

## **Myanmar in post-election limbo with slow official results**

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**Yangon, Myanmar:** Myanmar was trapped in a post-election limbo Tuesday with official results barely trickling in, although opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi's party claimed a victory massive enough to give it the presidency and loosen the military's grip on the country.

In an interview with the BBC, Suu Kyi said her National League for Democracy expects to win 75 percent of the seats contested in the 664-member Parliament.

The Union Election Commission has announced results for only 88 seats, giving 78 to the NLD and five to the ruling party from Sunday's vote. It has given no explanation for the slow results.

The delay has raised concern, with NLD spokesman Win Tien telling reporters that the election commission has been "delaying intentionally because maybe they want to play a trick or something."

"It doesn't make sense that they are releasing the results piece by piece. It shouldn't be like that," he told reporters after a party meeting at Suu Kyi's house.

"They are trying to be crooked."

The surprising accusation added a worrying twist to what had been an amicable election, with the ruling party appearing to be taking its expected loss gracefully.

It is also disconcerting because Myanmar's former military junta, which had called elections in 1990 after 28 years in power, refused then to recognize the NLD's overwhelming victory.

It continued its brutal rule for two more decades, keeping Suu Kyi under house arrest for much of that period.

Faced with intense international pressure after becoming a Southeast Asian pariah, the junta finally gave up power in a choreographed transition to democracy, being replaced in 2011 by the Union Solidarity Development Party, largely made up of former junta members.

The government, which remains beholden to the military, is led by President Thein Sein, a former general who has been praised for initiating political and economic reforms to end Myanmar's isolation and jump-start its moribund economy.

In the BBC interview, Suu Kyi was asked why, given the events of 1990, things will be different this time.

"They've been saying repeatedly they'll respect the will of the people and that they will implement the results of the election," she said.

She also said the people are far more aware now than in 1990.

"The times are different, the people are different ... very much more alert to what is going on around them. And then of course there's the communications revolution which has made a huge difference. Everybody gets on to the net and informs everybody else of what is happening, and so it's much more difficult for those who wish to engage in

irregularities to get away with it," she said.

Observers also believe the military has little to gain by interfering again, because as part of the reforms toward democracy it has already secured its position with constitutionally guaranteed powers.

For example, no matter who forms the government, the military gets to keep control of the ministries of defense, interior and border security.

It controls large parts of the national economy. The military can also block constitutional amendments because 25 percent of the seats in Parliament are reserved for it and amendments require more than a 75 percent vote.

If the NLD secures a two-thirds majority in Parliament— 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.

A large majority in Parliament would allow the NLD to take the presidency and one of the vice president slots.

Capturing the presidency and Parliament would give the NLD power over legislation, economic policy and foreign relations.

But a constitutional provision bars anyone with a foreign spouse or child from being president or vice president, meaning Suu Kyi, 70, is not eligible for those posts.

Her two sons are British, as was her late husband.

Suu Kyi has said, however, that she will act as the country's leader if the NLD wins the presidency, saying she will be "above the president."

International election monitors generally praised Sunday's balloting, but said more reforms are needed before full democracy can be achieved.

"Myanmar is definitely on a positive trajectory toward a peaceful democratic transition," said Mary Robinson of the Carter Center election monitors, led by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter's grandson.

In a reflection of the reverence that many people have for Suu Kyi, a woman in her 70s came to her house Tuesday to give her a ruby brooch set in gold, shaped like Myanmar's map.

Htay Htay Aye told reporters, "I've kept this brooch for more than 40 years but it's time for her to wear it. This is a present for her victory."

Suu Kyi was in a meeting and couldn't meet the woman. "But I left her that present. It's not because we are friends, it's only because I respect her," Htay Htay Aye said.

- AP