

Air attacks damage homes & religious sites in Pyin Taw U

The impact of a sustained air attack in Kale township, Sagaing region

REPORT BY MYANMAR WITNESS, 26 April 2023

Key Event Details

- **Location of Incident:**
 - Pyin Taw U (ပျဉ်းတော်ဦး), Kale (ကလေး), Sagaing (စစ်ကိုင်း), [23.356936, 94.039784]
- **Date/Time of Incident:**
 - 30 March 2023 - 6 April 2023
- **Alleged Perpetrator(s) and/or Involvement:**
 - Myanmar military
 - Chin Defence Force - Kalay Kabaw Gangaw (CDF-KKG)
 - Chan Thar Gyi People's Defence Forces (PDFs)
- **Summary of Investigation:**
 - Myanmar Witness has identified several incidents of interest pertaining to alleged air strikes by the Myanmar military in Pyin Taw U village.
 - It is alleged that the Myanmar military clashed with CDF-KKG and Chan Thar Gyi PDF from 30 March 2023 until 6 April 2023.
 - Myanmar Witness geolocated damage to multiple structures, likely to be civilian homes, as well as two separate religious sites, alleged to have been caused by airstrikes between 31 March and 6 April 2023.
 - Myanmar Witness geolocated footage of an aircraft in the airspace of Pyin Taw U village, allegedly taken on 31 March 2023.
 - In this timespan, there were three alleged civilian casualties reported on social media; one of which was identified through an online missing persons report earlier in the day.

Summary

On 31 March 2023, [Khonumthung Burmese](#) reported that the Myanmar military were attacking from the air with a Mi-35 helicopter during the battle that took place near Pyin Taw U village in the north Kale township. A clash between the Myanmar military and PDFs ensued between the villages of Pyin Taw U and Nan Saung Pu (နန်းစောင်းပု). As a result of the clashes, residents of Pyin Taw U, Let Pan Chaung (လက်ပံချောင်း), Myauk Chaw Taw (မျောက်ချောတော) and Chan Thar Gyi (ချမ်းသာကြီး) villages were forced to flee to Kale town.

[People's Spring](#) claims that an Mi-17 helicopter was in use by the Myanmar military, with another aircraft also airborne in the area. This may suggest multiple aircrafts were involved in the clashes in Pyin Taw U village. The exact model of the helicopter was verified by Myanmar Witness using the collected footage. Myanmar Witness geolocated images, using multiple pieces of user generated content (UGC), of an Mi-35 aircraft in Pyin Taw U village. The footage was posted on 31 March 2023, but cannot be chronolocated to the given date.

Damage to the structures of two separate religious sites in Pyin Taw U, Hosana Assembly of God Church and Shiloh Baptist Church, were verified by Myanmar Witness and alleged to have occurred during air attacks between 30 March and 6 April 2023. Damage to Hosana Assembly of God Church was not visible on satellite imagery, but a slight change in the area where Shiloh Baptist Church is located is visible on Sentinel. UGC identified by Myanmar Witness also showed destroyed and damaged houses, which were then geolocated to Pyin Taw U village. These structures are alleged to have been destroyed between 5 and 6 April 2023. Visible changes in the geolocated areas were also visible on Sentinel imagery.

The footage of the damaged Shiloh Baptist Church included a visual of munitions. These munitions were verified by Myanmar Witness as being an S-8 missile, which is specifically used by Myanmar military aircrafts and in use by Mi-35 aircrafts.

Warning: This report contains graphic imagery.



Myanmar Witness has been able to verify:

- The location of a Myanmar military aircraft, an Mi-35, that was geolocated to Pyin Taw U in the days leading up to the alleged air attack.
- The location of damaged structures in Pyin Taw U village, including two churches, allegedly taken on 6 April 2023.
- An S-8 rocket present in footage of one of the destroyed churches, Shiloh Baptist Church.
- Sentinel imagery, showing a loss of vegetation in three distinct areas of Pyin Taw U village, between 4 March 2023 and 8 April 2023.
- UGC of three casualties of the Pyin Taw U air attack that were not identified online prior to this conflict event. These images were also posted close to, or on, the claimed dates.
- A missing persons announcement on Facebook pertaining to one of the victims identified in the aforementioned UGC. The deceased were claimed to be three civilians, matching the three deceased individuals who were identified by Myanmar Witness.

