



SHAN

HUMAN RIGHTS FOUNDATION

www.shanhumanrights.org shanhumanrightsfoundation@gmail.com

Update by the Shan Human Rights Foundation

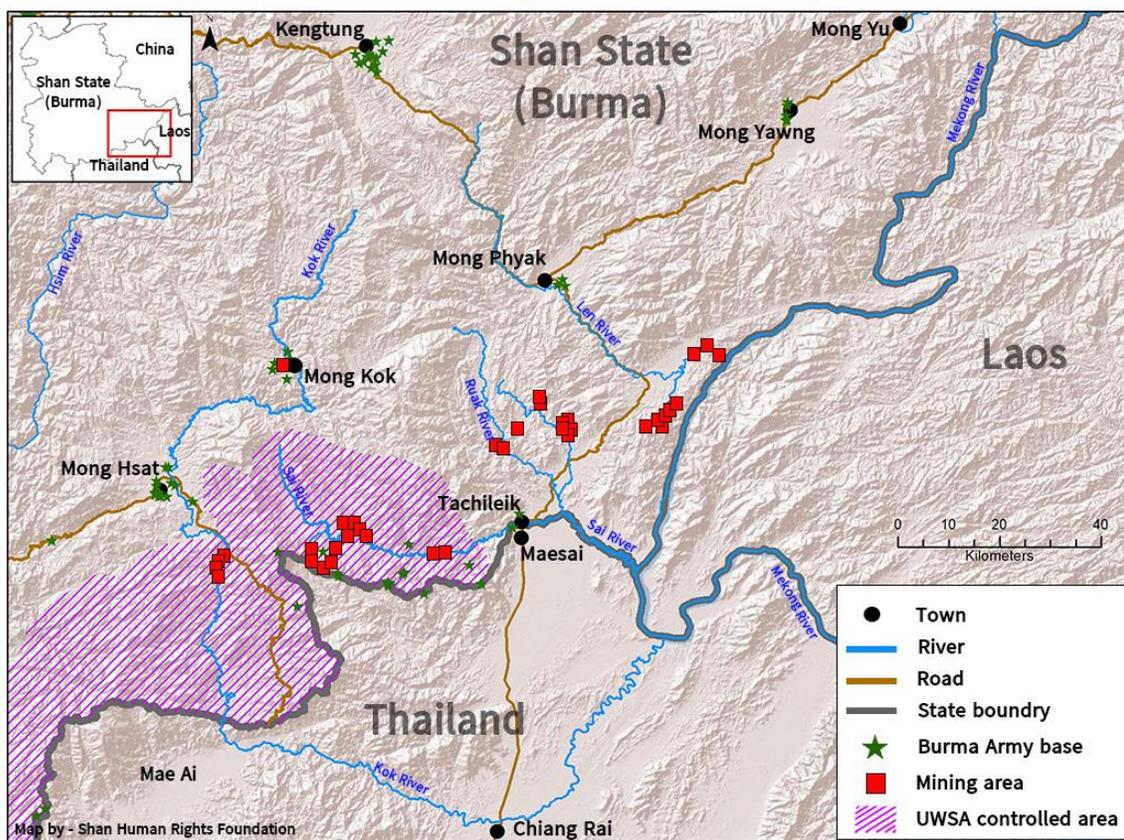
November 27, 2024

Thai government study identifies eastern Shan State mining as cause of unprecedented mud damage in Mae Sai during recent flooding

A study by Thailand's Department of Natural Resources in October 2024 has identified large-scale gold mining on the Sai River in eastern Mong Hsat as the cause of the unprecedented damage caused by mud-laden floodwaters to residents of the northern border town of Maesai.

The Sai River is one of several Mekong tributaries and sub-tributaries in eastern Shan State which have been impacted by expanded mining in recent years. These include the Kok River, impacted by coal and gold mining; the Ruak River impacted by manganese mining; and the Len River, impacted by gold mining.

Mining along Mekong tributaries in Mong Hsat and Tachileik townships, eastern Shan State



The mining is causing serious environmental degradation in the immediate vicinity of the mines, while run-off from the mines is polluting and clogging nearby rivers, impacting the health and safety of downstream communities, including inside Thailand.

Although the Sai River has often flooded into Maesai and Tachileik towns in the past, the water has never before contained such a large amount of mud, leaving behind thick residues that have been extremely difficult and costly to remove.



Flooding in Maesai, October 2024

In the recent Thai government study, scientific testing of flood sediment from the Sai riverbank showed high levels of heavy metals associated with mining, particularly arsenic, nickel and zinc. The amount of zinc in one sample was found to be 18 times higher than recommended safety levels.

A satellite map in the study highlighted clearly that gold mining areas in eastern Mong Hsat along the Sai River upstream of Mae Sai were the source of the muddy sediment afflicting the town.

