

RANGOON — In conducting its campaign activities, the junta's proxy party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), is paving roads and digging wells using state funds and property—according to a recent briefing to local media by the Rangoon mayor.

With the help of the Rangoon municipality, the USDP is paving roads and bridges in suburbs of Rangoon, according to Rangoon Mayor Aung Thein Lin, who is also a USDP central executive member, speaking to local media in late September.

“The USDP is paving roads and digging wells,” he said. “It opens free clinics and builds so many schools. It also provides low-interest loans to poor people.”



“It daily requires 6,000 to 7,000 bags of cement to pave a road,” he said.

He said that the cement is made in factories owned by the Rangoon municipality.

Aimed at garnering votes for the USDP in the November elections, such campaign activities are believed to be financed by the state itself despite the Political Parties Registration Law which prohibits political parties from the direct or indirect use of state money and property.

“Political parties must complain about the USDP violations of election laws to the Election Commission,” said a veteran journalist in Rangoon on condition of anonymity.

While Mayor Aung Thein Lin claimed during the briefing that the USDP's “welfare” activities are free of charge, there were also reports by locals that they were asked to contribute financially to these activities.

“Our ward had to pay 360,000 Kyat (US \$360) for the USDP paving a road,” said a local official in Rangoon's Kamaryut Township. “USDP members also had to chip in.”

The USDP was directly transformed as a political party from a regime-sponsored civic organization, the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA). After the USDA was “abolished” in July, it transferred all its assets to to the USDP, which is led by Prime Minister Thein Sein.

Meanwhile, many political parties are unable to conduct effective canvassing due to a lack of funds and strict, cumbersome rules imposed by the regime-appointed Election Commission.

However, it appears that senior USDP officials who hold government positions are doing rigorous election campaigning under the guise of performing their government responsibilities.

The state-controlled media recently gave special coverage of Prime Minister Thein Sein attending the opening ceremony of a hospital and a youth training school in the cyclone-hit area of Laputta Township.

In the absence of the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), which has been disbanded for failing to register in the coming election, the USDP is widely expected to win a landslide victory.