



Address:
P.O. Box 201, Prasingh,
Chiang Mai, Thailand 50200

Email: shanhumanrights@gmail.com
Website: www.shanhumanrights.org
Phone: +66 (0)93- 297-7754

Update by the Shan Human Rights Foundation

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Village leader of Nam Ma coal mining area shot dead by unknown assailants

The village tract secretary of Nam Ma coal mining area in Hsipaw township, was shot dead by unknown assailants near his farm on February 26, 2017, causing shock and fear among fellow villagers.

The secretary, Lung Jarm Phe, aged 57, from Na Koon village, Nam Ma tract, was shot dead on the road at the bottom of his hill farm, close to the coal mines north of Na Koon. Four bullets, from two different guns, hit his head, stomach, chest and left arm. He was shot from the front and the back.

His body was found at 4.30 pm by Sai Aye, a Na Koon villager, who was on his way home from the nearby village of Koong Pao. Sai Aye went to inform Lung Jarm Phe's daughter and other Na Koon villagers, who called the local monks and village tract chairman of Nam Ma to come and see the dead body.

That same day, another villager in his farm, about 200 meters away from Lung Jarm Phe's farm, said he heard about 3-4 gunshots coming from the direction of Lung Jarm Phe's farm, but did not dare go and find out what had happened.

On February 27, police and medics from Hsipaw came to investigate the incident, and took away the bullets and Lung Jarm Phe's blood-stained shirt.



Lung Jarm Phe aged 57



Bullets that hit Lung Jarm Phe

On February 28, his family held a funeral for him, and arranged his burial.

Lung Jarm Phe had been serving as the tract secretary for 30 years until his death, and was well-respected. He is survived by his wife, Pa Hseng Oo and his five children: Nang Mya Lay, Nang Mya Thay, Nang Mya Khin, Sai Nyarn and Nang Mya Jing. Villagers described him as a kind man, who did no harm to others.

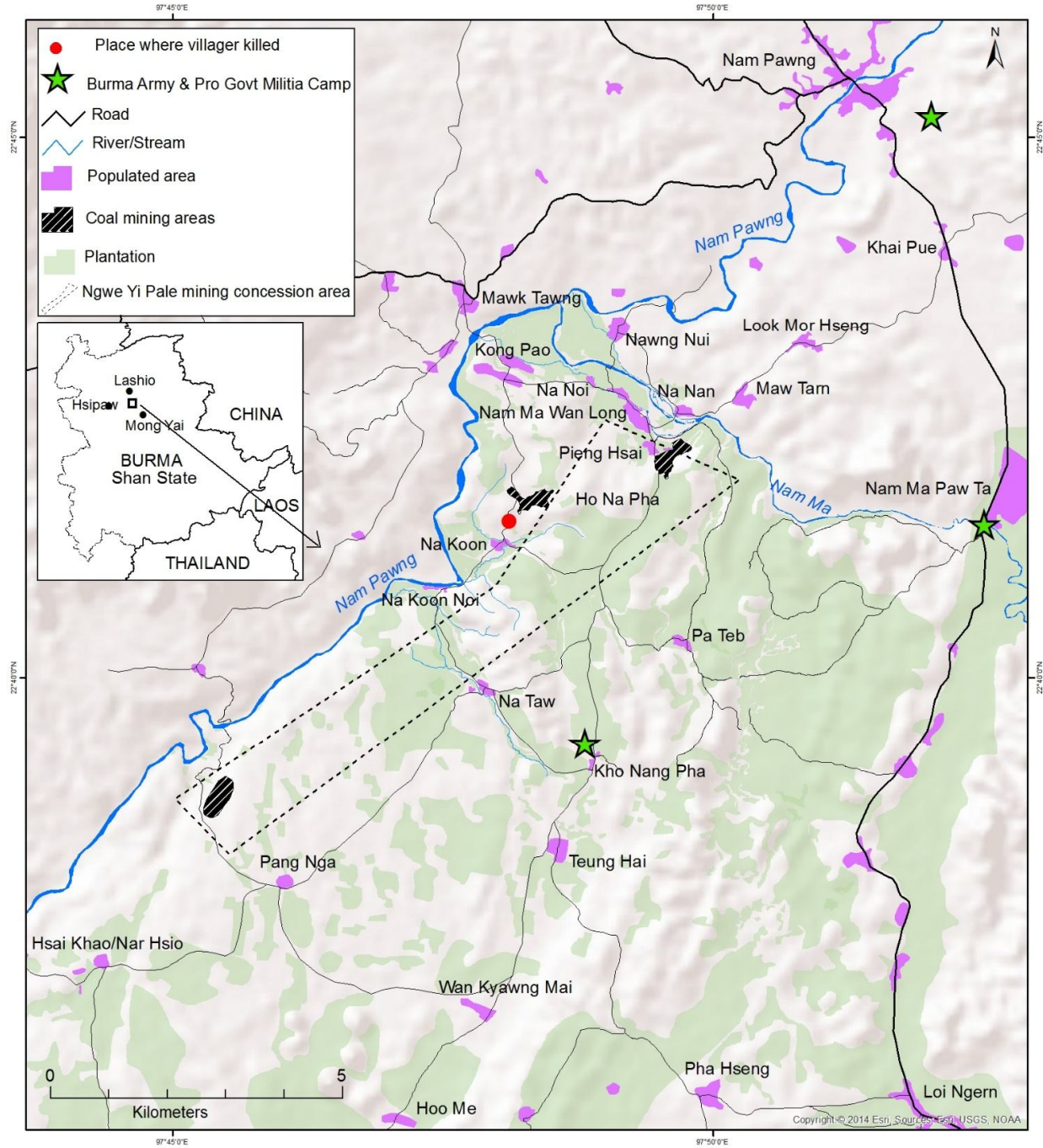
Nam Ma is a well-known coal mining area. The main mining company is Ngwe Yi Pale, which has been mining in Nam Ma since 2004. Large scale underground mining is taking place one kilometer north of Na Koon village. The mining has damaged farmlands, and caused water and air pollution. Since early 2016, local residents have been publicly demanding an end to all coal mining in their area. However, in May 2016, the Burma Army launched a ground and air offensive in Nam Ma, to drive out the Shan State Progressive Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA) and protect the mining operations. Villagers were killed, arrested and tortured. Burma Army LIB 325 then set up a base in Kho Nang Pha, formerly occupied by SSPP/SSA. About 100 Burma Army troops, together with their Wan Pang militia, constantly patrol through the area. Kho Nang Pha is about four kilometers south of Na Koon.

In early February 2017, a representative of Ngwe Yi Pale company, U Thein Myint, came to meet Lung Jarm Phe at his house and requested permission to start test digging for coal at the Ho Na Pha watershed area, two kilometers east of Na Koon. Ho Na Pha is the main water source for most of the Nam Ma residents. No agreement was reached during the discussion. Ngwe Yi Pale has been trying to start coal mining at Ho Na Pha since 2009, but was formerly stopped by SSPP/SSA.

The shooting of Lung Jarm Phe has instilled fear among local villagers. It is uncertain who will dare to replace him as the village secretary.

SHRF deploras this extrajudicial killing of a civilian community leader. We also deplore the ongoing destructive coal mining in Nam Ma, and the use of military force to secure the mines, which will only lead to further violence.

Killing of village leader in Nam Ma coal mining area, Feb 26, 2017



Contact

Sai Hor Hseng +66: (0) 62- 941-9600 (English, Shan)

Ying Lawnt Lieng +66: (0) 63-838-9029 (English, Burmese)