

“Let's go to the polling station!” blares the election campaign jingle on state-run TV and radio since the regime set the general election date.



Opposition political parties contesting the election, however, aren't getting the same degree of encouragement.

The Election Commission called on political parties last week to submit between Aug. 16 and Aug. 30 lists of the candidates they plan to field. Opposition parties complain that, due to the short period allowed for candidate registration and their lack of funding, they will be able to compete for only a limited number of the 498 seats in the national parliament.

The regime's election laws stipulate that if there is only a single candidate in a constituency, then he or she wins the seat—meaning that the junta's proxy parties are guaranteed victory in many constituencies.

Sai Hla Kyaw, a member of the Shan National Democratic Party (SNDP) central executive, said the party will be able to field candidates for 150 seats in 50 constituencies although it had originally planned to compete nationwide.

Sai Hlaw Kyaw said the party had lacked the time to properly check the qualifications of its candidates, nor had it been able yet to prepare its campaign.

The National Democratic Force (NDF) party led by renegade members of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) will be able to contest only in major divisions of Burma, renouncing seats in seven states.

The party has so far assembled a list of 100 candidates who will contest constituencies in Rangoon, Mandalay, Pegu and Magwe divisions, according to NDF political leader Khin Maung Swe.

“Our party is now only one month and six days old,” he said. “How on earth can we find enough money and enough candidates for the election?”

Election rules require payment of a 500,000 kyat (US \$500) fee for each candidate. Parties would need to pay the equivalent of US \$249,000 to the Election Commission if they want to contest all the available seats in the national parliament.

“[There's] not enough money and time, so we cannot contest the election nationwide as we had planned,” said Thein Htay, vice-chairman of the Union Democratic Party (UDP), whose leader Phyo Min Thein recently resigned from the party because he said the election would be neither free nor fair.

Following his resignation, the UDP threatened to pull out of the election if they see signs of foul play by the ruling military in the run-up to the polls.

Leaders of pro-democracy parties in Rangoon, including the NDF, recently discussed the possible formation of an informal alliance to allow them to distribute their candidates in as many constituencies as possible, thus preventing an automatic victory for the regime's proxy parties—estimated to be at least seven—including the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) led by Prime Minister Thein Sein. But that idea has so far not materialized.

“Parties are struggling with their own problems, but I heard that the USDP candidates recently received 100,000,000 kyat (US 100,000) for election activities,” said NDF leader Khin Maung Swe.

Some other party leaders say the election difficulties were not unexpected and that they will only focus on maintaining the existence of their parties and do what they can.

“In a multi-party general election, we will make sure that our party can exist,” said Soe Maung, vice-chairman of the Rangoon-based Democracy and Peace Party, which he said would only contest 20 constituencies.