

RANGOON — Election authorities in military-ruled Burma canceled voting in Sunday's elections in more areas where restive ethnic minorities are dominant.

The Union Election Commission canceled balloting in the Nov. 7 elections in 12 more village tracts in six constituencies in Karenni state "as conditions are not conducive to holding a free and fair election," according to an official notice seen Tuesday. Each tract comprises several villages.

The announcement in the official gazette gave no further explanation for the action, but exile Burma media have reported recent clashes between ethnic Karenni groups and government troops in Karenni state.

The commission in September announced the cancellation of voting in about 300 village tracts in 33 townships where restive ethnic minorities are dominant. The move is believed to have disenfranchised about 1.5 million people in more than 3,400 villages, though official numbers are not available.

The September announcement was the first sign from the government that the country's first elections in two decades may not go as smoothly as desired, despite the junta's tight control over their organization and rules. Pro-democracy groups, as well as Western nations and human rights organizations, have already criticized the elections as unfair and undemocratic.

The announcement said the elections had been canceled in several townships in Kachin, Karenni, Karen, Mon and Shan states, including four townships in the Wa self-administered division.

Ethnic groups in those areas, which are mostly along the eastern and northern borders, disagree with the ruling junta over its insistence that they integrate their semiautonomous security forces into the government's border guard forces.

Many of the groups have sought more autonomy since Burma's independence in 1948, and the government maintains uneasy cease-fires with them.