

In the lead up to Burma's first election in two decades, senior officials of the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) have stepped up campaigning in Pegu Division by making donations and providing health services and other benefits to the public, according to local sources.



A resident in Thayawaddy Township said Col. Myint Htun, the director-general of the Myanmar Fire Brigade who is a candidate for the township seat, donated 300,000 kyat (US \$306) to each village school on Tuesday.

The director-general's donation followed a visit by the junta's incumbent Prime Minister Thein Sein, the head of the USDP, to several townships in Pegu Division, in which he urged his fellow USDP members to systematically organize campaigns to try to win the election.

A resident of a village that received a donation said, "Political parties have to inform and seek permission from local authorities prior to their donations to schools or road constructions projects, but the USDP doesn't do that. Maybe the USDP is using state funds and that's why it doesn't need any permission."

Meanwhile, ex-Brig-Gen Win Myint, the deputy minister of the Ministry of Electric Power No. 2 who is a candidate in Latpantan Township, has reportedly visited Latpantan twice a week, and also visited nearby villages.

"The deputy minister, a Latpantan native, doesn't talk about politics and the election. He just asks villagers what they need and then donates. People are thankful to him because they are in need of help," a Latpantan resident told The Irrawaddy.

He said Win Myint has installed new electricity transformers, set up concrete lamp posts, replaced outdated electrical cables and donated 10 million kyat (US 10,204) to help provide

education to poor children in the town.

Last week, a team led by Nyan Win, the incumbent foreign minister, and his wife reportedly visited his native Zeekone Township, where he is a candidate, and local residents took advantage of a three-day service for free eye examinations and the distribution of eyeglasses.

“Minister Nyan Win told eye patients that the service was sponsored by a company based in Rangoon, and he was just lending a hand. He did not mention the name of the company,” a Zeekone resident told The Irrawaddy.

A number of residents in Pegu told the The Irrawaddy they suspected the USDP candidates used state funds in their election campaigning.

Thein Sein and 26 other ministers and senior officials of the regime resigned from their military posts and formed the USDP on April 29 to take part in the election that will be held on Nov. 7.