



MYANMAR: Tanintharyi Region

Monthly Situation Update

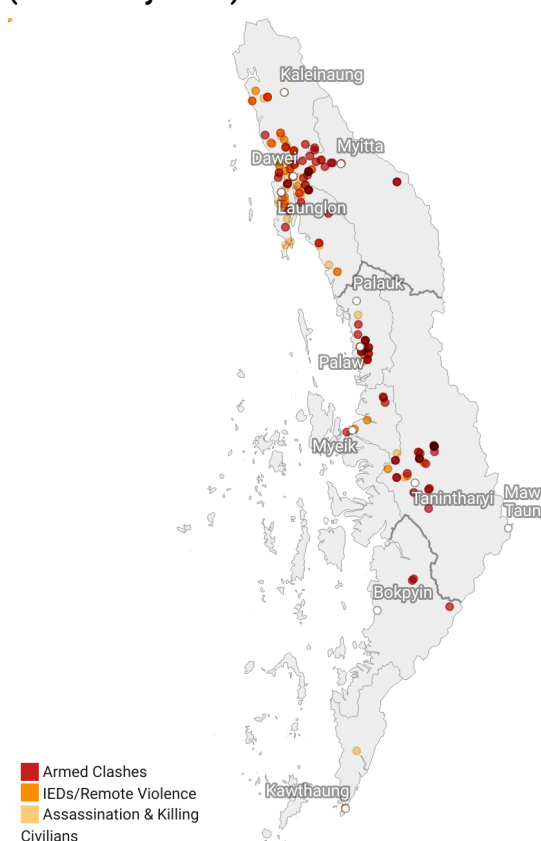
31 May 2022

This regular update, covering nonviolent movement, conflict trends, human rights violations and humanitarian developments up to 31 May, is produced by Southern Monitor, a local research group. The next monthly situation update will be issued in June 2022.

HIGHLIGHTS & KEY MESSAGES

- A total of 22 armed clashes between the junta forces and the local people’s defense forces have been reported in May 2022. The majority of the recorded armed clashes erupted in Dawei, Launglon, and Tanintharyi townships. A total of 7 civilians were killed during the armed clashes.
- The junta forces’ use of heavy weaponry and increased troop reinforcements in villages in Taku and Tha Ra Bwin village tracts in Tanintharyi township caused the displacement of more than 14,000 villagers.
- A total of 89 violent incidents (attacks and killings) in which civilians were targeted have been reported in Tanintharyi Region, with the majority of such incidents taking place in Launglon, Thayetchaung and Yebyu townships.
- A total of 53 civilian houses have been burned down by junta forces, as of 31 May. Many IDPs will not have homes to return to when there is a cessation of armed clashes.
- Tanintharyi Region saw a sustained presence of non-violent actions, with the majority of street demonstrations and anti-coup resistance campaigns in Dawei District.
- Tanintharyi Region saw an increase in pro-regime forces’ activities, including attacks on NLD members, members of people’s defense forces, and their respective family members. Movements of pro-regime forces have also caused further displacement of civilians.

Incident Map: Violent Incidents in Tanintharyi Region (Jan to May 2022)



Source: Southern Monitor • Created with Datawrapper

KEY FIGURES¹

250

Nonviolent actions mobilized by activist groups between January and May 2022

222

Violent incidents occurred in the region between January and May 2022

75

People killed by conflict actors between January and May 2022

19K

People currently displaced by clashes and insecurity since February 2021

¹ Displacement figures fluctuate during any given month. These figures represent the number of people currently displaced. Cumulative numbers for returns and displacement are not always available.

WHO WE ARE

Southern Monitor is an independent group that monitors socio-economic, peace and human rights issues in Tanintharyi Region of Myanmar. This report is based on primary data collection from the field and secondary data sources which include news from mainstream and local media. We also monitor social media pages of strike committees, student unions, civil society organizations, humanitarian support groups and local people's defence forces operating in the regions. This report is prepared by a technical team, in consultation with local partners and field monitors.

BACKGROUND

Tanintharyi Region has a distinct positioning among the regions in Myanmar due to its proximity to the border with Thailand, and long-standing presence of one of the largest ethnic armed organizations, the Karen National Union (KNU). A vast area of Tanintharyi Region is considered as Mergui-Tavoy (Myeik-Dawei) District, under the administration of KNU Brigade 4, although the map of the area endorsed by the KNU does not correspond directly with official government boundaries². The KNU's territorial control has been historically scattered along areas bordering Thailand. The strongholds of the KNU and its two-armed wings, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) are strategically significant, especially after the military coup on February 1, 2021. KNLA and KNDO territories have provided: refuge for political dissidents, a home for the influx of resistance fighters, and safe passage for displaced populations fleeing military-controlled areas.

The KNU is not merely an armed actor in Tanintharyi Region, but also a governance actor. In the aftermath of the coup, the KNU supported the local people's defence forces (PDFs) providing military training to fleeing activists and protesters, who subsequently joined the PDFs or the KNLA. The armed wings of the KNU have also launched joint military operations with the PDFs. Furthermore, the KNU has maintained its exclusive control over parts of the region, and its political wing has provided healthcare and education services to local populations for several decades. The KNU's administration system consists of a total of 14 departments through which it provides: Karen-language education, healthcare, forest conservation, and judicial mechanisms. Historically, these departments operated in parallel with government counterparts, covering the same or overlapping jurisdictions. Currently, the KNU has maintained its legitimacy among ethnic communities, and continues to provide social services that the local people have refused from the military. Also, the KNU has maintained close collaboration with the PDFs in its territory, providing shelter and assistance to displaced populations who fled their homes amidst intensified clashes between the local defence forces and SAC forces, since the last quarter of 2021.

NON-VIOLENT MOVEMENTS IN THE REGION

Following the coup staged by the Tatmadaw (Myanmar Armed Forces) and subsequent formation of the State Administration Council (SAC), mass demonstrations took place in Tanintharyi Region starting on February 3, 2021, when thousands of protesters from multiple ethnic groups joined in protests against the military regime. While there was initially no major violence against the protesters, the situation changed very rapidly when the Tatmadaw security forces started using lethal force against the protesters towards the end of February 2021. The police and military personnel used live ammunition to force the dispersal of the demonstrations, including firing indiscriminately at individuals. The disproportionate use of force by the security forces violates numerous legal rights, including the right to security of the person,

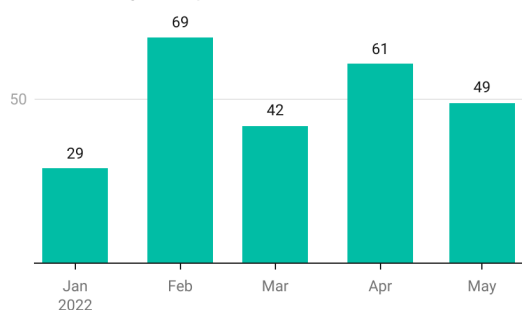
² This refers to the official government boundaries recognized by the NLD government. The administrative divisions of Tanintharyi Region (Tenasserim Region) of the state government are made of Dawei District, Myeik District, and Kawthoung District. The State Administration Council designated Bokpyin to be a district after the coup.

and the right to freedom of expression and assembly. Where such force caused the death of protesters, it amounts to extrajudicial killings.

