
Civilian infrastructure and food supplies destroyed in Myanmar military arson attacks

SAC operations in East Tabayin township, Sagaing region

REPORT BY MYANMAR WITNESS, 17 MARCH 2023

Key Event Details

- **Location of Incident:** Nyaung Hla village (ညောင်လှရွာ), Tabayin township (ဒီပဲယင်းမြို့နယ်), Sagaing region (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး), [22.65276909, 95.41811371].
- **Date/Time of Incident:**
 - Multiple events between 23-28 January 2023.
- **Alleged Perpetrator(s) and/or Involvement:**
 - State Administration Council (SAC) forces
 - A 17 January 2023 [announcement](#) from the National Unity Government (NUG) alleges the LIB 364 and LIB 701 (under direction of the LID 77) were responsible.
- **Summary of Investigation:**
 - SAC forces allegedly [entered](#) villages in Tabayin township, setting at least [10 villages](#) on fire. Fires were identified and verified in seven villages between 23-28 January 2023.
 - Almost the entirety of Nyaung Hla village [was levelled](#) by the fires, resulting in damage and destruction to up to 402 houses.
 - Food supplies - including a rice mill, multiple rice storage facilities, and farm animals - were reportedly damaged, destroyed or killed during the fires in [Nyaung Hla](#) and [Ma Ya Kan](#) (မရကန်) villages.
 - Based on the analysis of identified open source user-generated content (UGC), it is likely that the SAC forces who were active in the area were responsible for these fires.

Summary

On 23 January 2023, SAC forces reportedly [entered](#) several villages located at the border of Ye-U (ရေဦး) and Tabayin (ဒီပဲယင်း) townships, and [set](#) at least 10 villages alight. On 24 January 2023, sources including [Khit Thit News](#) and [Radio Free Asia](#) reported that SAC forces burned Nyaung Hla (ညောင်လှ) village, which was home to over [900 households](#), for the third time since January 2022. The fire resulted in the damage and destruction of hundreds of civilian homes, rice paddies, and a rice mill. Farm animals and an elderly woman were also reportedly killed.

Myanmar Witness has verified and chronolocated the fires in seven out of the reported [10 villages](#) (table 1). Additionally, Myanmar Witness has geolocated additional footage in Nyaung Hla village, where an estimated 402 houses were affected, and verified the destruction of a rice mill. Reports also indicate the damage and destruction of food supplies such as [rice paddies](#) and [farm animals](#) in some of the affected villages.

Myanmar Witness has identified content indicating the presence of SAC troops during and/or before the fires in and around the affected areas.

Village	Confirmed Date of Fire	Coordinates
Aung Chan Thar (အောင်ချမ်းသာ)	27 January 2023	22.66422081, 95.42001343
Daing Nat (ဒိုင်နတ်)	27 January 2023	22.59243965, 95.39610291
Let Yet Kone (လက်ယက်ကုန်း)	24 January 2023	22.6767807, 95.40236664
Nyaung Hla (ညောင်လှ)	24 January 2023	22.65276909, 95.41811371
Ohn Ta Pin (အုံးတပင်)	26 January 2023	22.60137939, 95.34348297

Tha Yet Taw (သရက်တော)	25 January 2023	22.66072083, 95.42534637
Yin Kyin (ယဉ်ကျင်း)	28 January 2023	22.62416077, 95.44740295

Table 1: Verified dates of fires in seven of the [reported](#) 10 villages.

