

In the latest sign that this year's vote will be neither free nor fair, Burma's ruling junta has ordered censors to ban reports on new election laws and other controversial election-related issues, according to Rangoon-based journalists.



“Soon after the election laws were announced, we interviewed members of various political parties to get their views on this subject,” said the chief editor of one Rangoon-based journal. “But when we submitted our reports to the censor board, we were told we couldn't publish them.”

Besides the recently announced election laws, the journals are also forbidden to report on the situation of the opposition National League for Democracy, which faces dissolution if it refuses to expel its leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

“Except for 'optimistic' news that is identical to what we can find in the state-run newspapers, we are not permitted to write anything about the election,” the editor said.

“There are pro-government parties and opposition parties. We can't say it's fair if the regime only allows us to report on what the pro-government parties are saying,” said a Rangoon-based reporter.

According to sources in Rangoon, a special body has been formed to oversee the work of the Press Scrutiny Board during the election period. The censor board must now submit draft publications to a “special security force” consisting of high-ranking officials, including Lt-Gen Myint Swe, who is close to junta head Sen-Gen Than Shwe.

Most of the private weekly journals in Rangoon, including *The Myanmar Times*, *Biweekly Eleven*, *Modern* and *7 Day News*, have had articles pulled by the censor board because they touched on sensitive issues related to the election, sources said.