



Situation Update

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Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: Attendance at KECD schools, the Civil Disobedience Movement, COVID-19 and the movement of SAC troops (March to June 2021)

This Situation Update describes events that occurred in T'Naw Th'Ree (Tanintharyi) Township, Mergui-Tavoy District from March to June 2021. State Administration Council (SAC) Military Security Affairs officers have been monitoring villagers whose children attend Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD) schools. Participants in the Civil Disobedience Movement are experiencing livelihood issues. There has been an increase in COVID-19 cases in Lay Nya Bok Pyin area. Local villagers are concerned about the movement of SAC troops through their area.¹

This update covers four issues in the Lay Nya Bok Pyin area, T'Naw Th'Ree (Tanintharyi) Township, Mergui-Tavoy District: attendance at Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD)² schools, the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM),³ COVID-19 and the movement of State Administration Council (SAC) troops⁴ in the period from March to June 2021.

Children attending KECD schools

¹ The present document is based on information received in June 2021. It was provided by a community member in Mergui-Tavoy District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions on the ground. The names of the victims, their photos and the exact locations are censored for security reasons. The parts in square brackets are explanations added by KHRG.

² The Karen National Union's Education and Culture Department is the education department of the Karen National Union. Its main goals are to provide mother tongue education services to rural Karen populations in Southeast Myanmar, as well as to preserve the Karen language, culture and history. Despite being an important education provider in the region, it is not officially recognised by the Myanmar government.

³ On February 2nd 2021, healthcare workers at state-run hospitals and medical facilities across Myanmar spearheaded what is being referred to as a Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) consisting of labour strikes in protest against the February 1st 2021 military coup. The movement quickly spread to include civil servants from all sectors of the government who are walking off their jobs as a way of non-recognition and non-participation in the military regime. Because of the popularity of the movement, and its seminal role in wider protests across the country, some people have begun using it as a catch-all phrase to include other protest forms like boycotts and pot-banging.

⁴ The term most commonly used in referring to Myanmar's armed forces is Tatmadaw. The term has been used by KHRG throughout its reporting history, and most consistently during periods of civilian government. Since the February 1st 2021 coup and the military's establishment of the State Administration Council (SAC) as the executive governing body of Myanmar, Myanmar's armed forces have also come to be referred to as the SAC military. KHRG uses the term SAC military in specific reference to the Myanmar military since the February 1st 2021 coup. During previous periods of military rule, KHRG also used the names adopted by the military government in referring to the Tatmadaw (i.e. SLORC [State Law and Order Restoration Council] between 1988 to 1997, and SPDC [State Peace and Development Council] from 1998 to 2011), because these were the terms commonly used by villagers in KHRG research areas.

Where parents send their children for schooling has become an issue in some of the villages in the Lay Nya Bok Pyin area, T’Naw Th’Ree Township, Mergui-Tavoy District. On June 15th 2021, three officers from *Sa Ya Pa* (Military Security Affairs [MSA]⁵) came to A--- village and asked the children who attend KECD schools to come back to the village [the students are in school in other areas]. They [the MSA officers] said they heard that the children who go to Karen schools are going to become Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)⁶ soldiers and so they [the MSA officers] came to check [surveil] the villagers. The intelligence [MSA] officers came to the village two or three times, after receiving surveillance reports from *da lan* [informants] in the village.

Some parents from B--- village who haven’t registered their children at the [government] school have been threatened by the village head, who said they would be charged for opposing the country since they had not registered their children.⁷ Some of the village leaders were appointed by the State Administration Council (SAC)⁸ after the military coup and they do as they are ordered by the SAC. I [the community member trained by KHRG] could not conduct any interviews because the *Sa Ya Pa* were there when I was documenting.

CDM

Since March 3rd 2021, participants in the CDM have come to Lay Nya Bok Pyin area, Mergui-Tavoy District. Some CDM participants struggle to have food, lack healthcare, or have stopped receiving their salary. They resolve these issues in different ways [but no further information was provided]. While most of the people who participate in the CDM are teachers, some are police, protest organizers, or healthcare workers, and some are representatives from Pyidaungsu Hluttaw [parliament]. Some have had to leave their families and children and flee to hide somewhere safe. However, they will continue to participate in the CDM and fight until the end. The Karen National Union (KNU)⁹ is taking care of the 50 CDM participants who arrived in the area during the period from March 3rd 2021 to June 24th 2021.

