

Suu Kyi to make Myanmar parliament debut on April 23, says party
Reuters
April 9 , 2012

YANGON, April 9 — Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been invited to make her debut in parliament in two weeks, her party said today, following a historic landslide victory for her and other party members in by-elections.

Party spokesman Nyan Win said Suu Kyi and 36 other National League for Democracy (NLD) candidates who won parliament seats had been asked to go to the capital, Naypyitaw, for the resumption of the house session, which initially was not expected to include the newly elected members.

The 66-year-old Nobel Peace Prize laureate's appearance in Myanmar's parliament will mark one of the biggest leaps forward for a country that was ruled by iron-fisted generals for five decades until a year ago.

The NLD won 43 of 45 seats contested in the April 1 ballots, dealing a crushing blow to the ruling military-backed party which won a 2010 general election widely deemed to have been rigged. The NLD boycotted that election.

"NLD candidates elected for the lower house including chairperson Daw Aung San Suu Kyi will attend the lower house session due to resume on April 23 as they have received invitation by telephone," Nyan Win said. Daw is a Burmese honorific.

He said the NLD's four new senators had yet to be contacted. Two NLD members also won seats on regional assemblies in the by-elections.

The international community appears to have accepted the by-elections were free and fair and several Western countries – the United States, France and Britain among them – have given strong hints of an imminent easing of some sanctions regarding investment and provision of financial services.

Symbolic landslide

The resumption of the parliamentary session coincides with the April 23 expiration of European Union sanctions. Diplomats say some restrictions, like investment in certain sectors and visa bans, are likely to be dropped while others – arms bans and access to trade concessions – are expected to be maintained.

The polls were largely symbolic, widely viewed as a rejection of the military's powerful political role and public endorsement of the wildly popular Suu Kyi, who spent a total of 15 years in detention because of her opposition to military rule.

The polls follow a year of astonishing change in a country that was in the grip of the generals from 1962 until a quasi-civilian and apparently reform-minded government took office on March 30 last year.

Suu Kyi's presence in parliament is likely to be a big boon for a government that is trying

hard to sell its sprawling legislature as proof it has taken genuine steps towards becoming a functioning democracy.

Over the past year hundreds of political prisoners have been freed, talks held with ethnic minority rebels, censorship has been eased, trade unions allowed and the country has shown signs of pulling back from the influence of China, which saw Myanmar as a bulwark against US influence.

Suu Kyi hailed the election win as a "triumph of the people" and is expected to focus on pushing for reforms that strengthen the rule of law in one of the world's most corrupt countries and raise living standards for Myanmar's 60 million people.

The NLD won an election in 1990 but the military ignored the result.

For the next two decades the military effectively excluded Suu Kyi and her party from politics while she boycotted military-run processes like the drafting of a constitution, which gives the military a leadership role, and the 2010 election. — Reuters

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2012 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/world/article/suu-kyi-to-make-myanmar-parliament-debut-on-april-23-says-party/>