One year after the coup, the SAC forces have continued repression against the non-violent resistance, including crackdowns using lethal force against peaceful protesters. Demonstrators have also received threats and withstood violence at the hands of SAC-backed pro-regime forces, which have, in turn, significantly decreased the number of protests across many townships in Tanintharyi Region. For example, the “Kite Force” group³ had reportedly warned Min Lwin Oo, a prominent member of the Dawei District Strike Committee and other protesters against staging protests in the district, and threatened to kill the latter. To this day, the anti-coup activists have also been subjected to arbitrary arrest, custodial torture, hefty prison sentences, and threats and intimidation against them and their family members by the forces of the SAC or the member of local pro-military militias in the region. Another factor that explains the decrease in protests is the increased reinforcements of Tatmadaw and police forces, as a result of intensified clashes between them, and the local PDFs in several townships including Palaw, Dawei, and Thayetchaung Townships.

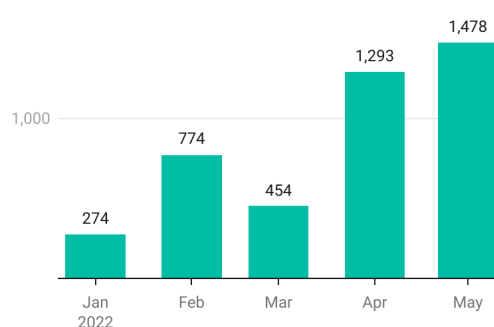
Despite the ongoing repression, non-violent resistance has been consistently pursued in various forms of demonstrations, boycotts, silent-strikes, civil disobedience and alternative institutions in Tanintharyi Region. With the mobilization of youth activists, students’ unions and the women, there remains a relatively strong presence of non-violent actions in the region unlike other states and regions, where protests and other non-violence campaigns have been far and few between. Amidst the arrests of the anti-coup activists and the increased troop deployments by the junta to counter the activities of the local PDFs, non-violent actions, mostly in the forms of street demonstrations, have been staged almost daily in some parts of Tanintharyi region.

Number of Nonviolent Actions in Tanintharyi Region



Source: Southern Monitor · Created with Datawrapper

Number of Participants in Nonviolent Actions



Source: Southern Monitor · Created with Datawrapper

During January 1 - May 31, a total of 250 non-violent actions have been reported, with the majority taking place in Dawei, Launglon, Thayetchaung and Yebyu townships in Dawei District. Protesters in Tanintharyi Region have continued pursuing demonstrations in protest against the military junta with the highest number of protests (151 protests in total) reported in rural areas in Launglon Township alone. Almost every day, the anti-regime protesters in Launglon Township stage demonstrations, which are often organized by the local chapter of the Basic Education Students’ Union (BESU) in the township. The protesters, mostly women and youth, in a village in Launglon Township called for the general public to reject the military in any possible way and refrain from “normalizing” the junta’s rule.⁴ The other

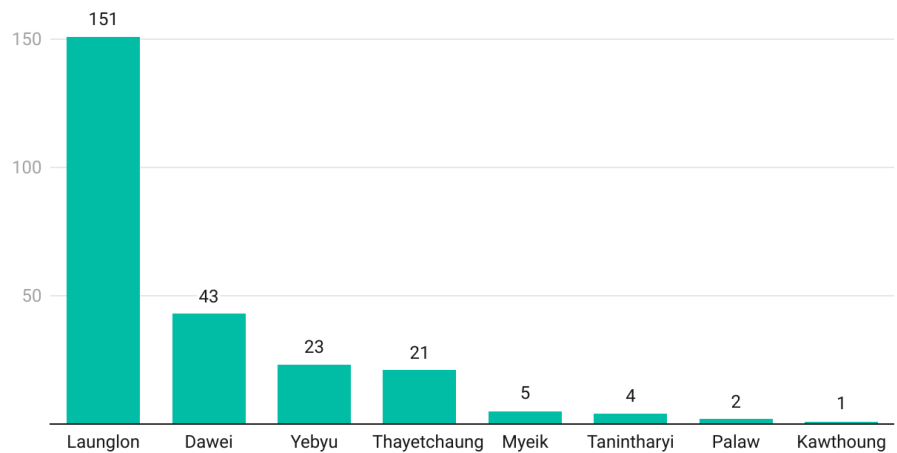
³ Local sources reported that the “Kite Force” is an assumed name of the pro-military Pyu Saw Htee local chapter, which is 15 members strong and armed by the State Administration Council (SAC).

⁴ Burma VJ. (May 2, 2022). <https://www.facebook.com/100446442122984/posts/364432985724327>

townships with moderate levels of peaceful protests include: Yebyu, Dawei, and Thayetchaung townships in Dawei District. Myeik District and Kawthoung District have seen very few protests due to ongoing repression, threats, and intimidation targeted at anti-regime activists.

Despite the general trends that suggest a decrease in the number of peaceful protests, the general public is still deeply involved in non-violent resistance. In April 2022, anti-regime protesters called for the public to partake in rallies in rural areas, as well as participate in a number of resistance actions including boycotting the SAC-sponsored Thingyan New Year holiday celebrations and SAC-run basic education. As a result of these mobilization activities in the previous month, May 2022 saw a considerable increase in the number of protesters, despite a fewer number of protests.

Number of Nonviolent Actions by Township



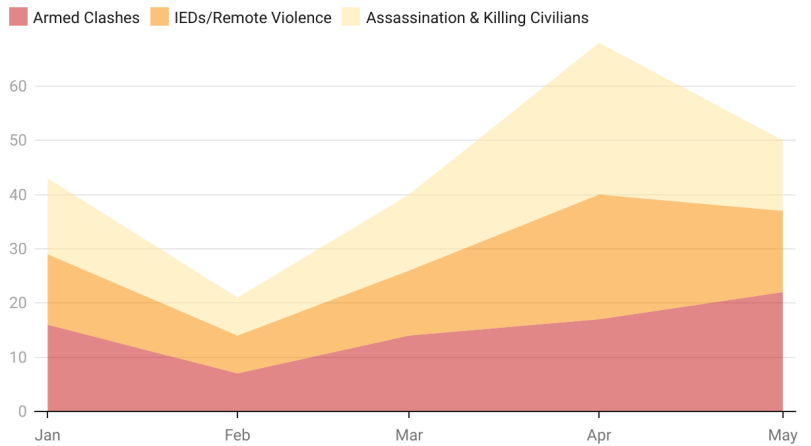
Source: Southern Monitor • Created with Datawrapper

Another non-violent resistance movement emerged in the form of the Civil Disobedience Movement, when thousands of government staff in Tanintharyi Region refused en masse to work for the military regime, since early February 2021. Some teachers were arrested and handed down lengthy prison sentences on incitement charges for participating in the anti-coup movement. According to a local teacher's union, by June 2021, more than 7,236 teachers and administrative staff were dismissed from their positions for partaking in the movement. In turn, this caused the SAC's plan to reopen the state-run basic education schools for the 2021-2022 academic year to fail. The Tatmadaw security forces also carried out raids and arrest operations into the private accommodations of the CDM participants and protest organizers, depriving the latter of many fundamental rights including the right to housing. Amidst threats, dismissals, and arrests by the military regime, many CDM participants, including teachers, military personnel, police officers, healthcare workers, and some members of the elected Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (the Union's parliament) sought refuge in areas controlled by Karen Nation Union (KNU) in Tanintharyi Region.

