

The chairman of the Chin Progressive Party (CPP) has said his party is unable to focus on the rights of Chin people at the moment because it is too busy concentrating on how to finance its candidates for the upcoming election.

“Unlike the USDP [Union Solidarity and Development Party], we don't have enough money or human resources,” said Hlung Kyae, 65, a former police colonel who retired in 2005. “They have a strong budget and can campaign much more than us.”

Speaking to *The Irrawaddy* on Friday, Hlung Kyae said, “We will field 40 candidates in both the national and regional parliaments, but we face severe budgetary problems—even just paying the candidates' fees to the Election Commission [EC] is a major struggle.”

According to the EC rules, each candidate must pay a fee of 500,000 kyat [US \$500] to contest a seat in the November general election.

The CPP plans to contest the nine townships in Chin State, plus Kalay and Tamu townships in Sagaing Division, where sizeable Chin populations live. Western Burma's mountainous Chin State has a population of some 300,000 to 400,000 people, 85 percent of whom are reportedly faced with food insecurity.

Hlung Kyae said that he expects four political parties to fight out the seats in the state: the junta-backed USDP, the National Unity Party (NUP), the Chin National Party (CNP) and the CPP.

He said he views the Nov. 7 election as an opportunity for change, adding that he does not object to the military reserving 25 percent of the seats in parliament for themselves.

The CPP was formed by 28 committee members composed of retired government staff and businessmen with no previous involvement in politics, he said.

According to a CPP statement, its main policy is to create opportunities in Chin State for peace, health care, education and economic development, as well as promoting equal rights for Chin people within the Union and the right to preserve their natural resources, literature and cultural heritage.

The party chairman said that while traveling around the state during his membership recruitment campaign, he was made aware of the lack of health care, education, food security and adequate roads.

There are no concrete roads in the region, he said, adding that many routes are blocked by landslides in the rainy season.

He said that many Chin people are farmers and are not interested in politics. Some don't even know that there will soon be an election, he said. In order to recruit more support for the CPP, he said his members had approached religious leaders in the community.

CPP has already collected a list of more than 1,000 party members, which it will soon send to the EC in Naypyidaw for verification, he said.

Hlung Kyae said he believes that no party will win by a landslide in the election and that his party will win some of the seats in Chin State.

He said the CPP had held discussions with the CNP on forming an alliance to contest the election.