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Myanmar polls: They were grateful there was change

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Rediff.com's Ajit Jain speaks to Canadian lawmaker Deepak Obhrai [[Images](#)], the head of a four-member Canadian observer team that monitored Sunday's Myanmar election.

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"There was a vast improvement in the Myanmar elections held on April 1 compared with the 2010 elections when the Opposition parties were hardly allowed to participate, and Aung San Suu Kyi [[Images](#)] was under house arrest," says Deepak Obhrai, parliamentary secretary to the Canadian minister for foreign affairs.

Of the National League for Democracy's 45 candidates, the team's report says 44 candidates -- including Suu Kyi, the NLD leader -- have been elected.

"Despite improvements in the elections, there were still some issues," Obhrai felt. "The official voters list was one of the biggest problems. Also, monitors were not allowed inside the polling booths."

The Myanmar government had invited Canadian representatives to watch the elections. "We had full access to Opposition party members, to the constituencies and the polling booths," Obhrai said.

Conservative Senator Con Di Nino and two Canadian diplomats were also part of the team.

"I was there, watching the proceedings, from 5.30 am to past 6 pm," Obhrai told [Rediff.com](#) "I went to almost 13 polling stations in three constituencies -- one in the city and two outside the capital, Yangon."

"There were several complaints, but most of them pertained to the voters list," Obhrai added. "I talked to many voters and most of them said they had voted for Suu Kyi. One could see the enthusiasm. They were grateful there was change in the country."

"I couldn't meet Suu Kyi," Obhrai said, "but a day before the polling, I met her chief executive and he too had similar concerns about the voters list."

The Canadian observers also met dissidents who had been detained in 1988 and have now been released. "They were cautious and didn't make any statement to us. They want to wait and watch how the political situation in the country develops," Obhrai said.

The lawmaker did not say if the Canadian government would lift the sanctions that Ottawa had imposed in the wake of suppression of democratic institutions by the military regime in Myanmar.

"I will meet with Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird and submit my report on what we saw on the ground. We will evaluate what happened during the elections and then announce our new policy," Obhrai said.

Baird visited Myanmar on March 8, met Suu Kyi and presented her with a certificate of honorary Canadian citizenship.

Image: Canadian Senator Con Di Nino, centre, and Deepak Obhrai (wearing a striped T-shirt) speak to National League for Democracy members in Yangon. Photograph courtesy: Friends of Burma

Ajit Jain in Toronto

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