



MYANMAR WITNESS

A project by



OAKAR FELLOWSHIP

Myanmar Witness

FORCED EVICTION AND ARSON AS PROJECT AREA EXPANDS

Villages Near The Wanbao Copper Mining Project Have
Been Subject To Arson Attacks

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31 March 2025

KEY EVENT DETAILS

Date/Time of Incident:

- From January 2022 to September 2023

Alleged Perpetrator(s) and/or Involvement:

- State Administration Council (SAC)
- Myanmar Air Force (MAF)
- Resistance Forces

Location of Incidents: Twenty-six villages in Salingyi Townships (ဆားလင်းကြီးမြို့နယ်), Sagaing Region (စစ်ကိုင်း တိုင်းဒေသကြီး)

Villages Targeted	Coordinates
Htan Taw (ထန်းတော)	[22.094869, 95.124076]
War Tan (ဝါးတန်း)	[22.095899, 95.033241]
Moe Gye Pyin (North) (မိုးကြိုးပြင်(မြောက်))	[22.065109, 95.050216]
Yae Khar (South) (ရေခါး(တောင်))	[21.996639, 95.081771]
Yae Khar (North) (ရေခါး(မြောက်))	[21.999750, 95.082656]
Du Htauk (ဒူးထက်)	[21.995359, 95.107559]
Htan Zin (ထန်းဇင်)	[22.012840, 95.119049]
Sar Htone (ဆားထုံးကြီး)	[21.991840, 95.116371]
Let Pan Kyun Gyi (လက်ပံကျွန်းကြီး)	[21.983289, 95.11466]
Taw Kyaung (South)	[21.975910, 95.116073]

(တောကျောင်း(တောင်))	
Taw Kyaung (North) (တောကျောင်း(မြောက်))	[21.978780, 95.11576]
Bin Gar (ဘင်္ဂါး)	[22.020299, 95.111297]
Hpaung Ka Tar (South) (ဖောင်းတကာ(တောင်))	[22.025199, 95.107566]
Hpaung Ka Tar (North) (ဖောင်းတကာ(မြောက်))	[22.030239, 95.109291]
Kyauk Hpyu Taing (ကျောက်ဖြူတိုင်)	[22.040790, 95.097122]
Kaing (ကိုင်း)	[22.032590, 95.048843]
Thar Yar Kone (သာယာကုန်း)	[22.107700, 95.090202]
Moe Gye Pyin (South) (မိုးကြိုးပြင် (တောင်))	[22.056739, 95.054626]
Ton Ywar Thit (တုံရွာသစ်)	[22.052240, 95.127662]
Moe Gye Pyin (Middle) (မိုးကြိုးပြင်(အလယ်))	[22.05936, 95.055198]
Se Te - Zee Taw (ဆည်တဲ-ဇီးတော)	[22.046720, 95.090133]
Wea Kwe (ဝဲကွဲ)	[22.037599, 95.137138]
Nyaung Pin Gyi (ညောင်ပင်ကြီး)	[22.098510, 95.120437]
Ywar Shey (ရွာရှည်)	[22.096109, 95.109176]
Aung Chan Si (အောင်ချမ်းစီ)	[22.100099, 95.104690]
Htan Taw Gyi (ထန်းတောကြီး)	22.109359, 95.107986]

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between January 2022 and September 2023, Myanmar Witness investigated incidents around the Letpadaung copper project (လက်ပံတောင်းတောင် ကြေးနီစီမံကိန်း) in Salingyi Township (ဆားလင်းကြီးမြို့နယ်), Sagaing Region (စစ်ကိုင်း တိုင်းဒေသကြီး) (figure 1). Following the February 2021 military coup, militarisation around the Chinese-owned Myanmar Wanbao Mining Company intensified, leading to widespread reports of arson, land confiscation, forced displacement, and airstrikes involving the State Administration Council (SAC) and the Myanmar Air Force (MAF).

Utilising open-source tools and geolocated user-generated content (UGC), Myanmar Witness verified that at least 21 villages near the Letpadaung project were burned between 2022 and 2023. UGC and satellite imagery also confirmed airstrikes, notably during the June 2023 attack on Nyaung Pin Gyi village (ညောင်ပင်ကြီး), after resistance forces seized the local police station. A video published by [Mandalay Free Press](#) (MFP) depicted a military MI-35 helicopter firing on the village; with analysis confirming the terrain matched views from Monywa (မုံရွာ) across the Chindwin River (ချင်းတွင်းမြစ်). [Mizzima News](#) reported over 200 homes destroyed, while Myanmar Witness independently verified at least 181 houses burned.

The case of Wet Hmay – Kan Taw village (ဝက်မေး-ကံတော) further illustrates the scale of displacement. Satellite imagery confirmed that between July and August 2023, Wanbao, with SAC support, erected fencing that gradually enclosed the village, leading to its depopulation. The fenced area, measured using Google Earth's polygon tool, covered approximately 3.41 square kilometres (842.6 acres). Within this zone, Myanmar Witness identified five structures resembling military outposts. In September 2023, The [Ayeeyarwaddy Times](#) reported that SAC forces were preparing to establish a military base there.

These events build on a longer history of contested land acquisition around the Letpadaung project. Forced evictions have been recorded since mining began in 2010. In 2016, Wanbao announced the acquisition of 2,000 acres of land and 141 houses across four villages, without disclosing the timing or process. The project's 2023 expansion reignited tensions, with compensation, when offered, fuelling further grievances. The [Mountain of Trouble](#) report notes that payouts under the 1894 Land Acquisition Act were based on outdated land tax rates, causing widespread dissatisfaction.

In a further escalation, on 18 February 2025, the military council passed a private security law allowing foreign companies to deploy armed personnel. While framed

as protecting foreign investments, residents fear that Wanbao could bring in Chinese armed forces. This raises concerns about foreign involvement in Myanmar's conflict and the blurring of commercial and military boundaries.

Myanmar Witness will continue monitoring the Letpadaung project's expansion, focusing on land acquisition, forced evictions, foreign armed security, and infrastructure militarisation. These investigations add to growing evidence of how post-coup extractive development in Myanmar is tied to violence, displacement, and potential violations of international human rights.

Location Map

Letpadaung copper mine project is located in Salingyi Township of Sagaing Region, where central region of Myanmar.



