

Myanmar junta chief to attend ASEAN summit in first foreign trip since coup

Myanmar junta chief Min Aung Hlaing will attend an Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in Indonesia on April 24, Thailand said on Saturday, for his first known foreign trip since he seized power on Feb. 1.

Myanmar has been in upheaval since Min Aung Hlaing ousted an elected government led by democracy champion Aung San Suu Kyi. Security forces have killed 728 people, according to an activist group, in an attempt to crush protests.

In the latest violence, security forces shot and killed two protesters in the ruby-mining town of Mogoke, a resident told Reuters, while several small bombs went off in the main city of Yangon, wounding several people, media outlets reported.

Myanmar's neighbours have been trying to encourage talks between the junta and the ousted government, but the military has shown little willingness to engage.

Several of the 10 ASEAN leaders, among them Min Aung Hlaing, confirmed they would attend the meeting in Jakarta, Thai foreign ministry spokesman Tanee Sangrat said.

A spokesman for the junta did not answer calls seeking comment.

Pro-democracy politicians including ousted members of parliament on Friday announced the formation of a National Unity Government (NUG) including Suu Kyi and leaders of the anti-coup protests and ethnic minorities.

The NUG has called for international recognition as the legitimate authority, and requested an invitation to the ASEAN meeting in Min Aung Hlaing's place. It could not immediately be reached for comment.

NEW YEAR AMNESTY

The junta released 23,184 prisoners from jails across the country on Saturday under a New Year amnesty, the Prisons Department said, though few if any democracy activists arrested since the coup were thought to be among them.

Saturday is the first day of Myanmar's New Year and the last day of a five-day holiday that is usually marked with visits to Buddhist temples and raucous water throwing and partying in the streets.

Suu Kyi is among 3,141 people arrested in connection with the coup, according to a tally by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP).

"These (freed) detainees are mostly from before Feb. 1 but there are also some who were imprisoned afterwards," Prisons Department spokesman Kyaw Tun Oo said by telephone. He said he had no details of the offences for which they had been jailed.

Among those released were 137 foreigners, who would be deported, state television said. It gave no details.

The AAPP said the military continued to seek 832 people in connection with the protests.

Among them are more than 200 people, including several actors, singers and internet celebrities, who have spoken out against the coup and are wanted on a charge of encouraging dissent in the armed forces, which can carry a three-year jail term.

State media announced the names of another 40 wanted people, 20 of them doctors, on Saturday.

MOVIE COUPLE HELD

The Irrawaddy news site said film director Christina Kyi and her husband, actor Zenn Kyi, had been detained at Yangon airport as they were trying to leave on a flight to Bangkok, though it later said they had been released.

The NUG's vice president, Duwa Lashi La, an ethnic Kachin lawyer, said in a New Year message that the road to replacing military rule with democracy would be rough.

"We pledge to continue working with all ethnic peoples to overthrow the military dictatorship and establish a new federal democracy," he said.

Hundreds of protesters took to the streets of several towns including Mogoke with banners supporting the NUG.

At least three explosions went off in Yangon, wounding several people, media outlets reported. There was no claim of responsibility.

The military has accused protesters of carrying out bomb attacks.

The coup has also triggered clashes between the army and ethnic minority insurgent groups in the north and east.

On Saturday, fighters from the Kachin Independence Army attacked an air base in the north with rockets, one of which hit a nearby village, injuring one person, the Mizzima news agency reported.

The military has defended its coup with by alleging that the result of November's election was fraudulent, although the election commission dismissed the objections.

Suu Kyi faces various charges, including violating an official secrets act that, could see her jailed for 14 years. Her lawyers reject the charges.

Our Standards: [The Thomson Reuters Trust Principles.](#)