

Campaigners for the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), the Burmese military regime's proxy party, have been warning Burmese journalists working for foreign media organizations not to photograph or film party members who are out campaigning.

On Sunday, when Thit Sar Hla Htwe from the Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS) and Khin Maung Win from The Associated Press (AP) photographed and filmed USDP representatives campaigning in Tamwe Township in Rangoon, the campaigners reportedly blocked the two journalists and warned them not to record their campaign activities in the future.

Thit Sar Hla Htwe told The Irrawaddy on Tuesday that a leader of the USDP campaigners asked him and Khin Maung Win where they were from and what agency they were working for.

He replied that they worked for TBS and AP, respectively, and after showing their press cards the two journalists were allowed to photograph and film.

“So far, there is no difficulty. But we don’t know what we will face on election day,” said Thit Sar Hla Htwe.

However, a journalist working for another foreign media organization said the dispute between USDP campaigners and the two journalists did take place in Tamwe Township and the journalists returned home because they did not want to challenge the campaigners.

Meanwhile, sources said that some residents of Tamwe Township would not accept campaign leaflets delivered by the USDP members. Others reportedly tore up the leaflets.

Journalists in Rangoon said that Burmese journalists working for foreign media have to be careful in covering events ahead of the election, with some locations being off-limits for any journalist.

Burma’s Election Commission previously announced that no video or photography will be allowed inside or around polling stations on election day.

Rangoon sources reported that some foreign journalists and local Burmese journalists have had difficulty making interview appointments because they are reportedly tracked by Burmese authorities.

In addition, Burmese journalists who work for Burmese news organizations in exile raised concerns that they will not be able to send photographs and video footage before and during the Nov. 7 election because the regime has slowed Internet connections.

On Oct. 20, the global media watchdog Reporters Without Borders ranked Burma in its Press Freedom Index 2010 as one of the ten worst countries in the world to work as a journalist.