



The junta's proxy, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), has started buying votes and intimidating voters in collaboration with government authorities in several parts of the country, according to local sources.

With less than three weeks before the country's first parliamentary election in 20 years, USDP members are now going door to door in townships in Rangoon, Irrawaddy Division and Arakan State, asking people for advanced votes with offers of money and other opportunities in return, say local sources.

Residents in those areas reported the presence of local authorities among the USDA members.

“On Tuesday, the USDP members and authorities asked us if there were any eligible voter in the house. And then they told us to cast an advanced vote for the USDP in return for some financial support,” said a resident of North Dagon Township in Rangoon.

“We don't know how much money they would give to people who agreed to vote for the USDP in advance,” he said. “But they left with a list of voters' names.”

Residents living in blocks 46, 47 and 50 in the township also reported similar USDP tactics in their areas, saying that the accompanying authorities were led by the chairman of the township authority and his deputy.

A Rangoon-based opposition party, the Democratic Party (Myanmar), has sent a complaint to the the regime-appointed election commission about the USDP activities, which it said violated the election law.

According to the election law, anyone who is found to be guilty of threatening, bribing or imposing undue influence on voters can face either a one-year jail sentence or a 100,000 kyat (US \$100) fine, or both.

Observers say it is unlikely that the commission would take any action against the USDP, which

is led by incumbent Prime Minister Thein Sein.

“These were mere complaints. They would go nowhere because the USDP, the local authorities and the election commission are all the same,” said Than Zaw Aung, a Democratic Party (Myanmar) candidate who is contesting for a seat in North Dagon Township.

In other townships in Rangoon, such as South Dagon, East Dagon and Dawbon, local residents said that USDP members and authorities made an offer of 10,000 kyat (US \$10) for a single advanced vote.

“They asked us to give an advance vote to them if we don't plan to go and vote on the polling day,” said a resident of South Dagon Township. “I was upset. So I replied that I would vote for nobody.”

On Sept. 11, authorities in Gwa Township in Arakan State also asked residents to appear in their office and tried to persuade them to vote for the USDP, said local sources.

“We were openly told that we would receive a financial loan if we voted for the USDP,” said a resident in Gwa Township, adding that some local people were also offered free National Registration Cards since many people in Arakan State still do not have legal registration cards and use temporary IDs.

Similar incidents were reported in Chaung Gyi village in Irrawaddy Division. Villagers said that the authorities showed them some names and photos of USDP candidates and asked them to vote for those candidates.

Some villagers said a local official threatened them, saying, “Don't bang your head against the wall. Vote for the people we suggest. You know what will happen if you don't listen to us, because we'll know who you vote for.”

Sources in Rangoon said the USDP election campaigns are now in full swing. Posters bearing the names of its candidates are now seen in the former capital and its campaign ads have appeared in local journals.