

Myanmar Junta Chief Elected Vice-president

AFP:: Myanmar's junta chief Min Aung Hlaing was elected a vice-president by the lower house, with the coup leader edging closer to becoming president (ANTHONY WALLACE)

Myanmar junta chief Min Aung Hlaing was elected a vice-president by the lower house on Tuesday, parliament officials said, with the coup leader edging closer to becoming the country's civilian leader.

Myanmar's former commander in chief Min Aung Hlaing has led Myanmar since 2021, when he ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi and triggered civil war.

His election sets in motion a process for him to exchange his uniform for civilian clothes, as the country's parliament selects three vice-presidents, one of whom is then chosen as president.

On the lower house floor Tuesday morning, MPs queued up at a row of tables and dropped their ballots into one of three clear-sided boxes.

"The lower house of elected MPs announces Senior General Min Aung Hlaing as a vice-president," lower house speaker Khin Yi said after the vote.

The junta chief received 247 of the 260 votes, a parliament official said, according to a live broadcast.

The upper house elected Nan Ni Ni Aye, a regional MP from Karen state with the military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), as another vice-president, local media reported.

A third vice-president will be chosen by the military.

A parliament-wide vote to select which of the three will be elevated to president is expected this week.

Democracy watchdogs have long warned that the new government will be a proxy of the military, which has ruled Myanmar for the vast majority of its post-independence history.

Myanmar's military has long presented itself as the only force guarding the restive country from rupture and ruin.

The generals loosened their grip for a decade-long democratic experiment beginning in 2011, allowing Aung San Suu Kyi to ascend as civilian leader and steer a period of reform as the nation opened up.

But after Aung San Suu Kyi trounced the USDP in a landslide in 2020 elections, Min Aung Hlaing snatched back power as he grew anxious about the military's waning influence, analysts say.

After five years of hardline rule, the top general oversaw heavily restricted elections that returned a walkover win for pro-military parties in January.

Now the USDP – led and staffed by many retired officers – is entrenched in parliament after winning 80 percent of elected seats, and it is expected the new government will march in lockstep with the top brass.

Min Aung Hlaing is expected to manage a carefully orchestrated transition to becoming president, after he handed over the reins of the military to loyalist Ye Win Oo on Monday.

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