

The November 7 election is likely to be ignored in areas controlled by Burma's ceasefire groups, according to ethnic sources.

One of the largest ceasefire groups, the United Wa State Army (UWSA) is expected to ban campaigning in the region it controls, and a UWSA official told The Irrawaddy, "I don't think the election will take place in Wa areas. Nobody here is interested in it."

Large areas of Burma are controlled by the Wa and other groups such as the Karen, Kachin and Mon.

The UWSA controls six areas of Shan State on the Sino-Burmese border. The areas have a combined Wa population of 700,000 to 800,000 people.

Sources in Myitkyina, capital of Kachin State, northern Burma, said that if the Kachin ceasefire group, the Kachin Independence Organization(KIO), rejected the regime demand to join the planned border guard force, polling stations in the state were unlikely to open. If they did, they would probably have to contend with threats, the sources said.

The KIO controls almost the entire Kachin State and claims to have an army of more than 20,000 troops. Its strongholds include the site of its headquarters, Laiza, and Mai Jaya.

Lapai Naw Din, the editor of the Thailand-based Kachin News Group, said the likelihood of the election taking place in the KIO-controlled areas would depend on the KIO's response to the regime's border guard force proposal. The KIO discussed the issue in Laiza last weekend.

A newly formed Kachin party, the Kachin State Progressive Party (KSPP), has applied to the Election Commission for registration and is still waiting for a decision. KSPP head Tu Ja said the party, if registered, would participate in the election in Kachin State with the exception of areas controlled by the KIO.

Sources within the KIO said the ceasefire group felt the upcoming election was irrelevant because there were no political parties it could trust and support, and the National League for Democracy (NLD) would not be participating.

The KIO and Kachin voters largely supported NLD candidates in the 1990 election. The NLD scored a landslide victory, which was never recognized by the military regime.

Meanwhile, Saw Htee Moo, a source close to the Karen ceasefire militia, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), said intimidation would possibly mark the pre-election period because the DKBA was divided.

A large faction from the DKBA's Brigade 5, led by Col. Saw Lah Pwe, also known as Mr. Beard, split from the DKBA in late July because it opposed the border guard force proposal. Another Karen ceasefire group, the KNU/KNLA Peace Council, is also against a border guard force.

"There are many risks," said Saw Htee Moo. "Those who want to destroy the election will do it

anyway. It is not secure.”

Nang Khin Htwe Myint, a Karen female politician who is the chairwoman of the NLD's branch in the Karen State capital of Hpa-an, said cheating and ballot fraud would occur if the election went ahead in areas controlled by the DKBA.

Voters there were ill-informed about the election, she said, “They will just follow what they are told.”

Nang Khin Htwe Myint said members of the government proxy party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), were actively campaigning in Karen State.

The DKBA signed a ceasefire agreement with the Burmese government in 1995. It has six brigades with an estimated 6,000 armed fighters.

In pre-election violence in the Burmese-Thai border area, a bomb exploded and two others were defused last week in southern Karen State's Three Pagodas Pass Township.

Sources close to the ethnic Mon ceasefire militia, the New Mon State Party (NMSP), said that under current conditions there was little chance of the election being held in areas held by the NMSP.