



Short Update

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Mergui-Tavoy District Short Update: SAC soldiers arbitrarily detained and tortured a villager at a checkpoint in Ler K'Saw Township (November 2023)

This Short Update describes events occurring in Ler K'Saw Township, Mergui-Tavoy District, in November 2023. On November 16th 2023, soldiers from the State Administration Council (SAC) Light Infantry Battalion (LIBs) #559 and #560 detained a villager from K--- village, Sa Tein village tract, Ler K'Saw Township, at the SAC checkpoint in Z--- village, Sa Tein village tract. The villager was returning from shopping in Z--- village at the time. SAC soldiers interrogated him and checked his motorbike. During the search, the SAC found yaba (methamphetamines) and opium in his motorbike seat compartment and accused him of purchasing drugs for the People's Defence Force (PDF). The SAC soldiers then tortured and threatened him. He was released after, and sustained injuries from the torture for several months. After the incident, the victim, his family, and fellow villagers were fearful and anxious.¹

Arbitrary detention and torture

On November 16th 2023, a villager named Ko² H--- [unknown age] from K--- village, Sa Tein village tract³, Ler K'Saw Township, was stopped and searched by soldiers from the State Administration Council (SAC)⁴ LIBs [Light Infantry Battalions]⁵ #559 and #560. He [Ko H---] was tortured severely [as witnessed and reported by local villagers].

On that day, Ko H--- had travelled from K--- village to Z--- village, to buy something. After buying the things [he needed] and on his way back, he was stopped by SAC soldiers from LIBs #559 and #560, who had set up a gate [a temporary checkpoint] at the entrance of Z--- village. The soldiers stopped [Ko H--- on] his motorcycle and interrogated him about where he was going,

¹ The present document is based on information received in November 2023 (and updated in January 2025). 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 'Ko' is a Burmese title meaning older brother. It can be used for relatives as well as non-relatives.

³ A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

⁴ 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 Burma/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.

⁵ A Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) comprises 500 soldiers. Most Light Infantry Battalions are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers, yet up-to-date information regarding the size of battalions is hard to come by, particularly following the signing of the NCA. LIBs are primarily used for offensive operations, but they are sometimes used for garrison duties.

where he was from, and what he had bought. Villagers who witnessed the arrest suspect that he was stopped [and questioned further] because two of his cousins are soldiers from the People's Defence Force (PDF)⁶. [The soldiers looked through Ko H---'s phone and saw a photo of him with his cousins, who were wearing their PDF uniforms.]

While questioning him, the soldiers opened the seat of the motorcycle and found 20 tablets of *yaba*⁷ [methamphetamine] and two packs of opium [weighing about 385 grams each or 13.5 ounces]. After that, the soldiers asked if anyone had requested him to buy these drugs. Ko H--- replied that he had bought the drugs for himself to use while he works. After Ko H--- replied, one of the SAC soldiers said that he was lying, and that he bought the drugs for the PDF. Then, one of the soldiers beat him on the side of the road with a bamboo [stick]. The soldier also cut his face and back with a knife. [After,] a commander of the SAC threatened Ko H--- to not tell anyone about the incident, and that if they saw the news on social media, they would kill him. After that, the SAC [soldiers] released him.

After Ko H--- arrived home, he dared not travel outside of the village and he could not eat well due to his injuries until now [the end of November 2023]. He also could not work for two and a half months because of the injuries. Ko H---'s wife told local villagers that they are afraid and concerned about their security since the arrest and torture.

[As updated in January 2025 to KHRG, the family relocated to a new village due to their security concerns. Ko H---'s uncle reported to KHRG that he wants people to know about the incident and to be careful around SAC checkpoints.]

⁶ The People's Defence Force (PDF) is an armed resistance established independently as local civilian militias operating across the country. Following the February 1st 2021 military coup and the ongoing brutal violence enacted by the junta, the majority of these groups began working with the National Unity Government (NUG), a body claiming to be the legitimate government of Burma/Myanmar, which then formalized the PDF on May 5th 2021 as a precursor to a federal army.

⁷ *Yaba*, which means 'crazy medicine' in Thai, is a drug containing a mixture of methamphetamine and caffeine in a tablet form. First developed in East Asia during the Second World War to enhance soldiers' performance, methamphetamine has become increasingly popular in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Burma/Myanmar where it is typically manufactured. See, [Yaba, the 'crazy medicine' of East Asia](#), UNODC, May 2008; Chapter IV in [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response in Southeast Myanmar since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, June 2014; "Thaton Situation Update: Bilin Township, July to September 2016," KHRG, April 2017; and "[Dooplaya Field Report: A quasi-ceasefire? Developments after the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, from January to December 2016](#)," KHRG, September 2017.

Further background reading on the situation on arbitrary arrests and torture in Southeast Burma/Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [*Permanent Scars : Torture of villagers under arbitrary detention by State Administration Council in Southeast Burma \(January - December 2023\)*](#), April 2024.
- ["Taw Oo District Short Update: SAC soldiers arbitrarily arrested and detained two villagers, including a 16-year-old, in Daw Hpah Hkoh Township \(July 2024\)"](#), August 2024.
- ["Mergui-Tavoy District Incident Report: Arbitrary arrest and killing of a villager by the SAC in K'Ser Doh Township, October 2023"](#), March 2024.
- ["Doo Tha Htoo District Incident Report: A male villager was arrested, tortured and killed by the SAC in Kyeh Htoh Township, in July 2023"](#), January 2024.

About KHRG

Founded in 1992, Karen Human Rights Group is an independent local organisation committed to improving the human rights situation in Southeast Burma. 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.khr.org

