

Egypt's Mursi faces tough tasks ahead

Friday 29 June 2012 - 11:17

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One and half year after the popular Arab uprisings blew away Hosni Mubarak from power, Egyptians have elected bearded 60-year-old Mohamed Mursi of the Muslim Brotherhood as the country's new president. The new president, to be enthroned early July, assumes office following the controversial divisive and tightly contested general elections.



The victory also comes a time when his predecessor Mubarak is reported in a coma suffering from stroke while in detention. The situation is made farcical by uneasy tension and shadow-boxing between the ruling Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) and the new political party in power-the Muslim Brotherhood.

Despite historic victory in which Mursi was on Sunday declared Egypt's first civilian president, he still has to contend with a ruling military seeking to retain broad powers and with a precarious economy. The Muslim Brotherhood that fielded Mursi in the election to replace ousted Hosni Mubarak has said it would press on with a sit-in to pressure the ruling generals lead by Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi to relinquish more powers to Mursi.

The ruling military junta had earlier promised and hand over power to the elected civilians and congratulatory messages are pouring in for Egypt's first democratically elected president, who began selecting a new government on Monday as his supporters pursued a sit-in to pressure the ruling military to hand over full powers to the Islamists.

Mursi defeated ex-Mubarak Premier Ahmed Shafiq, with 51.7 to 48.3 percent – or just 800,000 votes, quickly moved to allay domestic and international concerns over the Islamists' victory in the Arab world's most populous country. The polls were marked by other dynamics of Egypt's many challenges.

For example, Christian Coptic constituting about ten percent of the country's population, mostly backed Shafiq- whom they believed would stem the rising Islamists tide. Feeling discriminated

and oppressed, about creeping Islamism in the Egyptian society, their sense of insecurity was worsened by the fact that the Coptic patriarch and ardent community defender Shenouda 111 died on March 17 at 88 years and has been replaced.

World leaders including Italian Prime Minister Mario Monti while congratulating the new leader, urged him to pursue Egypt's "democratic transition" in order to fully implement human rights and the rights of religious minorities. The king of Morocco also congratulated Mursi, wishing him "full success" in steering Egypt during this "decisive" phase of its modern history and declaring his determination to work closely with Egypt.

US President Barack Obama telephone the new leader on Sunday evening to congratulate him, while earlier White House press secretary Jay Carney in a statement called the Islamist's election a "milestone" in Egyptians' transition to democracy. "Millions of Egyptians voted in the election, and President-elect Morsi and the new Egyptian government have both the legitimacy and responsibility of representing a diverse and courageous citizenry," he said.

Across the Middle East, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel, which is Egypt's most important ally, said the two countries will continue cooperation on the basis of the peace treaty signed by the two former enemies in 1979. Egypt in 1979 became the first Arab country to sign a peace agreement with the Jewish state, and U.S. governments have over the ensuing decades given Egypt more than \$60 billion in military aid linked to the treaty.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called for stronger ties between Iran and Egypt following the win, describing Egypt as friendly and brotherly country. Celebrations were reported in Gaza Strip, where tens of thousands of Palestinians demonstrated and celebrated "a victory for all Arabs and Muslims."

However, there is groundswell of reservations that victory for Islamists is not reassuring for Israel and the greater world. After being announced the winner on Sunday, Mursi vowed to be president to all Egyptians and appealed for national unity. The fiercely pro-Palestinian leader also pledged to honour Egypt's international treaties, which include a 1979 peace treaty with Israel.

Results had been delayed for four days, worsening an already tense atmosphere after tension-laden campaigns, worsened by recent court ruling dissolving Muslim Brotherhood-dominated parliament and claims of a power grab by the ruling military council.