

# Myanmar: Rise of Ultrationalist Militia Pyu Saw Htee

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**“Pyu Saw Htee are plain-clothed, and have used their anonymity to terrorize civilians and ambush local PDF with the support of junta troops.”**

The Myanmar military is utilizing the shift of the international community’s focus on the crisis in Ukraine to their full advantage, as they continue to commit heinous acts of violence against civilians, recently in Sagaing and Magwe Regions. In the past week, the Myanmar military razed and burned villages, used proxy-militia ultrationalist group Pyu Saw Htee to terrorize civilians and children and attacked People’s Defence Force (PDF) groups. Simultaneously, the junta has indefinitely cut the internet to most of Sagaing Region, blocking communication and information from reaching civilians who are left in the dark about impending airstrikes, ground offensives and raids.

The Myanmar military is switching up tactics from their old playbook in retaliation to PDFs, by arming and training ultrationalist group Pyu Saw Htee to act as a militia. Recently leaked military documents shown to a local news outlet *Myanmar Now* [establish](#) that the Myanmar military has armed 77 Pyu Saw Htee groups in Sagaing Region. Additionally, pro-junta administration staff, as well as Ma Ba Tha ultrationalist Buddhist monks have been [provided](#) military training and weapons. Increasing [defections](#) and casualties, in addition to a strong resistance from the people, has pushed the junta to create Pyu Saw Htee, which is a rebrand of Ma Ba Tha ultrationalist group.

Pyu Saw Htee comprises of military veterans and Buddhist ultrationalist pro-military supporters, with its roots in Ma Ba Tha, an organization of ultrationalist Buddhists whom the military bred and nurtured, both financially and politically, as part of the control machine and to [garner](#) legitimacy. Ma Ba Tha is notorious for propagating hate against ethnic and religious communities that are not part of the Bamar Buddhist hegemony. Recent photos and news reports have been [circulating](#) online picturing Ma Ba Tha monks with guns and reports of these monks [encouraging](#) civilians to crack down on PDFs. Increasingly, the military junta is using Pyu Saw Htee to spy and collect information on those who resist the junta, including protesters, those who support the Spring Revolution, PDF, National Unity Government (NUG) and Civil Disobedience Movement. They also recruit them to protect military informants, [spread](#) pro-military propaganda and assist families of military veterans. The aim is to counter the people’s resistance, as the junta’s coup attempt fails to gain control over the people of Myanmar.

Pyu Saw Htee is using increasingly violent and sadistic means of carrying out the junta’s orders. On 3 March in Lel Yar Village, Magwe Region, junta and Pyu Saw Htee thugs raided and torched 200 homes, completely destroying essential property including homes, livestock feed, a waterpump, and agriculture and food. Approximately 1,700 civilians, including 500 children, fled Lel Yar after hearing [gun fire](#) and as houses began to be set alight. On 4 March, junta and Pyu Saw Htee thugs [raided](#) Letpan Hla Village, setting fire to 30 homes and destroying property, with the junta deploying heavy artillery.

Pyu Saw Htee are plain-clothed, and have used their anonymity to [terrorize](#) civilians and [ambush](#) local PDF with the support of junta troops. For example, in the case of Myo Thit village in Sagaing Region, where 14 PDF were [killed](#) in mid February. They also form a vital part of the junta's [psychological](#) warfare against the people of Myanmar, terrorizing civilians into submission. Pyu Saw Htee is becoming extremely violent lately, [given](#) carte blanche by the junta to conduct arrests, kill PDF members, and loot and destroy property and have been [attributed](#) with the assassination of political leaders.

While Pyu Saw Htee wrecks havoc, the military junta has ordered an indefinite internet [blackout](#) to all but four of Sagaing Region's cities, adding to the eight townships in the region that have been without [internet](#) since September 2021 - Ayadaw, Butalin, Kani, Kawlin, Pale, Pinlebu, Wuntho and Yinmabin. Internet blackouts are used by the military junta as a premeditated tool of warfare, one that often precedes violent attacks, such as those [carried](#) out in Chin State last September and [during](#) the Rohingya genocide in 2017. This invariably forms part of the Myanmar military's [four cuts](#) strategy used in ethnic areas over the past six decades, now being employed in central Myanmar regions such as Sagaing and Magwe Regions. This tactic also serves to hinder communication between PDF fighters, terrorize civilians who have no access to up-to-date information on junta attacks and is used by the junta to cover up their atrocity crimes. A day after the blackout was imposed, junta troops reportedly [killed](#) nine civilians and abducted a woman and two children in a raid on Min Swe Hna Swe and Muu Kan Gyi, Sagaing Region. On 5 March, military junta troops conducted a [series](#) of attacks on Dan Kone village, Khin-U Township, Sagaing Region, almost burning the entire village to the ground.

At the end of February and under the cover of internet blackouts, the military junta forces targeted Chin Pone village, Yinmabin Township, Sagaing Region with [indiscriminate airstrikes](#) from five Mi-25 combat helicopters, followed by a ground attack where approximately 80 children and nine teachers were held hostage after fleeing to a nearby monastery. At least 13 bodies, some with [signs](#) of torture, were found after troops had raided and set fire to the village. Around 5,000 villagers from Chin Pone and surrounding villages [fled](#) for their safety. Yet, the rebukes from the international community have not come, undercutting the people's resistance.

Waning international attention on atrocities being committed on civilians in Myanmar, only serves to embolden the junta's terror campaign and in its continuing violations of international law with blanket impunity. Thus, a concerted international rebuke through cutting arms, funds and legitimacy to the junta must be coordinated as a matter of extreme urgency. Additionally, the international community must listen to the will, and prioritize the calls, of the people of Myanmar above all else, including supporting the Spring Revolution, the NUG and their desire for a fully-fledged federal democracy. The atrocities committed by the junta, and now with Pyu Saw Htee, since the failed coup attempt launched over 13 months ago on 1 February, 2021 will only increase and worsen if the international community continues to turn their backs on the people of Myanmar. The response by the international community has never been proportionate to the grave acts committed by the junta, apart from statements of concern and condemnations of the acts. The international community should have stood with the people of Myanmar and lent support as they have with Ukraine. Such solidarity with the Myanmar people's courageous resistance would have toppled the terrorist military junta and resurrected democracy.

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