MYANMAR WITNESS

A project by

CENTRE for INFORMATION RESILIENCE

CONFLICTING CLAIMS ON A SCHOOL STRIKE

An Analysis Of The Sagaing Airstrike Event

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15 May 2025

WARNING: This report contains graphic information and imagery. While efforts have been made to blur details, the report includes information which some readers may find distressing. Additionally, several sources have been withheld due to the graphic nature of the material.

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After the March 2025 earthquake in Myanmar, the ongoing conflict between Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) and the State Administration Council (SAC) continues to inflict civilian casualties and infrastructure damage across the country.

On 12 May 2025, reports emerged of an airstrike hitting a school in Oe Htein Kwin (North) (အိုးထိမ်းကွင်း (မြောက်), Tabayin (ဒီပဲယင်းမြို့နယ်) township, Sagaing Region [22.65184975, 95.20942688]. Khit Thit News [GRAPHIC] initially reported "up to 50 casualties" but later revised these figures to 22 deaths, of which 20 were children. Two days later, a local administration office updated the death toll to 24, with 102 injured.

These accounts were categorically denied by SAC-aligned sources. including MRTV, the Global New Light of Myanmar and other pro-SAC accounts (source). The denials of the event have taken several forms, including:

1. Disputing the reported death toll - Some pro-SAC sources reject the claim that 50 people were killed
2. Denying that an airstrike occurred at all
3. Shifting blame to the opposition forces - Certain sources claim that the incident was the result of a drone strike carried out by the People's Defence Force (PDF)
4. Framing the strike as justified, in some cases, it has been implied that the school was being used for bomb-making, thus suggesting the attack targeted a legitimate military objective.

Myanmar Witness analysed User Generated Content (UGC) showing between 11 and 16 bodies at the scene, although the status of these individuals (dead or injured) is, in most cases, undetermined. Additionally, multiple angles of the incident area were geolocated, confirming the event's occurrence. The date of the event is currently assessed as likely due to Sentinel footage, timestamps in the imagery, and the apparent absence of UGC prior to the event.

While available UGC does not definitively identify the ordnance used in the incident, it is reasonably consistent with other remnants of aerial explosives seen. Alongside this, the structural damage and the victims' injuries were consistent with airstrikes. Additionally, the presence of apparent EAO-related outfits among bystanders in some footage suggests that the PDF forces were unlikely to have been responsible for the strike.

Regarding claims that the school was used for bomb-making, according to pro-SAC accounts, imagery of the alleged production site does not match any UGC of the

struck school, making this claim highly unlikely. Furthermore, the original TikTok video has also been removed or hidden without explanation. Therefore, the denials and alternative narratives prompted by MRTV and other pro-SAC sources appear to be spreading disinformation around this incident.

Myanmar Witness will continue to investigate this event and related incidents in the region.

2 INTRODUCTION

Since the February 2021 coup, the State Administration Council (SAC), led by the Myanmar military, has conducted ground and air attacks in civilian areas, with the Sagaing Region being the main focus for the post-coup violence. This is evidenced by the significant number of arson attacks afflicting villages, many of which have been attributed to the SAC (see Myanmar Witness' report, Why is Sagaing the epicentre of Myanmar's conflict? and Myanmar on fire). In Sagaing, Myanmar Witness has documented airstrikes taking place in 31 out of 37 townships, along with the highest number of destroyed buildings and homes throughout the country, and large expanses of farmland burned along the way. Moreover, thousands of civilians have been displaced due to these attacks. These types of incidents have not stopped since the earthquake in March 2025, with the village discussed in this report located within the earthquake-affected area.

Since the coup, Tabayin township has a history of experiencing violent attacks, likely driven in part by its alleged position as a resistance stronghold against the SAC. Myanmar Witness has documented multiple similar events in the area (see The Tabayin School Attack). Multiple ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) have openly opposed the February 2021 coup and have conducted their collaborative attacks against the SAC military. Furthermore, the military appears to have used this knowledge as a reason for violent attacks throughout the area, claiming that the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and PDF are "terrorists". This has reportedly led to widespread SAC arson attacks and airstrike campaigns to try to gain a foothold in Sagaing. The SAC has also conducted sporadic internet blackouts. These extra measures are seemingly a means of pressuring resistance forces by harming the local communities where EAOs are located.

On 12 May 2025, media reports, including those from Mizzima and People's Spring, claimed that a National Unity Government (NUG) school in Oe Htein Kwin (North) village in Tabayin township was struck in an airstrike, allegedly carried out by the Myanmar Air Force (MAF). Initial figures reported that 13 people died, including 11 children. A later update from a local administration group raised the death toll to 24

and 102 injuries. Additional UGC suggests that a separate strike occurred in Tabayin later the same day, although no visual evidence of this second strike has yet been analysed (at the time of writing).