Location Map

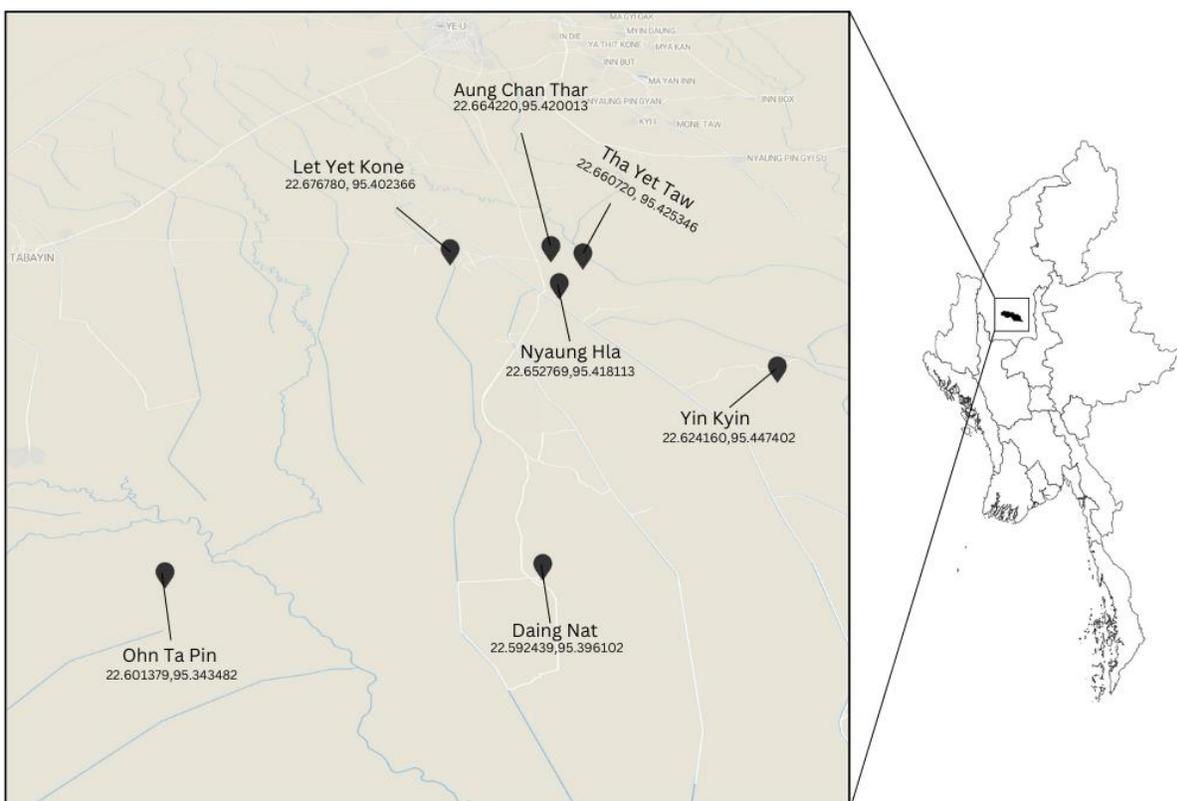


Figure 1: Map of verified fires in seven of the alleged ten villages in Tabayin Township, Sagaing Region.

Myanmar Witness was able to verify:

- At least seven villages were burnt between 23-28 January 2023.
- Up to 402 houses in Nyaung Hla Village were damaged or destroyed by the fires.
- A rice mill, and reportedly rice storage facilities, were damaged or destroyed in the fire.

Verification and Chronolocation of Fires in Nyaung Hla Village

Verification via FIRMS

Between 23-27 January 2023, The Fire Information for Resource Management System (FIRMS) shows multiple areas of high heat signatures in Nyang Hla village, consistent with the dates of the reported fires (Figure 2).



Figure 2: FIRMS identified [fire](#) events between 23-27 January 2023

Verification via Sentinel

The fire locations identified using FIRMS were further analysed using [Sentinel](#) satellite imagery. Nyaung Hla and Tha Yet Taw were visibly damaged during the investigated timeframe, corroborating the FIRMS data on 25 January 2023. Additionally, an image from Sentinel hub on the 25 January shows smoke above the area (Figure 3). This can be seen by the discoloration shown in Figure 4 (from 10 January 2023 to 30 January 2023).



Figure 3: Sentinel Hub [imagery](#) showing smoke above the area on 25 January 2023

Utilising Sentinel Hub's 'False Colour' filter, as shown in Figure 4, large areas of Nyaung Hla and Tha Yet Taw have become a more homogeneous brown, indicating a loss of vegetation and thus supporting the FIRMS identified presence of various fire events.