Map: Myanmar Witness Oakar Fellowship • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 1: Location map of the Letpadaung Copper Project

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2 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Letpadaung Copper Project is located in Salingyi Township, Sagaing Region, in central Myanmar. Myanmar [Wanbao Mining Company](#) Ltd. (MWMCL) was established in September 2010 to manage the project. Construction began in 2011 amid allegations of land confiscation, forced relocation, and a failure to conduct social and environmental impact assessments.

Copper mining at Letpadaung Mountain originally began in 1996 as a joint venture between the Canadian mining company Ivanhoe and the Myanmar government's No. 1 Mining Enterprise. Following the imposition of international sanctions, Ivanhoe withdrew its investment, and two new companies assumed ownership of the project.

These companies were the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (UMEHL), established in 1990 and linked to the Myanmar military, and Wanbao Mining Ltd., owned by China North Industries Group Corporation (Norinco), a Chinese state-owned enterprise with ties to the Chinese military. According to a

January 2022 [report](#) on Chinese mining operations in Myanmar by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Norinco is involved in both arms production and mining.

Wanbao Mining Ltd. is a subsidiary of Myanmar Wanbao Copper Mining Limited (Myanmar Wanbao) and Myanmar Yang Tse Copper Limited (Myanmar Yang Tse). Myanmar Wanbao operates the Letpadaung mine, while Myanmar Yang Tse operates the Sabe and Kayesin mines.

Although the transfer of ownership was not transparent, it reportedly took place in 2010 during a visit to Myanmar by then-Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, according to the same Carnegie Endowment report.

According to a 2017 Amnesty International report, *Mountain of Trouble*, Wanbao and its holding company receive 49 percent (%) of the profits from the Letpadaung mine, while the Myanmar government, through Mine No.1, receives 51% (figure 2). Construction of the project began in March 2011 but was temporarily suspended in November 2012 (figure 3).



Figure 2: Companies collaborating in the Letpadaung copper project (Source: [Mountain of Trouble](#))

Key Dates of Letpadaung Mine Project

1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project became a joint venture between ME1 and Ivanhoe Myanmar Holdings Ltd, a subsidiary of the Canadian mining company Ivanhoe Mines Ltd.
1996-1997	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The government nationalised farmlands to make way for the Sabe and Kyaesin mines.
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Monywa project was taken over by Wanbao Mining and UMEHL.
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work to develop the Letpadaung mine began. Construction and land acquisition for the mining project began.
2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The first large-scale protests against the project started in March 2012 and ramped up in August 2012. In November, the project was suspended. Myanmar's president established the Letpadaung Investigation Commission to investigate the impacts.
2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Letpadaung Commission issued a report which made a series of recommendations to the government and the companies, including that the companies should pay compensation for all the land they took at market value and also called for greater transparency and discussions with affected people. Construction on the mining project resumed in October 2013.
2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the second large-scale protest, a female protester was reportedly shot dead by police in December 2014. Myanmar Wanbao suspends plans to extend the mine area.
2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Myanmar Wanbao began copper production at Letpadaung, prompting peaceful protests by affected community members. Myanmar Wanbao announces that it still intends to take control of 2,000 acres of farmland and the homes of 141 households in the four villages, but does not provide a date or other details.
2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wanbao and some villagers from Se Te completed negotiations in January 2021 on terms for resettlement and land acquisition though some still refused to move.
2021, FEB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project suspended due to workers joined Civil Disobedience Movement to peacefully oppose the ministry coup.

References

- [Mountain of Trouble](#) report by Amnesty International (2017)
- [Chinese Mining Companies and Local Mobilization in Myanmar](#) report by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2022)

Figure 3: Records of the Letpadaung Copper Project by year

Residents began setting up protest camps against the Letpadaung copper mining project in March 2012. On 28 November 2012, at around 03:00 local time, authorities used tear gas and incendiary devices to [disperse](#) six protest camps. More than 20 monks and several other protestors were [injured](#) and treated at Monywa General Hospital. This was the first violent crackdown on a public protest under the civilian–military government.

In December 2014, Wanbao announced it would halt the expansion of the mining area following the [killing](#) of [Daw Khin Win](#), a resident of Moe Gye Pyin (Middle) village. She was shot in the head by police providing security for the company during a protest against the expansion. The area in question had been dug by excavators without compensation.

Two years later, in May 2016, protests resumed after Myanmar Wanbao Company announced the start of copper production from the Letpadaung mine. The issue of land acquisition has remained unresolved under both the U Thein Sein and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi governments. According to official [records](#), 5,057 acres of agricultural land and 2,810 acres of uncultivated land—totalling 7,867 acres—were acquired for the Letpadaung Copper Project under the Land and Revenue Act and the Land Acquisition Law of 1894.

The project has resulted in forced relocations, with villagers displaced due to land confiscation. During protests against the project, injuries and deaths were reported. Local communities have also experienced [environmental pollution](#) and [crop damage](#), largely due to the use of sulfuric acid in copper extraction.

Following the 2021 military coup, land confiscations reportedly continued with the support of the SAC. Villages near the project site experienced [raids, arson, and killings](#) carried out by SAC forces, often in coordination with Wanbao Mining Company. In July 2021, the U.S. Department of Commerce imposed sanctions on Wanbao Mining Ltd. and its subsidiaries, Myanmar Wanbao Copper Mining Limited and Myanmar Yang Tse Copper Limited, citing their support for the Myanmar military.

The SAC, in collaboration with Wanbao Mining, has been implicated in human rights violations in nearby villages. The provision of military security has enabled the company to resume operations and carry out contested land acquisitions in ways that appear to benefit both the company and the military authorities.

3 BURNING OF VILLAGES NEAR MYANMAR'S WANBAO MINING PROJECT

Myanmar Witness investigated reports from UGC and media outlets alleging that SAC troops have been clearing villages near the Letpadaung Mountain copper mine. These reports describe raids, arrests, torture, killings of villagers, the burning of homes, and airstrikes. Myanmar Witness verified that 21 villages near the project site have been burned since the 2021 military coup (figure 4).

UGC has documented the presence and movement of SAC troops within the mining project area. Satellite imagery confirms the expansion of land around the mine since 2023. [Radio Free Asia](#) (RFA) also reported that SAC troops stationed in the project area have burned 26 villages in the surrounding vicinity.

