

Burnt human remains in Kya Paing

Destroyed houses and bodies reportedly discovered in Monywa township, in December 2023

REPORT BY MYANMAR WITNESS, 24 January 2024

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.

Key Event Details

- **Location of Incident:** Kya Paing village (ကျပိုင်ရွာ), Monywa township (မုံရွာ မြို့နယ်), Sagaing region (စစ်ကိုင်း) [22.035227, 95.202875].
- **Date/Time of Incident:**
 - 2 December 2023
- **Alleged Perpetrator(s) and/or Involvement:**
 - People's Defence Forces (PDF)
 - Myanmar military
 - Pyu Saw Htee (PSH) militia
- **Summary of Investigation:**
 - Myanmar Witness has verified the presence of fires on 2 December 2023 in Kya Paing village, using NASA's Fire Information Resource Management System (FIRMS), satellite imagery and user-generated content (UGC).
 - Myanmar Witness identified UGC purportedly showing burnt bodies in Kya Paing village. At least eight bodies can be identified. Myanmar Witness cannot verify claims that the individuals were burnt alive nor that the bodies were found in Kya Paing due to a lack of geolocatable features in the footage; however, there is evidence that at least one victim was bound prior to the fire.

Introduction

The neighbouring villages of Kya Paing and Taw Pu, in Monya township, have been the site of recent human rights infringements. On 2 December 2023, fires were reported in Kya Paing village, and 60 locals were allegedly detained, 10 of whom were reportedly burned to death.

According to local [news media](#), Taw Pu village is a Pyu Saw Htee (PSH) village: a village where members of PSH, a pro-military militia, live. The fires came a day after the PDF had reportedly attacked houses northwest of Taw Pu village and cut electricity to Taw Pu village. This attack allegedly resulted in the death of one Myanmar military soldier and one PSH militia member.

Myanmar Witness has previously investigated, verified, and reported on several claims related to the burning of individuals, alive or deceased, intentionally or indirectly. This has been captured in multiple reports, including a thematic report published in December 2023, titled '[Stories left behind in the ashes](#)'.

Myanmar Witness has been able to verify:

- Myanmar Witness geolocated imagery posted on social media showing extensive fire damage to structures in Kya Paing village. The areas identified correlated with locations where NASA's FIRMS detected heat signatures, Planet, and Sentinel-2 satellite imagery showed significant damage to the terrain, leading Myanmar Witness to confirm that fires took place in this location on 2 December 2023.
- Myanmar Witness has analysed and cross-referenced images and videos of burned bodies to conclude they are likely showing the same incident, as a lady in a yellow top is visible in both. However, the images and video could not be geolocated to Kya Paing village.
- At least nine deceased, burned individuals were visible in UGC and one additional body was present, which had not sustained the same fire damage. Myanmar Witness is not able to conclude if the bodies were burned alive, as reports around this case allege.