The investigation walkthrough

Geolocations

Myanmar Witness geolocated [imagery](#) of Hosana Assembly of God Church in Pyin Taw U village to around 23.357231, 94.040508, having been damaged. It is alleged this damage occurred on 31 March 2023 (Figure 1). Further footage, uploaded on 31 March 2023 by [Khonumthung Burmese](#), demonstrates an aircraft, identified by Myanmar Witness to be an Mi-35, geolocated in the airspace of Pyin Taw U village (Figure 2).



Figure 1: Geolocation of the damage to Hosana Assembly of God Church at 23.357231, 94.040508. (Source: [Zalen](#)).



Figure 2: Geolocation of an Mi-35 aircraft in Pyin Taw U village, allegedly taken on 31 March 2023 (23.357911, 94.039910). (Source: [Khonumthung Burmese](#)).

Myanmar Witness geolocated further footage, allegedly from 6 April 2023, of Shiloh Baptist Church in Pyin Taw U having suffered structural damage. The damage could have been caused by airstrikes, as roofing appears to have been affected in these images; there does not appear to be much visible burn damage (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Geolocation of the damaged Shiloh Baptist Church from 6 April 2023 (23.358067, 94.042780). (Source: [Zalen](#)).

Additional footage geolocated by Myanmar Witness showed heavy damage in Pyin Taw U village (Figure 4). A PDF Facebook page posted more footage of the village on 5 April 2023. In

