

## **Suu Kyi's close aide Htin Kyaw sworn in as Myanmar's President**

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**Naypyitaw:** Htin Kyaw, a trusted friend of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, took over as Myanmar's president Wednesday, taking a momentous step in the country's long-drawn transition toward democracy after more than a half-century of direct and indirect military rule.

But democracy in this impoverished Southeast Asian nation still feels incomplete. The military retains considerable amount of power in the government and parliament, and the president himself will play second fiddle to Suu Kyi, who has repeatedly said that she will run the country from behind the scenes because the military has ensured "through a constitutional manipulation" that she can't be the president.

For now, the country was celebrating the installation of the 70-year-old Htin Kyaw, as he took the oath of office in a joint session of Myanmar's newly elected parliament, as Suu Kyi sat watching in the front row.

"I, Htin Kyaw, do solemnly and sincerely promise and declare that I will be loyal to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and its citizens," he said, reading from a written pledge, while repeating after the house speaker Mann Win Khaing Than. "I will uphold and abide by the constitution and its laws... I will dedicate myself to the service of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar."

The same pledge was simultaneously read by First Vice President Myint Swe and Second Vice President Henry Van Tio. After a 20-minute tea break, all 18 members of Htin Kyaw's Cabinet, including Suu Kyi took a joint oath of office read out by the speaker.

Rightfully, the job belonged to Suu Kyi, who has been the face of the pro-democracy movement and who endured decades of house arrest and harassment by military rulers without ever giving up on her non-violent campaign to unseat them. But a constitutional provision barred Suu Kyi from becoming president, and she made it clear that whoever sits in that chair will be her proxy. She has said repeatedly she will run the government from behind the scenes.

Still, Htin Kyaw will be remembered by history as the first civilian president for Myanmar and the head of its first government to be elected in free and fair polls. Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy, won a landslide victory in elections last November, in a reflection of Suu Kyi's widespread public support.

The constitutional clause that denied her the presidency excludes anyone from the position who has a foreign spouse or children. Suu Kyi's two sons are British, as was her late husband. The clause is widely seen as having been written by the military with Suu Kyi in mind.

The military has reserved 25 percent of the seats in parliament for itself, guaranteeing that no government can amend the constitution without its approval. The military also heads the Home Ministry and the Defense Ministry, which gives it control over the corrections department, ensuring that the release of political prisoners is its decision to make.

Also, it ensured that one of Htin Kyaw's two vice presidents is a former general, Myint Swe, a close ally of former junta leader Than Shwe. Myint Swe remains on a U.S. Treasury Department blacklist that bars American companies from doing business with several tycoons and senior military figures connected with the former junta.

- AP