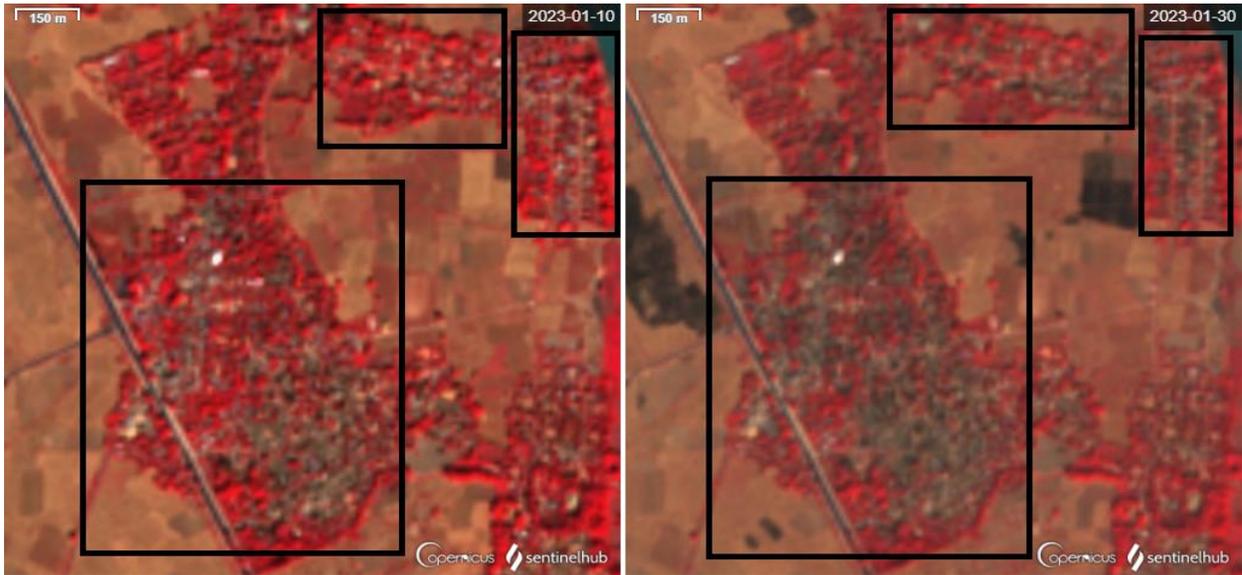


Figure 4: False colour satellite [imagery](#) showing the decrease of vegetation in the urban areas in Nyaung Hla Village and Tha Yet Taw Village

Estimating the number of houses affected

Sentinel imagery can also be used to count and estimate the number of damaged or destroyed houses. This is done by overlaying the discoloured area with higher resolution imagery (Figure 5). Using this method, Myanmar Witness was able to estimate that up to 402 houses were damaged or destroyed.



Figure 5: the outline of the damage seen in sentinel was overlaid onto the higher resolution imager showing Nyaung Hla Village

Geolocations

Rice Mill

The fires in Nyaung Hla village visibly damaged a rice mill located in the west of the village. Figure 6 and 7 compare drone footage (UGC) and satellite imagery of the location near the rice mill (blue box), showing the damage incurred by the fire.





Figure 6: [Aerial view](#) of Nyaung Hla village taken by a drone after the fires compared to Google Earth Imagery.



Figure 7: The rice mill in Nyaung Hla (red box) was geolocated using the [UGC footage](#) and satellite image.
[22.655667, 95.416778]

Additional images of Nyaung Hla Village

Multiple sources of UGC, both drone and on-ground footage, show clear views of Nyaung Hla village during and after the fires were identified. These pieces of UGC, showing the fire and its aftermath, are verified from different angles below.

Figure 8 shows the geolocation of the middle section of Nyaung Hla village. The boundary (marked by the dotted line) and the white roofed house (marked in a red box) are verified by matching UGC with satellite imagery. The [post](#) claims the events took place on 24 and 25 January 2023, corroborating the aforementioned FIRMS and Sentinel data.