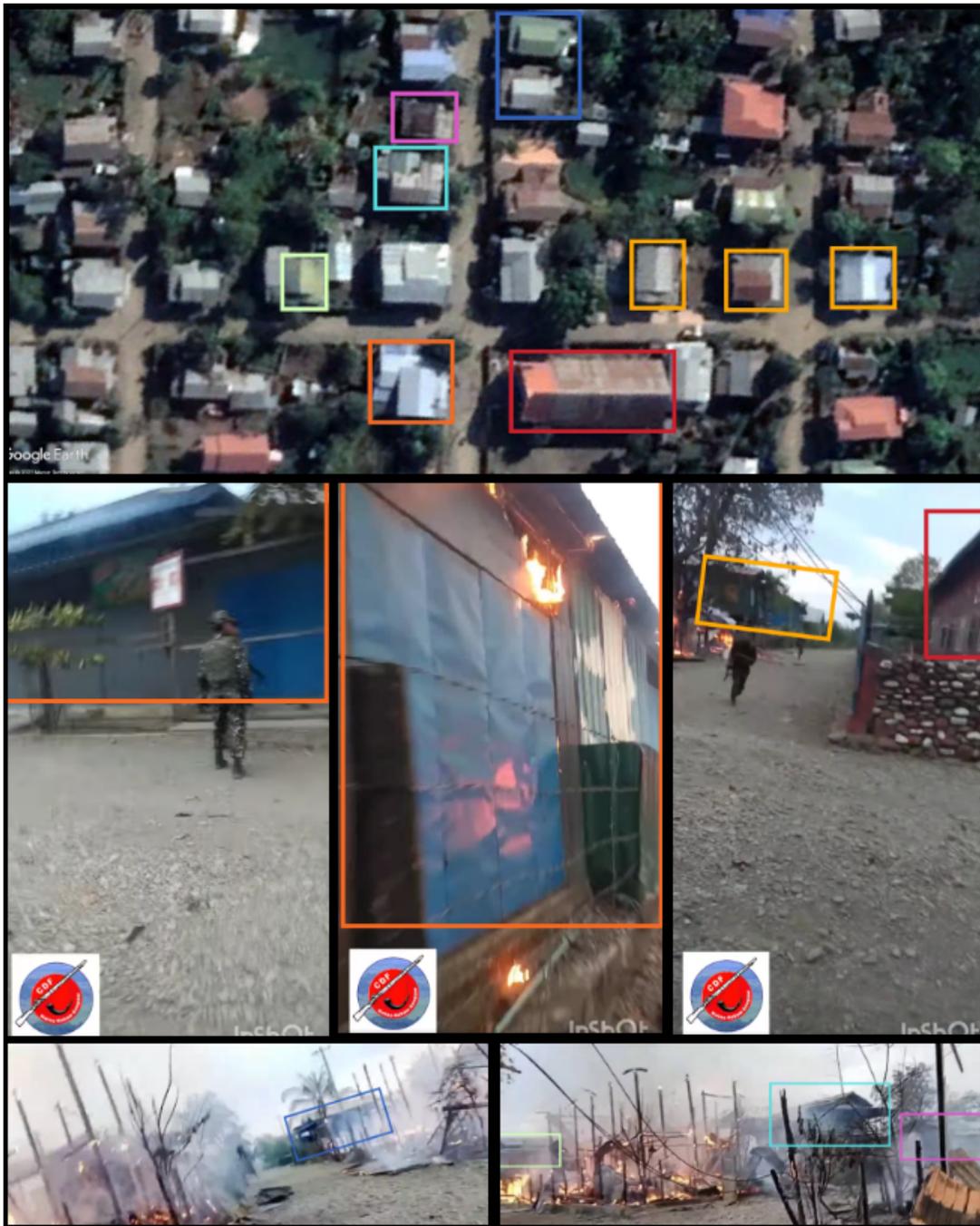


Figure 5: Geolocations of PDF footage posted on 5 April 2023, demonstrating damaged structures and active fires in Pyin Taw U (23.357001, 94.041667). (Source: Private).

Additional [unverified images](#) identified by Myanmar Witness demonstrate abusive graffiti on walls, alleged to be from structures in Pyin Taw U village. These messages contain abuse towards [Chin ethnic people and PDF forces](#) and [threats related to burning](#) down the village (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Handwritten text on walls alleged to be from Pyin Taw U village are abusive towards Chin people and PDFs, as well as making threats. (Top image) “Stupid Chin, PDF”, (bottom left) “Stupid Chin, PDF terrorist” and (bottom right) “will burn down next time, from the leader”.

Verification via Sentinel

Sentinel satellite imagery shows a decreased definition and discoloration in an area of Pyin Taw U village between 14 March and 18 April 2023. This area aligns with the affected area from Figure 5 that Myanmar Witness geolocated (Figure 7). These changes could be a result of small fires affecting structures or the ground in the area. This can also be demonstrated to a lesser extent in [Sentinel](#) imagery between 14 March and 8 April 2023. Satellite imagery is predominantly unclear in the intervening days and thus a wider time frame of reference was required for assessment. This makes Myanmar Witness' analysis less accurate to a specific date, but does demonstrate that the attack occurred within 14 March and 18 April 2023

This Sentinel imagery, together with the ground footage geolocated by Myanmar Witness, narrows down the timeframe of these events occurring between 14 March 2023 and 8 April 2023.

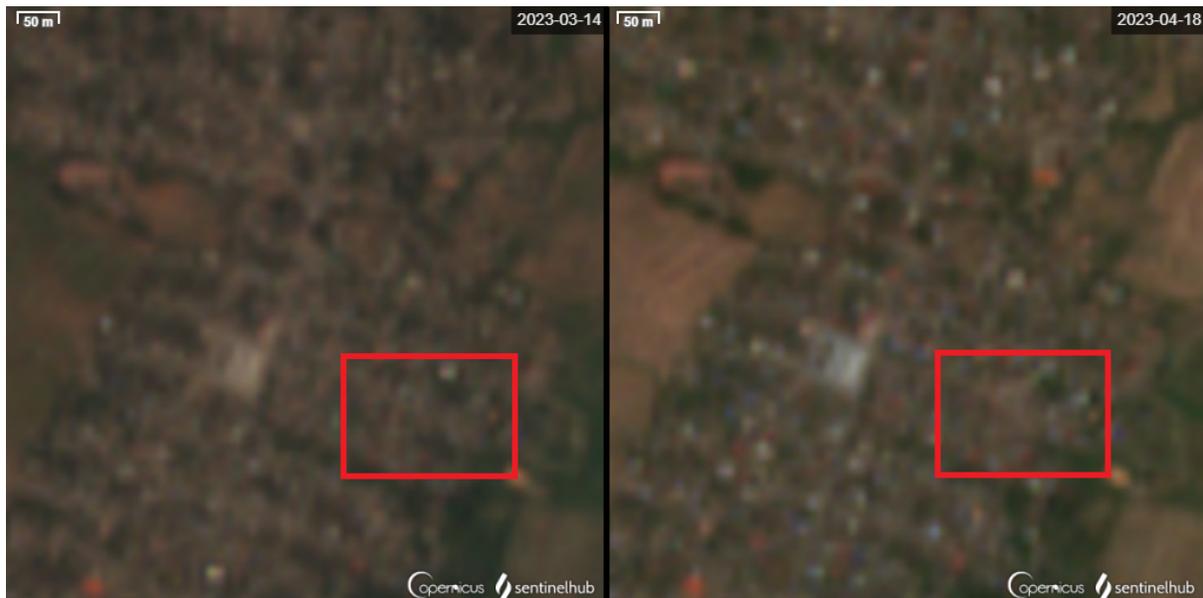


Figure 7: [Sentinel](#) footage demonstrates that the layout of the village- highlighted in red - differs greatly with discoloration and lesser definition to the area between 14 March 2023 and 18 April 2023.