To investigate these reports, Myanmar Witness used NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System (FIRMS), along with open source intelligence (OSINT) tools including Copernicus Sentinel-2, Google Earth Pro, and Apple Maps. Through these methods, Myanmar Witness verified fire incidents in 21 villages near the Letpadaung project (figure 5). The date and location of fires were verified in 15 villages. In six additional villages, either the date or the location could be confirmed. Reports of fires in five other villages, based on UGC and media sources, could not be verified through OSINT techniques.

3.1 DATES AND COORDINATES OF BURNED VILLAGES

No.	Village Name in MM/ENG	Claimed Date of Fire	Coordinates	GEP	NASA FIRMS
1	Htan Taw / ထန်းတော	7 Mar 2022	22.094869, 95.124076	Yes	No
2	War Tan/ ဝါးတန်း	26 May 2022	22.095899, 95.033241	Yes	No
3	Moe Gye Pyin (North)/ မိုးကြိုးပြင် (မြောက်)	21 June 2022	22.065109, 95.050216	Yes	Yes
4	Yae Khar (South)/ ရေခါး (တောင်)	28 July 2022	21.996639, 95.081771	No	Yes
5	Yae Khar (North)/ ရေခါး (မြောက်)	28 July 2022	21.999750, 95.082656	No	Yes
6	Du Htauk/ ဒူးထောက်	28 July 2022	21.995359, 95.107559	Yes	No
7	Htan Zin/ ထန်းဇင်	30 November 2022	22.012840, 95.119049	Yes	Yes
8	Sar Htone/ ဆားထုံး	1 December 2022	21.991840, 95.116371	Yes	Yes
9	Let Pan Kyun Gyi/ လက်ပံကျွန်းကြီး	1 December 2022	21.983289, 95.11466	Yes	Yes
10	Taw Kyaung (South)/ တောကျောင်း (တောင်)	2 December 2022	21.975910, 95.116073	Yes	Yes
11	Taw Kyaung (North)/ တောကျောင်း (မြောက်)	2 December 2022	21.978780, 95.11576	Yes	Yes
12	Bin Gar/ ဘင်္ဂါး	6 January 2023	22.020299, 95.111297	No	Yes

13	Hpaung Ka Tar (South)/ ဖောင်းကတာ (တောင်)	6 January 2023	22.025199, 95.107566	Yes	Yes
14	Hpaung Ka Tar (North)/ ဖောင်းကတာ (မြောက်)	6 January 2023	22.030239, 95.109291	Yes	Yes
15	Kyauk Hpyu Taing/ ကျောက်ဖြူတိုင်	6 January 2023	22.040790, 95.097122	Yes	Yes
16	Kaing/ တိုင်း	8 January 2023	22.032590, 95.048843	No	Yes
17	Thar Yar Kone/ သာယာကုန်း	8 January 2023	22.107700, 95.090202	No	No
18	Moe Gye Pyin (South)/ မိုးကြိုးပြင် (တောင်)	12 January 2023	22.056739, 95.054626	Yes	No
19	Ton Ywar Thit/ တုံရွာသစ်	12 January 2023	22.052240, 95.127662	No	No
20	Moe Gye Pyin (Middle)/ မိုးကြိုးပြင် (အလယ်)	13 January 2023	22.05936, 95.055198	Yes	No
21	Se Te - Zee Taw/ ဆည်တဲ - ဇီးတာ	13 January 2023	22.046720, 95.090133	Yes	Yes
22	Wea Kwe/ ဝဲကွဲ	17 March 2023	22.037599, 95.137138	Yes	No
23	Nyaung Pin Gyi / ညောင်ပင်ကြီး	10 June 2023	22.098510, 95.120437	Yes	Yes

24	Ywar Shey/ ရွှေရှည်	17 June 2023	22.096109, 95.109176	No	No
25	Aung Chan Si / အောင်ချမ်းစိ/	25 June 2023	22.100099, 95.104690	No	No
26	Htan Taw Gyi/ ထန်းတောကြီး/	25 June 2023	22.109359, 95.107986	No	No



