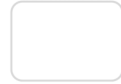


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Junta forces resume raids on villages in Sagaing region, residents say

Homes were burned and 5 villagers were brutally killed in one recent attack.

By RFA Burmese

Junta forces recently killed five residents during a raid on a village in northwestern Myanmar's Sagaing region, one of several recent attacks that signals a resumption of the military's brutality in the area, local residents said.

Soldiers also arrested 10 people in the Jan. 18 attack on Me Oe village in Tabayin township, a local resident close to the victims told Radio Free Asia.

"One dead body was cut at the neck, and two others were killed after brutal torture. Their body parts were cut off," the resident said.

Sagaing has been a hotbed of armed resistance and conflict between rebels groups and junta troops ever since the military's takeover in a February 2021 coup d'état.

There was a brief pause earlier this month when the junta agreed to a ceasefire in neighboring Shan state with the Three Brotherhood Alliance, which is made up of three ethnic armies. The alliance's Operation 1027 began in October with a series of simultaneous attacks in multiple towns in northern Shan state.

But in the last two weeks, local residents in Sagaing have told RFA that junta forces are again setting fire to homes and killing civilians in Tabayin, Ye-U, Khin U, Budalin, Ayadaw and Kanbalu townships.

Junta troops also shelled the villages of Salingyi township on Jan. 20, leaving a child and two adult civilians dead, residents said.

Thousands displaced

Nearly 20,000 people fled from their villages in Salingyi, Tabayin, Ye-U and Khin U townships between Jan. 16 and Jan. 24, according to volunteers who are providing assistance to the displaced persons.

Junta troops have surprised some of the villages in the recent raids, a People's Defense Force official in Tabayin told RFA anonymously. Previously, villagers could hear gunfire or see smoke from neighboring villages just before their own village was attacked.

The junta is targeting civilians because they are increasingly unable to defeat opposition forces on the battlefield, according to Aung Kyaw Moe, the deputy minister for human rights for the shadow National Unity Government.

"They have no capacity to conduct battles," he said. "They have lost their ethics and morality by targeting civilians."

A lawyer told Radio Free Asia on condition of anonymity for security reasons that the killing of five civilians in Tabayin was a violation of the Geneva Conventions, which regulates the conduct of armed conflict.

"After the junta suffered great losses to Operation 1027, they became more brutal to cover their losses," the lawyer said. "However, these are war crimes with the maximum punishment of life sentence or the death penalty."

Calls by RFA to Sai Naing Naing Kyaw, the junta's ethnic affairs minister for Sagaing region, seeking comment on the recent attacks went unanswered Monday.

Translated by Aung Naing. Edited by Matt Reed and Malcolm Foster.

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