

Suu Kyi's party defeats military-backed regime in Burma election

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Early results from Sunday's national elections in Burma (Myanmar) indicate that the military-backed United Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) government of President Thein Sein has suffered a humiliating electoral defeat to the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi.

Jubilant crowds in Rangoon and other cities cheered the first results in an expression of popular hatred for the half-century rule of the brutal and corrupt military regime.

The USDP won the last election in 2010 because it was boycotted by the NLD in protest over the rigged ballot process and the 2008 military-imposed constitution. Since then the NLD and the USDP have worked out an accommodation. Both share the common goal of moving away from China economically and politically, and embracing the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia" in order to have crippling sanctions lifted and facilitate an inflow of Western capital.

Of the 664 seats in the two-house national parliament, 498 were contested. The remainder are reserved for the military. In all, 6,000 candidates from 91 political parties and 310 independent candidates stood for 1,150 positions in the parliament, the Union Assembly, and state and regional assemblies.

Yesterday the Union Election Commission (UEC) released the results of 54 constituencies with the NLD winning 49, the USDP three and two going to regionally-based parties. In Rangoon (Yangon), Burma's largest city, the NLD won all 12 parliamentary seats announced last night. The NLD has told the media that it has won 44 of the 45 lower house seats in Rangoon and all 12 in the upper house.

Overall the NLD claims to have won 70 percent of parliamentary seats. This includes all 38 seats in

Ayeyarwaddy state, 39 out of 40 in Bago and 11 of the 19 lower house seats and all 10 upper house seats in Mon state. Opposition party officials said they expected the trend to continue in the other 10 states. The UEC is expected to announce further results today.

Results from the more remote areas where there are parties based on ethnic minorities are not in. The UEC has refused to hold elections in some 600 villages because of armed conflict between the military and insurgents. Most of the fighting is in the Shan and Kachin states.

According to a report in the *Irrawaddy*, 15 of the 19 government ministers contesting seats have been voted out of office. USDP acting chairman Htay Oo, who lost his seat, conceded that the ruling party had lost more seats than it had won.

Armed forces commander Min Aung Hlaing said that there was "no reason not to accept the election results," implying that the military was not in a position to annul the election result, as it did in 1990. The close collaboration of Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD with the military over the past four years has undoubtedly reassured the generals that their interests will be looked after.

A number of the military's business cronies standing as candidates were also victims of the overwhelming vote for the NLD. One of those who could lose his upper house seat is Khin Shwe, chairman of Zaykabar Group, which has interests in construction and real estate. He told the *Irrawaddy*: "I believe that after Daw Aung Suu Kyi's government begins, there will be many more foreign direct investors, so I need to focus on my business."

This reaction indicates that backroom deals have already been done. Suu Kyi represents a section of the Burmese capitalist class that have been sidelined by

military rule and intends to get its share of the national wealth with the introduction of pro-market economy measures. But she has already indicated that her party will work with all parties to accelerate the opening up of Burma to foreign capital and to orient foreign policy to Washington.

Last Friday the *Australian* newspaper interviewed Australian economics professor Sean Turnell, an economic policy adviser to the NLD and Suu Kyi. His job, the article said, was to “help them [the NLD] up to speed on mainstream economic thought.”

Suu Kyi was not an economic collectivist, Turnell said, but a liberal “in the true sense of the word, and quite conservative on fiscal and monetary policy.” He criticised President Thein Sein for falling short on “bold” reforms and warned that the NLD would have to show that it “is a safe pair of hands.”

This means savage economic restructuring, including cuts to public spending, privatisation of state assets and the liberalisation of the agricultural sector which will devastate poor farmers. One of the main grievances of Suu Kyi’s rural supporters against the junta was its land grabs for mining, property developers and large scale agri-businesses. This process will be accelerated.

Suu Kyi’s “democratic” posturing is exposed by her callous disregard for the 750,000 Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine state who were disenfranchised by the regime and her adaptation to the nationwide anti-Muslim campaign by Buddhist monks of the Ma Ba Tha movement. The NLD, like the USDP, did not field any Muslim candidates ensuring there will be no Muslims in the new parliament.

Yesterday NLD official Nyan Win announced the party was offering an alliance with the Buddhist Arakan National Party (ANP). The ANP advocates the deportation or internment of the one million Rohingya in Rakhine state, demanding Burma “keep pure blood.”

If the NLD wins a two-thirds majority in the parliament Suu Kyi will be in a strong position to put forward an NLD presidential candidate, appoint ministers and win control over legislation and economic policy. Under the constitution Suu Kyi cannot be president due to the British citizenship of her deceased husband and her two children. The military will retain the key posts in defence, interior and border security and has an effective veto on constitutional change.



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