

Myanmar protesters hurt in Japan rally

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TOKYO -- Ten demonstrators demanding that all Myanmar citizens living overseas be given the right to vote in an upcoming referendum were injured Saturday in a scuffle with police in Japan.

Eight of the 10 injured in the confrontation outside the Myanmar Embassy in Tokyo were taken to a hospital for treatment, said Tokyo Fire Department spokesman Yoshinori Nagashiki.

He said all those hurt were conscious but other details of their conditions were not immediately known.

A Tokyo Metropolitan Police spokesman confirmed that four Myanmar citizens were taken to a hospital, and said two were slightly injured while two others felt sick following the scuffle. He said he did not have details about any others who might have been hurt.

The injured were among about 150 people - mostly Myanmar citizens and some Japanese supporters - demanding that all Myanmar citizens living abroad be allowed to vote on Myanmar's new constitution in a May 10 referendum, the police spokesman said. He spoke on condition of anonymity, citing policy.

The protesters' exact demands about voting were not immediately clear. Myanmar's government, however, has stipulated that only citizens with legitimate government documents, such as exit permits, can vote overseas. That rule would exclude most political exiles and refugees.

Officials at the Myanmar Embassy could not be reached for comment Saturday.

Myanmar's ruling junta, facing growing domestic and international pressure due to its authoritarian rule, recently announced it would hold the referendum on a draft constitution as part of a "road map to democracy."

Critics have said the charter is a sham designed to perpetuate military rule and keep pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi from running for office.



Protesters shout slogans in front of Japanese police near the Myanmar embassy in Tokyo, Saturday, April 26, 2008. About 10 Myanmar demonstrators were injured in a scuffle with Japanese police outside the Myanmar embassy in Tokyo on Saturday, ahead of a referendum on the military-backed constitution in their country. (AP Photo/Kyodo News)