

Southeast Asian countries will discuss the crisis in Myanmar at a summit in Jakarta on Saturday, the ASEAN bloc's secretariat said on Tuesday, but Thailand's prime minister said several will be represented only by their foreign ministers.

Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha said he would not be attending and that Thailand would be represented by Deputy Prime Minister Don Pramudwinai, who is also foreign minister.

"Some other countries will also send their foreign ministers," Prayuth, a former army chief who led a coup in Thailand in 2014, told reporters after a weekly cabinet meeting.

A Thai government official said on Saturday that Myanmar junta chief Min Aung Hlaing would go to Jakarta, although the Myanmar government has not commented. However, this is seen as unlikely - in previous stints of military rule, Myanmar has usually been represented at regional meetings by a prime minister or foreign minister.

The 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been trying to find a way to guide fellow member Myanmar out of the bloody turmoil that it descended into after the military overthrew an elected government, led by Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, on Feb. 1.

But there have been divergent views among ASEAN members over how to respond to the army's use of lethal force against civilians and the group's policies of consensus and non-interference in each others' affairs have limited its ability to act.

Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore have sought to ramp up pressure on the junta. Thailand, Myanmar's neighbour, has said it is "gravely concerned" about escalating bloodshed, but close military ties and fears of a flood of refugees mean it is unlikely to go further.



Image source: Bangkok post

Brunei, the current chair of the bloc, said after a meeting of the group's foreign ministers in March that ASEAN expressed concern about the situation in Myanmar and called on "all parties to refrain from instigating further violence".

Little Willingness

Romeo Jr. Abad Arca, assistant director of the community relations division of the ASEAN Secretariat, said Saturday's summit would take place at its Jakarta headquarters under strict health and security protocols due to the pandemic, confirming an earlier advisory.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) activist group, 738 people have been killed by Myanmar security forces since the coup.

Myanmar's military has shown little willingness to engage with its neighbours and no sign of

wanting to talk to members of the government it ousted, accusing some of them of treason, which is punishable by death.

Pro-democracy politicians including ousted members of parliament from Suu Kyi's party announced the formation of a National Unity Government (NUG) on Friday.

It includes Suu Kyi, who has been in detention since the coup, as well as leaders of the pro-democracy protests and ethnic minorities.

The NUG says it is the legitimate authority and has called for international recognition and an invitation to the ASEAN meeting in place of the junta leader.

Former U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon urged his successor to engage directly with Myanmar's military to prevent rising violence and said Southeast Asian countries should not dismiss the turmoil as an internal issue for Myanmar.



Image source: The Indian Express

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' special envoy on Myanmar, Christine Schraner Burgener, has communicated with the military since the coup, but the junta has not allowed her to visit.

In its firmest response yet, the European Union said on Monday nine members of the junta's State Administration Council, formed the day after the coup, had been targeted with travel bans and asset freezes. Information Minister U Chit Naing was sanctioned also.

The decision follows similar measures by the United States. Min Aung Hlaing and Myint Swe, who has been acting president since the coup, were blacklisted by the EU last month.



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