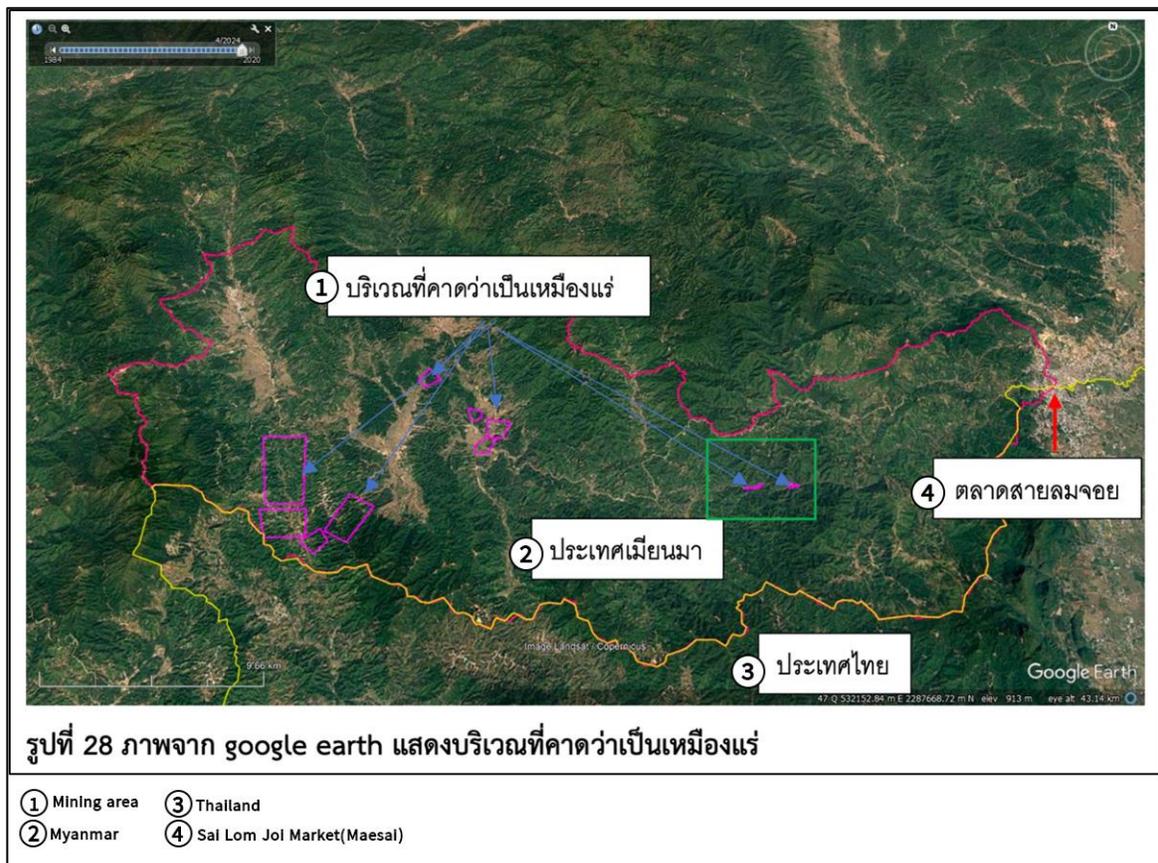
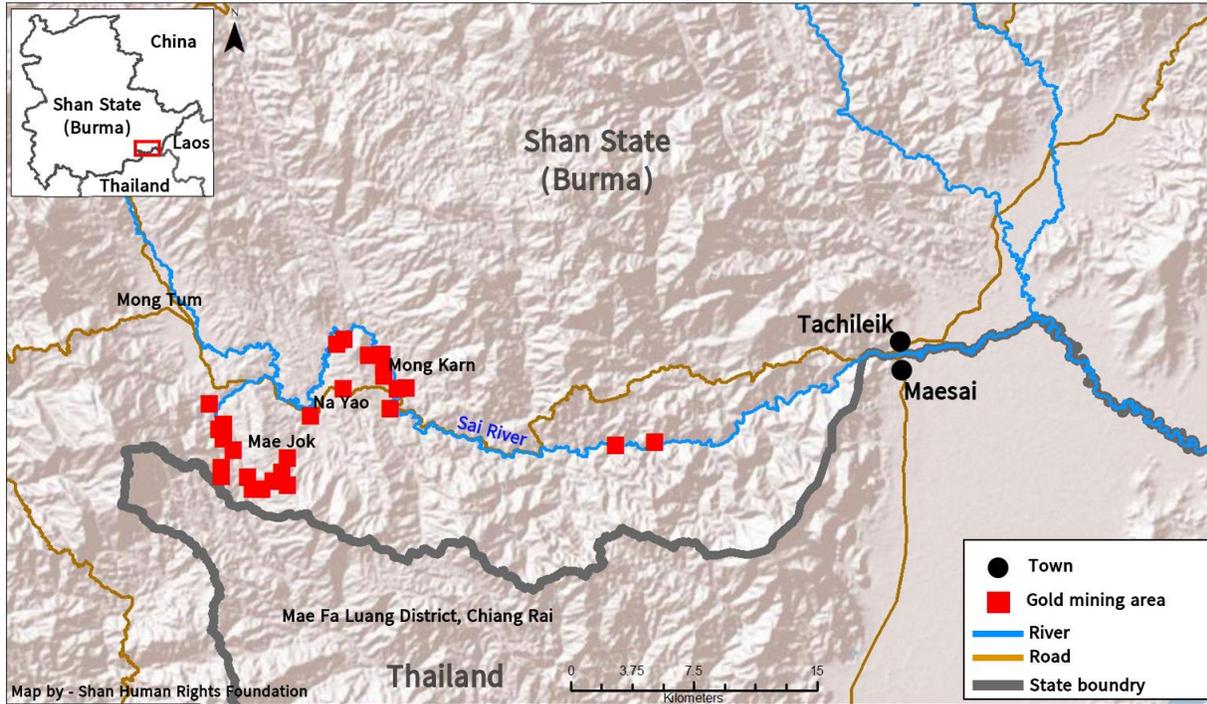


