

REUTERS

Cautionary tales from Rangoon

Burma's generals vie for control as the commander-in-chief prepares to stand down, reports Larry Jagan

THERE are increasing signs that a power struggle is taking place amongst Burma's top generals as the country moves slowly towards introducing political change and passing control of the army onto the next generation of military commanders. The head of the country's military junta, Senior General Than Shwe's health is failing, and he has become increasing reclusive amid growing international pressure to change.

Burma's National Convention, which is drawing up the country's new constitution, finished its latest session in December. Diplomats in Rangoon believe that there will be one more session in the next few months before it is formally drafted and put to a national referendum. "We expect the referendum to be conducted before the end of the year," according to an ethnic leader involved in the constitutional discussions.

The regime's top leaders are currently pre-occupied with preparing the military for this change. A massive shake-up of the army and the government is planned in the coming months. The country's top two military rulers, General Than Shwe and his deputy General Maung Aye, are expected to stand down from their military commands as the junta's leaders pass power onto the next generation of generals.

The planned changes are intended to prepare the army for the next phase in the country's move towards political reform, and the introduction of a civilian administration. The changes