

Burma's election campaign may have officially begun, but the authorities in Mon State will not allow the only Mon party the freedom to campaign publicly and are restricting party events and rallies to private houses and public halls, according to the secretary of the All Mon Region Democracy Party (AMRDP), which is registered to run 34 candidates in seven townships in Mon State at the Nov. 7 general election. "The Election Commission (EC) ordered us to request permission at least a week before we hold an event or rally," said the party secretary, Min Nwe Soe. "We have to provide details about how many people will attend the rally and at what times we intend to hold it.

"They will only allow us to campaign inside a private house, a public hall or in an office," he said. "No one is permitted to stand outside while a campaign event is taking place."

Party members told The Irrawaddy that special branch police infiltrate and follow any election activities in Mon State, and attempt to find out what issues the party leaders discuss at their meetings.

Nai Mang, a member of the AMRDP in Thanbyuzayat Township in Mon State, said, "They turn up at events with a Mon interpreter any time we have a meeting or an election campaign."

Nai Htet Khine, a party member from Mon State capital Moulmein, said, "In some places, they have turned up at houses where events took place and asked the owners what was discussed at the meeting. They intimidate the house owners.

"Our party members are not afraid of the authorities," he added. "But many other people are too scared to welcome us into their homes."

The AMRDP is one of just a handful of parties registered to run in November's election in Mon State. The Democratic Party (Myanmar) and the National Democratic Force are registered to contest a few seats. The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) and the military-aligned National Unity Party (NUP) will contest every constituency in all 10 townships of Mon State.

The AMRDP is registered to contest seven Mon townships after the EC rejected the party's application to run in Rangoon and Tenasserim divisions.

"When the USDP have a rally, they frequently warn people that they should not join the AMRDP," said Min Nwe Soe. "They tell people that if they want to vote for a Mon party they should vote USDP because it has Mon candidates."

The AMRDP was established in March with 15 committee members. Party Chairman Nai Ngwe Thein said that the party's committee are using their own funds to finance the election campaign. The AMRDP has opened several offices in townships across Mon State, but does not have enough funds to run an adequate political campaign, it says. Among its 15 committee members, three are former New Mon State Party (NMSP) members while the others are civil servants, doctors, school teachers, community leaders and a university professor.