Image from Thai government study shown by Thai Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) TV on October 29, 2024

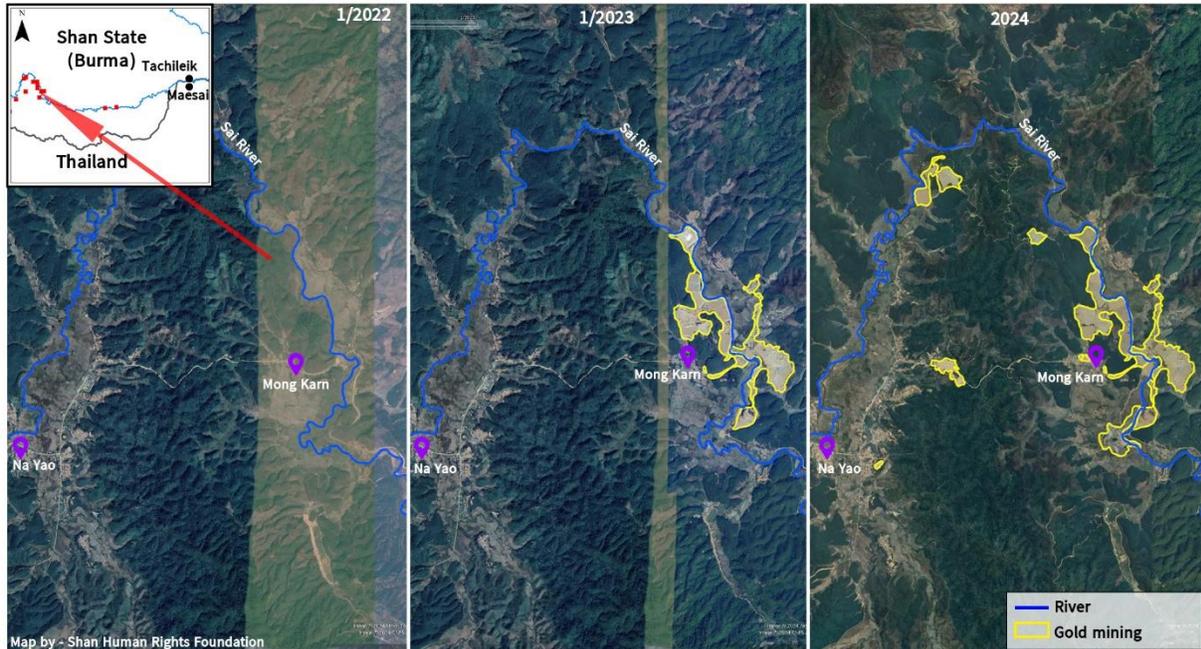
Expanded gold mining in eastern Mong Hsat

Gold mining has rapidly expanded over the past two years in eastern Mong Hsat: near Mong Karn and Na Yao villages under the control of the United Wa State Army (UWSA), and near Mae Jok village under a SAC regime-aligned militia.

