

Burma's Election Commission has begun an education campaign on voting less than two weeks before the election, featuring videos on state-run MRTV, but one of the messages does not conform to its own electoral law in defining “advance [early] voters.”

The video footage includes key points of the electoral law that voters should know in advance before the election.

The video defines seven types of people who have the right to cast advance (early) votes: (a) military personnel and their families who live together, (b) students, (c) trainees and (d) other voters who are away from their constituency, (e) detainees, (f) in-patients in a hospital and (g) the people who are living abroad with the permission of the junta.

At first sight, the definitions seem to conform with the electoral law. However, a careful review reveals that one definition carries a large error. In the military personnel category (a), the election commission dropped the wording “on duty who are away from their respective constituency” and added the information about their families.

The change clearly violates Article 45 (a) of the Pyithu Hluttaw (People's Assembly) Electoral Law, which reads: “The respective Township Sub-commission shall arrange for the Defense Services personnel, students, trainees, detainees, in-patients in a hospital and persons on duty who are away from the respective constituency to enable them to vote with advance ballots for their respective constituency [[sic].”

According to the earlier published electoral law, only active duty military personnel serving outside of their own constituency on Election Day are entitled to vote early.

For the families of military personnel, nothing in the electoral law entitles them to vote early. As ordinary citizens, they only have the right to vote early if they are away from the respective constituency, detainees in prisons or in-patients at the hospitals, etc.

The Irrawaddy tried to contact EC officials in Naypyidaw to clarify why the commission's video instructions to the public differed from the published Election Law, but no responsible official was available for comment.

This discrepancy raises the question of whether the vast majority of the 450,000 military personnel and their families will be allowed to vote early.

Leaders of the National Democratic Force (NDF) and Democratic Party (Myanmar) said that they were not aware of the differences.

"I do agree that it is not in conformity with the electoral law," said Thu Wai, the chairman of the Democratic Party (Myanmar).

On other campaign issues, Thu Wai said that he will write a protest letter to the EC regarding violations of the election laws by the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP ) in their campaigns.

"Now, the USDP is speeding up its activities to collect early votes with the help of the local authorities," said Thu Wai. "Why don't they allow the citizens to go and cast their votes in the polling station on election day?"

Sources say that commanders of military battalions are collecting early votes from their subordinates and their families before the election. Military officials will make sure that the early votes go to the USDP candidates, said sources.

Meanwhile, USDP candidates are unopposed in 52 out of 54 constituencies, meaning their candidate will be automatically declared the winner.

Article 41 (a) of the People's Assembly Electoral Law reads: "If there is only a single Hluttaw candidate in a constituency, election for such constituency shall not be held, and the relevant

Region or State Sub-commission shall declare such candidate to be the Hluttaw representative.”