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RFA – Radio Free Asia

Battle between Karen rebels and junta troops intensifies in Myanmar’s Kayin State

The junta sent in strike helicopters after 3 of its battalions were ambushed.

By RFA Burmese

Fighting between junta troops and Karen National Liberation Army joint forces continued in Kayin State Thursday, a day after the rebel group attacked three military camps in Kyainseikgyi township, according to Liberation Army members and local residents.

A Karen National Liberation Army member who wished to remain anonymous for security reasons told RFA the KNLA and local People’s Defense Forces launched simultaneous attacks Wednesday on Infantry Battalions 32, 283 and 284, based in and around Kyainseikgyi city.

“The attack started around 5.30 a.m. yesterday morning. All three battalions were attacked. We withdrew around 9 a.m. after the fighting,” he said.

“Military helicopters opened fire about 10 times on the areas where fighting broke out. We got a lot of weapons and ammunition from the army in Wednesday’s battle. There were casualties on both sides but it is difficult to tell the exact number because we are fighting with joint forces. The relevant organizations will publish details.”

Liberation Army sources told RFA three of its fighters were killed and six injured during Wednesday’s battle. The junta did not disclose casualties on its side but KNLA troops told RFA they killed nearly 50 soldiers and captured others.

They said Thiri Wai, the wife of Lt. Col. Kyaw Zin Oo, the commander of Infantry Battalion 32 was among those arrested. RFA has not been able to confirm the claim.

On Thursday morning, junta forces hit back with airstrikes and bombings of Liberation Army positions. Military attack helicopters dropped 17 bombs on the administrative office of Karen National Union Brigade 6 in Dooplaya district, KNLA troops said. The extent of the damage is still unknown.

The Karen National Union is the political wing of the KNLA and represents ethnic Karen in Myanmar.

Saw Khin Maung Myint, Kayin State’s junta spokesman and economy minister, declined to answer RFA’s questions on the conflict, saying it was a security issue.

The junta released a statement Thursday saying KNLA joint forces attacked its military camps Wednesday, but the army was able to fight back and the KNLA retreated with many casualties.

On Dec. 16, 2022, a week-long urban battle broke-out between junta troops and the KNLA in Kayin State’s Kawkaik city, leaving three civilians dead and forcing more than a thousand to flee their homes.

Translated by RFA Burmese. Written in English by Mike Firm.

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