

Burma

Myanmar Military Suffers Heavy Casualties in Fierce Fighting With Ethnic Armed Groups

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Fighting broke out between various ethnic armed groups and the Myanmar military at several locations in the country's north and northeast on Monday, resulting in heavy casualties to the military, including the death of a battalion commander, as well as the reported capture of some of their soldiers.

Fierce clashes between the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Tatmadaw (Myanmar military) took place around Dokphoneyan in Kachin State's Momauk Township. Tensions have been rising since the KIA seized the Alaw Bum base on March 25 near the Chinese border, which was previously occupied by the Tatmadaw.

KIA information officer, Colonel Naw Bu told The Irrawaddy that the Tatmadaw launched several airstrikes over four days in their efforts to recapture the base from the KIA.

Col. Naw Bu said that the "Tatmadaw is reinforcing its soldiers and clashes may intensify again today".

A KIA official on the ground said many soldiers, including the battalion commander of the Tatmadaw's light infantry Battalion No. 387, were reportedly killed by the KIA during the fighting on Monday.

He said that the KIA also captured eight Myanmar military soldiers. However, The Irrawaddy was unable to verify the claim.

A local resident said that six bombs landed in Chinese territory during the airstrikes.

He said that no one was injured on the China side as the bombs landed on farmland.

Clashes were also reported elsewhere in Momauk Township, after the KIA occupied two police outposts and a military base at Tarpein Bridge. Three civilians died in the fighting after artillery shells landed in villages.

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

On Monday night, there were also reports of fighting between the Tatmadaw and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) around Myanmar's ruby centre Mogoke in the Mandalay region.

"We heard heavy artillery shells exploding from 7:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. We also heard gunfire several times," a Mogoke resident said.

"We saw that the military is reinforcing the troops near that area this morning," he said.

The Irrawaddy was unable to confirm details of casualties from the fighting.

The TNLA and the Shan State Progress Party's armed wing Shan State Army-North are active in areas of Mogoke Township. The TNLA is a member of the tripartite Brotherhood Alliance, which also includes the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and the Arakan Army.

The alliance recently condemned the military regime, warning that they are ready to join forces with all ethnic people in fighting against the junta if it continues its brutal killing of anti-coup protesters.

The Brotherhood Alliance attacked a police outpost in northern Shan State's Lashio Township on April 10. At least 14 policemen were killed and at least five family members of police officers were wounded in the attack.

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Myanmar Military Artillery Kills Kachin Civilians

Three civilians have died in fierce fighting between Myanmar's military and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Momauk Township, Kachin State.

The victims were an 83-year-old woman, a 23-year-old man and a 21-year-old woman from three different villages.

"They clashed intensely throughout the night from 11pm yesterday until this morning. Artillery shells fell into villages and the villagers died. Houses and monasteries were hit. Three people died. Two houses were blown up and windows were shattered elsewhere," said a Myothit villager.

Artillery shells were fired by Myanmar's military after KIA troops raided a police outpost and a military outpost on Sunday night, according to residents.

Two people were killed immediately by the artillery fire and the 21-year-old bled to death on Monday morning.

Villagers said the fighting was still taking place on Monday at noon.

Colonel Naw Bu, the KIA's information officer, said: "The KIA occupied a police outpost at Tarpein Bridge. We also raided a military outpost which was building a communications tower. Junta troops provided artillery support for the outposts under attack. Artillery shells landed on villages. I heard civilians were hit but I don't know the details."

The KIA only confiscated ammunition from the two outposts and did not try to permanently occupy them, said Col. Naw Bu.

Clashes are also taking place near Alaw Hill in Momauk, where KIA's Battalion 30 is stationed.

The battalion seized the hill near the Chinese border from Myanmar's military on March 25. The military has been attempting to retake the hill for three days, said Col. Naw Bu.

"They have attacked with jet fighters four times this morning. They are still firing. It is far from villages and there are no civilians there. They are fighting fiercely. We are trying to maintain our control of the hill," said Col. Naw Bu.

Villagers have asked both sides to avoid their homes. A villager said: "We have nowhere to run. There is open space outside the village. We can only hide in bomb shelters when they attack. If a bomb directly hits a shelter, we will die. This is our destiny. The fighters were overhead until this afternoon. We wish they would avoid civilian targets."

Fresh clashes broke out in Kachin State on March 11 between Myanmar's military and the KIA after two years without major violence.

The two sides were in the process of negotiating a ceasefire before the Feb. 1 coup. The Kachin armed group asked the military's Northern Command not to harm peaceful Kachin protesters opposing the military regime.

Tensions grew after two civilians were shot dead in a crackdown by the security forces on anti-regime protesters in the Kachin capital, Myitkyina, on March 8.

Three days after the Myitkyina killings, the KIA raided a military outpost in the jade-mining hub, Hpakant, and since then carried out a series of attacks on police and military outposts in Waingmaw, Bhamo, Namtu, Hpakant, Mogaung and Shwegu townships.

The military has also attacked KIA camps with artillery and bombed KIA battalions 11 and 14 on March 29.

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