These reports were contested by state-run and pro-SAC outlets such as MRTV and the Global New Light of Myanmar. Regarding civilian casualties, including children, as a result of airstrikes, SAC spokesperson General Zaw Min Tun stated in an interview with Al Jazeera in May 2025:

> *"Regarding children being present, they were part of groups working with terrorists. So yes, attacks happen, and in attacks, collateral is unavoidable. This is the reality of war. Collateral damage happens. To be clear, if you don't support terrorists, if you don't support violence, then there is no reason for violence in these areas."*

Given the high number of children reportedly killed in the airstrike on 12 May, these comments from General Zaw Min Tun are of significance, as they highlight the SAC's view of civilian harm as an unavoidable consequence of their military operations during this conflict.

The following sections examine the available UGC, satellite imagery and State and non-State narratives to assess what happened at Oe Htwin Kwin (North) and whether the contested claims can be validated.

3 GEOLOCATIONS & SPATIAL ANALYSIS

Based on open source analysis and UGC analysis emanating from this event, extensive geolocation processes were conducted to Oe Htein Kwin (North) village as the location where the incident occurred. Four separate images were geolocated, two of which are shown below (figure 1 & figure 2).

Figure 1: UGC showing people looking at a row of bodies (cropped out due to the graphic nature) gathered on the school compound. In the image [Left], multiple buildings (and the nearby vegetation)

can be seen matching up as per the coloured boxes. [22.650504, 95.209105] (satellite source: © 2025 Airbus/Maxar Technologies via Google Maps) (Source: Khit Thit Media [GRAPHIC])

Figure 2: [Top] another damaged school building, in this image, the most notable feature is the two-tiered roof [22.650894, 95.209071] (satellite source: © 2025 Airbus/Maxar Technologies via Google Maps) (source: Mizzima News)
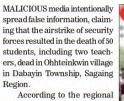
4 MEDIA DISINFORMATION & ANALYSIS

The details of this event have been met with several counter-statements from pro-SAC sources, which, despite some contradictions, generally fall into these four main categories:

1. Disputing the reported death toll - Some pro-SAC sources reject the claim that 50 people were killed (figure 3).
2. Denying that an airstrike occurred at all.
3. An airstrike did happen, but it was carried out by the PDF.
4. Framing the strike as justified, it has been implied that the school was being used for bomb-making, thus suggesting the attack targeted a legitimate military objective.

Counter-argument to false information

False airstrike reports spread by malicious media

MALICIOUS media intentionally spread false information, claiming that the airstrike of security forces resulted in the death of 50 students, including two teachers, dead in Ohhteinkwin village in Dabayin Township, Sagaing Region.

According to the regional security officer, such news was invalid, and security forces conducted proper security measures to protect the lives and prosperity, and did not conduct an airstrike.

The government focuses on the promotion of the education quality of the new generation, and terrorists commit attacks and kidnappings.

Certain subversive media outlets disseminate false narratives to disrupt community peace and stability, aiming to conceal the collaborative efforts between security forces and residents in maintaining security. — MNA/KTZH

Screenshots validate misinformation.

Figure 3: Article from the Global New Light of Myanmar claiming that other reports are false information. (source: available upon request)

To assess the possibility that [MRTV](#) and other Pro-SAC accounts ([source](#)) appear to be spreading disinformation, forensic and arms analysis was conducted by experts at Myanmar Witness. These findings will be addressed in the following sections.

4.1 FORENSIC ANALYSIS (EXTREMELY GRAPHIC)

Myanmar Witness analysed UGC and media sources to ascertain likely casualty figures, the cause of death, and the cause of damage, where possible.

Using images from a source that shared many of the more graphic visuals (Redacted due to privacy), Myanmar Witness confirmed the presence of up to 16 separate bodies in the footage (figure 4). Additional unidentified body parts were also observed, suggesting the total body count could be higher. However, this remains unconfirmed at the time of writing, due to a lack of UGC showing further details. The available imagery shows victims with extremely graphic injuries, including extensive bleeding, lacerations, and partial or potentially full-body mutilation. This type of bodily damage is consistent with that typically seen in large, violent events involving heavy weapons or airstrikes.

Following the MRTV claim disputing the reported death toll, it would appear to be lower than 50.

Figure 4: Blurred example of the images analysed. The timestamp fits the 12 May 2025 narrative, giving some additional support to the date. (Source Redacted, available upon request)

4.2 ARMS ANALYSIS

Social media posts shared by a local PDF group and a private account on their official Facebook pages purport to show remnants from the alleged airstrike (source redacted due to privacy issues). Myanmar Witness analysed these fragments and determined that the images captured depict two damaged tail fins from an unguided air-delivered ordnance (figures 5 & 6). Despite identifying the type of ammunition, Myanmar Witness is unable to provide an accurate ID of its make and model.

This evidence contradicts MRTV's statement that no airstrike was carried out. Additionally, in comparison, Global New Light of Myanmar's coverage remains ambiguous, offering no

clear denial but yet implying justification, thus making it difficult to classify as direct disinformation.