Gold mining on the Sai River upstream of Tachileik and Maesai

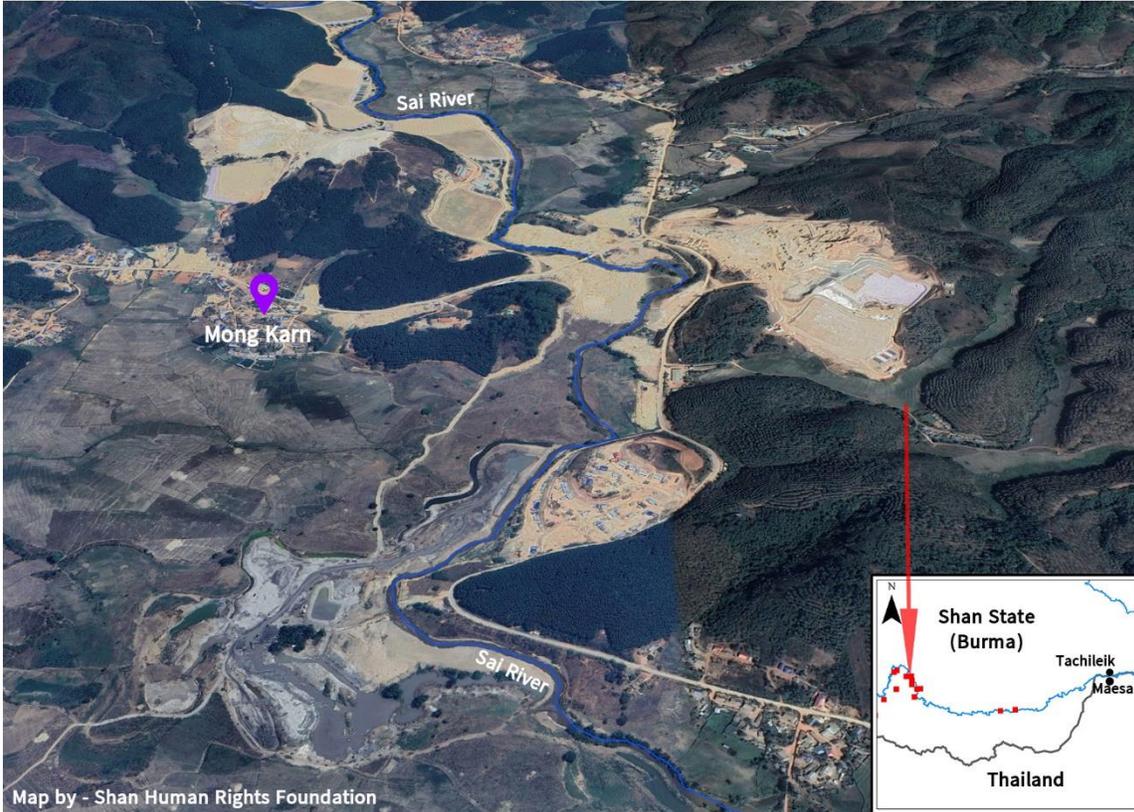


Google Earth timelapse images of gold mining at Mong Karn-Na Yao



The mining in Mong Karn and Na Yao, which began in late 2022, is taking place directly alongside the Sai River. The hills beside the river have been flattened and turned into vast leaching ponds- where toxic chemicals including cyanide are used to separate the gold.

