot who spent more than 16 years in prison as a political prisoner and who fled to Thailand following his release in late 2009, said the NDF should avoid using any similar signs to the NLD.

“It is kind of tricky,” he said. “A good politician must be honest with voters, not confuse them.”

In May, about 40 Burmese intellectuals sent a letter to the EC complaining about the use of the “fighting peacock” symbol, which is the logo of the Burmese student movements. They claimed it was being used in the flags and seals of two new political parties: the Union of Myanmar Federation of National Politics, and the 88 Generation Student Union of Myanmar, both of which are led by controversial politicians.

“It's not appropriate to use the student movement's flag as the symbol of a political party,” said prominent journalist Ludu Sein Win, a signatory to the letter of complaint in May.