

RANGOON — Burma pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi will help investigate charges of election fraud if and when she is released from house arrest this week, a close political colleague said Wednesday.

Her intention was announced a few hours before the first official results from Sunday's election were released, showing that the country's pro-military party was headed toward an expected sweeping election victory.

Critics said the vote was rigged and poll fraud was rampant.

Top members of the ruling junta, including Prime Minister Thein Sein, were among those who won seats in Parliament, according to results broadcast Wednesday night on state television. Thein Sein heads the Union Solidarity and Development Party, which served as a proxy for the ruling junta.

Independent observers and Western leaders including President Barack Obama have said Sunday's election—the first in two decades—was neither free nor fair.

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy has established a committee to probe allegations of fraud in the polls, said Nyan Win, a spokesman for the group.

It was officially disbanded as a political party because it refused to register for the polls it considered unfair, but the group remains active as a social movement.

The election sparked violence and fears of civil war among Burma's ethnic minorities, who make up about 40 percent of the population. Some have fought the central government since Burma gained independence from Britain in 1948, and chafe at the thought of continued military dominance.

Suu Kyi's intention to re-enter the political fray, especially in a manner that would embarrass the junta, poses the sort of challenge the military has met in the past by locking her up again. The 65-year-old Nobel Peace Prize winner has been detained for 15 of the past 21 years.

Her term of house arrest is due to expire Saturday. A government official who asked not to be named because he is not authorized to speak to the press, said although no official instructions have been made about her possible release, "necessary security preparations are being made on the ground."

The NLD's dilapidated headquarters in Rangoon was bustling Wednesday with party members tidying up Suu Kyi's old office.

Nyan Win expressed confidence she would be freed. Suu Kyi was convicted last year of violating the terms of her previous detention by briefly sheltering an American man who swam uninvited to her lakeside home.

"She has to be freed as there is no law under which her detention can be extended," said Nyan

Win. But he added Suu Kyi would not accept her release if there were any conditions attached to her freedom. In the past, the military has refused to let her travel out of Rangoon, fearing her popularity could encourage dissent.

Her party's vast popularity was confirmed in the election two decades ago, when it won a landslide victory—only to have the military refuse to hand over power. She remains by far the country's most popular political figure.

The election was a key stage of the ruling junta's "road map to democracy"—a process it has controlled every step of the way to ensure it would retain a commanding role in government, even with the ostensible restoration of civilian rule.

Nyan Win said Suu Kyi "will actively get involved in the (fraud investigating) committee and give advice when she is released." He said the committee would hold hearings and gather evidence of election malpractice from independent election monitoring groups.

"We will compile a list of election fraud reports and expose the election irregularities," said Nyan Win. "This is the ugliest election I have ever encountered. There is enormous amount of unfair activity all over the country."

The state television report did not give the total number of seats won by each party, but its partial list of winners by constituency made it apparent the pro-military party had won a decisive majority. Top USDP officials had privately said the party won 75-80 percent of the seats at stake.

According to the results released so far, USDP captured 48 of 60 lower house seats, nine of 13 upper house seats, and 83 of 109 seats in regional legislatures. Vote totals were not given. The USDP had already been declared the winner of several dozen seats in constituencies where it ran without competition.

Some 3,071 candidates from 37 political parties, along with 82 independent candidates, contested 1,159 seats: 326 in the Lower House, 168 in the Upper House and 665 spread among 14 regional parliaments. But under the 2008 constitution, one-quarter of the total seats in the upper and lower houses are reserved for the military.

There was never much doubt about the outcome because the USDP fielded candidates in nearly every district, while the largest anti-government party was able to contest only 164 seats.

Campaign rules also limited challengers' chances.

But those parties that challenged the USDP still expressed shock at what they alleged was blatant and widespread vote-rigging.

The country's second biggest party, the National Unity Party—inheritor of the political machine of late strongman Gen Ne Win, and previously seen as pro-junta—has joined the chorus of critics.

"The election process is absolutely unfair," said 82-year-old retired Brigadier Aye San, a senior NUP official who claimed many cases of fraud.

Associated Press photographer Apichart Weerawong in Mae Sot, Thailand, and writer Thanyarat Dokson in Bangkok contributed to this report.