CONFLICT TRENDS

The National Unity Government (NUG), a parallel administration consisting of ousted NLD lawmakers, announced the formation of the people's defence forces (PDFs) in May 2021. Following the announcement, Tanintharyi Region saw the emergence of an increasing number of local defence forces which claim to align themselves with the Ministry of Defence of the National Unity Government (NUG), or ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), or both. There is now a presence of more than 35 local PDFs that operate in specific townships in the region. Given the scattered locations of local PDFs' respective operational areas, and less capacity (e.g. manpower and ammunition supplies) of the local PDFs compared to the forces of the SAC, the main tactics employed by the resistance forces include the use of remote-detonated improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and skirmishes targeted at the police stations. Using social media pages of local PDFs, the resistance forces have also claimed responsibility for a number of targeted killings, involving alleged military informants, and members of pro-regime forces.

Number of Violent Incidents in Tanintharyi Region

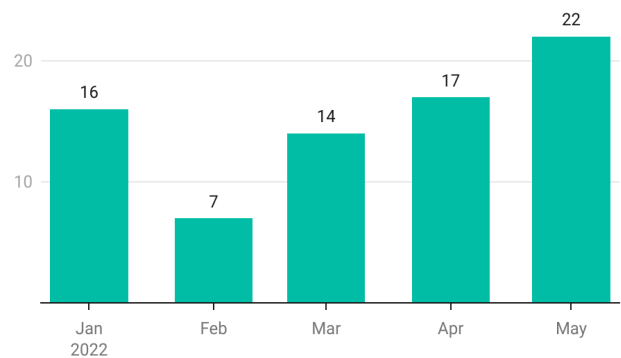


Source: Southern Monitor • Created with Datawrapper

Armed Clashes

Sporadic fighting between the Tatmadaw and the local defence forces has occurred in a number of townships in Tanintharyi Region since September 2021. Notably, in Taung Pyauk area in Thayetchaung Township, a joint force of a local PDF and KNLA forces of the SAC erupted following the former's attack on a police station. From that moment, the Tatmadaw security forces positioned their troops in the police stations and the private accommodations in the village, restricting movements to 10 villages in the area, in an attempt to deprive the local defence forces of access to food, fuel, and other supplies. The junta forces had employed a similar tactic of curtailing access to supplies, and tightening the movement restrictions in many townships following the events of violence and skirmishes by the resistance forces. In turn, this led to a surge in displacement, shortages of essential supplies, as well as rising commodity prices in the affected townships.

Number of Armed Clashes in Tanintharyi Region



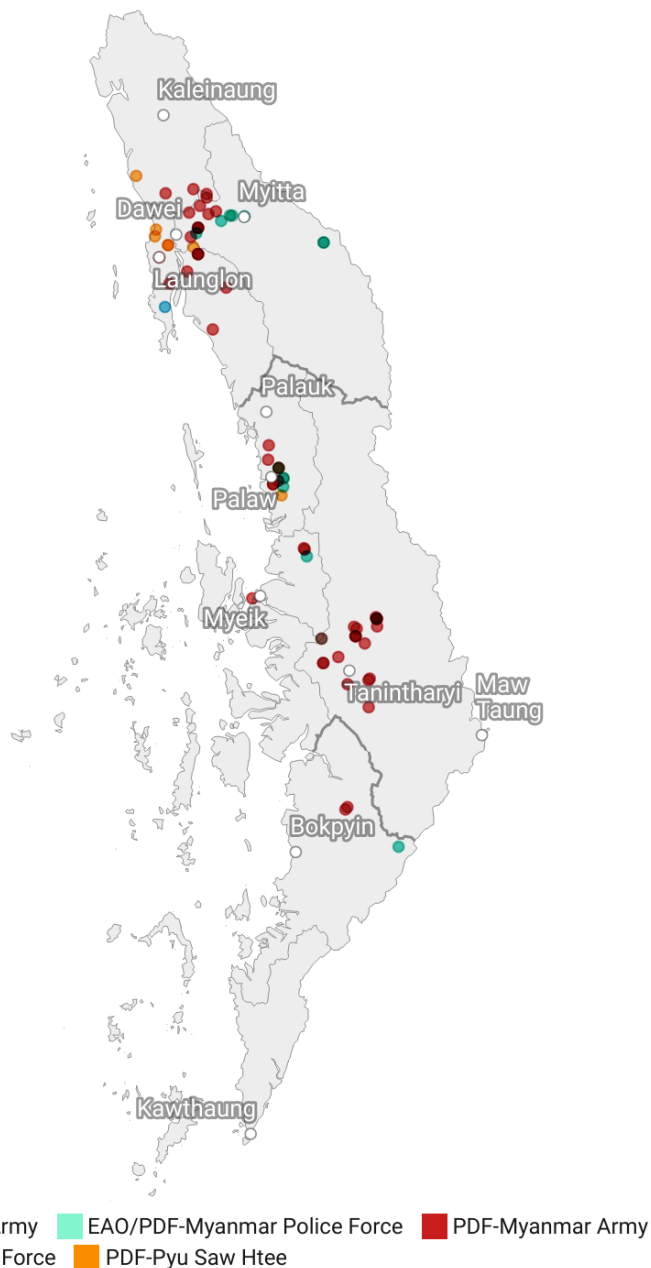
Source: Southern Monitor • Created with Datawrapper

The trends of armed fighting between the local PDFs and SAC forces in the first 5 months of 2022 demonstrated that the clashes continue to erupt across Dawei, Palaw, Launglon, Tanintharyi, Thayetchaung townships in the region, and will potentially expand to the areas with a close proximity to urban settings, causing a spike in the figures of new displacement and its subsequent need for urgent humanitarian assistance. The major highway roads, especially the Dawei-Hteekhee Road, became a

flashpoint as the clashes between the Tatmadaw forces and a combined force of Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and local people's defence forces broke out along the road.

Incident Map: Armed Clashes in Tanintharyi Region (Jan to May 2022)

The map shows the locations of armed clashes between different conflict actors



Source: Southern Monitor • Created with Datawrapper

Hostilities committed by Tatmadaw forces

May 1 : Tatmadaw soldiers continued to station themselves at Thae Chaung Gyi Village police station in Taung Pyauk area, and fired artillery shells at nearby villages; some shells fell at the gate of a monastery in Kywel Chan village. Until March 2022, the villagers sought shelter at the monastery, as the Tatmadaw fired artillery shells at the villages almost every night. Since the shelling continued to intensify in the area, the villagers of Kywel Chan village fled their homes and the monastery to seek refuge in the jungle. Thae Chaung Gyi village and Kywel Chan village are in close proximity; they are separated by a creek which is just 80 feet wide..⁵

May 5 : Tatmadaw soldiers launched artillery strikes at Pa Kar Ri village in Dawei township on May 5 and the shelling destroyed at least 6 houses in the village.⁶ No casualties have been reported. The majority of the villagers had fled their homes since April 25-27 when the Tatmadaw soldiers started launching artillery strikes in the area. Although the displaced villagers have been expecting to return to their places of origin provided that there is a relative stability in the area, the continued shelling has further prevented them from entering the village premises.