Figure 5: A remnant of munitions within the premises of the destroyed school building. (Source: [Local Administration Media (မိစ္ဆာနိုင်မနင်းရေး ညီကိုများ-ဒီပဲယင်း ပကဖ) *[GRAPHIC]*

Figure 6: A remnant of munitions within the premises of the destroyed school compound. (Source: redacted, available upon request)

4.3 EXPLOSIVE PRODUCTION

It has been suggested that the school hit was being used for explosive production. One source included video imagery allegedly showing such activity, thus prompting further analysis. Following review of the video, it is highly unlikely that the site shown in the video is the same as the school involved in the 12 May incident, as none of the UGC from that date match the depicted location. Furthermore, the original TikTok video referenced in the imagery has since been removed (figure 7). The reason for this is unclear, but it could be due to the platform's Terms of Service.

Figure 7: Munition/explosive production at a likely separate school. It appears to be distinct from the UGC of the Oe Htein Kwin (North) school. (source redacted, available upon request)

4.4 UNIFORM ANALYSIS

The claim that the strike was carried out by PDF-affiliated drones is difficult to definitively disprove. That said, some footage of the airstrike's aftermath shows individuals wearing outfits commonly associated with the armed forces (figure 8). While these uniforms resemble those worn by EAOs, in contrast to SAC forces, who typically display visible emblems and patches, the available UGC lacks the resolution needed to confirm group affiliation. However, the likely tolerated presence of EAO-aligned forces near the victims of the airstrike in the area makes it less likely that the PDF was responsible for the strike.

Figure 8: Outfits worn by some of the bystanders in the UGC (source: Khit Thit Media [GRAPHIC])

5 CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATION & CURRENT SURROUNDING EVENTS

Based on the available analysed UGC, visible ordnance remnants, structural damage and the presence of child casualties, it is highly likely that a strike was carried out by the MAF on a school in Oe Htein Kwin (North), Tabayin township, Sagaing Region.

While the date itself has not been independently confirmed, the absence of prior UGC, changes in visible satellite imagery, and the consistency of timestamps all support the claims and reports that the events took place on 12 May 2025.

This incident at the Tabayin school resembles a 2022 event, though with a slightly higher reported death toll. This, along with many other airstrikes, indicates that the safety of children in Myanmar is still compromised, and it highlights the need to protect education facilities, which should remain safe, neutral spaces even in times of conflict.

The politically charged nature of attacks on educational institutions is of significant concern. Myanmar Witness will continue to document, archive and investigate such events to support future accountability efforts and ensure that those responsible are held to account.

6 METHODOLOGY

Myanmar Witness follows a methodology of digital preservation and rigorous, replicable analysis. Digital evidence is collected and archived in a secure database and preserved with hashing to confirm authenticity and prevent tampering.

COLLECT   PRESERVE   ANALYSE   VERIFY   INVESTIGATE   REPORT

Myanmar Witness applies a four-tier classification system to describe the extent to which footage has been independently verified by Myanmar Witness.
This is as follows:
- **Very High**: Myanmar Witness is 85-95% sure that the event took place as described in the claims. Footage is independently geolocated and mostly chronolocated by Myanmar Witness, with strong corroborating evidence on details of the claim.
- **High**: Myanmar Witness is 70-80% sure that the event took place as described in the claims. The footage is geolocated by Myanmar Witness. Other reliable sources confirm the time and date, but it cannot be independently chronolocated. Other details of the claim have not been proven beyond a reasonable doubt.
- **Medium**: Myanmar Witness is 50-60% sure that the event took place. The event is somewhat verified, but significant gaps remain, such as the inability to identify or geolocate the mechanism of attack linked to the damage.
- **Low:** The geolocation and chronolocation process has shown the location or timing of the footage to be inaccurate.
- **Unknown**: There is not sufficient evidence for the investigator to make a confident judgment.

For the avoidance of doubt, this verification system only refers to Myanmar Witness' ability to independently geolocate or chronolocate footage. Incidents marked as unverified may still be substantiated by multiple eyewitness reports. Sources are cross-referenced in this report to indicate where this is the case.

This report contains images showing how footage has been geolocated. In these images, white lines are used to represent the left and right arcs of vision. Coloured boxes show how landmarks or distinguishing details in each piece of footage or data correspond with each other. Geolocation is conducted using a varied array of open source online tools, such as Google Earth, to match satellite imagery with visual features identified in the footage or images. Geolocations are cross-checked and peer-reviewed before they are credited as verified.

Chronolocation is typically conducted by analysing UGC timestamps to determine hard end limits for the possible time frame. This is followed by contextual analysis, for example,

comparing against known indicators such as events or clocks visible, weather, and shadows.

If dealing with unverified information, such as witness testimony or outside reporting, Myanmar Witness has made known that these inclusions are claims and have not been independently verified by Myanmar Witness. Following ethical standards, Myanmar Witness has obscured identifying information about individuals involved, censored private information and images where appropriate, removed links to private individual accounts and archived said information securely. Where appropriate, Myanmar Witness has also blurred or excluded graphic imagery.

7 ABBREVIATIONS

Ethnic Armed Organisation	EAO
National Unity Government (of Myanmar)	NUG
People's Defence Force	PDF
State Administration Council	SAC
User Generated Content	UGC