

One of Japan's leading dailies, citing a Burmese military source, says this year's election is slated to take place on October 10.

Burma's ruling junta will likely hold its long-awaited election in October and announce electoral and party laws in April, according to a report by a leading Japanese newspaper on Thursday.

The *Asahi Shimbun*, citing a Burmese military government source, reported that the election will be held on Oct.10. The newspaper also reported that the junta-backed mass organization, the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), and former military officers will form two or three proxy parties in April ahead of the six-month campaign period.

A USDA source contacted by *The Irrawaddy* could not confirm the dates mentioned in the report, saying that the group is still waiting for the junta to officially announce the election date.

"Except for the head of the state, no one knows the date," he said, referring to junta head Snr-Gen Than Shwe.

"The USDA is in a good position. It is almost ready for the election," the source said, adding that the group has already made a list of candidates for pro-government parties.

According to USDA sources, officials of the organization have been planning since August 2008 to form proxy parties with respected local people, businessmen and former military officers. One of the newly formed parties will reportedly be named the "National Prosperity Party."

Others who may take part in the election include former student activists who are well connected with the ruling generals, as well as veteran politicians and relatives of cabinet members who served in the administration of U Nu, Burma's first and last democratically elected post-independence prime minister.

Although parties cannot legally be formed before the electoral law is announced, veteran politician Thu Wai has already formed the Democratic Party with the children of former ministers from the U Nu era.

Speaking to *The Irrawaddy*, Thu Wai said that the election is a kind of military tactic that will allow the junta to withdraw from the front line. “So we, civilian politicians, should prepare to systematically take over their places,” he said.

However, the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, has not yet announced whether it will join the election.

NLD sources said the party's most urgent task is to reorganize itself before the elections.

According to government staffers, since late 2009, senior officials have been ordering public servants to prepare for the election to take place sometime between May and October. International non-government organizations have reportedly been told by the authorities to stop their operations in the country during this period.

“The government and the USDA have been preparing for the election for at least one and a half years, secretly nominating candidates for future pro-government parties,” said Aye Thar Aung, an Arakanese leader and the secretary of the Committee Representing the People’s Parliament, an umbrella opposition organization.

Some observers in Burma said the Oct. 10 date provided by the *Asahi* source was plausible, given the junta's superstitious attachment to auspicious numbers. By setting the election on the 10th day of the 10th month of the 10th year, the regime may believe that it will improve its chances of victory.

Traditionally, however, the junta has regarded nine as its luckiest number. When it seized power in 1988, it chose Sept. 18 as the day to launch its coup (18 is significant because it is a multiple of 9). Similarly, the last election held in the country took place on May 27, 1990.

Moreover, all three dates—Sept. 18, 1988, May 27, 1990 and Oct. 10, 2010—fall on Sundays.

“The generals are crazy about numbers and astrology, so you can't totally dismiss the possibility that the junta has decided to hold the elections on Oct. 10,” said an editor with a private journal in Rangoon.