3.2 BURNED VILLAGES LOCATION

Torched villages near Letpadaung Area

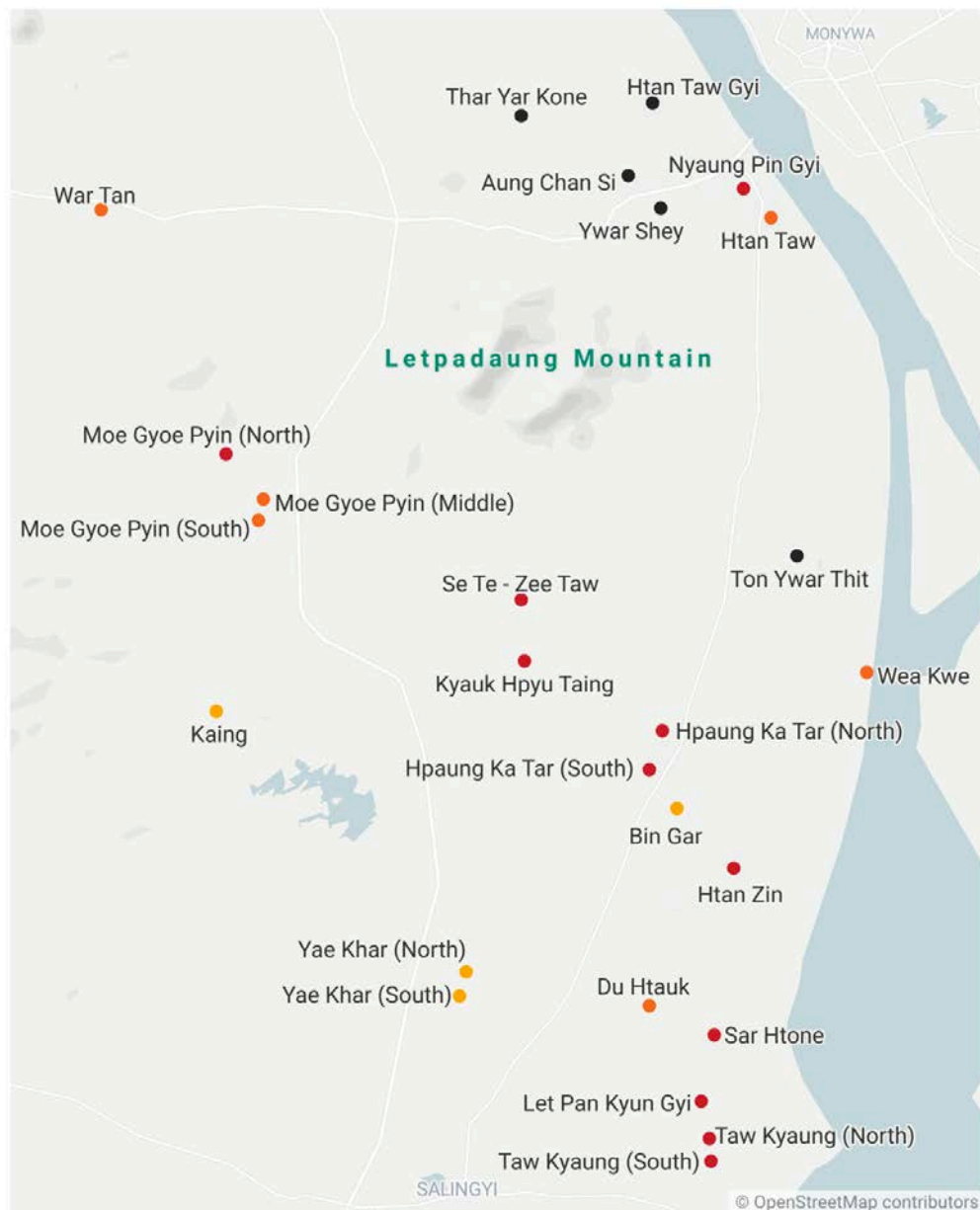


Figure 4: Confirmed villages burned

3.3 EVENT TIMELINE



Figure 5: A Timeline of Village Arson Incidents Near the Project Area from January 2022 to September 2023

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Myanmar Witness applies rigorous digital evidence preservation techniques and reliable, transparent analytical methods that are accessible to all. Digital evidence is securely collected and stored in a database using hashing systems to ensure data integrity and protection from unauthorised alterations.

Using open-source tools such as Google Earth, [Who posted what?](#), [Google Advanced Search](#), NASA's FIRMS, and Copernicus Sentinel-2 Myanmar Witness cross-check video footage, photographs, and other visual content with satellite imagery to verify locations. Published reports indicate that when evidence has been verified, it meets the highest standards of reliability through systematic cross-checking and expert peer review.

Myanmar Witness also employs chronolocation, a method used to determine the date and time of an event based on geolocation and contextual data. By analysing timestamps and uploading the dates of UGC, Myanmar Witness can narrow down the likely timing of an event. This is cross-referenced with environmental indicators, such as weather conditions, shadows, and other incidents, to increase accuracy. Once the location is confirmed, the time a photograph was taken can be further estimated by tracking the subject's position relative to the camera and determining sun angles or movement patterns. While minute-level accuracy can be challenging, Myanmar Witness strives for maximum precision while minimising the risk of error.

When external reports, such as witness statements, are used, Myanmar Witness makes clear that these have not been independently verified. Such information is presented as unverified and treated accordingly. Where additional background or contextual information is necessary to support understanding of an event, Myanmar Witness discloses when these claims have not been verified.

In line with ethical standards, Myanmar Witness ensures that any personal or identifying information is redacted or kept confidential. Personal details and imagery are carefully handled to avoid potential harm and are stored securely. Distressing or graphic visuals are censored or withheld in published materials to minimise potential harm to viewers.

4.1 LIMITATIONS

The information collected by Myanmar Witness originates from regions experiencing ongoing conflict. As a result, several challenges arise during data

collection, including the risk of retaliation against sources or communities, the lack of reliable information from official channels, and frequent internet disruptions. These factors often lead to a shortage of verifiable video or photographic evidence.

Given these limitations, there is an inherent risk of selection bias in the available data. Myanmar Witness takes steps to minimise this risk by seeking information from a wide range of sources and reducing the inclusion of non-representative data wherever possible.

To support this effort, Myanmar Witness conducts:

- Focused searches in multiple languages centred on specific subjects; and
- Broad searches related to incidents using open-source platforms, to acquire the most complete picture possible.

Searches include media from a variety of sources, including social media platforms, pro-military news outlets, and independent or opposition media.

5 INVESTIGATING WALKTHROUGH

[Reports](#) indicate that clashes occurred between SAC forces and local resistance groups either near or within villages that were later burned. Following these confrontations, SAC troops reportedly entered the villages and set fire to civilian homes. Both news sources and UGC support these claims. Myanmar Witness found that information reported by media outlets regarding these fires is consistent with findings obtained through OSINT techniques.

In the case of Moe Gyoe Pyin (Middle) village, located near Letpadaung Mountain, the General Strike Coordination Body (GSCB) referenced its destruction during a press conference. While the precise time and date of the burning could not be confirmed, Myanmar Witness was able to verify the location (figure 6).



Figure 6: [Left] image shows houses destroyed in Moe Gyoe Pyin village, and Myanmar Witness geolocated it to [22.060889, 95.055995]. (Source: [Left] [CSCB](#) and Airbus via Google Earth [Right])

5.1 CASE STUDY 1: ARSON AND AIRSTRIKE ON NYAUNG PIN GYI VILLAGE

Myanmar Witness investigated claims that SAC forces set fire to Nyaung Pin Gyi village in Salingyi Township, Sagaing Region, following an airstrike that occurred after local defence forces captured the village's police station.

Nyaung Pin Gyi is located on the western bank of the Chindwin River, near the Letpadaung Copper Mine. The village lies within Salingyi Township, which has been under martial law since the February 2021 military coup. It is also situated near resistance strongholds, including Pale, Myaung, and Yinmarbin Townships. Due to its strategic riverside location and jetty, SAC forces have previously entered the village via the river.

On 9 June 2023, local defence forces launched an assault on the police station in Nyaung Pin Gyi. During the clash, SAC reportedly [conducted](#) an airstrike on the village. [Mandalay Free Press \(MFP\)](#) published a video report showing a military MI-35 helicopter engaged in the attack, with audible gunfire.

Myanmar Witness verified that the location shown in the footage corresponds with the terrain of Letpadaung Mountain as viewed from Monywa (figure 7). The mountain lies just across the Chindwin River from Nyaung Pin Gyi village.



