

The lone candidate challenging Burma's Prime Minister Thein Sein, the chairman of the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), for parliament in his Zabbu Thiri Township constituency in Naypyidaw was allegedly injured in a suspicious motorcycle incident on Oct. 29.

The accident, which occurred in Pyinmana Township in Mandalay Division, was deliberately meant to injure or kill 70-year-old Kyaw Aye, the candidate representing the National Unity Party (NUP), according to NUP party members. He sustained minor injuries to his legs and head after being struck from behind while riding on the rear of a motorcycle.

The motorcyclist left the scene and has not been identified, but local residents suspect that he is connected to the USDP. Because of his injuries, Kyaw Aye will not be able to continue campaigning, but has not canceled his participation in the election, said a party member.

The NUP is widely viewed to be pro-regime because it was transformed from the former ruling Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP) led by the late dictator Gen. Ne Win. But in the absence of the National League for Democracy, which is boycotting the polls, and since other pro-democracy parties are unable to field many candidates due to financial constraints, analysts speculate that the NUP might become the opposition party to the USDP.

Top junta officials, including Thein Sein, are running for parliamentary seats as USDP candidates in five sparsely-populated townships in Naypyidaw, with their only opponents being members of the NUP. Pro-democracy parties said that they would not run in those townships since the voters there have been heavily influenced by the regime.

"The NUP members are running there to help create an impression of opposition for the junta officials. Actually, there are not many voters in these townships in Naypyidaw, except Zabbu Thiri where the prime minister is running. So the prime minister's opponent was harassed," said the owner of a restaurant located in a government ministerial building in Naypyidaw.

The NUP is the second largest political party, contesting for 999 parliamentary seats in the election on Sunday. Only the USDP and NUP will be running for seats in ten Naypyidaw constituencies having a population of 600,000 people, and there will be 200 voting centers for the election on Sunday in those constituencies.

The NUP suffered a strong defeat to the disbanded NLD party in the last election in 1990, winning only 10 seats.