

In an apparent attempt to shed its pro-regime image, the National Unity Party (NUP) announced on Friday that it will try to win the November parliamentary elections without forming an alliance with the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP).



“We are not allied with the USDP. We will compete fairly against them,” said Khin Maung Gyi, the NUP party secretary at a press conference on Friday that marked the 22nd anniversary of the party's foundation.

He announced that his party would field 999 candidates nationwide in the Nov. 7 general election—295 for the Peoples' Parliament, 149 for the Nationalities' Parliament, and 555 for regional parliaments.

According to official data from Burma's Union Election Commission, the NUP is the second largest party contesting the election in terms of numbers of candidates and constituencies, following the USDP which will contest all 1,163 constituencies nationwide.

The NUP is the direct offshoot of late dictator Gen Ne Win's Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). It suffered a heavy defeat to the disbanded National League for Democracy (NLD) in the last election in 1990, winning only 10 seats. Although the NLD won that election by a landslide, the results were never honored by the regime.

Though most of its campaign platform reflects the current regime's policies, NUP officials said that the junta-drafted 2008 Constitution contains elements that they could not entirely accept and would try to amend from within Parliament.

"I wish to request the people of Burma to vote for our party in the interests of our country and peoples," said party chairman Tun Yi, the former deputy prime minister in Ne Win's regime.

As no other party in the election is able to contest more than 300 seats—mostly due to a lack of finances—the NUP and USDP will compete in a two-horse race in several constituencies, including those in Naypyidaw.

Though it remains to be seen how genuinely the two military-aligned parties will campaign against each other, some pro-democracy observers say they are hoping the NUP might serve as a counterbalance to the overwhelming force of the USDP, which is led by Prime Minister Thein Sein and the junta's third- and fourth-ranking officials, Shwe Mann and Tin Aung Myint Oo.

Ex-Col. Win Naung, a USDP candidate in Rangoon, blamed the country's setbacks on the socialist policies of the BSPP, from which the NUP transformed into. He said the USDP is now telling people not to vote for the NUP.

The NUP's anniversary event was attended by 700 party members, local reporters and by police and intelligence officials.

*Irrawaddy correspondents in Rangoon contributed to this article.*