Figure 7: Airstrikes on Nyaung Pin Gyi village from the Sagaing Region side. (Source: [MFP](#) and Airbus via Google Earth)

Following the loss of the police station (figure 8), SAC forces launched a retaliatory [attack](#) the following night, setting fire to Nyaung Pin Gyi and nearby villages. Beginning on 10 June 2023, SAC troops reportedly [burned](#) Nyaung Pin Gyi and the surrounding areas, resulting in widespread destruction. NASA FIRMS also recorded fire activity in the village [22.098510, 95.120437] on [10 June](#) and [15 June](#) (figure 9).



Figure 8: Myanmar Witness geolocated the location of the [Top] image that shows destroyed buildings just outside of the police station, Nyaung Pin Gyi village. [22.098314, 95.121214] (Source: [Top] private and [Bottom] Maxar Imagery via Apple Maps)

Additionally, on 17 June 2023, SAC troops reportedly set fire to huts at the Nyaung Pin Gyi village jetty, according to a report by the [Myaelatt Athan news](#) agency. Myanmar Witness verified the report by cross-referencing satellite imagery with photographs published in the news article (figures 9 and 10).



Figure 9. Image of buildings near Nyaung Pin Gyi Marina on fire and geolocated to [22.104253, 95.120876] (Source: [Top] [Myaelatt Athan news agency](#) and [Bottom] Airbus via Google Earth)



Figure 10: Destroyed area in Nyaung Pin Gyi village [22.098510, 95.120437] can be seen from satellite imagery taken on 27 April 2023 and 11 May 2024 (Source: Airbus via Google Earth)

Given the military's documented role in widespread village burnings following the 2021 coup, SAC forces are the most likely perpetrators of this incident.

[Mizzima News](#) reported that more than 200 houses were destroyed in the fire at Nyaung Pin Gyi village. A verification process conducted using Google Earth Pro confirmed that at least 181 homes were burned (figure 11).

According to UGC and reports from media outlets, arson attacks in the area reportedly continued for nearly a month after 10 June 2023. These reports were further corroborated by data from NASA's FIRMS and satellite imagery from Copernicus Sentinel-2 (figure 12).

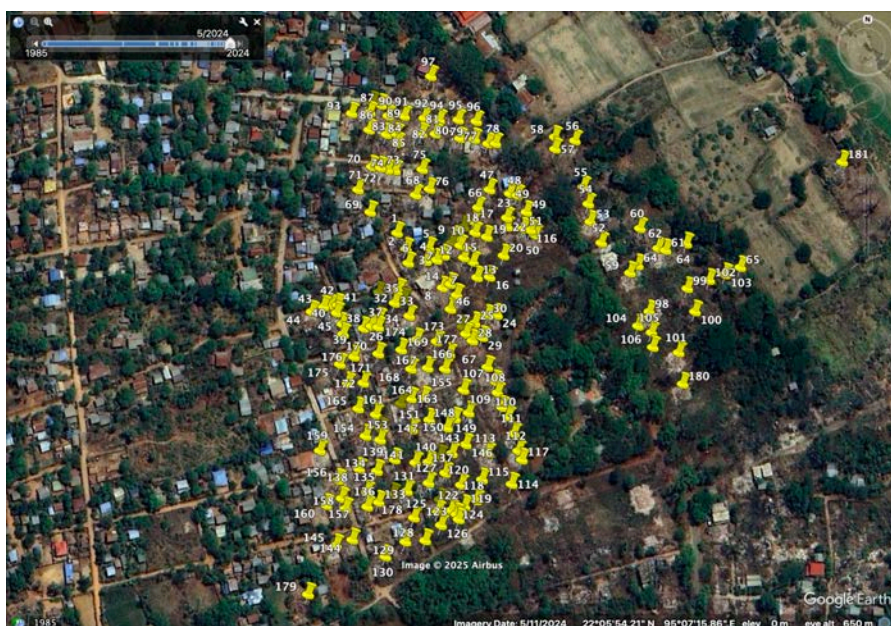


Figure 11: Satellite imagery dated 5 November 2024 shows damaged buildings. Myanmar Witness verified that at least 181 buildings were damaged as a result of the reported attack. (Source: Airbus via Google Earth)



Figure 12: The damaged area of Nyaung Pin Gyi village is clearly visible in Sentinel-2 L2A imagery taken on 30 May and 19 July 2023. [22.098510, 95.120437] (source: Copernicus Sentinel-2)

Based on the evidence, Myanmar Witness concludes that SAC forces are the most likely perpetrators of the arson attack on Nyaung Pin Gyi. Additionally, as only the military possesses the capability to conduct airstrikes in Myanmar, SAC is also the most probable actor responsible for the aerial attack on the village.

5.2 CASE STUDY 2: THE EMERGENCE OF NEW BUILDINGS WITHIN THE PROJECT AREA

Following the 2021 military coup, workers involved in non-violent resistance movements contributed to the suspension of operations at copper mining projects employing more than 7,000 people.

Despite facing sanctions from the United States, Wanbao Mining Company, known to have supported the military authorities, reportedly permitted SAC forces to move through and operate within its premises. According to media reports and UGC, SAC troops have conducted raids, set fire to nearby villages around Letpadaung, and used heavy weapons in attacks (figure 14). Additionally, forces have blocked and inspected public roads used by civilians in the surrounding area (figure 13).



Figure 13: Barricades with sharp spikes seen in front of Myanmar Wanbao Company at the intersection of Nyaung Pin Gyi-Yinmarbin Road and Monywa-Pathein Road 5/1 (Source: [GSCB](#))



Figure 14: Alleged SAC troops moving towards the villages as they pass through the Wanbao Company near Ingyin Taung (Source: [GSCB](#))

Further reports from media outlets and UGC indicate that SAC soldiers stationed within the Wanbao company premises carried out raids and set fire to nearby villages. According to [The Irrawaddy Burmese](#)-language news outlet, nearly 100 troops from Light Infantry Divisions (LID) 77 and 33, along with subordinate units, were deployed inside the project area. Mines were planted near the site and later cleared by fighters from the Myanmar Che Guevara Group, a unit of the Myauk Yamar People's Defence Force. According to [Khit Thit News](#), a total of 78 mines were removed.