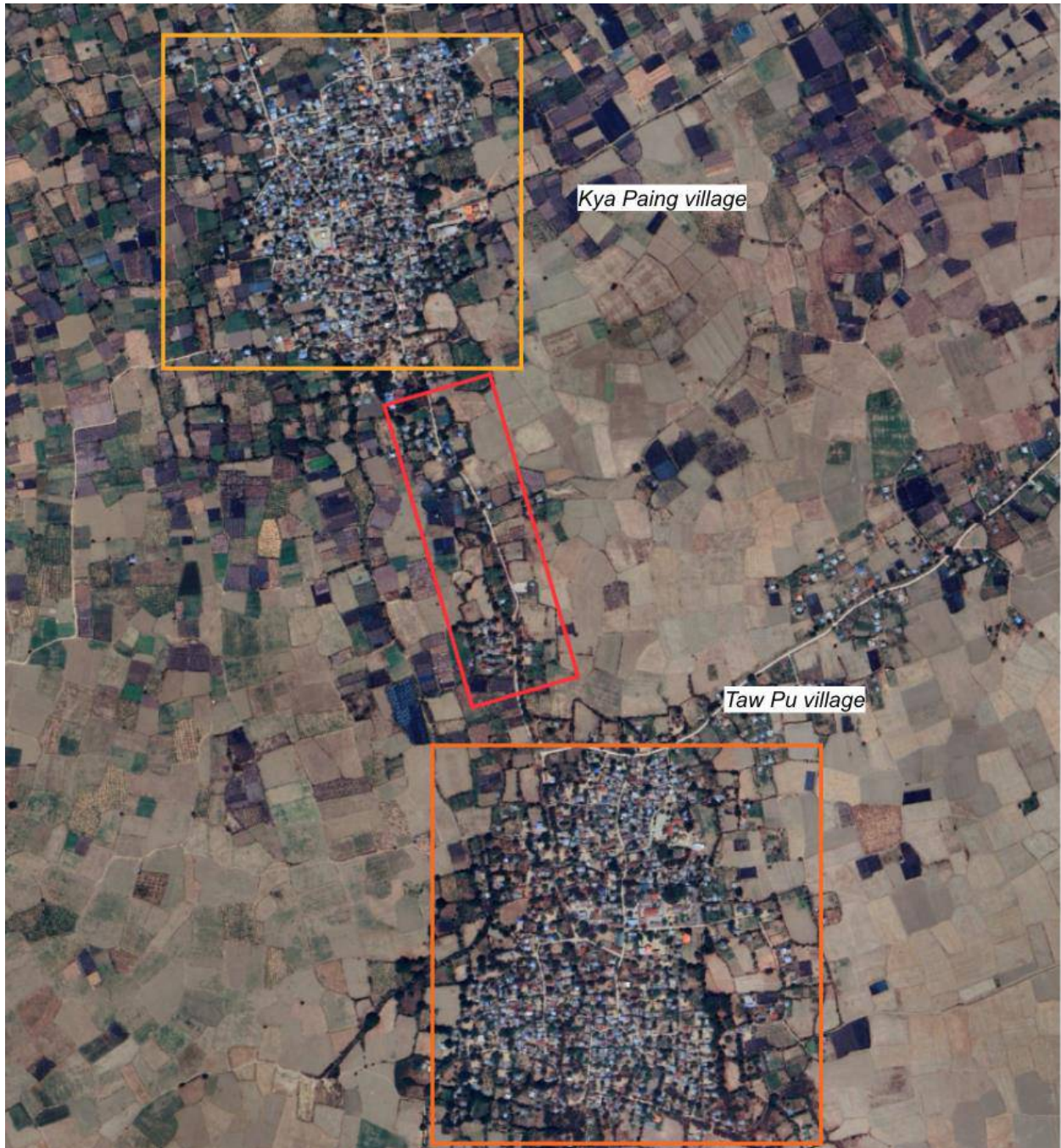


Figure 1: Location of the Kya Paing village [22.035227, 95.202875] (yellow), Taw Pu village [22.028223, 95.205835] (orange), and houses allegedly attacked by PDF forces on 1 December 2023 (red). The villages are one kilometre apart.

The investigation walkthrough

Village structures burned down

Myanmar Witness identified UGC showing extensive fire damage to houses in Kya Paing village first posted on social media on 2 December 2023 by reverse image searching. These images were geolocated to the [middle of the village](#) (22.036619, 95.203096) and near a [small pagoda](#) (22.035149, 95.202132; figure 2).

In line with [online reports](#), Myanmar Witness can confirm that fires occurred in Kya Paing on 2 December 2023. NASA's [FIRMS](#), detected fires on this date (figure 3). Additionally, by comparing high-resolution, Planet satellite imagery (dated 27 November and 3 December 2023) and Sentinel-2 satellite imagery, it is possible to identify changes to the terrain in the areas where fire damage had been geolocated (figures 4 and 5).



Figure 2: A number of houses were destroyed by fire at 22.035149, 95.202132 and 22.036619, 95.203096 in Kya Paing village (source: [Facebook](#) and [Myanmar Pressphoto Agency](#)).

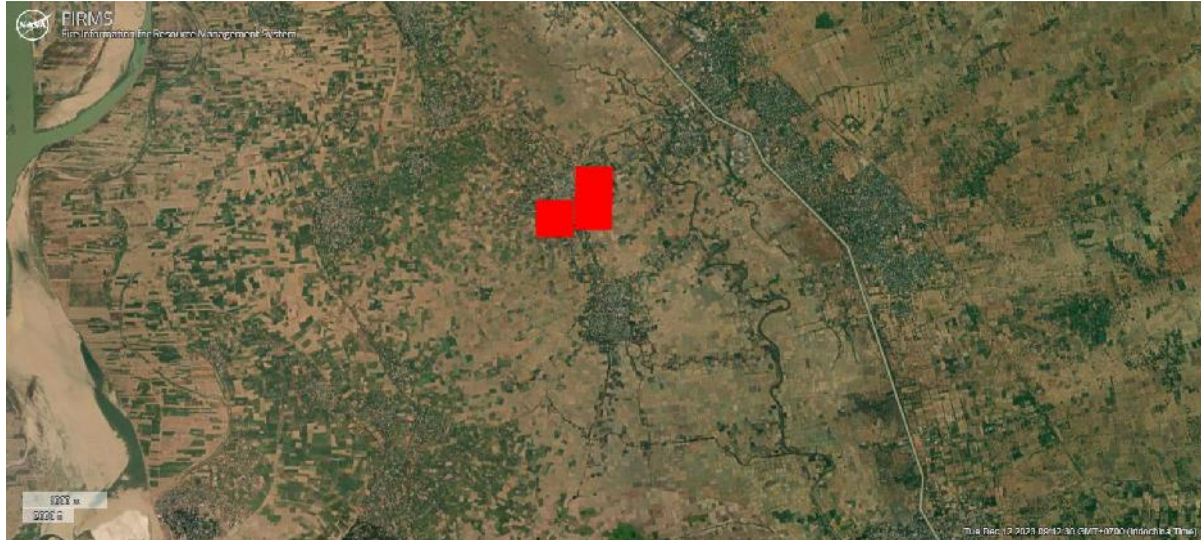


Figure 3: FIRMS shows fires in Kya Paing village on 2 December 2023 (source: [FIRMS](#)).



