

Burma

Myanmar Military Raids Kachin Churches

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Myanmar's military regime has searched churches in Mohnyin Township, Kachin State, claiming illegal activity was taking place.

Northern Command troops searched Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC), Roman Catholic Association and Anglican Association churches in Mohnyin on Saturday.

"It was not a random search. They were thorough, climbed over fences and went into every building in the compound. An officer came through the door but did not say a word and went straight to search my house," said Rev. Awng Seng of Mohnyin KBC.

Soldiers only said they had been informed a protest leader was inside the compound and that religious leaders were participating in anti-regime protests.

They also searched dustbins, said the priest.

"This is a religious site that shares Christian teachings. If they want to search, they should have sought faith leaders' approval. Instead, weapon-wielding personnel arrived like they were conducting a military operation. It is unacceptable and I strongly condemn it. If they behave like this on religious land, we can't imagine how they behave in people's homes. Nowhere is safe," said Rev. Awng Seng.

The security forces reportedly found nothing illegal in all three churches.

A member of the Roman Catholic Association said: "They searched everywhere. They were also after anti-regime protesters. They even searched our motorbikes."

On March 13, the security forces carried out a midnight search at Kachin Theological College and Seminary (Nawng Nang) in Kachin State's capital, Myitkyina.

The military, however, sought prior approval from the KBC to search the college.

Dr. Hkalam Samson, the KBC president, said: "We religious associations always preach for the truth. Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims do the same. As religious organizations always preach for the truth, searching religious buildings is appalling."

Searches using unnecessary force were signs of a dictatorship, he said.

"Religious sites are sacred. Not to mention God, people don't like bullying with rifles and boots in a sacred place," he added.

On March 1, the security forces broke open the gate of a KBC church in Lashio, northern Shan State, and detained more than 10 faith leaders and staff for two days. They fired shots inside the church

while looking for anti-regime protesters who had reportedly run into the compound.

With over 400,000 members and 429 churches, the KBC plays a leading role in Kachin political and social issues.

The KBC has said it opposes the military regime and has been holding daily prayer services, asking for a federal democracy with equality.

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P.S.

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