

The Burmese military junta has been interrogating political prisoners since early June about their opinions of the upcoming election and their intentions for future political activity, according to the families of political prisoners.



Than Than Win, the wife of Shwe Maung, a political prisoner being held in Mandalay Division, told The Irrawaddy that her husband said the special police came to his prison and asked him to give his opinion on the election and tell them whether he will continue his political activity when he gets released.

She said her husband, who was sentenced to six years in prison for his involvement in the 2007 Saffron Revolution, told the special police that, if necessary, he will enter politics again.

Shwe Maung was tortured when he was arrested, and now has a heart condition and back pain. His wife requested that the prison authorities give him a medical examination outside the prison, but the authorities refused.

The family of another political prisoner, Zaw Thet Htwe, also said the police have recently interrogated him. "The police asked Zaw Thet Htwe about his opinion of the election and what he is going to do when he gets outside," they said.

Zaw Thet Htwe is being detained in Taungyi Township, the capital of Shan State. He was chief sports editor at a journal in Rangoon when he was sentenced in 2008 to nine years in prison for helping Cyclone Nargis victims in the Irrawaddy delta.

Ashin Gambira, a prominent monk and leader of the Saffron Revolution, has also been asked the same questions by authorities. Gambira was sentenced to 63 years in prison and is being held in Kalay prison, Sagaing Division.

There are 2,157 political prisoners in Burma, according to the Thailand-based Assistance Association for Political Prisoners-Burma (AAPP). Many of them were arrested in 2007 during the Saffron Revolution.

Many in the international community have called on the junta to release all political prisoners, including pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, before the election to be held late this year—the first election in Burma since 1990.

Although some political observers believe the junta will release a number of political prisoners before the election to improve its credibility with the international community, most believe the junta will release only low-profile political prisoners who won't oppose the junta or the election.