



The United Wa State Army (UWSA), Burma's largest ethnic armed cease-fire group in northern Shan State, will ban political party campaigns in areas under its control, say UWSA leaders.

Speaking to *The Irrawaddy* on Monday, Bawn Thein, an official at UWSA headquarters in Panghsang, said, "Let them [the regime] do their election on their own. It's not our affair. We will not allow any election activities in our area, because we will not participate in the election."

Sources said that army leaders spoke publicly about the ban on campaign activities in their area in late July. The UWSA allowed the Burmese regime to hold a referendum on the Constitution in their area in 2008.

Observers said that UWSA leaders were unhappy about the results of the referendum in which the Burmese junta announced that the referendum received 94 percent support.

The UWSA made a cease-fire agreement with the Burmese junta in 1989. It is based in Panghsang and Mong Pawk, on the China-Burma border and the Thai-Burma border. About 700,000 to 800,000 Wa live in the region.

The ban on campaign activities would affect Wa political parties and the Union Solidarity and Development Party, which is led by the junta's Prime Minister Thein Sein, according to Aung

Kyaw Zaw, a Burmese observer on the Sino-Burmese border.

The Wa region has two political parties, the Wa Democratic Party and the Wa National Unity Party, led by Khun Tun Luu and Philip Kham, respectively.

Khun Tun Luu is the brother-in-law of Lt-Gen Ko Ko (chief of the Bureau of Special Operations 3). He is a former member of the National Unity Party, a pro-junta party.

“Khun Tun Luu may not win in Wa areas because he hasn't invested his life to help the Wa people before,” said Aung Kyaw Zaw.

There are six Wa self-administered areas, according to the 2008 Constitution, that include Ho Pang, Mongma, Panwai, Nahpan, Metman and Pangsang.

Political parties may be limited to campaigning in Ho Pang and Pang Yang townships, which are controlled by the Burmese government.

The UWSA is the first ethnic cease-fire group to announce that it will not allow any political groups to run election campaigns. The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and the New Mon State Party have not made any announcements about campaigning in their areas.

The UWSA has about 25,000 troops. It has refused to transform its army into a border guard force (BGF) under the control of the Burmese regime. The Burmese regime continues to pressure the UWSA and other armed ethnic groups to join the BGF before the election.

Nai Chay Mon, a NMSP spokesperson, said, “It's too early to say anything about a ban on election campaign activities.”

More than 20 ethnic political parties will compete in the election. No date for the election has been announced.

Meanwhile, the Union Election Commission (EC) approved party registration for the Unity and Democracy Party in Kachin State, which supports the junta.

The Kachin Progressive Party, led by Tu Ja, a former KIO vice chairman, is still waiting for approval.