Google Earth image of gold mining at Mong Karn

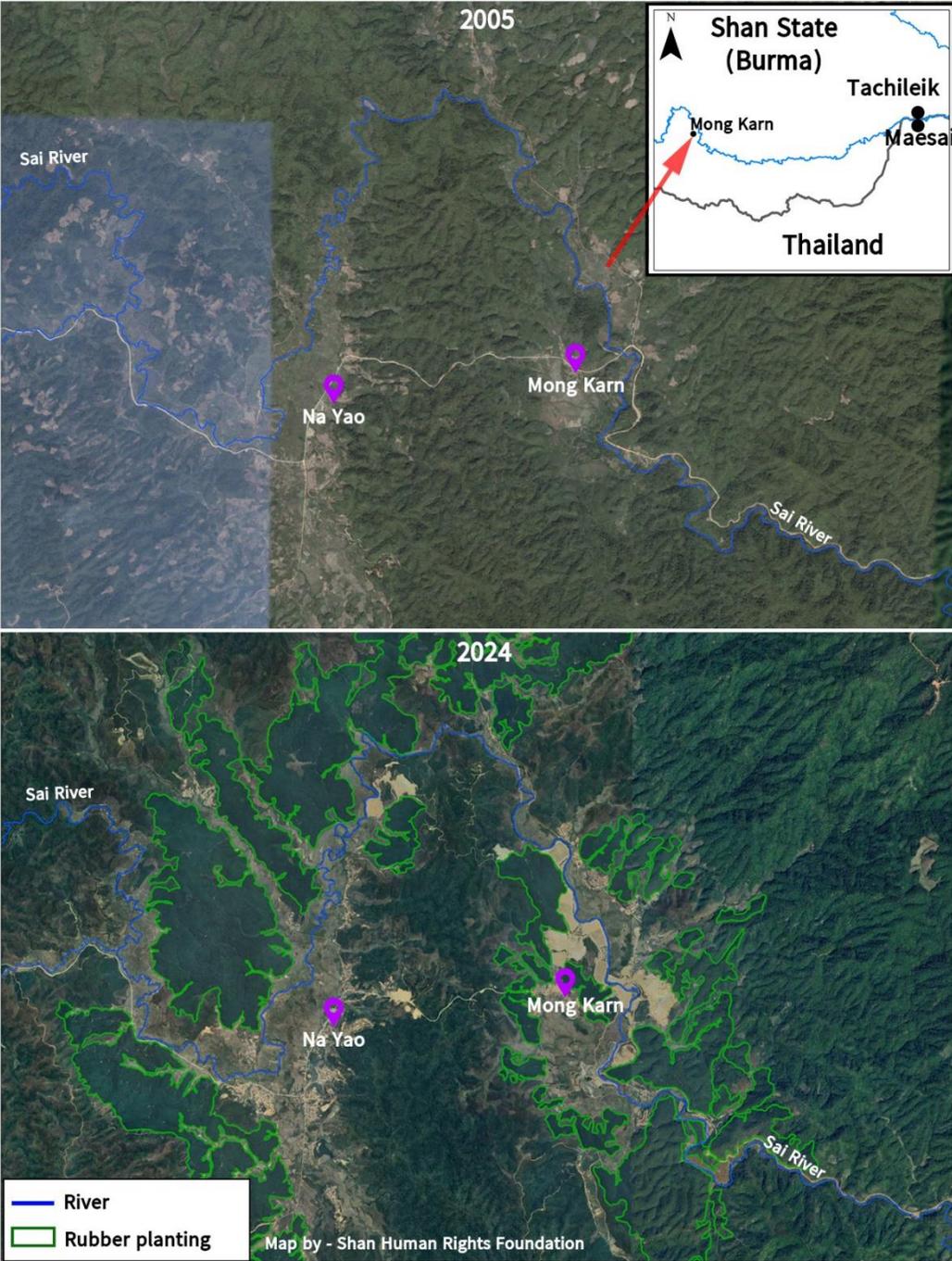


Google Earth image of gold mining at Mong Karn



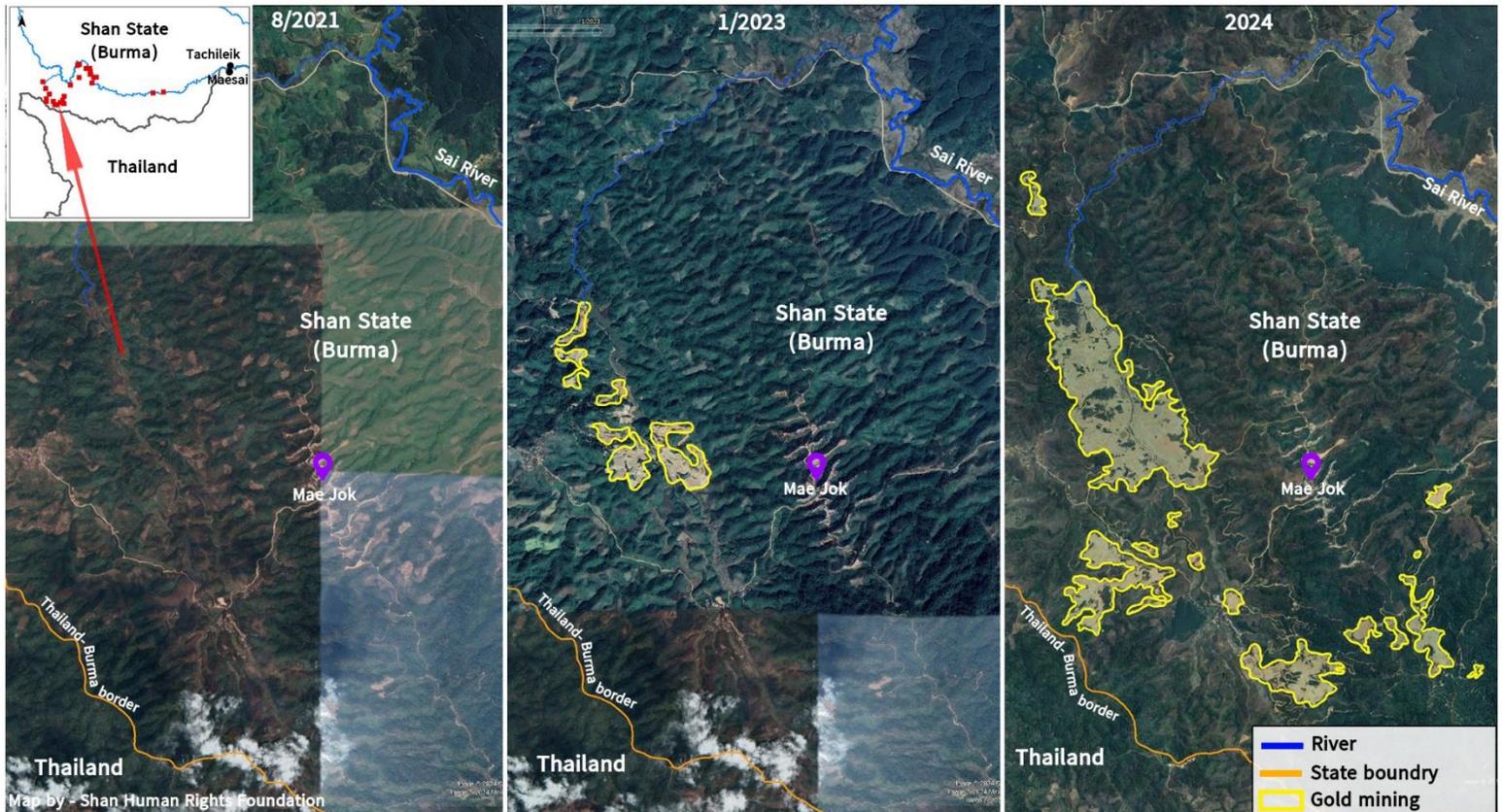
The UWSA first set up a base in the Mong Karn-Na Yao area in 1999, and during the next two years forcibly relocated over 16,000 Wa villagers from northeast Shan State into the area (who were among the 126,000 Wa forcibly resettled to Mong Ton, Mong Hsat and Tachileik townships between 1999 and 2001), displacing over 1,200 local villagers, mostly Shan subsistence rice farmers. Since that time, the ecology of the area has been vastly altered by the UWSA’s export-oriented agricultural policies, involving large-scale planting of rubber on the hills along the Sai river.

Google Earth timelapse images of rubber plantations along Sai River at Mong Karn-Na Yao



The mining in Mae Jok, which began in late 2021, is taking place in the hills close to the Thai border, with run-off from the mines flowing into a stream that joins the Sai River above Mong Karn. The Mae Jok area is under a local Lahu militia aligned to the SAC military, which has several military outposts close to the mining sites.

