

# MYANMAR REBEL GROUP CALLS FOR UNITED FIGHT AGAINST JUNTA

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Huge march: Protesters hit the streets to denounce the military coup at Kyaukme in Shan State on Sunday. AFPHANDOUT

A prominent rebel group in eastern Myanmar appealed on Sunday to other ethnic armies to unite against the military, as the country enters its fourth month under a junta regime.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi was deposed in a February 1 coup, triggering a mass uprising across the country.

As security forces have deployed deadly violence against civilians to suppress a persistent anti-junta movement, some of Myanmar's myriad ethnic armies have spoken out against the military.

Among the most prominent opponents is the Karen National Union (KNU), which has admitted offering shelter to fleeing dissidents in the territory they control along Myanmar's eastern border.

Clashes have escalated in Karen state between the KNU's fighters and the military.

Last week the rebels attacked and razed a military base. The junta retaliated with airstrikes and rocket launchers aimed at rebel-held territory.

On Sunday — after five days of air raids — the vice chief of staff for the KNU's armed wing wrote an open letter calling for all ethnic Karen fighters to unite, regardless of their loyalties.

“Never has there been such a great opportunity during the 70-plus years of revolution. Take advantage of this and fight against the Burmese military dictatorship,” said Lieutenant General Baw Kyaw Heh.

“In our generation, let us stand united... to escape the military dictatorship.”

His letter was addressed to two other rebel groups in Karen state — the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army and the KNU/KNLA Peace Council.

Mr. Baw Kyaw Heh also called for unity among ethnic Karen fighters in the Border Guards Forces (BGF) -- a subdivision of Myanmar's military made up of former ethnic insurgents.

“So BGF, as you are Karen, you need to think carefully about it and make the right decision,” he said. “Karen people should not be killing each other.”

Myanmar has more than 20 ethnic rebel groups, many of whom hold territories in the country's border regions.

Meanwhile, thousands of anti-coup protesters marched in Myanmar on Sunday, calling for a “spring revolution” with the country in its fourth month under a military regime.

Demonstrations kicked off early in commercial hub Yangon as activists called for a show of force

and a “spring revolution”.

Bomb blasts also went off across different parts of Yangon on Sunday. Explosions have been happening with increasing frequency in the former capital, and authorities have blamed it on “instigators”.

Youths gathered on a street corner before marching swiftly down the streets in a flash mob — dispersing soon after to avoid clashing with authorities.

“To bring down the military dictatorship is our cause!” they chanted, waving a three-finger salute of resistance.

### **Violence continues**

Violence erupted again on Sunday by 10 a.m. in Shan state’s Hsipaw township, when security forces opened fire on protesters, killing at least one.

“He was shot in the head and died immediately,” said one protester, who said he rushed to hide his friend’s body in case authorities tried to take it away.

In northern Kachin state, security forces also fired on protesters, even flinging grenades into the crowd.

A 33-year-old man was shot in the head, a fellow demonstrator told AFP, adding that many others were wounded in the attack.

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