



## **Update by the Shan Human Rights Foundation**

April 1, 2021

### **Australian-led mining company pushes ahead with large-scale gold exploration in eastern Shan State amidst military atrocities**

On March 8, 2021, one of the bloodiest days of the military regime's crackdown on nationwide anti-coup protests, staff of Australian-led Access Resources Asia (ARA) met with local officials in Mong Phyak, eastern Shan State, to push ahead with large-scale gold exploration.

ARA's initial exploration site covers 574 square kilometers, out of its total 1,800 sq. km. concession area in eastern Shan State. This giant gold mining venture is strongly opposed by local communities, due to the devastating environmental and social impacts of existing gold excavation in eastern Shan State, which has gutted mountains and poisoned farmlands and water sources over a wide area, particularly in Tachileik township.

In 2017 and 2018, Mong Phyak residents sent petitions to the NLD government to stop the ARA project, but to no avail. On November 26, 2020, ARA was granted a 3-year exploration permit in Mong Phyak by Burma's Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation.

On January 6, 2021, ARA staff visited Mong Phyak to meet with local officials regarding the opening of a branch office.

On January 24, 2021, Mong Phyak locals, including community leaders from 13 village tracts and 3 town wards, wrote a petition to the President and State Counsellor to stop the project signed by 3,883 people. ARA ignored this petition, and is now openly partnering with the new coup regime in pushing through its investment.

Long before the coup, SHRF had called for Access Asia Mining Pte Ltd (the Singapore-based parent company of ARA) to end its exploration plans in Eastern Shan State, citing community opposition, the ongoing conflict and heavy Burma Army militarization. In April 2018, SHRF documented the rape and robbery of a 73-year-old woman by a Burma Army soldier in Mong Phyak, and urged Access Asia Mining (AAM) to stop planned mining exploration in the area or risk complicity in the military's atrocities.

In response to SHRF’s concerns, AAM sent a letter on May 14, 2018, to the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, stating it had “never engaged with the Tatmadaw to solicit their support or to request security. We state this categorically and unequivocally. AAM has always found the areas of Myanmar that we operate in safe and secure with a welcoming people. We have never felt the need for security and indeed, as stated above, as we have no operations or permanent presence in Shan State there is nothing to be protected.”

It is clear that ARA/AAM does indeed now have “operations” in Shan State, and, particularly following the February 1 coup, ARA/AAM is now undeniably partnering with the military authorities in implementing these operations. ARA/AAM is therefore directly complicit in the security forces’ atrocities against unarmed protesters across the country, as well as ongoing atrocities against villagers in ethnic conflict areas.

Although registered in Singapore, the management of Access Asia Mining is comprised of Australian nationals, self-advertised as “principals behind several major Australian engineering firms,” who must realize the risks now far outweigh any potential benefits of staying in Burma.

SHRF reiterates our call for Access Resources Asia/Access Asia Mining to immediately end their investments in Burma.

SHRF urges foreign companies not to invest in Burma until there is peace and a new federal democratic constitution, enabling local communities to protect their lands and resources from predatory exploitation.

#### **Timeline of Access Asia Mining exploration in Eastern Shan State**

Jan 26, 2015	Access Asia Mining Pte Ltd incorporated in Singapore
Oct 13, 2015	Access Asia Mining subsidiary, Access Resources Asia Co. Ltd, officially registers in Burma
July 2017	AAM’s shareholder update states it has started an “engagement process” with residents of 50 villages in the proposed E. Shan State license area, which will take about 2 months, and will visit each village “to discuss our exploration plans and any concerns they may have.”
Sep 10, 2017	Petition by Mong Phyak residents to Shan State government to stop the ARA gold mining exploration project.
May 14, 2018	AAM writes to the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre saying they have never engaged with the Tatmadaw, and saying that “As a Singapore company with Australian management we are committed to international best practice standards and to proceeding with our work only after extensive consultation with local communities.”
Jul 2018	AAM shareholder update states it has received Shan State government approval for its East Shan mining exploration license.

Sep 13, 2018	Mong Phyak residents send written petition to State Counsellor against ARA gold mining exploration, signed by over 3,300 people
Nov 26, 2020	Burma's Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation (MONREC) grants official permission to ARA to carry out exploration in Mong Phyak in the Nam Long concession area in Mong Phyak and Kengtung, which is 141,904.628 acres (574.2802 square kilometers) in size, according to the following schedule: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Prospecting 26.11.2020 to 25.11.2021</li> <li>2. Exploration 26.11.2021 to 25.11.2022</li> <li>3. Feasibility 26.11.2022 to 25.11.2023</li> </ol>
Dec 7, 2020	The Department of Mines sends official permit to ARA to carry out surveying in Mong Phyak. The permit letter states that if the work does not start within 3 months, the advance payment will be seized by the state, and the permit revoked.
Jan 6, 2021	ARA staff visit Mong Phyak and meet officials to discuss opening a branch office.
Jan 24, 2021	Mong Phyak residents send written petition to President and State Counsellor against ARA gold mining project signed by 3,883 people.
Feb 1, 2021	Military coup in Burma
Feb 19, 2021	Ethnic villagers around Mong Phyak are forced to join a pro-coup rally
Mar 8, 2021	Geologist Ko Myat Thu Hla from ARA meets local authorities in Mong Phyak to discuss exploration plans

