



Burma's National Unity Party (NUP), with a list of more than 800 candidates, has emerged as the challenger to the regime proxy Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) in the November election.

Party strengths were disclosed on Monday as the Aug. 30 deadline passed for the 42 registered parties to submit their candidate lists. NUP will field over 300 candidates for the national legislature and about 500 for regional parliaments, according to the party sources.

The NUP won 10 seats in the 1990 general election after changing its name in 1988 from the Burmese Socialist Programme Party, which was established by the late dictator Ne Win in 1962 and controlled the country for 26 years.

A leading NUP member, Chit Hlaing, told *The Irrawaddy* on Monday: "I think we have to compete with the USDP because it will compete in most constituencies. Competition make it more meaningful for democracy."

Chit Hlaing will not be standing for election, but he said he would still serve the party in a leading role. "I expect the election to be free and fair," he said.

The November election will be for a total of 1,187 seats—330 in the people's parliament (lower house), 168 in the nationalities parliament (upper house) and 689 in the state and regional parliaments.

However, observers suggested that the NUP lacks popularity among voters as people still remain hostile toward past socialist governments.

Meanwhile the National Democratic Force—led by former members of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy—will field 150 candidates, according to the party.

The Democratic Party (Myanmar) also will compete in 60 constituencies, with party Chairman Thu Wai contesting Mingalar Taung Nyunt Township in Rangoon.

Three of the DP candidates are daughters of well-known former leaders of the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League. Than Than Nu will contest Aung Myay Thar Zan Township in Mandalay Division, Cho Cho Kyaw Nyein will stand for election in Gyobingauk Township in Pago Division and Nay Yi Ba Swe in Rangoon's San Chaung Township.

Veteran politician Thu Wai said the cost of standing as a candidate was preventing many who wished to contest the election, leading to anger and disappointment. Election Commission regulations require candidates to pay a fee of 500,000 kyat [US \$500] to participate in the election.

The high cost of standing as a candidate has prevented Tin Maung Aye, vice-chairman of the Peace and Diversity Party, from joining his party's list of seven contestants. Four will run in Bogalay Township in Irrawaddy Division and three in Rangoon's Mingalardon and Kyeemyindaing Townships. The party had insufficient funds to finance his candidature, Tin Maung Aye said.

Kyi Win, a leader of the National Political Alliance (NPA) complained that the period of time allowed for submitting candidate lists had been too short. The NPA planned to field 20 candidates, he said.

The Union Democratic Party will contest the election with only three candidates—its chairman, vice-chairman and general-secretary, who will stand in the constituencies of Pago Township in Pago Division, and Hlaing Tharyar and Tarmway Townships in Rangoon.