

Several prominent Karen figures are reportedly busy forming political parties to contest this year's general election, while others are preparing to stand individually. Several prominent Karen figures are reportedly busy forming political parties to contest this year's general election, while others are preparing to stand individually.

Among the planned new parties is the Karen-People Party (KPP), which Karen sources say will be based in Rangoon's Insein Township.

The sources said the party is being formed by Dr Saw Simon Tha, a well-known Karen physician. One of its 15 members said: "We will be contesting the election. Our party will represent all Burma's Karen people."

The KPP will use the Karen national flag as its standard.

The KPP member said the party will register itself within 60 days. It will campaign in areas where many Karen live, such as Irrawaddy, Rangoon and Pegu Divisions and Mon State.

Saw Simon Tha became famous as a peace negotiator between Karen rebel groups and the Burmese regime. In 2004, he arranged peace talks in Rangoon between the Karen National Union, led by the late Gen Saw Bo Mya, and a government delegation led by former Burmese Premier Gen Khin Nyunt.

He is chairman of the Rangoon-based Karen Development Committee.

A "Peace Group" led by Pado Aung San will also contest the general election, according to the Karen sources.

Six other splinter groups, all based in Karen State, including the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), the Karen Peace Force (KPF) led by Col Thu Mu Heh, the KNU/KNLA Peace Council led by Maj-Gen Htain Maung, and a new group led by the late Gen Bo Mya's son Nay Soe Mya have no interest in forming political parties and contesting the election, the sources said.

Karen sources in Rangoon also reported that the pro-junta militia, the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), is also seeking help from influential and well-respected Karen religious leaders to launch a campaign among Karen people for election candidates.

One source close to the DKBA told *The Irrawaddy* on Wednesday that a retired former army colonel, Saw Khin Soe, a well-respected Karen who served in the Burmese armed force during the colonial era, had agreed to campaign in Karen State for the USDA.

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 DKBA. He once served as a military attache at the Burmese embassy in Tokyo.

DKBA sources say that after the election Saw Khin Soe could be given the post of Chief

Minister of Karen State.

The constitution gives the President of the Union the power to appoint chief ministers of the constituent regions or states.

Three Karen political parties were formed at the time of the 1990 election: the Karen State Nationals Organization (KSNO), the Union Karen League, and the Karen National Congress for Democracy. The KSNO won in one constituency in Karen State.

The main Burmese opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD) won in 10 of the 14 constituencies in Karen State. *The Irrawaddy*