

Burma

KIA Ambushes Myanmar Military Convoy in Kachin State

Kachin State Land Confiscated by Myanmar Military Crony Taken Back by Local Farmers

Saturday 10 April 2021, by [The Irrawaddy](#) (Date first published: 9 April 2021).

The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) attacked a military convoy in Mogaung Township, Kachin State, on Thursday evening.

The Kachin armed group said the attack was targeting reinforcements in the township.

KIA information officer Naw Bu told The Irrawaddy that the group used mines against two military trucks near Loili Yang village.

He said: "We are carefully observing how the Tatmadaw [Myanmar's military] has been reinforcing troops and supplies. We attack if they are sending more troops and ammunition to fight us. We have to take the upper hand before they attack us."

Naw Bu said he was unsure about the details of the attack and he did not confirm reports of prisoners and seized ammunition from the trucks.

A villager told The Irrawaddy he heard loud explosions and at least 10 bursts of gunfire on Thursday evening.

"We saw the aftermath of exploded mines in the morning. Some houses were hit by the bullets but no villagers were injured," he said.

Following the KIA's refusal to recognize the military regime, fighting has been reported across Kachin State and northern Shan State since March 11. The KIA has attacked military and police outposts, threatening to step up attacks if the regime continues to shoot peaceful protesters across the country.

In response, the military launched airstrikes on KIA Battalions 11 and 14 in Namtu in Shan State and Tanai Township in Kachin State in March.

On Thursday night, the Tatmadaw fired at least 10 artillery rounds near the KIA headquarters in Laiza. No casualties were reported.

Naw Bu said: "They have been shooting randomly near the Laiza recently. They appear to be warning shots."

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Local residents in Kachin State's Hukawng Valley have reportedly taken back land which a crony close to Myanmar's military confiscated from them some 15 years ago.

Yuzana Co, founded by Htay Myint, a businessman linked to the former junta that ruled Myanmar from 1992-2011, confiscated some 200,000 acres of land in the Hukawng Valley, Hpakant Township, in 2006 and has since grown cassava there commercially. In total, Yuzana Co has confiscated over 300,000 acres of land in the area, including land in Tanai Township.

"Locals from nine villages have taken back their own land as of Wednesday and have started farming on that land. The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) said Yuzana Co was dissolved on April 7. We have taken back our land as the company no longer exists," said U Aung Latt, leader of the farmers in Hukawng Valley, which is known as the world's largest tiger reserve.

Yuzana Co also operates a plant in Wara Zup Village by the Ledo Road in Hpakant Township. The plant produces tapioca starch and sugar. Plant employees reportedly do not get along with local residents and are alleged to have beaten them over land disputes.

The Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the armed wing of the KIO, carried out an attack on the plant on April 1. The ethnic armed group ordered Yuzana Co to leave Hpakant by April 7.

"We demanded, through various channels, appropriate compensation for our land both under military rule and under two elected governments. They didn't give back our land. As the KIO has ordered the Yuzana Co to leave by April 7, we local people have now got back the confiscated lands," said U Aung Latt.

On Wednesday, local people staged a protest in support of the KIA's move against Yuzana Co. Protesters called on Yuzana Co to leave Hukawng once and for all, holding placards reading "No Dictatorship", "Kachin farmers support CDM (civil disobedience movement)", "We want farmland rights", "Yuzana Co! Get out of our land."

KIA information officer Colonel Naw Bu confirmed the KIA's April 1 attack on Yunaza Co, but said he has no knowledge about locals taking back their land. The KIA attacked the Yuzana Co's plant because it suspects that Myanmar's military has been using the factory compound to store food supplies and ammunition for its troops, said Col. Naw Bu.

Col. Naw Bu said he also could not confirm whether KIA troops had ordered Yuzana Co to leave the Hukawng Valley.

Yuzana Co has filed a complaint against U Aung Latt and two others with the police in Hpakant. The three have gone into hiding. The Irrawaddy was unable to contact either local police or Yuzana Co for a comment.

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