

RANGOON — Burma's first election in two decades will be held Nov. 7, the junta announced Friday, setting the wheels in motion for a long-awaited event that critics have dismissed as a sham designed to cement military rule.

The brief announcement was carried on state TV and radio, marking the first time the junta has given a date for the country's first polls since 1990.

"Multiparty general elections for the country's parliament will be held on Sunday Nov. 7," according to the brief announcement from the Election Commission, which also called on political parties to submit their candidate lists between Aug. 16 and Aug. 30.

Ahead of the polls, the ruling military junta has passed numerous laws and rules criticized by detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and the international community as undemocratic and unfair.

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy is boycotting the polls. It was disbanded in May because it refused to register.

The new laws effectively bar Suu Kyi and other political prisoners — estimated at more than 2,000 — from taking part in the elections.

Tight rules for campaigning bar parties from chanting, marching or saying anything at rallies that could tarnish the country's image.

Renegade members of Suu Kyi's disbanded party have formed a new group, the National Democratic Force, to carry the party's mantle in the vote. Suu Kyi has expressed dissatisfaction through her lawyer with the formation of the new breakaway party.

Suu Kyi's party won a landslide majority in the 1990 election, the result of which was not honored by the junta.