

The Burmese military junta's proxy party for the November election, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), has recently been distributing about 100,000 copies of its weekly party newsletter free of charge to the general public, according to sources in Burma.



“The cost to print 100,000 copies of full-coloured newsletters is a lot,” said a news editor in Rangoon. “It must be at least 4 or 5 million kyat [US \$4,000 – 5,000] per week.”

Led by the military regime's incumbent Prime Minister Thein Sein, the USDP has distributed a campaign brochure called “USDP Weekly Newsletter” since the beginning of September.

The eight-page newsletter features include the USDP's political platform, principles, economic policies and the party's vision of a future government agenda for farmers and blue-collar workers. The newsletter also carries similar articles and statements of propaganda to those that can be read in the state-run press.

“When I read the USDP newsletter I felt as if I was reading the state-run newspapers,” said the Rangoon-based editor. “Things like 'How the State is prospering,' 'All the things the military regime has done for its citizens,' and 'Beware of foreign subordinates.’”

A USDP official from Rangoon's Sanchaung Township told *The Irrawaddy* that the USDP brochures were published and distributed from Naypyidaw, and that the party plans to increase its circulation in the near future.

Several locals in Naypyidaw, however, said there is no private printing press in the town, certainly not one which could print hundreds of thousands of newsletters. They told *The Irrawaddy* they assumed the USDP were using the Ministry of Information's printers.

According to Article 12 (A-5) in Chapter 3 of the regime's Political Parties Registration Law, “a party shall not have the right to subsist as a political party if it obtains and uses directly or indirectly money, land, house, building, vehicle, property owned by the State.”

Other political parties have also published leaflets and newsletters, but only in the range of 500 to 1,000 copies. The parties mostly sell their newsletters for about 500 kyat [\$0.50] each as they can't afford to distribute them free of charge.

Pro-democracy party sources said that due to financial constraints, most political parties can only afford to print one batch of brochures or leaflets.

They said that in addition to "USDP Weekly Newsletter," the USDP plans to publish a monthly newsletter during the pre-election campaign period, as well as a party-owned daily newspaper after the election.

Other publications that have been in circulation include "The Union" by the Union Democratic Party, "Golden Khamauk" by the National Democratic Force, "Ethnic Newsletter" by the National Unity Party, and "White Tiger" by the Shan National Democracy Party.

The Ministry of Information issued an order in March this year stating that if political parties wanted to publish election-related documents and materials they would have to register at the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division and pay a 100,000 kyat [\$100] registration fee and a 500,000 kyat [\$500] "insurance fee" or deposit.