

Burma's Union Election Commission (EC) has censored campaign ads submitted by ethnic political parties that make reference to a federal union in Burma, several ethnic leaders have told The Irrawaddy.

The campaign ads—which can be no longer than 15 minutes air time in length—must be submitted to the EC for approval before they are broadcast on radio or TV.

Nai Ngwe Thein, the party chairman of the All Mon Regions Democracy Party (AMRDP), said, “Two phrases from our script were deleted—“genuine union” and “narrow-minded nationalism.”

He said he believes the Burmese junta disapproves of federalism and is censoring any mention of it.

A representative of the Shan Nationals Democratic Party (SNDP) said that six sentences from the party's campaign script, which referred to the the 1947 Panglong Agreement, were deleted by the EC.

SNDP Secretary Sai Hla Kyaw said, “They deleted the words 'Panglong Agreement,' which was signed in 1947 by ethnic and Burman leaders, and proposed a multi-ethnic union with equal rights for ethnic minority groups.

“We want to tell our people about the Panglong Agreement,” he added. “But the regime will not let us.”

Each of the 37 political parties approved by the EC to contest the Nov. 7 election are allowed one 15-minute advertisement on state-run radio and television, but must submit the script for their campaign ad to the EC for approval seven days before broadcasting.

Political parties whose ads are rejected may revise them and resubmit them, but must submit them in person at the EC headquarters in Naypyidaw, which the ethnic leaders say is costly and time-consuming.

“It takes a lot of time to write a campaign ad,” said Sai Hla Kyaw. “We take care not to write anything inflammatory or anything we suspect the EC will censor. If our ad is rejected and we have to submit it a second time, it means a long trip to Napyidaw. It is too far for us.”

Thu Wai, the chairman of the Democratic Party (Myanmar), confirmed that his party's election campaign ad was rejected by the EC in the second week of September, and that the party had until Sept. 23 to submit a revised script to the EC in Naypyidaw, but was unable to comply.

Burma state-run television and radio started broadcasting party campaign ads on Sept. 26. Ads for two ethnic political parties, the AMRDP and the Taaung (Pa Laung) National Party, were broadcast on TV on Wednesday.