

## **Myanmar junta calls for discipline as country marks 60 years of independence**

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YANGON, Myanmar: Myanmar's military rulers celebrated the 60th anniversary of independence from Britain on Friday with a simple flag-hoisting ceremony and a message from the junta chief calling for more discipline in the country.

The annual message from junta leader Senior Gen. Than Shwe did not directly mention the pro-democracy street rallies that were violently suppressed by troops in September, but he reiterated that the military-ruled government will make democratic reforms according to its own so-called road map.

Than Shwe called for the country's cooperation in building a "discipline-flourishing democratic state."

His comments came in a speech published in Myanmar's three state-run newspapers and read aloud by an official at an annual flag-raising ceremony in a Yangon park beside the city's famed Shwedagon Pagoda.

Police and soldiers were deployed around Yangon, Myanmar's largest city, during the ceremony amid rumors of possible protests and violence. Security was removed after the ceremony ended.

Myanmar's crackdown on pro-democracy protests in September killed at least 31 people, according to a U.N. investigator, whose tally was twice the toll acknowledged by the junta. The crackdown on protests, led by Buddhist monks, sparked global outrage.

Than Shwe's message reviewed the junta's progress toward its road map to democracy.

He noted that the country's eventual constitution was being drafted according to the "fundamental principles" outlined by a constitutional convention, which finished its task in September.

The seven-stage road map is supposed to lead to a general election at an unspecified future date, but critics call it a sham designed to keep the military in power.

The convention's principles call for the military to maintain a prominent role in politics and they bar detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi from holding elected office.

The convention, the road map's first stage, started in 1993 and took 14 years to finish its task. The actual constitution drafting process started in December.

After gaining independence from Britain in 1948, Myanmar, also known as Burma, experimented with democracy until 1962, when the military seized power.

The current junta emerged in 1988 after violently suppressing mass pro-democracy protests. It held a general election in 1990, but refused to recognize the results after a landslide victory by Suu Kyi's party. The Nobel peace laureate has been under house arrest for 12 of the past 18 years.

Her National League for Democracy was to hold a separate ceremony at its Yangon headquarters Friday afternoon. The independence struggle was led by Suu Kyi's father Aung San.

<http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/01/04/asia/AS-GEN-Myanmar-Independence-Day.php>