

With the possibility of polls being held in October looking increasingly unlikely, political sources say the junta may push the election date back to December.

The Burmese military junta may extend the date of the election to the end of the year, said political sources based on conversations with election commission officials who had contacted newly formed political parties to invite them to attend the junta's Martyr Day ceremony on Monday.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, a leader of a new political party in Rangoon told *The Irrawaddy* on Thursday that his party learned from election officials that the polls, previously expected to be held in October, are now not expected before December.

"It is now July, less than 90 days from the expected election date of October 10, and all political parties are in the process of collecting members. The circumstances say the election could not be held in October," said the party leader.

Political sources in Rangoon said the lack of activity by the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), led by Prime Minister Thein Sein, also indicates that the election will not be held in October. For example, no USDP signboard has been placed in Burma's biggest cities, including Rangoon and Mandalay.

A businessman in Rangoon who has been nominated by the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) to run as a USDP candidate in the election, told *The Irrawaddy* that the USDP is in the membership organizing stage, adding that he and other candidates have applied for party membership with the USDP.

"People should expect no unusual activity from the USDP at this time, but the mother organization, the USDA, is working on its ongoing community development projects such as road construction and opening libraries across the country," he said.

Diplomats and international observers, including US Senator Jim Webb, had previously predicted October 10 as the election day. But a rumor circulated earlier this month predicting that junta chief Snr-Gen Than Shwe and his top generals had decided to shift the election date from October to an undisclosed date.

Than Shwe and his top generals reportedly held a meeting about the election with military commanders on July 10, said an official source from Napyidaw, citing a military telegraph to regional military commands instructing commanders to arrive in the capital by July 9.

Meanwhile, the Rangoon Division Election Commission held a meeting with new political parties on Wednesday, calling on the parties to attend the Martyr Day event on July 19 and pay respects to independence heroes, including Aung San, father of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who was assassinated 63 years ago.

“At the meeting, officials from the Division Election Commission said they invited 21 political parties based in Rangoon to attend the Martyr Day event. But representatives from only 14 parties showed up at the meeting yesterday,” said a source.

He added that division-level leaders of the the USDP and representatives of the National Democratic Force, a splinter group of the main opposition National League for Democracy, attended the meeting.

“On July 19, political parties will have three minutes to pay their respects to martyrs, following government officials led by Rangoon Mayor U Aung Thein Lynn, family members of martyrs and diplomats,” he said.