May 8-10 : Tatmadaw forces increased deployment of troops and launched offensives in several townships in Dawei township and parts of Launglon township starting on May 8. On the following day on May 9, Around 40 Tatmadaw soldiers along with the members of the Pyu Saw Htee groups entered Nyaw Pyin village in Launglon township and fired shots at the villagers, injuring one villager. Following the skirmishes of the local defence forces on a police station in Tha Kyet Taw village, troop reinforcements have been transported to the areas through waterways and extended operations have been launched affecting the villages including Nyaw Pyin. The accounts of Tatmadaw soldiers occupying the private houses of the villagers as well as looting civilians' properties including food and clothing items have been reported. Two elderly women have also been reportedly beaten by the Tatmadaw soldiers who continued to station at the village police station.⁷

On the same day, clashes between the Tatmadaw soldiers and the local people's defence forces erupted in Tha Byar village in Dawei Township. During the clashes, Tatmadaw's shelling injured two civilians. At least 3 Tatmadaw soldiers were reportedly injured and a member of the local people's defence forces was also injured. Another clash between the alliance forces (of Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) and local people's defence forces) and the Tatmadaw troops broke out in Kyauk Me Taung village tract, Myitta town on the following day on May 10 and the shelling of the Tatmadaw troops fall into the compounds of two monasteries, resulting in the death of a local volunteer as well as injured a Buddhist monk.⁸

On the night of May 10, the Tatmadaw forces of around 200 soldiers grouped a total of 3 columns to enter three different locations: Me Chaung, Ka Than and Taung Poet village in Dawei Township. ⁹Clashes between the Tatmadaw forces and local people's defence

⁵ Dawei Watch.(May 1, 2022) <http://www.daweivatch.com/2022/05/01/news/40269/>

⁶ Development Media Group. (May 11, 2022) <https://www.facebook.com/874334009274294/posts/7475253582515604>

⁷ Tanintharyi Times. (May 16, 2022) <https://www.facebook.com/108506238223647/posts/165913712482899>

⁸ Myanmar Pressphoto Agency. (May 11, 2022) <https://www.facebook.com/874334009274294/posts/7475253582515604>

⁹ Than Lwin Times. (May 10,2022) <https://www.facebook.com/163055077152350/posts/3800752723382549>

forces broke out in Me Chaung.¹⁰ Due to the increased deployment of the Tatmadaw troops and intensified clashes, civilians from the nearby villages: Ta Laing Taung, Ka Than, Taung Poet, Tha Byar villages have fled their homes.

May 14-15 : On May 14-15, the Tatmadaw forces fired gunshots at random, affecting at least 10 houses and set three buildings ablaze in three villages, including Pa Kar Ri, Me Chaung, and Pa Kat villages. The Tatmadaw forces reportedly entered the villages with a military convoy of one armoured combat vehicle and multiple vehicles carrying ammunition supplies and rations. The villagers fled their homes when a large number of Tatmadaw forces entered the villages.¹¹ The artillery strikes followed an incident on April 24 when the local people's defence forces ambushed Pa Kar Ri village police station.

The junta forces arrested three men, who were allegedly connected to local people's defence forces in Mee Kyaung Aing ward in Kanbawk, Yebyu township on May 15. The three men were abducted from their homes to the compound of Myawaddy Regional Command, reportedly for their involvement in mobilizing silent strikes and demonstrations. One of the three men was later released on the next day. The junta forces have been raiding the homes of the residents in the Kanbawk area under the pretext of "overnight guest registration" and drug searches. The security checks by the junta forces are often observed at the intersections of the roads and followed by the acts of them extorting money from the civilians.¹²

May 17 : The junta forces entered Wa Kone village on May 17 and fired gunshots at random, reportedly searching for the members of the local people's defence forces in the village. That led to the displacement of more than 200 villagers fleeing to seek shelter in an area controlled by KNU Brigade 4. According to a member of the Karen National Defence Organization (KNDO), a total of 10 villagers, who went back into the village after indiscriminate shooting/shelling stopped, were arrested by the Tatmadaw forces.¹³

May 18-21: A Tatmadaw column raided the village of Taku on May 18, when the local defence forces reportedly launched a counter attack to the unit, resulting in an intensified clash in the area that last through May 21. During the 4-days raid, two villagers and two members of a local PDF (two members of Southern Warriors Defence Force (SWDF) and two villagers from Ban Pyayt village in Thein Daw village tract) were believed to have been captured and executed by the Tatmadaw troops. Two other villagers from Taku village: a 10 years old child with disability and a 30 year old man have also been shot and killed by the Tatmadaw soldiers during the fighting.¹⁴

May 23 : On May 23, the Tatmadaw forces burned down at least 4 houses in Wa Kone village in Dawei township and launched artillery strikes at the village and nearby areas including Taung Thone Lone and Ba Wa Pin villages. The continuation of artillery strikes caused more than 1,000 villagers from those villages to flee their homes to seek shelter in the houses of their relatives in Dawei town, or other (relatively) safer locations in the township.¹⁵

¹⁰ RISE news. (May 12, 2022) <https://www.facebook.com/2741985585815921/posts/5738267516187698>

¹¹ Tanintharyi Times. (May 18, 2022) <https://www.facebook.com/108506238223647/posts/166266269114310>

¹² Myeik Now. (May 16, 2022) <https://www.facebook.com/2216707851889615/posts/3490079594552428>

¹³ Development Media Group. (May 18, 2022). <https://www.facebook.com/466648543487562/posts/2296205520531846>

¹⁴ Myanmar Now. (May 23, 2022). <https://www.myanmar-now.org/mm/news/11414>

¹⁵ RFA burmese. (May 24,2022) <https://www.facebook.com/39218993127/posts/10161842726413128>

Attacks targeting civilians

During January to May 2022, a total of 89 violent incidents in which civilians were targeted have been reported in Tanintharyi region, with the majority of such incidents taking place in Launglon, Thayetchaung and Yebyu townships. A total of 30 incidents have been reported in Launglon township alone. The victims involved alleged military informants, junta-appointed village administrators, members of the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) and the alleged members of pro-regime Pyu Saw Htee militias. The pro-regime forces have also increasingly targeted their perceived opponents involving the anti-coup activists, members and alleged supporters of the National League for Democracy (NLD), and family members of the members of the local PDFs.

Activities of Pro-military actors

The recent developments in Tanintharyi Region that have compounded the existing regional instability stem from the increasing presence and movements of pro-regime forces, namely *Pyu Saw Htee*, and *Thway Thout* and their associated groups assuming different names in various townships. The National League for Democracy (NLD) released a statement alleging that the members of the SAC's security forces have been involved in the activities of pro-military actors that operate under different names, such as Thway Thout, Kite Force, Myo Chit Coalition, and Myo Chit Alliance. The estimated figures in the statement acknowledged that a total of seven members of the previous ruling party, NLD and 7 of its supporters had been targeted and killed by the pro-military armed actors. A total of three members of the NLD were shot to death in Tanintharyi Region.

Number of Casualties by Victim Types (Jan to May 2022)

| | Type of victims | Death | Injury | Total |
|---|------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1 | Alleged Informer | 21 | 4 | 25 |
| 2 | Pyu Saw Htee | 24 | 4 | 28 |
| 3 | Retired Army Officer | 1 | | 1 |
| 4 | USDP | 5 | | 5 |
| 5 | Village Administration | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| 6 | Civilian | 17 | 5 | 22 |
| 7 | NLD | 1 | | 1 |
| 8 | PDF's Family Members | 1 | | 1 |
| 9 | Total | 75 | 15 | 90 |

Source: Southern Monitor • Created with Datawrapper

The pro-regime groups/forces were established, to name a few, under the names of Thway Thout, Kite Force, Myo Chit Coalition and Myo Chit Alliance in April 2022.¹⁶ According to the statement, there were witness accounts that acknowledged that people who have been recruited to the pro-regime forces were transported in military and police trucks during actions against the perceived opponents involving arrests and extrajudicial killings.

