

Since the release of the Burmese election laws, political campaigns have begun in Karen State.

Since the release of Burmese election laws, campaigns to increase voters' awareness have begun in Karen State, according to sources.



Among the politicians who are most active is retired Col Saw Khin Soe, a Karen who served under the Burmese army during the colonial era.

He has not yet founded a political party, but he is campaigning to encourage people to vote for candidates who will support the best interests of the Karen people.

Saw Khin Soe is believed to have the trust of the Burmese regime, and he is also well-respected among the Karen people including members of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), according to Karen sources.

He graduated from the Defense Service Academic (4) and once served as a military attache at the Burmese embassy in Tokyo.

Saw Khin Soe, who is in his 60s, and his supporters have conducted campaign activities around Pa-an, the capital of Karen State, including Kawkaireik, Hlaingbwe and Thadaw.

"He is believed to be popular among many Karen people," said a Karen businessman close to the DKBA.

Meanwhile, sources said that Dr Saw Simon Tha, a well-known Karen physician and a peace negotiator between Karen rebel groups and the Burmese regime, reportedly will form a political party to contest the election.

Simon Tha is chairman of the Rangoon-based Karen Development Committee.

Also, other retired Karen politicians are believed to be preparing to contest in the election as candidates, said sources.

Karen groups that are reportedly not interested in contesting the election are Karen breakaway groups such as DKBA, the Karen Peace Force led by Col Thu Mu Heh, the KNU/KNLA Peace Council led by Maj-Gen Htain Maung and a splinter group led by Pado Aung San.

The Burmese regime announced the electoral laws on March 8. The election date has yet to be announced, but observers say it is likely to be around October or November.

Sources said that many Karen at the grassroots level don't have much awareness of the electoral law and so far have shown little interest in the election. Many ordinary Karen say that their daily survival is more important than the election.

Meanwhile, the National Unity Party also has started campaigning in Karen State while members of the Union Solidarity and Development Association, a junta-backed civic group, have reportedly solicited support among Karen by providing loans as part of its campaign to win support.