

Several top leaders of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) are likely to form a political party to contest the general election on Nov.7, according to sources close to the DKBA.



The leaders include Thar Htoo Kyaw, who is the chairman of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Organization, the political wing of the DKBA, and educated Karen elders such as Saw Aung Ngwe and Saw Than Myat, the sources said.

“We heard that Thar Htoo Kyaw's party will run in the election,” said one source who added that it appeared that Thar Htoo Kyaw and his colleagues were forming a party because they are now too old to continue armed struggle.

The name of the party is as yet unknown as is the size of its membership. The party has not yet officially applied to the Election Commission to register for the election with the deadline to do so only one week away.

Nang Khin Htwe Myint, a female Karen politician who is the chairperson of the Pa-an-branch of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, said the DKBA party plans to contest seats only in Karen State.

Observers said that Thar Htoo Kyaw's party may win a few constituencies in Karen State, especially in constituencies where the DKBA is strong, such as Myawaddy, Myaing Gyi Nyu, Kawkareik and Kyar Aye Seint Kyi townships.

They also claimed that the Burmese regime has given a green light for the DKBA leaders to form the party as part of a deal resulting from the DKBA acceding on Aug. 20 to the junta's border guard force (BGF) plan.

Meanwhile, the Burmese military government has held a series of ceremonies across Karen State to honor the DKBA for joining the BGF.

DKBA commanders were publicly presented with cash gifts as rewards for joining the Burmese army-led joint force.

According to the Burmese state-run newspaper, The New Light of Myanmar, the DKBA troops

will officially be allowed to hold weapons, and will be assigned to duties aligned with securing and guarding the Thai-Burmese border.

Some observers have suggested that DKBA commanders may lose power as part of the BGF plan after they come under Burmese army command. Over the past few years, several DKBA leaders have established lucrative business deals through border trade in the region.

According to Burma's 2008 Constitution, the BGF will be incorporated into Burma's national armed forces, and soldiers from participating groups, such as the DKBA, will receive the same salaries as Burmese army troops.

The DKBA split from its mother organization, the Karen National Union, and signed a cease-fire agreement with the Burmese military government in 1995. It has six brigades with an estimated 6,000 armed fighters.