Google Earth timelapse images of gold mining at Mae Jok

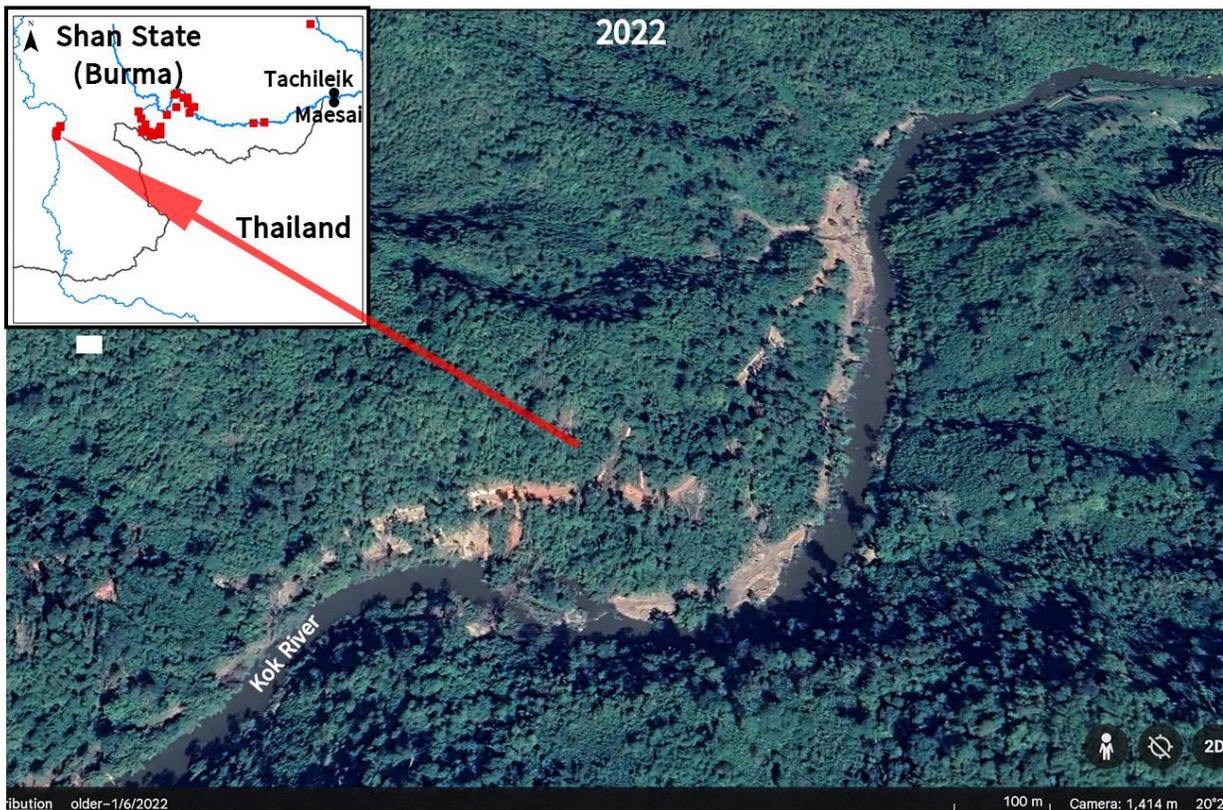


Mining along the Kok River

The long-held plans to mine the huge coal resources at Mong Kok, near the source of the Kok River, were finally realised in 2019, when Thailand's Sahakol Equipment Company began large-scale excavation, under a 20-year permit, with the Burma Army's Myanmar Economic Corporation (and a Tachileik-based company called Golden Lake). It is planned for eight of the nine villages in Mong Kok tract to be relocated for the mine, and a coal-fired power plant to be built.

Although the coal mining was suspended during the Covid-19 pandemic and has not yet restarted, the mining machinery is still at the site, where large coal piles remain – with spontaneous combustion of the coal regularly polluting the air, and run-off from the piles polluting the Kok River.

Google Earth timelapse images of gold mining on Kok River in Mong Yawn



Whenever the coal mining is resumed, the water quality of the Kok River is sure to be seriously impacted.

Further downstream, south of Mong Hsat town, seven Chinese companies linked to the UWSA have been carrying out gold mining in several sites beside the Kok River since 2023. Toxic residue from the mining flows directly into the river, only about 30 kilometers from the Thai border.