In many townships in Tanintharyi Region, locals echoed similar sentiments regarding the increased movements of pro-regime forces. Additionally, it was common knowledge who had been recruited to the pro-regime forces, to the extent that the members were conducting security checks together with the junta forces in increasing numbers at designated checkpoints along the routes connecting different townships, and on the way to the KNU Brigade 4 areas. Furthermore, locals have increasingly reported that the pro-regime forces have taken or threatened the lives of the members of National League for Democracy (NLD) and the family members of the members of local people's defence forces (PDFs).

¹⁶ Tanintharyi Times. <https://www.facebook.com/108506238223647/posts/164796305927973>

April 28 : In Pan Da Le village, Launglon township, two NLD members and one of their family members were shot on April 28; two people were killed and two people were wounded. The locals attributed the killings and attack to Pyu Saw Htee, the pro-regime network of armed civilians. The perpetrators of the violent incident left their logo of a kite (bird) with a motto written on a piece of paper that suggests a deadly threat to the members of NLD, which won a landslide in the 2020 general elections in Tanintharyi Region.

May 1-3 : In Pan De Le village, there was an armed clash between the members of “Pyu Saw Htee” and a coalition force of the local people’s defence forces on May 1; both sides sustained injuries and no casualties have been reported.¹⁷ In addition, a male civilian who was later identified to be a villager from Myaung Pauk village was found dead, with his hands tied behind his back and gunshot wounds in his head and hands. His body was found beside the road near Thar Yar Gone village in Launglon township on May 3. He was arrested by the Tatmadaw soldiers about a month earlier and accused of shooting and killing a SAC appointed local administrator in Myaung Pauk village.¹⁸ The same logo of a kite was seen at the scene where the body had been found, suggesting that the perpetrators belonged to the same group. Following the violent incidents, locals in Pan Da Le village fled their homes amid fears of being targeted by the pro-military forces’ attacks and killings of civilians, and the potential escalation of armed confrontation between the local People’s Defense Forces and the pro-military forces. Pan Da Le village is located on the Dawei-Launglon road and is home to over 500 households. The newly displaced populations have difficulty seeking adequate shelter, and are unable to earn any income. . The locals also expressed that they are worried that their houses will be broken in and their belongings looted.

May 18 : As of May 18, the fear of targeted killings by members of pro-regime forces has prevented the displaced populations from returning to Pan Da Le village.¹⁹

Locals in other townships have also seen similar threats; in Yebyu township, a statement titled “Red Operations” in which the undersigned “Thway Thouk - Yaypyu” announced its plan to launch attacks on the associates of People Defense Forces, or generally any perceived opponents of the coup, and NLD members, in reprisal of the wave of attacks and killings targeted at the Tatmadaw soldiers and pro-military actors had been circulating. A similar statement had also been seen to be circulating Maung Mei Shaung village in Dawei township and in Myeik town.²⁰ This month, in particular, has seen the increased pro-military sentiments and their activities across several townships in Tanintharyi Region, leading to tit-for-tat reprisals and heightened escalation of tension, which may likely eventually lead to communal violence.

May 24 : A 60 year old woman, who was identified as a mother of a member of a local people’s defence forces, was shot and killed by two unknown gunmen in a marketplace in Dawei. This incident was the first ever shooting incident by an unknown gunman in a downtown area. Consequently, increased insecurity has extended beyond the rural areas, and armed clashes have expanded into urban settings as well.²¹

¹⁷ DVB burmese. <http://burmese.dvb.no/archives/533000>

¹⁸ Khit Thit Media. <https://web.facebook.com/385165108587508/posts/1487434588360549>

¹⁹ Myeik Now. <https://www.facebook.com/2216707851889615/posts/3491719647721756>

²⁰ Tanintharyi times. <https://web.facebook.com/108506238223647/posts/162938399447097>

²¹ Than Lwin Times. <https://www.facebook.com/163055077152350/posts/3841110172680137>

Activities of local People's Defense Forces

Following the visit of the SAC vice-chairman during the first week of May 2022, an increasing number of offensives launched by the Tatmadaw, and clashes with the local people's defence forces have been reported, causing hundreds of civilians to flee their homes.

May 3 : On the morning of May 3, 2022, a bomb exploded on Kanna Road in Seik Nge ward, in the downtown area of Myeik, and a Tatmadaw soldier was severely injured. Despite the additional deployment for a three day visit of SAC vice-chairman and deputy prime minister Soe Win to Tanintharyi Region, the incident took place when the junta's deputy chief was in Myeik town.²² Bomb blasts were reported in two additional locations near downtown Myeik; in front of Sea View Condo on Kanna road and Pyidawthar Jetty. The deputy chief was paying a visit to Tanintharyi Region where the Southeastern Command and Coastal Region Command of the Tatmadaw were located, reportedly to boost the morale of military personnel. The visit was speculated to be an attempt to staunch flows of defections in the region as the regional commands have been facing increased attacks from local defence forces.²³

May 4 : The Land Records Department in Palaw township was targeted with a bomb attack on the evening of May 4. The area around the department has other government departments such as the Department of Agriculture, township development committee, and residential areas of government staff. A bomb blast was also reported recently on April 23. The government departments and the administrator's office in Palaw township were often targeted with a bomb attack.²⁴ On the following day, a bomb blast was reported near the government office building where the township-level government departments are located.²⁵

May 5 : There was a bomb explosion at the house of an alleged military informant, Han Maung Maung, in Kanbaw, Yebyu township on May 5. The house was known to be a gambling site with alleged links to the military. In April 2022, Yebyu-based people's defence forces issued a statement urging the local people not to get involved in the military-backed gambling businesses. Kanbaw Defence Force (KBDF) claimed responsibility for the incident and further stated that the civilians in the area were not involved in inciting the attack.²⁶ A few days after the incident, the police from Kanbaw police station arbitrarily arrested a visitor from Dawei, accusing him of being involved in inciting the attack, and extorted 1.2 Million Myanmar Kyat (MMK) from him to be released.²⁷ According to local sources, such violent incidents were often followed by the actions of the local police and military authorities, who were involved in arbitrarily arresting innocent civilians and extorting money from them.

May 7: On the morning of May 7, a Tatmadaw convoy was attacked with a remote-detonated improvised explosive device near Kaleinaung Bridge (2) in Kanbaw, Yebyu township, where the Tatmadaw navy force is based. Following the incident, the Tatmadaw soldiers barricaded the Kaleinaung-Kanbaw Road and conducted increased security checks

²² Myeik Now. <https://web.facebook.com/2216707851889615/posts/3479039738989747>

²³ The Irrawaddy.

