Myanmar MPs reject bid to allow Suu Kyi to become president

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Suu Kyiâ€™s party took power in 2016 by winning a landslide election victory after five decades of direct and indirect military rule. (AP/File)

Myanmarâ€™s parliament rejected on Wednesday a proposed constitutional amendment that would have allowed the countryâ€™s de facto leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, to officially become president.

The rejection had been expected because the proposal was opposed by the military, which under the constitution adopted when it held power, holds enough parliamentary seats to block any constitutional change. The defeated motion was one of several constitutional changes proposed by Suu Kyiâ€™s ruling National League for Democracy party, with most expected to be blocked.

Article 59(f) of the constitution bars a person from becoming president if his or her spouse or children are foreign citizens. Suu Kyiâ€™s two sons are British nationals, as was her late husband.

Despite the rule, Suu Kyi holds executive power in the government because of a legal loophole that allowed the creation of the post of state counsellor, to which she was appointed. Under the arrangement the actual president _ a member of her party _ defers to her.

The efforts to change the constitution come ahead of a general election slated for late this year. Suu Kyiâ€™s party took power in 2016 by winning a landslide election victory after five decades of direct and indirect military rule. But its intended reforms have been thwarted by the rules the military inserted in the 2008 constitution.

In addition to wielding a veto over constitutional change, the military controls three key ministries: defense, border and home affairs.

Any constitutional change requires the approval of more than 75% of the members of the combined houses of parliament. Members of the military automatically hold 25% of the seats, and can usually also count of the support of a civilian opposition party allied with it, the Union Solidarity and Development Party.

Suu Kyi was an ardent critic of military rule during her decades-long Nobel Peace prize-winning nonviolent struggle for democracy. But the realities of sharing power with the military have made the relationship more ambiguous.

She has defended the armyâ€™s actions in the western state of Rakhine which drove more than 700,000 members of the Muslim Rohingya minority to seek shelter in neighboring Bangladesh.

The well-documented brutality of what the military called a counterinsurgency operation caused the International Court of Justice to accept a case charging Myanmar with genocide.

- AP