Deceased Individuals

UGC of deceased individuals, claimed in online posts to be civilians affected during the 5-6 April 2023 clashes, were first posted on social media on 6 April 2023. Separate posts claimed that those depicted had been tortured, and that two of the individuals were brutally killed by the Myanmar military. None of the casualties are pictured wearing uniforms.

For one of the deceased individuals (Figure 8), Myanmar Witness identified a social media post on 6 April 2023 at 0612 local time, wherein an individual matching the clothing, with similarities

in the ears and hair of the deceased had been reported missing. The face of the deceased is too swollen and bruised for Myanmar Witness to make a positive identification on facial features. This social media post came over five hours before the post of the deceased individuals at 1147 local time.



Figure 8: Image of a deceased individual, uploaded on 6 April 2023, alleged to have been killed in the airstrike. This is compared to an image taken from a Facebook page sharing a missing persons advertisement on 6 April 2023. (Sources: Private).

Munitions Used

During the course of this investigation, two separate pieces of footage contributed to the analysis of the armament employed in this attack.

UGC describing the attack mentioned the presence of SAC military helicopters, either of the Mi-17 or Mi-35 models (Figure 9). The Myanmar Air Force (MAF) is the only party to the conflict currently employing such aircraft models. Myanmar Witness can verify that the footage of a helicopter in Pyin Taw U airspace, allegedly on 31 March 2023, depicts an Mi-35 attack helicopter.



Figure 9: Images of the Mi-35 helicopter in the airspace of Pyin Taw U village, allegedly taken on 31 March 2023 (23.357911, 94.039910). (Source: [Khonumthung Burmese](#))

Secondly, one of the videos analysed by Myanmar Witness shows the destruction suffered by the Shiloh Baptist church, depicting a piece of ordnance stuck in the floor of the church (Figure 10). Myanmar Witness has been able to identify this remnant as belonging to an air-to-ground unguided Soviet-designed 80mm S-8-type rocket, by visually matching the unique features of the visible portion protruding out of the soil to the tail fins section of a S-8-type rocket (Figure 11).



*Figure 10: A piece of ammunition filmed inside of Pyin Taw U village, next to Shiloh Baptist Church.
(Source: Private).*



Figure 11: Visual comparison of remnants from Shiloh Baptist Church to confirmed S-8-type rockets' fins sections. (Sources: Private; [Guns.allzip](#); [KNU](#)).



Figure 12: One of the S-8 rocket variants (the S-8KOM) as marketed on the website of one of its current exporters. The S-8-type is today manufactured by many companies internationally. (Source: Roe.ru).

The S-8 type rocket (of which several variants exist) can be employed by several aircraft in use within the MAF. It is electrically fired by several models of rocket pods which are mounted on underwing pylons.

Myanmar Witness can confirm that apart from the Mi-35, the Yak-130, MiG-29, Su-30 and G-4 aircraft models, utilised currently by the MAF, could have been equipped with the S-8-type rocket. This lends credibility to the fact that the Myanmar military, possibly using Mi-35 aircrafts, could have attacked Pyin Taw U village.

Future monitoring

Since the military coup in February 2021, the fighting between PDFs and the Myanmar military has continued to rage. As the situation has worsened, attacks impacting civilians have become more commonly reported and investigated by Myanmar Witness. In particular, the 'dry zone' - made up of Sagaing, Chin and partially Magway - is a key area of strategic importance for both sides of the conflict.

It is essential to continue monitoring the clashes between the Myanmar military, PDF, EAO and other parties to the conflict, particularly in the dry zone, given its strategic importance in the conflict. Myanmar Witness will continue to monitor reports of conflict activity and MAF airstrikes to provide insight into the patterns of conflict in Myanmar.



Abbreviations

Chin Defence Force - Kalay Kabaw Gangaw
Myanmar Air Force
People's Defence Force
State Administration Council
User generated content

CDF-KKG
MAF
PDF
SAC
UGC