

In preparation for the upcoming election, Burmese authorities have tasked 600 schoolteachers in Rangoon Division with the mission of organizing voter lists and inputting the information on computers, according to sources in Rangoon. The schoolteachers were summoned by the authorities on June 9, said one schoolteacher in Rangoon who is participating in the process and who asked for anonymity. They were asked to take lists of eligible voters collected from across the country, organize the lists and place the information on government computers.

The process will take at least two months. The completed voter lists will be sent to the election commission, the schoolteacher said.

According to a report by the Rangoon-based Eleven Media Group, the chairman of the election commission, Thein Soe, held talks with members of the election commission who represent divisions and states about providing election related training and activities in their areas.

The commission members also received demonstrations on and practiced how to operate a polling center, how to set up a polling station and how to perform the voting process. The practice sessions are intended to show international observers and the public that the junta will hold "free and fair elections," according to the Eleven Media Group report.

The Burmese government has not officially announced the election date, but many observers and diplomats say the election is expected to be held in October. The Eleven Media Group report said that Thein Soe will announce the election date after the election preparations are complete.

Most of the schoolteachers involved in organizing and inputting the voter lists are members of the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), a junta-backed civil organization. In Burma, schoolteachers are usually assigned as supervisors and polling center watchers during elections.

The USDA, founded in 1993, claims more than 24 million members nationwide, including schoolteachers, civil service personnel and members of the military.

On April 29, USDA leaders who are also government ministers and senior officials, including Burmese Prime Minister Thein Sein, founded the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) to contest the election.

The USDA and USDP have been criticized by analysts and other political parties for their interconnected leadership, current government positions and ties to the military.

Thus far, 33 political parties that plan to contest the upcoming election have been granted registration permission by the election commission, but the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD) led by pro-democracy advocate Aung San Suu Kyi, decided not to register and was therefore dissolved.

The election will be Burma's first since 1990, when the NLD won a landslide victory but the military junta refused to transfer power.