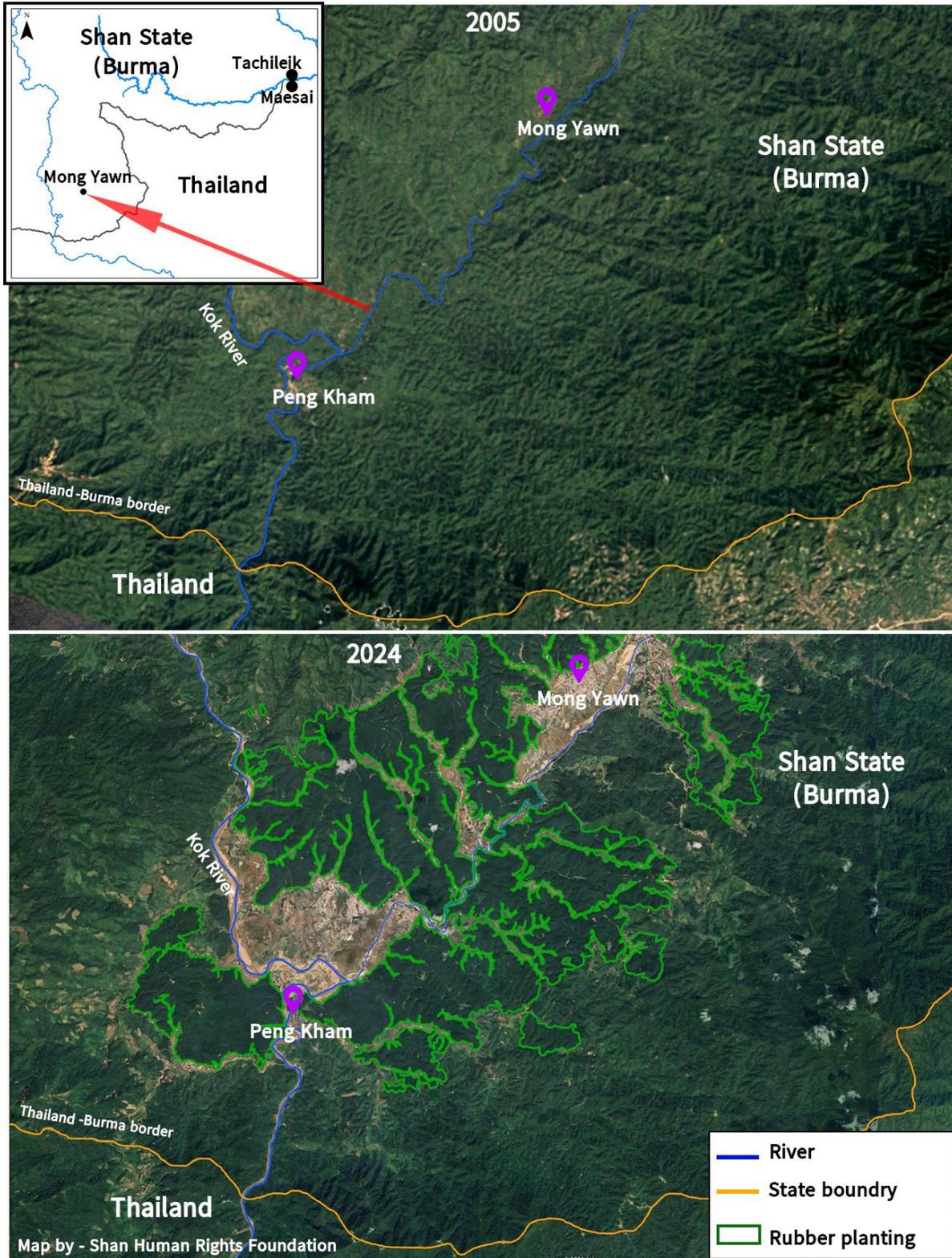
In September 2024, the Shan village of Peng Kham (with 80 households) in Mong Yawn tract on the Kok River three kilometers north of the Thai border suffered unprecedented damage from mud-laden flooding, likely caused by the new gold mining upstream. On the Thai side of the border, Thaton and other villages along the Kok River in northern Chiang Mai province were also badly affected by muddy flooding.



Flooding of Kok river into Pengkham village, October 2024

The ecology of Mong Yawn has drastically changed over the last 20 years, due to the UWSA's forced resettlement of over 29,000 Wa villagers from northeast Shan State into the area during 1999-2001, and subsequent large-scale mono-crop planting of rubber in the hills along the Kok River.

Google Earth timelapse images of rubber plantations along Kok River at Mong Yawn



Mining impacting the Hok (Ruak) River

As detailed by [SHRF in an earlier report](#), manganese mining by at least nine companies in the hills above Mong Ko, ten kilometers north of Tachileik town, has caused dangerous levels of manganese in the Hok (Ruak) River. As water from the river is used by the Mae Sai municipal water system, the local Thai water authorities have had to implement special filtration measures.