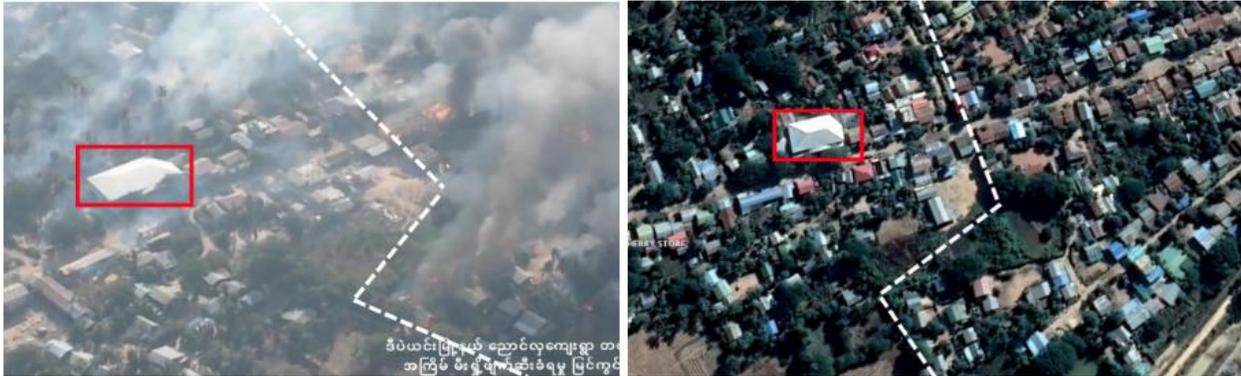


Figure 8: Image on the left shows the snapshot from the source [video](#) of the burning village and was located using the roofs and roads to [22.658455, 95.416979] (Nyaung Hla village).

Figure 9 shows the geolocation of an area in the west of Nyaung Hla village near the canal. The road (marked in red) and the bridge (marked in orange) are verified with the matching satellite imagery.



Figure 9: Image on the left is a snapshot of a [video](#) and is geolocated using the bridge, water, roofs and roads [22.655851, 95.416388].

Unverified claims

Elderly woman's remains in Ohn Ta Pin village

On 27 January 2023 it was [reported](#) that an elderly woman from Ohn Ta Pin (အံ့တပင်) [22.60137939, 95.34348297] village was killed in a fire set by SAC troops (identified through FIRMS to have occurred on 26 January 2023). Figure 10 shows the alleged remains of the victim found in the ashes.



Figure 10: [Alleged](#) burnt remains of a human victim.

Burnt rice store piles and farm animals

In Ma Ya Kan village, SAC troops [allegedly](#) burned the rice storage building (Figure 11) and damaged an estimated 70 houses. Myanmar Witness was able to verify the fire in the village using Sentinel satellite imagery, but the footage posted online of the burnt rice does not provide enough information to verify its location through geolocation.



Figure 11: [Footage](#) of the partially burnt rice paddy mixed with burnt building remnants.

Photos allegedly taken in Nyaung Hla village also show the destruction of food supplies. At least four farm animals were reported to have died as a result of the fires, and a partially burnt rice storage building can be seen (Figure 12).



Figure 12: (Top left) [Dead farm animals](#), one hen and possibly one goat. (Top right) Same two farm animals [along with](#) two other animals on the ground. (Bottom) Rice paddy seen [burnt](#) under the rubble. All photos were [reportedly](#) taken in Nyaung Hla village.

Food shortages for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

A local support group [reported](#) that a military operation undertaken by an estimated 150 SAC troops in the east of Tabayin township resulted in tens of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The group appealed for donations as it expected it would face food shortages for the IDPs. These challenges may be exacerbated by the damage and destruction of food supplies caused by the fires.

Perpetrators of the Fires

Several used packages of bullets (Figure 13 a-d) labelled Ka Pa Sa, Defence Industries (ကကွယ်ရေးပစ္စည်းစက်ရုံ, ကပစ), were allegedly found in Nyaung Hla village. The box in Figure 12a states “Manufactured by Defence Industries”. Figure 12d shows a paper box labelled “KaPaSa (2) 5.56x45mm bullets”, and Figure 12e shows possible rifle grenade casings - the features match the container tube for a 40mm rifle grenade model MG-2 which is used by the Myanmar military. This is determined due to the tube size and cracking of the tube body with the twist off end. While Myanmar Witness cannot verify the location where these boxes and weapons were found, the weapon characteristics and manufacturers signal that they belonged to SAC troops.



