

## **Myanmar's Suu Kyi unlikely to take formal role in new gov't**

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**Hnin Yadana Zaw, Reuters**

Myanmar democracy champion Aung San Suu Kyi is unlikely to take a formal position in the incoming government of her National League for Democracy (NLD), a senior official said, and will control the administration through her position as party leader.

The Nobel peace prize laureate led the NLD to a landslide win in a historic election in November, but a constitution drafted by the former junta bars her from the presidency because her two sons are British citizens, as was her late husband.

"Taking positions is not that important any more... In the United States there are many famous lawmakers in the parliament who are very influential, but they don't take any position in the cabinet," Zaw Myint Maung, the NLD's spokesperson and one of its leaders, told Reuters late yesterday.

"It's the same here. She will lead the party, so she will lead the government formed by that party," said Zaw Myint Maung, in the most detailed remarks from the NLD so far on how Suu Kyi plans to wield power.

Other top-level NLD politicians, including Win Htein, her confidant, have likened Suu Kyi's role to that of Sonia Gandhi, the Italian-born widow of former Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi. As leader of the Congress party, she dominated the government of prime minister Manmohan Singh before it fell from power in 2014, but held no ministerial position.

NLD leaders have derided the constitution as "ridiculous", and Suu Kyi has pledged to run the country through a proxy president.

Last week, the NLD-dominated parliament elected Htin Kyaw, a close friend and confidant of Suu Kyi, for that role, making him the first head of state since the 1960s who is not a serving or recently retired senior military officer.

In the run-up to the November poll, Suu Kyi had made clear she intended to lead the government regardless of whether she was president, but said the Sonia Gandhi comparison was "not quite" accurate. She has not elaborated since.

### **Making savings**

Today, Htin Kyaw made his first public speech since being elected, pledging job security for public servants even as the parliament cut the number of ministries by about a third to 21.

He said the reforms would save Myanmar more than US\$4.1 million and those savings would be spent on healthcare, education and rural development.

“There is no reason for causing unemployment if the government employees take jobs in accordance with existing laws, rules and regulations,” he said. He did not go into the details.

Most military MPs, who hold a quarter of seats in the parliament, also voted in favour of the changes, results showed.

“I think the military also understands that they (some ministries) are not necessary. Their collaboration is an improvement in the parliament,” said Aung Hlaing Win, a lower house NLD lawmaker.

Despite public messages of support and collaboration, behind the scenes tensions between the army and the NLD have simmered in the run-up to the handover of power.

The military questioned the NLD’s presidential and vice-presidential picks and openly confronted its MPs over a controversial copper mine project last month.

How the army, which sees itself as the guardian of the constitution, responds to Suu Kyi’s bid to lead from “above the president” remains to be seen. The document states the president “takes precedence over all other persons” in Myanmar.

The NLD government’s term starts on April 1. A parliamentary agenda showed the speaker would unveil the make-up of the cabinet tomorrow.

- Reuters

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