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/specials/junta-watch/junta-watch-regime-admits-its-not-in-full-control-asean-rebuffed-and-more.html>

²⁴ Dawei Watch. (May 4, 2022) <http://www.daweivatch.com/2022/05/04/news/40320/>

²⁵ RISE news. (May 5, 2022) <https://web.facebook.com/2741985585815921/posts/5718972188117231>

²⁶ Dawei Information Center. (May 6, 2022) <https://web.facebook.com/100066523820714/posts/346133127614145>

²⁷ Myeik Now. (May 9, 2022) <https://www.facebook.com/2216707851889615/posts/3484303361796718>

along the road. A Tatmadaw column, consisting of around 30 soldiers, scoured the jungle behind Kaleinaung Buddhist religious site thoroughly to uncover the attackers.²⁸ On the same day, the local defence force, Kanbawk Defence Force (KBDF) issued a statement claiming responsibility for the attack and further stated that a total of four Tatmadaw soldiers were killed, and at least six were injured. The KBDF warned civilians to stay clear of the area near the Tatmadaw convoys, amidst the escalation of hostilities in the area.²⁹

May 11: Local people's defence forces had allegedly set ablaze the abandoned houses of a military-appointed village administrator, and a member of a Pyu Saw Htee group, the office of the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), and a military-owned telecom tower in Pe Det village on May 11. The village administrator and the Pyu Saw Htee member, and their family members, had fled their home days before the incident. On the same day, around 50 Tatmadaw personnel entered the village and interrogated the locals.³⁰

May 13: A Tatmadaw convoy was attacked with a remote-detonated explosive device near Pa Wut Kone village in Palaw township on May 13; at least 40 Tatmadaw soldiers were reportedly killed in the incident according to the Palaw People's Defence Force (PPDF).³¹

May 17-18: In addition, a clerk at a village-level General Administration Office and a member of the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) was shot and killed in Launglon Township on May 17. Dawei Guerrilla Revolution Force (DGRF) claimed responsibility for the incident on May 18 with the release of a statement on its social media page. The forces further alleged that the victim was a military informant who had been involved in providing a tip-off to the SAC forces to arrest anti-coup protesters and threatening the civil servants who joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) in the vicinity.³²

May 20: A total of 3 alleged members of the pro-military militia, Pyu Saw Htee local chapter in Thayetchaung township, were shot and killed on May 20. According to local sources, the three alleged military informants have caused some villagers to flee their homes for safety.³³

²⁸ Tanintharyi Times (May 7, 2022) <https://web.facebook.com/108506238223647/posts/164025316005072>

²⁹ Dawei Information Center. Kanbawk Defence Force statement. (May 7, 2022). <https://web.facebook.com/100066523820714/posts/346712037556254>

³⁰ Than Lwin Times. (May 11, 2022) <https://www.facebook.com/163055077152350/posts/3804028756388279>

³¹ Mlzzima Burmese. (May 13, 2022) <https://www.facebook.com/216265185075061/posts/5567713433263516>

³² Network Media Group. (May 20, 2022) <https://www.facebook.com/382181045736248/posts/1072588446695501>

³³ Network Media Group. (May 20, 2022) <https://www.facebook.com/382181045736248/posts/1072604980027181>

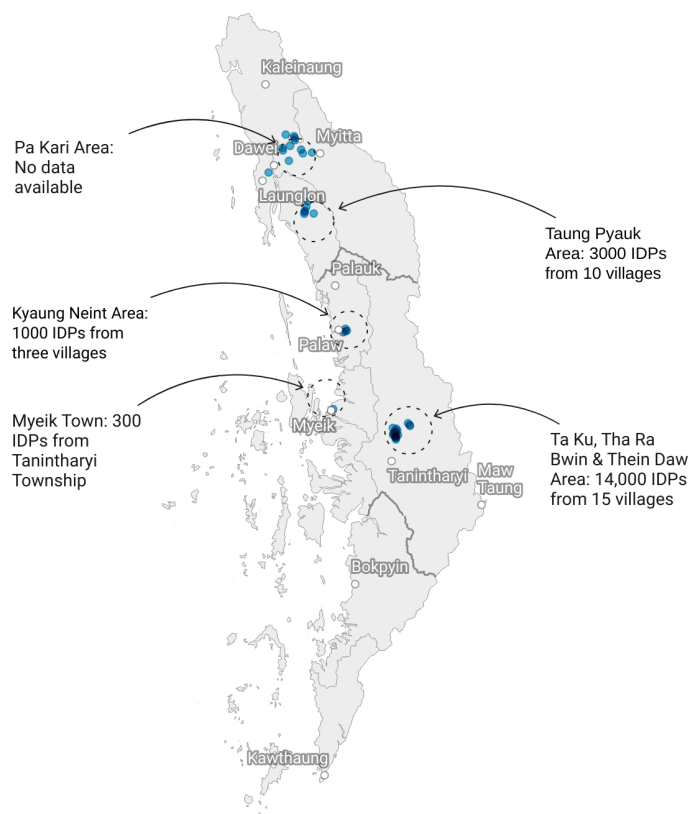
IMPACTS OF VIOLENT CONFLICT

Current Situation of Internally Displaced People

The month of May 2022 saw a drastic increase in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), with the majority of displacement in Tanintharyi township. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than 8,100 people were estimated to be displaced in Tanintharyi Region by the end of April 2022.³⁴ The figures, however, may have significantly increased following the intensified fighting across Dawei, Tanintharyi, Thayetchaung, and Palaw townships in May in Tanintharyi Region. The intensified fighting, including heavy artillery shelling and troop reinforcements by the Tatmadaw, continued through late April and May 2022. As a result, it is estimated that more people have been displaced in the region, as the Tatmadaw's counterinsurgent activities have occurred in areas along the major highway roads, connecting multiple villages across different townships. The primary sources acknowledged that the junta forces' use of heavy weaponry and increased troop reinforcements in villages in Taku and Tha Ra Bwin village tracts³⁵ in Tanintharyi township, Myeik District caused the displacement of more than 14,000 villagers. Around 300 of the displaced populations are seeking shelter in a monastery in Myeik town.³⁶

In Dawei District, there is significant new displacement of local populations; the villagers fled their homes amidst artillery shelling and the Tatmadaw's operations to their villages with an intent to eliminate the local PDFs. In some affected areas, the displaced populations returned to their villages when the use of heavy weaponry was stopped by the Tatmadaw forces or there was no presence of the Tatmadaw troops in the premises of their respective villages. Due to the clashes between the local PDFs and the Tatmadaw forces in January 2022, the villagers from Khaung Taing Pyin and nearby villages in Dawei township fled their homes. As of May 2022, the displaced populations from the villages have returned to their homes. Similarly, the majority of the displaced populations from Pa Kar Ri village, where the Tatmadaw forces' heavy artillery shelling and increased troop deployments took place on 25 May, have been forcibly returned to their homes amidst fear that their houses will be set ablaze by the junta forces. However, about 200 people of which the majority are Karen ethnic remained

Reported Locations of Displaced Populations



Source: Southern Monitor • Created with Datawrapper

³⁴ UNHCR. SE displacement snapshot. (May 24, 2022)

<https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-south-east-monthly-displacement-snapshot-trend-people-displaced-south-east-feb-2021-and-remain-displaced-25-apr-2022>

³⁵ Taku Village Tract: Taku, Inn Shey Kone, La Maing Kawt, Mei Ngaw, Sa Bai Kone, Taku Nge, Than Taik, Ywar Ma, Pyi Aye, Aiei Kone, Thar Yar Kone, Ta Laing Tat; Thar Ra Bwin tract: Kyauk Taung, Thar Ra Bwin, Thar Ra Bwin East

³⁶ Source: Southern Monitor's field monitor

in camp settings in Myitta town, Dawei after being displaced due to the Tatmadaw's clearance operations in the town starting on May 16-17. According to a confirmed local source, there are more than 1000 people who have been displaced since the clashes between the local PDFs and the Tatmadaw forces erupted in Taung Pyauk area in Thayetchaung township in September 2021 and increased operations of the latter in March 2022.³⁷ The Pan Da Le village in Launglon township saw the displacement of the villagers due to tit-for-tat killings organized by the local PDFs and the pro-regime Pyu Saw Htee groups.

