

Myanmar's Suu Kyi wins seat, requests meeting with military

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Yangon, Myanmar: Myanmar's opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has won her parliamentary seat, official results showed Wednesday, leading a near total sweep by her party that will give the country its first government in decades that isn't under the military's sway.

While a win of that magnitude virtually assures the National League for Democracy of electing the president as well, Suu Kyi is barred from becoming president by a constitutional hurdle inserted by the junta when it transferred power in 2011 to a quasi-civilian government.

Still, she recently has declared that she will be the country's de facto leader, acting "above the president," if her party forms the next government.

In an interview on Tuesday with Singapore's Channel News Asia television, Suu Kyi reiterated that plan.

"I make all the decisions because I'm the leader of the winning party. And the president will be one whom we will choose just in order to meet the requirements of the constitution," she said.

"He (the president) will have to understand this perfectly well that he will have no authority. That he will act in accordance with the positions of the party."

In a sign she intends to play a key role, Suu Kyi requested meetings with the military chief, current president and the chairman of parliament next week, apparently to discuss the formation of the new government.

It is "very crucial that the government implements, for the pride of the country and the peaceful desire of people," the results of Sunday's elections, she said in the three letters sent Wednesday.

President Thein Sein's spokesman, Ye Htut, said on his Facebook page that the meeting with Suu Kyi can take place only after all official results are in.

He said the government and the military will respect the results of the "free and fair elections."

The military, which took power in a 1962 coup and brutally suppressed several pro-democracy uprisings during its rule, gave way to a nominally civilian elected government in 2011 with strings attached.

The army installed retired senior officers in the ruling party to fill Cabinet posts and granted itself constitutional powers, including control of powerful ministries and a quarter of seats in the 664-member two-chamber Parliament.

In a state of emergency, a special military-led body can even assume state powers.

Another provision bars Suu Kyi from the presidency because her sons hold foreign citizenship.

And while Myanmar's people voted overwhelmingly to remove the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party from power, it's clear that the military's involvement in this Southeast Asian nation's politics would not end.

"Sunday's poll does not mark democracy's triumph in Burma," said Ellen Bork of Foreign Policy Initiative, a

Washington-based think-tank.

"Over the past few years, it has become obvious that the military and its political proxy (the ruling party) were not actually interested in a democratic transition that required them to relinquish their power."

The Union Election Commission announced 63 more results for Parliament's lower house on Wednesday, which included Suu Kyi's name as the victor from Kawhmu, which is part of Yangon state.

It said she won 54,676 votes without giving more details of how many the losing ruling party candidate won or how many eligible voters were in the constituency.

Of the remaining 60 seats, the NLD won 56 seats, and USDP won three.

That brings to 135 the number of seats won by NLD out of the 151 lower house seats announced so far. For the upper house, the NLD has won 29 out of 33 announced.

NLD co-founder Tin Oo told The Associated Press on Tuesday that the party expects win about 80 percent of the votes — putting it on pace with the party's 1990 landslide that the military annulled.

"The NLD's big victory is best seen as the first step of a negotiation that is going to play out in the coming weeks and months between the elected power of the NLD, and entrenched, constitutionally guaranteed military power," said Phil Robertson, deputy director of the Asia division of New York-based Human Rights Watch.

"So, even with the people behind her, Aung San Suu Kyi will face problems — because if she tries to force her way with the military, it will be like banging her head against the wall," Robertson said.

Because the military still controls important political decisions, said Toe Kyaw Hlaing, an independent political analyst in Myanmar, the NLD and other political parties have to cooperate with the military.

"But I think the NLD will happily cooperate with them since one of their mandates is 'National Reconciliation,' he said. "They are the important group in Parliament that shouldn't be ignored. There must be cooperation and the NLD will have to convince the military to cooperate with them."

The military is also invested in the freed-up economy that semi-democracy has brought as Western nations eased their trade and investment sanctions in response to political liberalization.

If the NLD secures a two-thirds majority of the parliamentary seats at stake — a likely scenario now — it would gain control over the executive posts under Myanmar's complicated parliamentary-presidency system.

The military and the largest parties in the upper house and the lower house will each nominate a candidate for president.

After Jan. 31, all 664 legislators will cast ballots and the top vote-getter will become president, while the other two will be vice presidents.

- AP