

Myanmar: Escalation of clashes in northern Shan and the Southeast

Flash Update #1

As of 30 October 2023

Highlight

- Fighting between the Myanmar Armed Forces (MAF) and various ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) intensified in northern Shan after a series of assaults launched by the “Three Brotherhood Alliance” against military and police bases on the night of 26 October.
- Most intense clashes occurred in Chinshwehaw, Hseni, Kutkai, Kyaukme, Lashio, Laukkaing, Namhkan, and Muse townships in northern Shan, causing civilian casualties and widespread displacement.
- On the same day, the joint forces of the Karen National Liberation Army and People’s Defense Forces attacked several MAF’s bases in Kawkareik township in Kayin.
- Vital routes north from Lashio, the capital city of northern Shan, have been severely restricted by the MAF and EAOs, and mobile communication services have been disrupted. Lashio airport will remain closed until at least 3 November, according to airport authorities. These hindrances are hugely impacting people’s mobility, humanitarian access, and communication with affected communities.
- As of 30 October, over 6,200 individuals have reportedly been newly displaced, seeking refuge in nearby forests or religious compounds within northern Shan. Additionally, several hundred people have reportedly crossed the border into China in search of safety.
- Host communities and private donors have provided the newly displaced people with basic food and other essential relief items.
- Humanitarian partners, including the UN, INGOs and local partners, in northern Shan have existing prepositioned relief supplies and stand prepared to respond promptly once security and access improves. In the Southeast, humanitarian partners are currently verifying the number of displaced people and their humanitarian needs to respond accordingly.
- The situation remains fluid with ongoing clashes. While the exact number of the newly displaced people are difficult to verify, the displaced are expected to further increase, stretching the already under-funded humanitarian response in Myanmar.
- The situation in the rest of the country will also need to be closely monitored. The Arakan Army, which is part of the Three Brotherhood Alliance, has maintained the temporary ceasefire with the MAF in Rakhine since November 2022.



Situation Overview

Over the past days, the security situation in northern Shan and the Southeast deteriorated significantly due to escalating fighting between the Myanmar Armed Forces (MAF) and various ethnic armed organizations. In a [statement](#) issued on 27 October, the Three Brotherhood Alliance in northern Shan, composed of three ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) – the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and the Arakan Army (AA) – announced that they launched attacks against MAF positions and police outposts in northern Shan. Intense gunfire, artillery shelling, and aerial assaults have been reported in 8 out of 22 townships in northern Shan since then. Consequently, seven civilians, including two children, were allegedly killed, and nine civilians, including a child, were injured in Chinshwehaw, Hseni, Kutkai, Lashio, and Namhkan townships. Moreover, at least more than 6,200 people have been displaced in Hseni, Kutkai, Kyaukme, Lashio, and Muse townships, with around 1,000 of them seeking refuge in forests and more than 5,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) taking shelter in temporary sites, mostly religious compounds.

Unverified reports suggest that approximately 500 people from Chinshwehaw town in Laukkaing township fled across the border to China for safety. There are indications that the number of people fleeing into China is increasing. Domestic flights to Lashio were suspended from 27 October to 3 November, according to airport authorities, and roads from north of Lashio to access the displaced people remain blocked by both the MAF and EAOs. Mobile communication and data services remain severely limited in Hseni, Kutkai, Muse, Namhkan townships, and Kokang Self-Administered Zone. Additionally, electricity was cut off in Kutkai township due to the destruction of power lines during the fighting.

Attacks by the joint forces of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and People's Defense Forces (PDFs) against MAF positions were also reported in Kawkareik township in Kayin on 27 October. The fighting has since persisted, particularly in and around Kawkareik town along the Asia Highway Road, disrupting the main transportation route between Myanmar and Thailand. There have been reports of two fatalities and two injuries from artillery shelling in Kawkareik town. Residents of Kawkareik and Kyondoe towns, and nearby villages have been fleeing their homes to safer locations in Kawkareik, Hpa-an, and Hlaingbwe townships. The exact number of newly displaced people is still being verified.

Humanitarian Needs and Response

The newly displaced people in northern Shan have received basic food and essential relief items from host communities and private donors. A network of local partners is utilizing US\$12,000 of its reserve funding to aid those in need, and a local church has allocated \$6,000 from its donation box.

Humanitarian organizations, including six UN and a number of INGOs and local partners, in northern Shan are trying to identify the exact number of the newly displaced and the humanitarian needs to prepare for additional response. They have existing prepositioned relief supplies to provide to the people in need when access is feasible, including cash assistance, medicines, and medical supplies in Hseni, Kutkai, Kyaukme, and Muse towns, child protection kits, non-food items (NFIs) for 900 families (4,500 people), and hygiene kits in Lashio town.

Gaps and Challenges

- Ongoing fighting and road closures expose residents to various protection risks and restrict the movement of goods and people seeking safer locations, hindering aid delivery and exposing humanitarian responders to safety and security risks.
- The continued interruption in mobile telecommunications hampers communication with affected communities and further assessments of emerging needs which are critical to inform humanitarian responses.

**** Information in this update is based on initial inputs from humanitarian partners in northern Shan and the Southeast.**

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