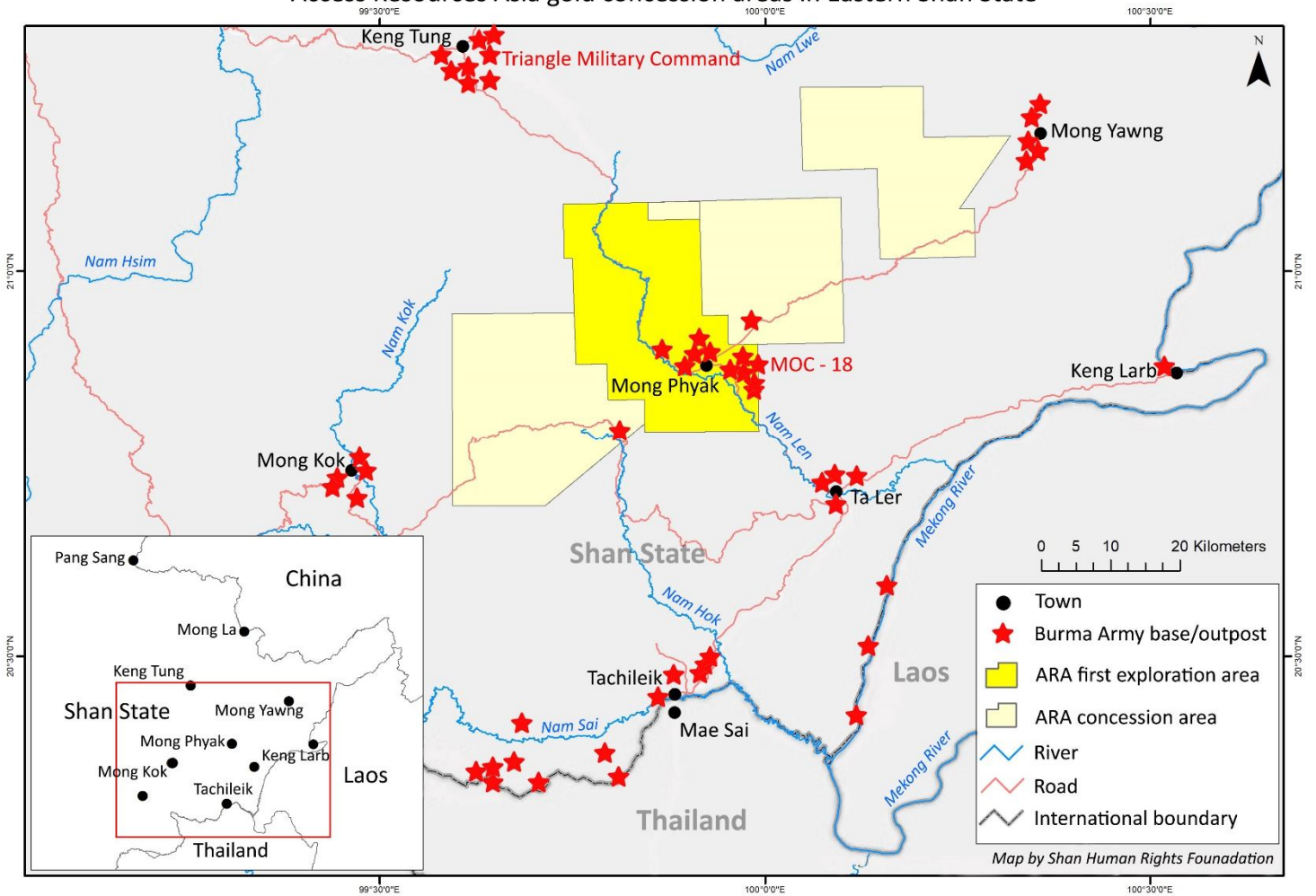


*Loi Kham hills ravaged by gold mining in Tachileik district, E. Shan State*



*Paddy fields destroyed by gold mining waste near Na Hai Long village, Ta Ler, Tachileik district, E. Shan State*

## Access Resources Asia gold concession areas in Eastern Shan State



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