

RANGOON—Burma's Election Commission has designated constituencies for the national and regional parliaments, state media announced yesterday, moving a step closer toward the general election promised for sometime this year.



The 440-member House of Representatives will have 330 elected civilians and 110 military representatives, while the 224-member House of Nationalities will seat 168 elected candidates and 56 nominated by the military chief.

The country's ruling junta has yet to announce the date for the polls, the first since 1990 when the party of detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi won a landslide victory but was not allowed to take power.

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party is boycotting the polls because of what it calls unfair and undemocratic election laws. It was disbanded in May because it refused to register.

Suu Kyi has told colleagues she suspects the reason the date for the polls has not yet been set is that "there could be some problems among them", meaning members of the ruling junta.

She made the remark during her meeting with her lawyers on Wednesday at her lakeside house.

She also told her lawyers that rule of law in the military-led Burma is very weak and stressed that no system will work unless there is rule of law.

Nyan Win, one of the lawyers and a spokesman for her NLD party, told reporters that Suu Kyi said the weakness of rule of law is an important issue for all of the country's people, and not just her group.

"No system will work without any rule of law," he quoted her saying.

Several parties which plan to run in the polls are already critical of the official process. Forty political parties have registered to contest the elections, and six others are awaiting approval to run.

The leader of the Democratic Party said that the group complained on Tuesday to the Election Commission that police are intimidating its members.

Police visited party members' homes in Rangoon and asked for personal data and photographs, said Thu Wai, the party's chairman. "This amounts to intimidation. Party members don't want to deal with the police and some members could resign for fear of harassment."

Thu Wai, 77, is a longtime democracy activist and former political prisoner, while the party's executive secretaries include former Prime Minister U Nu's daughter Than Than Nu, former Prime Minister Ba Swe's daughter Nay Yee Ba Swe, and Cho Cho Kyaw Nyein, the daughter of a former deputy prime minister Kyaw Nyein.

Thu Wai said his party sent in a list of over 1,000 members last month as required by the political party registration law and the Election Commission had shared the information with police.

"Special Branch police are applying pressure on political parties that are popular among the public (because) the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party is not faring well," Thu Wai said yesterday.

The chairman of another party, the Union Democratic Party, resigned last week, saying the elections would not be free and fair.

Phyo Min Thein, another former political prisoner, said the junta was restricting campaigning.

He said the Union Solidarity and Development Party was receiving preferential treatment from the Election Commission and that local officials were helping it recruit members, while other political parties faced myriad legal restrictions.