Google Earth timelapse images of manganese mining in Mong Ko track, Tachileik



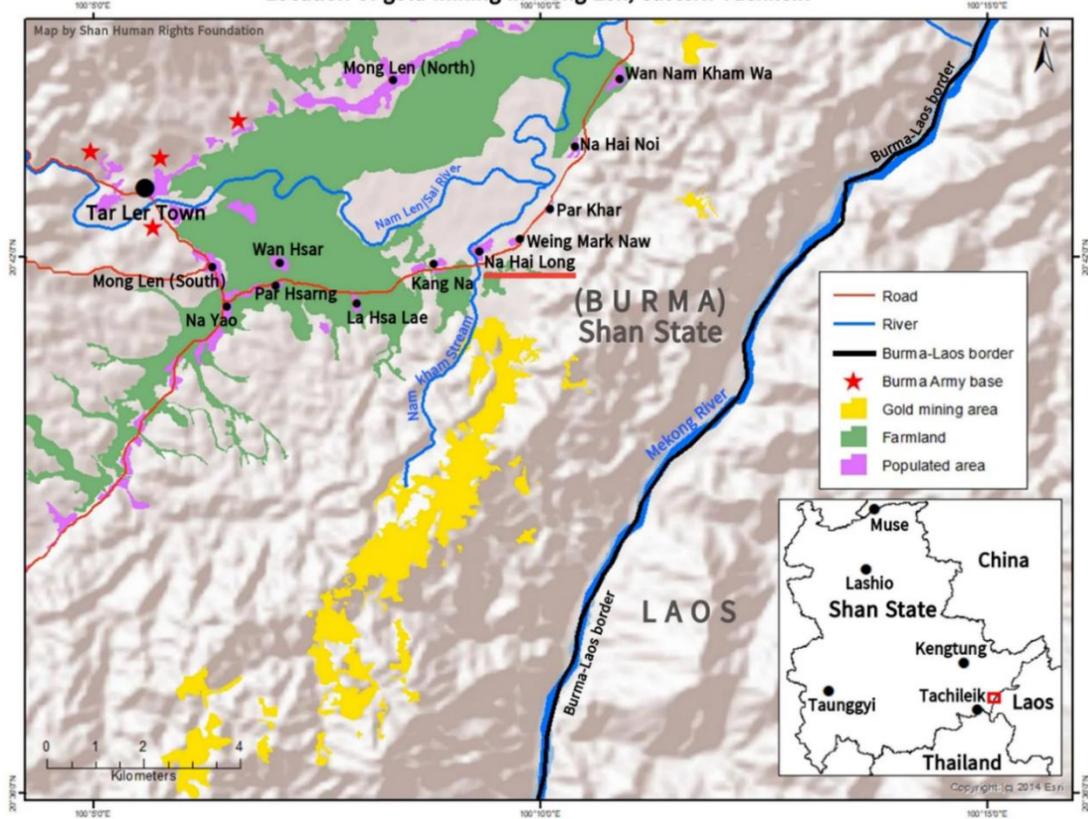
Mining along the Len River

Since [SHRF's report](#) in August 2022, gold mining in the hills along the Len River valley has continued to expand. As previously reported, most of the companies digging for gold have no official permits.

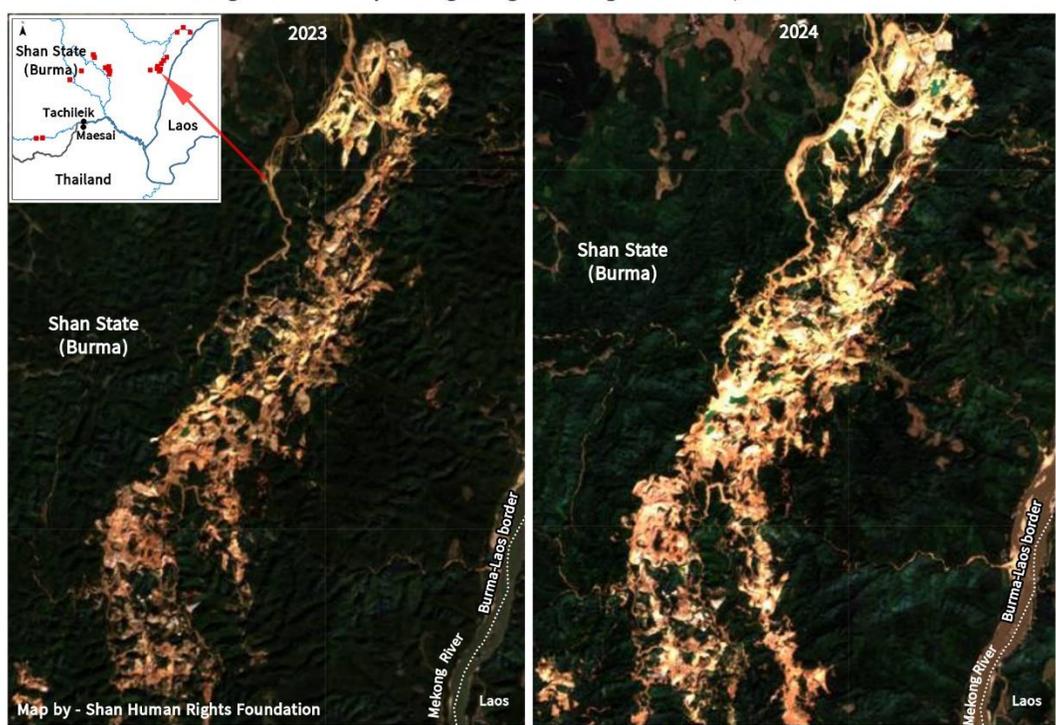
The toxic, muddy run-off from the mines has continued to have devastating impacts on communities living in the Len River valley, causing mud-laden flooding of villages, polluting household and agricultural water resources and making fields uncultivable.

The Len River flows into the Mekong River about 40 kilometers upstream of the Golden Triangle junction of the Ruak and Mekong rivers, marking the border between Burma, Thailand and Laos.

Location of gold mining in Mong Len, eastern Tachileik



Google Earth timelapse images of gold mining at Loi Kham, east of Tachileik





Mining run-off in Nai Hai Long village, Monglen tract, Tachileik district

Contacts:

Sai Hor Hseng 66 94 728 6696 Signal (Shan, English)

Ying Leng Harn 1 825 425 4099 Signal (Burmese)