On 10 August 2023, according to [Radio Free Asia](#), the Salingyi Township People's Administration Team publicly urged Wanbao Company to cease collaboration with SAC. In its statement, the team reported that 444 homes across 13 villages were destroyed and 17 civilians killed during SAC-led arson attacks carried out in and around the company's premises.

Myanmar Witness used Google Earth Pro and satellite imagery to verify that, following the 2021 coup, new buildings resembling military outposts appeared within and around the Wanbao company compound (figures 15, 16 and 17).



Figure 15: Changes in land conditions within the project area were observed, indicating ongoing modifications by comparing satellite imagery taken on [Right] 25 July 2020 and [Left] 8 May 2023. This suggests that Myanmar Wanbao Mining Company continued its operations within the project area even during the period of the military coup in Myanmar. (Source: Maxar Technologies via Google Earth and Airbus via Google Earth)



Figure 16: The emergence of structures within the project area can be observed when comparing satellite imagery from [Right] 25 July 2020 and [Left] 11 May 2024 [22.091765, 95.103592] (Source: Maxar Technologies via Google Earth and Airbus via Google Earth)



Figure 17: The emergence of structures within the project area can be observed when comparing satellite imagery from [Right] 25 July 2020 and [Left] 5 December 2024 [22.094305, 95.081427] (Source: Maxar Technologies via Google Earth and Airbus via Google Earth)

The emergence of structures within the project area that resemble potential military outposts during the period of military rule suggests ongoing collaboration between SAC forces and Myanmar Wanbao Mining Company.

5.3 CASE STUDY 3: THE FORCED EVICTION OF WET HMAY - KAN TAW VILLAGE

Forced evictions linked to the Letpadaung copper project have not occurred as isolated incidents. Since mining began in 2010, there has been a documented pattern of residents being forcibly removed from their homes. In 2016, Wanbao Company [announced](#) the acquisition of 2,000 acres of land and 141 houses across four villages. However, the company did not disclose the specific timing of these acquisitions.

As the project expanded, the villages of Wet Hmay – Kan Taw and Se Te – Zee Taw Taw were incorporated into the project area. Both villages are adjacent to the copper project: Wet Hmay – Kan Taw lies to the east, while Se Te – Zee Taw Taw is located to the south.

There is some discrepancy in how these villages are categorised. The *Mountain of Trouble* report refers to four villages. In contrast, data from the Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU) lists Wet Hmay – Kan Taw and Se Te – Zee Taw Taw as separate, individual villages (figure 18).



On 20 February 2016, imagery shows the Letpadaung Copper Mine. The yellow lines delineate the mine perimeter on 20 February 2016 and the orange polygons highlight the areas of planned mine expansion, based on information provided in the ESIA. At the time of the image, the mine is approximately 21 square kilometres in area and will expand by approximately 9 square kilometres. This expansion will require the relocation of four villages located within the final boundary.

Figure 18: The Mountain of Trouble report on the conditions for expanding the mining area

Furthermore, following the 2021 coup, the [Myanmar Mining Watch Network](#) reported that Wanbao Company was granted permission to conduct copper exploration across one million acres of land, including 33 hills surrounding Letpadaung, as part of plans to expand the Letpadaung Mountain copper project.

According to the *Mountain of Trouble* report, some residents accepted the compensation offered by Wanbao Company, while others rejected it. The report also notes that, under the Land Acquisition Act of 1894, compensation is paid at a rate equivalent to 20 times the land tax per acre of agricultural land.

Compensation rates reportedly varied based on the category of land tax: between five and 25 kyats for land taxed at 0.25 to 1.25 kyats per acre, and between 20 and 45 kyats for land taxed at 1 to 2.25 kyats per acre. Following the report's publication in 2013, compensation was adjusted to 1.8 million kyats per acre. This significant increase aimed to align compensation with the actual market value of the land, addressing previous inadequacies where compensation was based on outdated land tax assessments that did not reflect current land values. However, some individuals reportedly [refused](#) to accept this amount, possibly because it still did not meet their expectations or the prevailing market value at the time.

After the February 2021 military coup, forced land seizures resumed in areas around the Letpadaung copper project. Villagers were reportedly forced to relocate as fencing was erected—at gunpoint and without consultation—around their homes and farmland. Since 3 August 2023, SAC forces have reportedly used coercion to fence off Wet Hmay – Kan Taw village, displacing residents and seizing approximately 70 acres of agricultural land, according to [MFP](#).

Myanmar Witness verified the construction of fencing by SAC and Wanbao Mining Company using Copernicus Sentinel-2 satellite imagery (figure 19). Imagery from 19 July 2023, along with comparative images from two weeks before and after, clearly shows the forced acquisition of land in Wet Hmay – Kan Taw village through fencing.