According to local sources, there are two local community-based organizations providing assistance to the displaced populations in Dawei township. However, assistance provided has been falling short of the actual basic needs of the IDP populations in the township. No assistance has been provided by the SAC. As the majority of people fled their homes to the jungle and KNU-controlled areas in which a number of people's defence forces were provided protection and shelter, the displaced populations were provided shelter in camp-like settings and assisted by the resistance fighters. An alliance, consisting of PDFs and the KNU, established committees to fundraise for humanitarian aid for IDPs with the support of their networks and civilians in the country and abroad.

A member of the IDP assistance committee based in Palaw township stated that more than 1,100 IDPs in 3 temporary makeshift camps in Palaw township are in dire need of humanitarian assistance. The IDP populations consist of displaced people who fled their homes amidst armed clashes, the family members of resistance fighters in the local PDFs, and the alleged NLD supporters who faced threats and intimidation from the pro-regime forces in the villages in Palaw township. Amidst the Tatmadaw's restrictions curtailing all local PDFs' ability to receive supplies, the local aid groups are struggling to transport food items from Palaw town to the displaced populations in the established IDP camps. Tight restrictions on vital aid to the displaced have been imposed, and the locals transporting the supplies are often accused of having ties to and supporting PDFs with supplies. The Tatmadaw soldiers search the vehicles at multiple checkpoints scattered along the major highway roads, and any possible gateways to the largely KNU controlled areas where the IDPs were provided temporary shelter. Although the Karen ethnic people in the host communities have previously assisted aid groups with transporting supplies to the camps, tighter restrictions and security dynamics in the area currently do not allow them to continue this type of support. The local aid committee sought an alternative to securing rice by requesting local businessmen in the area to sell paddy, which is later processed into rice at mills in the villages.³⁸

A local aid group stated that the displaced populations are in dire need of assistance, especially relief items such as food, tarpaulins, and medicine as the monsoon season is approaching. During the monsoon season, there is an increased prevalence of seasonal influenza, malaria, and other diseases caused by poor sanitation, such as cholera. Since transportation via main roads will become more difficult in the rainy season, the aid group highlighted the need to collect the items prior to the onset of the monsoon in the region.³⁹

The number of IDPs in each township cannot be independently verified, since there are no organizations operating on the ground in Tanintharyi Region that can verify the exact number of IDPs in their respective townships. There also remained constraints for collecting data on the ground. The IDPs have also been seeking refuge in temporary camp-like settings in areas controlled by the KNU, primarily in makeshift shelters in the rubber and palm plantations.

In Tanintharyi Region, 2,000 people from Thein Daw Ywar Ma village in Tanintharyi township and 3,000 people from at least 10 villages in Thayetchaung township have been displaced since early April 2022.

³⁷ Source: Southern Monitor's field monitor.

³⁸ Interview with a member of the IDP support group in Palaw township. May 24, 2022.

³⁹ Myeik Now. (May 17, 2022) <https://www.facebook.com/2216707851889615/posts/3490940627799658>

Many of these people have taken shelter in the jungle or plantation fields without adequate shelter or access to basic services.⁴⁰

Number of IDPs in Tanintharyi Region (As of 31 May 2022)

| Township | Town/Village Tract | Pcode | Village Name | Number of IDPs |
|--------------|--------------------|---------|----------------------------------|----------------|
| Thayetchaung | Kayin Taung Pyauk | 177,291 | Kayin Taung Pyauk (+ 9 villages) | 3,000 |
| Myeik | | | Myeik Town | 300 |
| Palaw | Nan Taung | 177,785 | Kyaung Neint (+ 2 villages) | 1,000 |
| Tanintharyi | Thein Daw | 177,997 | Thein Daw Ywar Ma | 500 |
| Tanintharyi | Ta Ku | 178,013 | Mei Ngaw | 70 |
| Tanintharyi | Ta Ku | 178,014 | La Maing Kawt | 1,100 |
| Tanintharyi | Ta Ku | 178,016 | Ta Ku Nge | 400 |
| Tanintharyi | Ta Ku | 178,021 | Than Taik | 1,400 |
| Tanintharyi | Ta Ku | 221,904 | Ywar Ma | 400 |
| Tanintharyi | Ta Ku | 221,905 | Inn Shey Kone | 2,700 |
| Tanintharyi | Ta Ku | 221,906 | Sa Bai Kone | 500 |
| Tanintharyi | Ta Ku | NA | Pyay Aye | 3,000 |
| Tanintharyi | Ta Ku | NA | Ah Lel Paing | 300 |
| Tanintharyi | Ta Ku | NA | Thar Yar Kone | 110 |
| Tanintharyi | Thar Ra Bwin | 178,064 | Thar Ra Bwin (East) | 1,500 |
| Tanintharyi | Thar Ra Bwin | 178,070 | Kyauk Taung | 400 |
| Tanintharyi | Thar Ra Bwin | 178,074 | Thar Ra Bwin | 1,800 |
| Tanintharyi | Thar Ra Bwin | NA | Ta Laing Tat | 500 |
| Total | | | | 18,980 |

Source: Local Sources Compiled by: Southern Monitor • Created with Datawrapper

⁴⁰ UNOCHA Myanmar, Situation Update No. 18, 31 May 2022

Burning Civilian Houses

Among the ramped-up use of force by the junta troops with an intent to eliminate the local PDFs during the clashes and the military operations in the villages, there were accounts of arson attacks that destroyed dozens of civilians' houses. Incidents in which the Tatmadaw soldiers launched arson attacks at the houses of the civilians have been reported in Dawei, Thayetchaung, Palaw, Tanintharyi and Yebyu townships. Over the course of 4 months, a total of 53 civilian houses had been burned by the junta troops. There were accounts revealing that the alleged members of the pro-regime Pyu Saw Htee groups were seen to be involved in launching arson attacks at the houses and shops of the civilians. In some villages affected by the armed clashes, some displaced populations have been able to return to their homes after a relative and temporary stability in their villages have been observed. That was only possible because their houses in those villages were largely unaffected during the armed fighting and the Tatmadaw's operations. However, if the surge of arson attacks by the Tatmadaw soldiers and pro-regime forces continues, it will lead to large-scale and longer term displacement, with a spike in the number of IDPs with no homes to return to.

