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Junta artillery destroys 400 homes, kills 5 in southern Myanmar



Junta artillery shelling in the southern part of Myanmar killed five people and burned down an estimated 400 homes, the first major attack in relatively peaceful Mon state since the February 2021 military coup d'état, residents said.

Naval vessels fired heavy weapons at Dhamma Tha village in Kyaikmaraw township from the Gyaing River on March 27-28, killing a 12-year-old child, two women and two others, according to the Mon State Federal Council, or MSFC, a political organization representing the people of the state.

More houses went up in flames after junta troops barred fire trucks from entering the area, destroying about one-third of the village's more than 1,000 homes, residents said.



Houses burn following a naval attack from a nearby river by the military junta, in Dhamma Tha village, Kyaikmaraw township, in southern Myanmar's Mon state, March 27, 2024. (Mi Jandai Mon via Facebook)



The village — the native home of the leader of an ethnic Mon armed resistance group that declared war against the junta in February — was the first community in the state to suffer significant damage in more than three years after the military toppled the elected government.

The Myanmar military's power grab triggered a wave of resistance by insurgents and ethnic armed organizations across the country. In response, junta forces have targeted civilians, viewing them as a support base for armed resistance groups, resulting in thousands of deaths and mass displacements.

The junta attacked Dhamma Tha village, even though Nai Banyar Lel, deputy leader of the anti-junta New Mon State Party-Anti-Dictatorship group, or NMSP-AD, and his family do not live there, said Mi Su Ta, head of the MSFC's Humanitarian and Relief Department.

“It was a very crazy and inhumane attack on the village,” he told Radio Free Asia. “It was also a terror attack on civilian targets.”



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Residents said most people fled the village to avoid getting caught up in armed conflict before the deadly shelling occurred, and returned afterwards only to see houses they had built with money they earned from blue-collar jobs in Thailand and Malaysia in ashes.

More than 10,000 people who lost their homes fled to Mawlamyine, capital of Mon state and the country's fourth-largest city with an estimated population of 438,000.

Suppressing 'the revolutionary spirit'

Dhamma Tha village is close to Kawt Bein village police station in Kawkareik township of neighboring Kayin state, which was captured by the Karen National Liberation Army — an ethnic armed group that controls parts of Mon state — and joint revolutionary forces on March 25, and to Ta Ra Na village where junta troops are based.

NMSP-AD spokesman Nai Banya Mon said the military council retaliated against Mon resistance forces and Mon communities for their strong support of the seizure of Kawt Bein police station.

“It was concluded that the village was set on fire to suppress the revolutionary spirit of the Mon people, and the military might have considered this tactic to crack down on the resistance movement of the Mon people,” he said.



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Area resistance groups said the junta has reinforced its troops so they don't lose the Ta Ra Na village police station near Dhamma Tha village to resistance fighters.

The military council has not issued a statement about the shelling of the village.

RFA could not reach Aung Myat Kyaw Sein, Mon state's natural resources minister and spokesman under the junta, for comment.

Junta forces, including pro-regime militias, burned about 79,000 civilian homes across Myanmar between February 2021 and December 2023, according to the independent research group Data for Myanmar.

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