COVID-19

There are more cases of COVID-19 in the Lay Nya Bok Pyin area, Mergui-Tavoy District. [Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW) seems to be offering some testing, particularly for those experiencing COVID-19 symptoms.] There have been no reports of individuals in Karen villages dying of COVID-19, but it is believed that four or five individuals from [ethnic] Burmese villages in the area have died. Some who have contracted COVID-19 have gone to the public hospital, while others are using herbal medicines and following the prescribed COVID-19 procedures.

⁵ Military Security Affairs (MSA), commonly referred to by its Burmese acronym *Sa Ya Pa* (*Sa Aa Pa* in Karen) is the office of the Burma/Myanmar armed forces tasked with intelligence gathering. It was created to replace the Military Intelligence Service, which was disbanded as its chief Khin Nyunt fell from favour in 2004. The office is charged with handling political issues, and had played a central role in monitoring the 2007 popular protests in Burma/Myanmar; coordinating widespread arrests of protesters and their interrogation. Human Rights Watch reported that as part of its interrogation process, MSA uses sleep deprivation and condones the beating and kicking of detainees until they are unconscious, see [“Crackdown: Repression of the 2007 Popular Protests in Burma,”](#) *Human Rights Watch*, December 2007. As of September 2014, MSA is headed by former army chief of staff Lieutenant General Mya Tun Oo. For further details see, [“Burmese Military Reshuffle Sees New Security Chief Appointed,”](#) *The Irrawaddy*, September 2014.

⁶ The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

⁷ There was no mention of which section of the Penal Code the villagers would be charged under.

⁸ The State Administration Council (SAC) is the executive governing body created in the aftermath of the February 1st 2021 military coup. It was established by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on February 2nd 2021, and is composed of eight military officers and eight civilians. The chairperson serves as the de facto head of government of Myanmar and leads the Military Cabinet of Myanmar, the executive branch of the government. Min Aung Hlaing assumed the role of SAC chairperson following the coup.

⁹ The Karen National Union (KNU) is the main Karen political organisation. It was established in 1947 and has been in conflict with the Burma/Myanmar government since 1949. The KNU wields power across large areas of Southeast Myanmar and has been calling for the creation of a democratic federal system since 1976. Although it signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in 2015, relations with the government remain tense.

Moreover, some of the villagers are concerned about the virus because many people are travelling. The Myanmar authorities told them to shut down the churches, but are allowing the government primary and high schools to open. The KNU leaders wanted to set up a required COVID-19 checkpoint to monitor outsiders traveling in the area, but Myanmar government authorities have not allowed it. The Myanmar government authorities in Lay Nya Bok Pyin area only do what they want to do [that is, they disregard the requests of the local KNU]. As more COVID-19 cases are found, local villagers are faced with travel and livelihood difficulties, including an increase in the price of goods.

The movement of SAC troops

The military rotated troops in many places including the Lay Nya Bok Pyin area, Mergui-Tavoy District. Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)¹⁰ #559 from Lay Nya village went to the upper [northern] part of Mergui-Tavoy on March 25th 2021. The troops [unreported battalion number] from the upper part of Mergui-Tavoy came to the lower part [rotated south]. On June 17th 2021, the troops placed themselves in multiple palm tree plantations in M--- and N--- villages, remaining there and performing patrols through the evening before returning to their camp in the morning. On June 20th 2021, SAC troops crossed the Lay Nya Bridge during the troop rotations. There are many Karen villages in the upper part of the Lay Nya area and they [the local villagers] are afraid to travel [to go to work or to their plantations] due to the presence of the SAC troops. Consequently, the local villagers are faced with livelihood challenges.

This is the current situation in the Lay Nya Bok Pyin area, Mergui-Tavoy District. The local villagers are afraid of the rotating SAC troops and there are many problems for CDM participants. It is also difficult for me [the KHRG researcher] to travel alone for documentation.