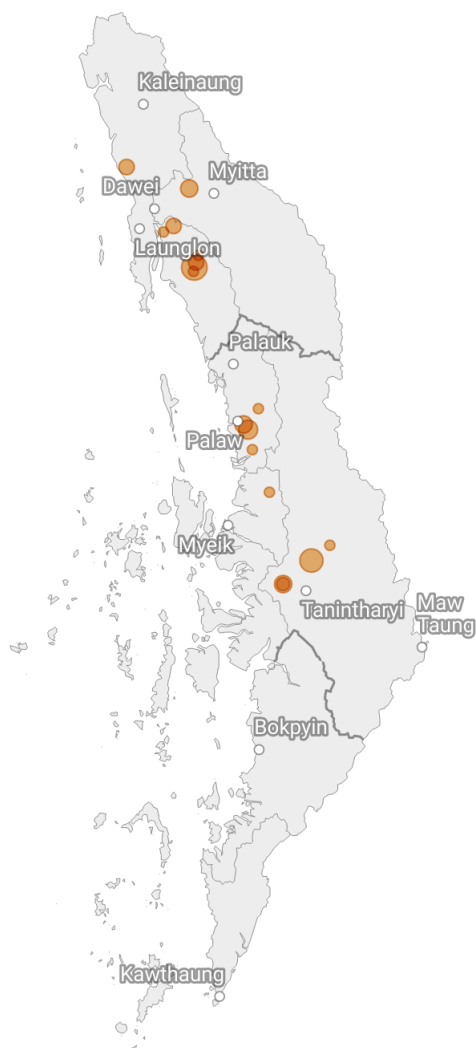
Number of Houses Burned by Myanmar Military - Tanintharyi Region (As of 31 May 2022)

| Incident Date | Township | Village Name | Number of houses burned |
|--------------------|--------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 2021-Sep-30 | Thayetchaung | Thea Chaung Gyi | 1 |
| 2021-Nov-04 | Palaw | Set Taw Yar | 1 |
| 2021-Nov-06 | Palaw | Mee Kyaung Thaik | 1 |
| 2021-Dec-10 | Thayetchaung | Saw Hpyar | 3 |
| 2021-Dec-25 | Thayetchaung | Thin Kyun | 1 |
| 2022-Jan-08 | Palaw | Pa Wut Kone | 5 |
| 2022-Jan-08 | Tanintharyi | Ta Ku | 8 |
| 2022-Feb-05 | Yebyu | Pa Ra Dat | 3 |
| 2022-Feb-19 | Tanintharyi | Pa Wa Ywar Ma | 2 |
| 2022-Feb-27 | Tanintharyi | Pa Wa Ywar Ma | 4 |
| 2022-Mar-18 | Myeik | Ah Lel Chaung | 1 |
| 2022-Apr-02 | Thayetchaung | Mei Ke | 1 |
| 2022-Apr-03 | Thayetchaung | Kyauk Aing | 3 |
| 2022-Apr-03 | Thayetchaung | Win Ka Hpaw | 10 |
| 2022-Apr-22 | Tanintharyi | Thein Daw Ywar Ma | 1 |
| 2022-May-01 | Palaw | Kyaung Neint | 4 |
| 2022-May-23 | Dawei | Wa Kone | 4 |
| Grand Total | | | 53 |

Source: Local Sources Compiled by: Southern Monitor • Created with Datawrapper

Number of Houses Burned by Myanmar Military - Tanintharyi Region (As of 31 May 2022)

The map shows the locations of villages where civilian houses were burned down by Myanmar's military.



Source: Southern Monitor • Created with Datawrapper

ANALYSIS

Armed conflict in Tanintharyi Region continues to intensify between the Tatmadaw (Myanmar Armed Forces) and the local people's defence forces, resulting in further internal displacement of civilians, as well as civilian casualties. The recent developments suggest that Tanintharyi Region will likely see a stark increase in insecurity, due to the Tatmadaw's escalated use of force involving increased use of heavy weaponry and troop reinforcement, which spans several villages in Dawei and Tanintharyi Townships. The humanitarian situation in the area has significantly deteriorated since April 2022, with thousands of newly displaced populations after the Tatmadaw launched artillery strikes and increased troop reinforcements in civilian areas. In fact, the Tatmadaw's operations involved raiding areas which they suspected were harbouring resistance fighters, with an intent to eliminate the local PDFs. This entailed the disproportionate use of heavy weaponry and manpower, which led to civilian casualties and mass displacement. This affirms that Tatmadaw forces have failed to distinguish between combatants and civilians, thereby violating international humanitarian law.

Increased insecurity has also been compounded by security checks conducted by the combined forces of the Tatmadaw personnel and pro-regime forces as well as threats and intimidation, targeted at the perceived opponents (anti-coup protesters, members of the local people's defence forces, and supporters of the NLD and their family members). These trends have led to a rapid surge in displacement. Furthermore, the pro-regime militias' campaign against the resistance and their involvement in the reported atrocities following the formation of the local chapters of pro-regime militias has significantly increased in scale. The atrocities allegedly committed by the pro-regime militias have also caused new displacement involving the perceived opponents and heightened insecurity among the civilians. The alleged members of the pro-regime militias have also targeted by local people's defence forces. Despite guidelines outlined in the Code of Conduct for all resistance fighters iterated by the National Unity Government (NUG), it is unlikely that the NUG will be able to police the behaviour and actions of each and every local defence force that spreads across the region. The victims of violence on both sides lack the right to protection, and the right to legal recourse, which has led to tit-for-tat reprisals among members of the same local communities. As a result, there is potential for significant escalation of violence and forced displacement.

In addition, Tatmadaw forces continue to fail to allow unimpeded humanitarian access to displaced populations. In response to the increased movements of pro-regime forces iterated by the statements posted on the social media pages of local people's defence forces, as well as that of the National Unity Government (NUG), the Tatmadaw continues to further restrict access to parts of the region. Additionally, they have curtailed all local people's defence forces' ability to receive supplies such as fuel, food, and medicine. This has also further constrained the operations of many local aid groups which transport supplies to the established IDP camps in remote villages in largely KNU-controlled areas. The widespread restrictions will also deprive civilians of the right to freedom of movement. Due to the scarcity of essential supplies, such as oil and rice amidst the tightened restrictions, local populations will have to pay significantly inflated prices to meet their daily needs. This humanitarian crisis is playing out against the backdrop of already existing food insecurity, surging poverty, and deepening economic recession across Myanmar.

As schools are scheduled to open in early June, there were three explosions near schools in Myeik. These incidents occurred when the NUG and PDFs were urging people not to join the SAC's public school. Local PDFs and community members denied these attacks and accused the SAC of creating mistrust between the public and PDFs. Myeik PDF released⁴¹ a statement stating that they are following the NUG's policies and code of conduct, and will not target schools, religious areas, and public spaces. The Dawei Political Prisoner Network (DPPN)⁴² also called for all armed actors to respect the code of conduct.

⁴¹ Myeik People's Defense Force. (May 31, 2022) <https://www.facebook.com/108136718450730/posts/154147760516292>

⁴² https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=164216476067922&id=111584941331076

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Tatmadaw must cease attacks on civilians and must also allow humanitarian access to displaced populations.
- PDFs and local resistance groups should refrain from committing abuses, including killing of detainees, and attacks on civilians and civilian property. They must also refrain from targeting schools and medical facilities.
- The NUG should ensure that local resistance groups are following its military code of conduct.
- All armed actors and local groups should respect parents' choices regarding their children's education, and should not target teachers, students, or schools.
- The international community should advocate for the removal of the military's restrictions on the flow of trade and freedom of movement. These restrictions affect not only areas where armed clashes occur, but also surrounding areas. As a result, local communities suffer from significantly increased prices of food and essential medicines.
- In collaboration with local organizations, humanitarian partners should provide critical life-saving assistance to the most vulnerable people in conflict affected villages, despite challenges accessing these areas, and limited funding.
- Humanitarian partners should implement programs facilitating the delivery of cross-border aid to reach displaced populations in the region.
- Humanitarian partners should coordinate with ethnic armed organizations' respective departments to ensure the swift and effective provision of humanitarian assistance.
- International organizations should strengthen the capacity of local community-based organizations and civil society organizations in aid delivery, including data collection and monitoring.
- Local non-governmental organizations and international organizations should support the implementation of activities regarding mine risk reduction education, as well as first-aid trainings and supplies to local communities.

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