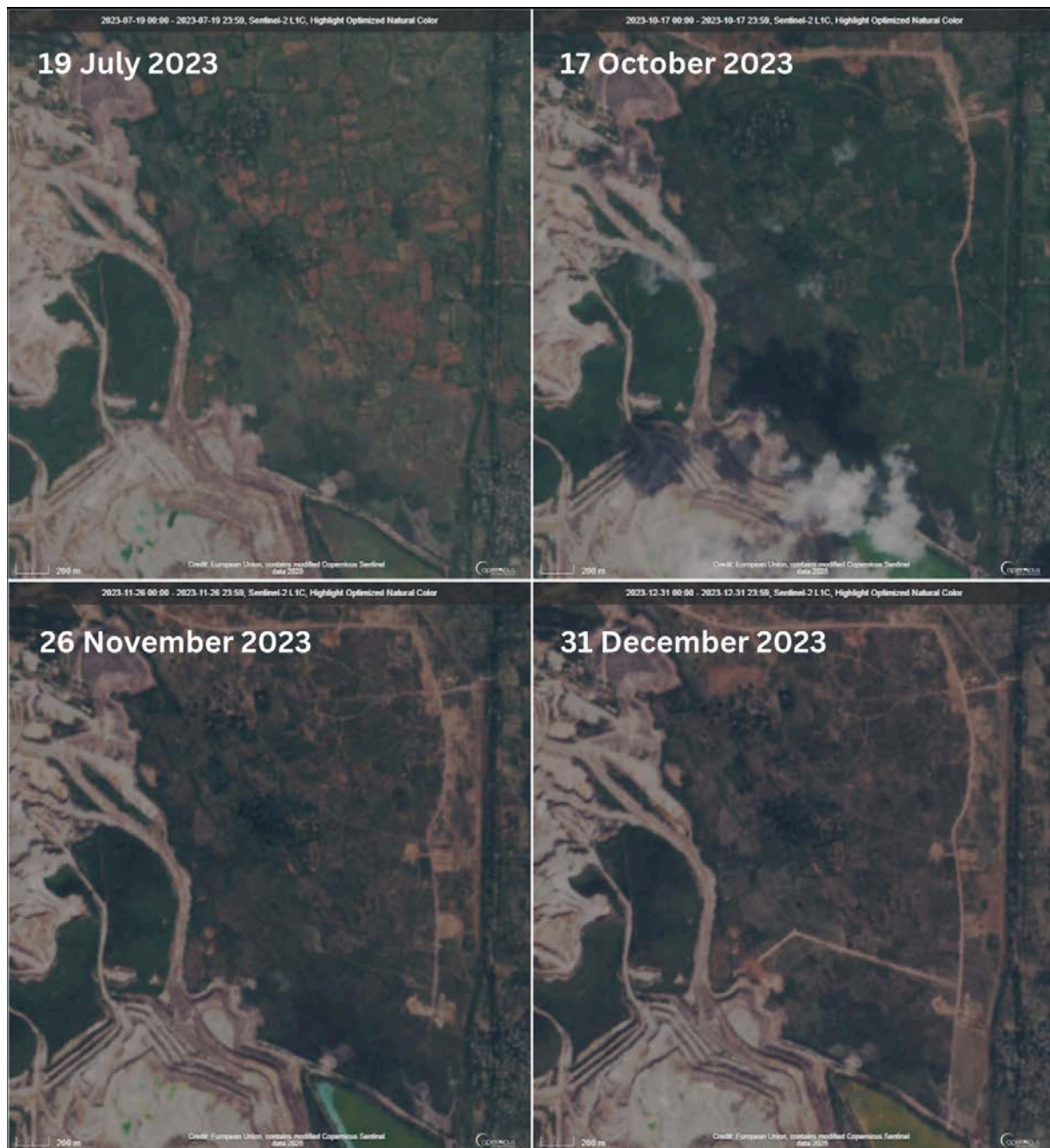


Figure 19: Changes in landscape characteristics due to the expansion of the project area and the fencing off of public land between July and December 2023 can be observed through Sentinel-2 L2A satellite imagery. (source: Copernicus Sentinel-2)

Additionally, an image showing the fence around the Wet Hmay – Kan Taw village was published by the [MEF](#). Myanmar Witness was able to verify the location of the fence using geolocation techniques. The timestamp visible in both images was consistent at 13:44 local time, indicating they were captured within the same minute. These two pieces of UGC were used to verify the geolocation of the fencing site (figure 20).

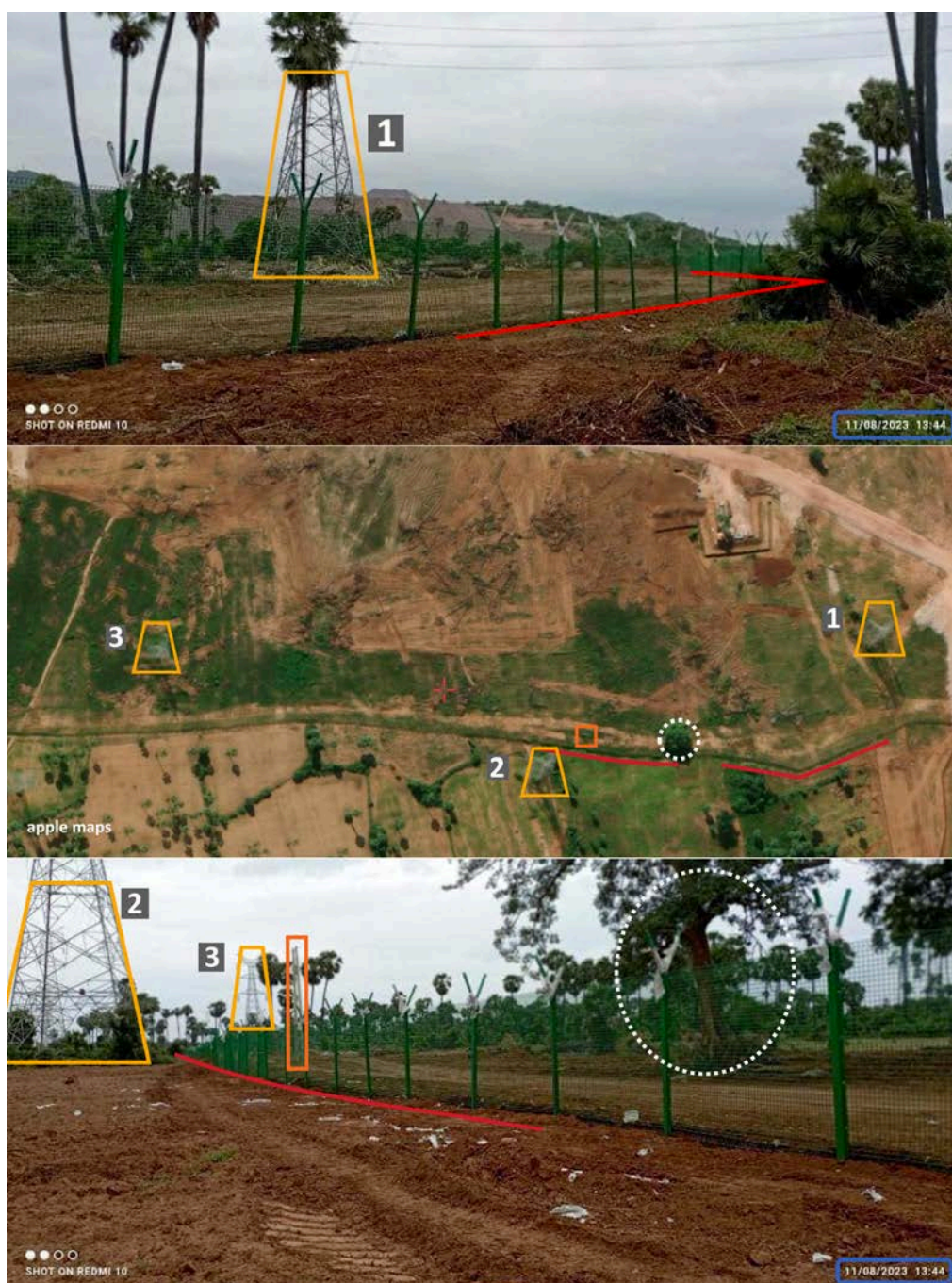


Figure 20: Myanmar Witness was able to verify the location of the UGC reported by MFP, which stated that the company expanded the project area and built a perimeter fence. [22.092190, 95.108360] (Source: Maxar Imagery via Apple Maps)

The land acquisition—on hold for over a decade due to earlier forced relocations by the SAC—has now been rapidly implemented.