Figure 13: Top to bottom (a) Ammunition case with the label that reads, “Manufactured by Defence Industries” in both Burmese and English. (b) Ammunition case that reads, “Lot No and Manufacture Date”. (c) Multiple ammunition

cases. (d) Ammunition case that reads, “KaPaSa (2) 5.56x45mm bullets”. (e) has matching features to a container tube for 40mm rifle grenade model MG-2, manufactured by DDI (Source: [Khit Thit Media](#)).

Images also circulated online showing messages on a blackboard inside a school building in Nyaung Hla village, both of which contain profanities directed against the PDF (Figure 14). While Myanmar Witness cannot verify the authors of these messages, they were left in a location where SAC troops were allegedly located and weapon boxes were also found.

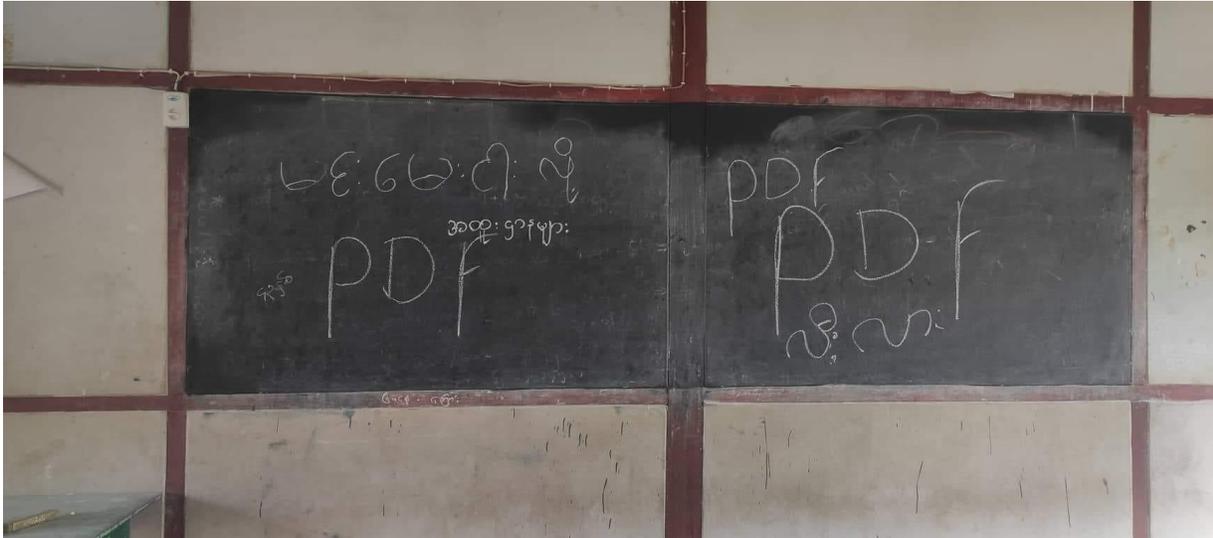


Figure 14: [Hand written curses](#) against PDFs on a blackboard allegedly in Nyaung Hla village. The text on the left side of the blackboard reads, “Motherfucker PDF”, and on the right reads, “Fuck you, PDF”. Small text in the middle of the left side reads, “special departments”, likely unrelated to the incident.

Future monitoring

Although direct attribution cannot be made to the SAC in this case, SAC troops have an established history of using [fire as a weapon](#) against the local resistance forces and civilians in Sagaing region. The continued use of fire by armed forces within Myanmar is concerning; it places civilian lives at risk, creates IDPs and could destabilise local food supplies. Myanmar Witness will continue to monitor the use of fire in the region.

Abbreviations

Internally Displaced Person	IDP
State Administration Council	SAC
User Generated Content	UGC
People Defence Force	PDF
Defence Industries	Ka Pa Sa (ကပေ)