Figure 4: Planet imagery shows significant changes (red), especially in the middle and southern parts of Kya Paing village, between 27 November and 3 December 2023 (source: Planet).



Figure 5: Sentinel-2 false colour filters show significant changes (grey), suggesting fire damage, in Kya Paing village, between 26 November and 16 December 2023 (source: [Sentinel Hub](#)).

[WARNING: GRAPHIC] Analysis of the Burnt Bodies

According to social media users and [local news media](#), 10 people were killed by the PSH and Myanmar military forces in Kya Paing on 2 December 2023. Myanmar Witness identified UGC associated with these claims. For example, Khit Thit Media posted a [video](#) on Facebook allegedly taken after the fire in Kya Paing village on 2 December 2023. It shows five or six burnt bodies. A Facebook post by a local PDF group also contains images of burnt bodies. By comparing the UGC, it appears that one lady, wearing a yellow chequered shirt and red scrunchie, and a yellow tarp-like fabric are present in both the video and the images, increasing the likelihood that the images and videos were from the same event (figure 6). Unfortunately, Myanmar Witness was unable to geolocate the UGC.



Figure 6: A lady can be seen wearing the same shirt and hair tie at the beginning of the Khit Thit Media video and in one of the images with the burned bodies. Furthermore, a yellow tarp-like material is also visible in both the video and images of the charred bodies (sources: [Khit Thit Media video](#) and other sources are redacted due to privacy concerns).

In the photos posted on Facebook, there appear to be eight or nine burnt bodies and one unburnt body lined up together on blankets and plastic wrapping (figure 7). The post claims that there were ten dead bodies overall, however, the extent of the damage to the bodies means that Myanmar Witness cannot confidently confirm this.



Figure 7: There appear to be eight or nine burnt bodies (it is unclear if bodies labelled nine and ten are separate victims or the same body) and one unburnt body (source redacted due to privacy concerns).

Myanmar Witness has not been able to geolocate the UGC of the burnt bodies; however, by analysing the [video](#) and images of the burnt bodies, it can be deduced that:

1. **The victims were likely burnt in the room where the bodies were found.** The bodies are covered in debris and ash, indicating that the fire burned around them and that they were likely inside the building when it was on fire. This further signals that the bodies were burned in this location (figure 8).



Figure 8: Clearly burned debris and ash covering the bodies are clearly visible in video footage (source: [Khit Thit Media](#)).

2. **There was a fire inside the room.** The video pans to show the inside of the room. It appears that the roof sustained fire damaged and collapsed from the middle, as the roofing materials have fallen inwards from the centre of the roof. This signals that the fire likely began inside the building. The fire caused significant charring to the bodies, indicating a strong fire. A small fire is still visible inside the room when the camera pans around (the right side of the room from the camera's point of view) (figure 9).



Figure 9: There are burnt marks on the wall in the corner right of the camera. A small flame is still visible in the same corner (orange) (source: [Khit Thit Media](#)).

3. **The victims were likely unable to move, unconscious, or dead when they were set alight.** The burnt bodies appear to be in a prone or supine position, lying horizontally; this could indicate that the victims were unable to move when the fire occurred. A conscious person, able to move, might try to protect themselves or curl up into the fetal position. Myanmar Witness cannot determine whether the individuals were alive at the time of the fire.
4. **Metal wires are visible, suggesting that at least one victim was bound at the time of the fire.** Analysis of the photos of the bodies revealed three pieces of thin material, likely metal, wrapped around the right arm and both thighs of one of the burnt bodies (figure 11). The material may have been used to restrict the individual's movement. The darkened appearance and the residue on the wire suggest that the individual was tied up before the fire. The curling and warping of the material also suggest that it is metal, as metal wire warps when exposed to heat, while rope or string would have survived the fire.



Figure 10: The image shows what appears to be three pieces of metal strings wrapped around the burnt body near the right arm and both thighs (source: source redacted due to privacy concerns).

Conclusion and future monitoring

On 2 December 2023, fires destroyed large areas of Kya Paing village. Myanmar Witness has verified that these fires took place and analysed imagery of the destruction. [Local news media](#) claim that the fires were a retaliatory attack carried out by the pro-military militia, the PSH, after an attack by the PDF the previous day. Clashes between the PSH and PDF have been frequently reported throughout the conflict.

In Kya Paing village, a number of people were reportedly detained, 10 of whom were burnt to death. Myanmar Witness was unable to verify all of these claims. However, a number of burnt bodies were allegedly found within the remains of a building in the village. One of the deceased showed signs that they had been bound before the fire. While the building could not be geolocated, images of the bodies were posted by two different sources, with the same lady present in both, increasing the likelihood that the imagery was from the same event. Myanmar Witness will continue monitoring social media and news media for further information about these events.

Abbreviations

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| ● Fire Information for Resource Management System | FIRMS |
| ● People's Defense Force | PDF |
| ● Pyu Saw Htee | PSH |
| ● User-generated content | UGC |