Myanmar Witness verified the newly fenced area using Google Earth Pro satellite imagery. The area, measured using a polygon tool, covers approximately 3.41 square kilometres (842.6 acres) (figure 21).



Figure 21: According to satellite imagery, the features of the land confiscation and boundary demarcation were identified, and it was possible to calculate the area of the location. (Source: Airbus via Google Earth)

According to [The Ayeerwaddy Times](#), SAC forces were reportedly preparing to establish a military base in the fenced-off area of Wet Hmay – Kan Taw village as of 22 September 2023. Myanmar Witness has verified the presence of five outpost-like structures within the fenced area, located near the expanded eastern section of the project site (figures 22 and 23). These structures were constructed by Wanbao Company with the support of SAC forces. Following the expansion of Myanmar Wanbao Mining Ltd.'s project area and the construction of the perimeter fence, Wet Hmay – Kan Taw village gradually became uninhabited and has since deteriorated. Upon examination, Myanmar Witness verified that some of these structures exhibit characteristics consistent with typical military outposts (figure 23).



Figure 22: Satellite imagery captured from 11 May 2024 shows the project's expansion, perimeter, fencing, and military outposts-like structures, leading to the disappearance of Wet Hmay-Kan Taw village. (Source: Airbus via Google Earth)

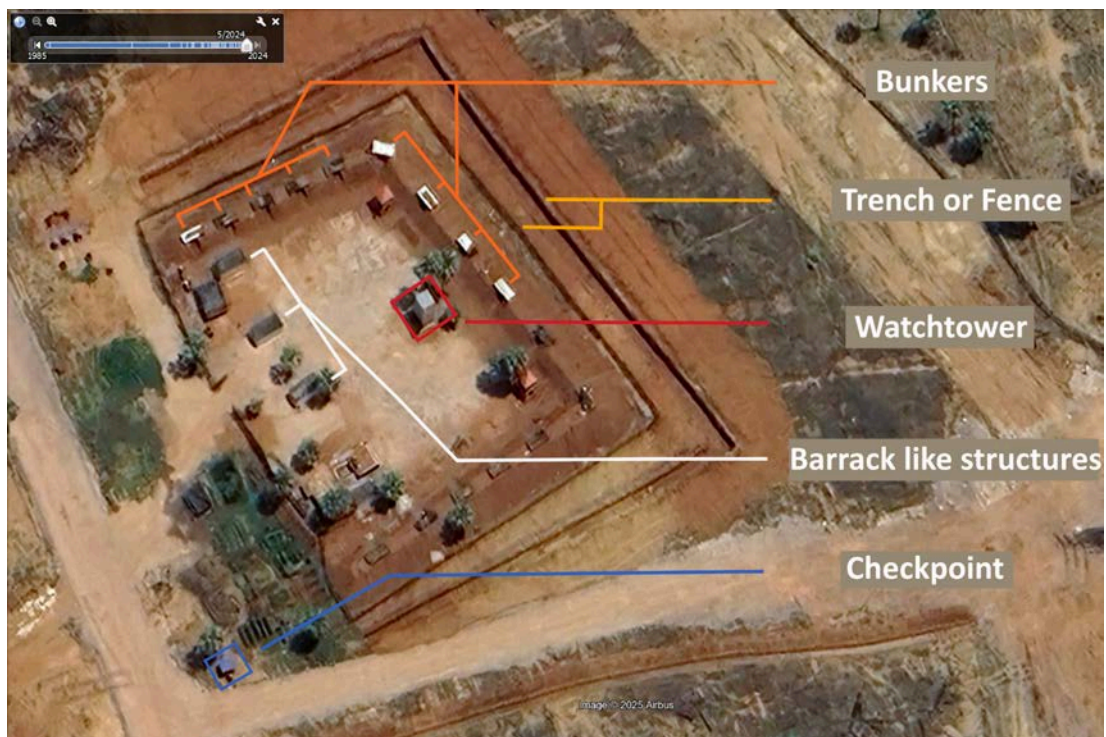


Figure 23: Updated satellite imagery shows features of military outposts, indicating small-scale military camps. [22.088330, 95.120304] (Source: Airbus via Google Earth)

6 CONCLUSION

This report draws on open-source technologies to document the burning of villages near the Letpadaung copper project, raids on nearby communities, and land acquisitions that occurred between 2022 and 2024. These incidents are linked to joint operations between the Chinese-owned copper company and Myanmar's military authorities (SAC).

To verify the locations of burned villages, Myanmar Witness utilised a range of open-source tools and platforms, while UGC and media reports were cross-referenced with satellite imagery to geolocate and confirm the incidents. Through structured analysis of this information and associated imagery, Myanmar Witness was able to assess the likely perpetrators of these incidents. The findings indicate that airstrikes and the burning of civilian homes frequently followed clashes between SAC forces and local resistance groups.

On 18 February 2025, the SAC [enacted](#) a law on private security services that permits the deployment of foreign, potentially Chinese, armed personnel to protect foreign business interests in Myanmar. This has raised concerns among residents near the Letpadaung project that Wanbao Company may employ Chinese armed forces to protect its operations.

Myanmar Witness will continue to monitor whether Myanmar Wanbao Mining Company facilitates the deployment of foreign armed personnel at its site. The organisation has already [mapped](#) and published verified data on arson attacks perpetrated by SAC across the country and will continue to investigate, verify, and report on these incidents.

7 ABBREVIATIONS

State Administration Council	SAC
Myanmar Air Force	MAF
User-Generated Content	UGC
Fire Information for Resource Management System	FIRMS
General Strike Coordination Body	GSCB
Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited	UMEHL