

Karen National Union (KNU) Blocks Food Deliveries to Myanmar Military Regime Soldiers in Karen State

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An ethnic armed organization, the Karen National Union (KNU) said its Brigade 5 will ensure that no food is supplied to Tatmadaw (Myanmar military) soldiers isolated in Karen State's Papun District.

KNU Brigade 5 has blocked the routes to Papun, effectively preventing the Tatmadaw from transporting food supplies to its troops based there.

Unable to use supply routes inside Myanmar, the Tatmadaw bought 700 sacks of rice and oil from Thailand, on the opposite bank of the Salween River to Karen State. On Saturday, the food was unloaded on the Thai side of the Salween River, but the rice and oil has been stranded there ever since.

"We have stopped them from sending the sacks of rice. If they carry rice in defiance of our order, we will do what we are authorized to do in our territory. We want to throw water before the fire starts. We are taking pre-emptive action to prevent conflicts from escalating. If something happens because they don't comply with our request, we won't take responsibility," said KNU Brigade 5 spokesman Major Saw Kler Doh.

The KNU said it is blocking the food delivery because 500 local Karen people are currently affected by armed conflicts in Papun District, and also because it does not support the military regime and cannot accept the junta killing innocent people across the country.

KNU Brigade 5 issued a warning in both the Burmese and Thai languages saying that it would not tolerate anyone who carries food for the soldiers of Myanmar's military regime.

"Normally, they send food supplies [to troops in Papun] at this time of year. But this year, they staged a coup and oppressed the people. They are not a legitimate government. The military dictatorship will survive if they can sustain their troops in our territory. We are therefore preventing them from delivering food. People don't support them and we are standing by the people," said Major Saw Kler Doh.

The Tatmadaw has made no public statement about food supplies being cut off in Papun District. Nor has the military asked the KNU to allow the food to be delivered.

After the rice and oil were unloaded by the Thais, Karen people and Karen civil social organizations, as well as citizens from other parts of the country, expressed their disapproval at the Thai military's decision to sell food to the Myanmar junta.

Myanmar people rushed to condemn the Thai military's move on Twitter and Facebook. They called

on the Thai army not to support the military regime's security forces who are murdering peaceful protesters demonstrating against the junta's Feb.1 coup.

"The Thai army is not supplying the Myanmar army and there has been no contact from the Myanmar army requesting help or demanding any assistance from us," Major General Amnat Srimak, commander of the Naresuan Force of the Thai army said in a statement.

"If there are any supplies, I think it is regular commerce at normal border crossings. We are not blocking this if the product is not against the law and follows customs procedures," said the Major General.

The stretch of the Salween River in Papun is under the control of KNU Brigade 5 and is home to KNU outposts, Karen villages and camps for internally displaced Karen people, as well as military outposts of the junta. Locals said that the rice and oil are not part of the regular trade between the two countries, but are being supplied solely to Tatmadaw units.

In 2015 the KNU signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, but conflicts with the Tatmadaw in Karen State have never really ended because of increased militarization and road construction by Tatmadaw units in areas under the control of Brigade 5. There have been fresh clashes between the KNU and the military regime's troops since the coup.

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