Further background reading on the current situation in Mergui-Tavoy District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

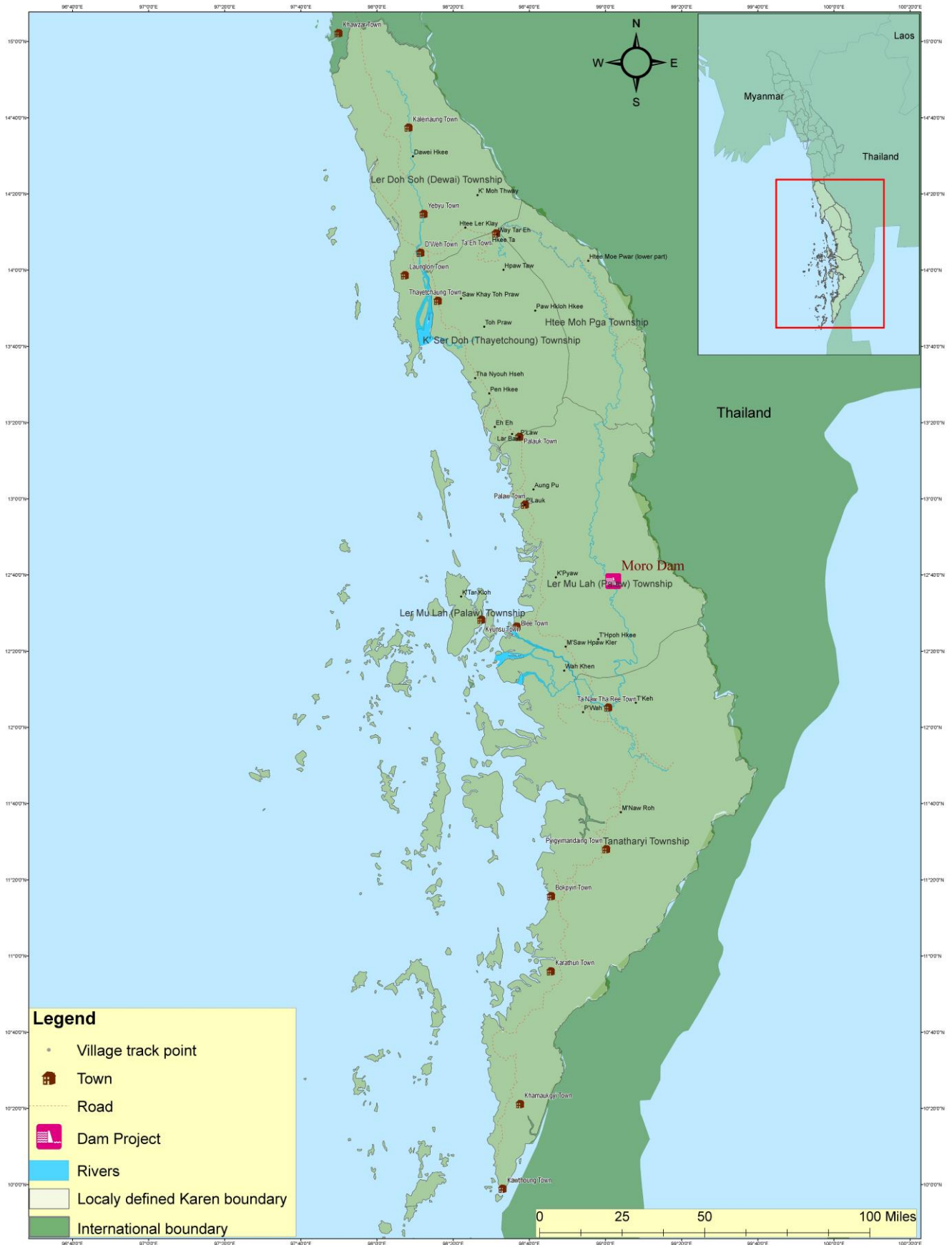
- [“Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: Impact of the military coup on villagers in K’Ser Doh, Ler Muh Lah and Ler Doh Soh townships, February 2021”](#), May 2021.
- [“Mergui-Tavoy District Interview: Security forces intimidate anti-coup activists in T’Naw Th’Ree Township, February 2021”](#), March 2021.
- [“Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: COVID-19, access to civil documents, livelihood difficulties, August and September 2020”](#), February 2021.

About KHRG

Founded in 1992, the Karen Human Rights Group is an independent local organisation committed to improving the human rights situation in Southeast Myanmar. KHRG trains local people to document and gather evidence of human rights abuses, and publishes this information to project the voices, experiences and perspectives of local communities. More examples of our work can be seen online at www.khrq.org.

¹⁰ A Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) comprises 500 soldiers. Most Light Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers, yet up-to-date information regarding the size of battalions is hard to come by. LIBs are primarily used for offensive operations, but they are sometimes used for garrison duties.

Mergui-Tavoy (Tanintharyi) District



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