

THAILAND

During 2009-2012, more than 120 Buddhist and Muslim students, teachers and education staff were killed or wounded by insurgents in the far south, who also did much of their recruiting in schools in 2009. Widespread military use of schools by armed forces and paramilitary forces made them a target for attack.

CONTEXT

Since early 2004, an insurgency by Muslim separatists seeking autonomy in Thailand's four southernmost provinces – Songkhla, Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat – has led to more than 5,000 deaths, 9,000 injuries and human rights abuses by all sides.¹⁵⁸⁰ Three of the provinces are predominantly ethnic Malay Muslim in a country that is 90 per cent ethnic Thai Buddhist.¹⁵⁸¹ Despite an agreement between the government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra and the separatist Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) on 28 February 2013,¹⁵⁸² hostilities were continuing in the southern border provinces at the end of the year.

Insurgents in the far south have carried out bombings and shootings of security forces and civilians, including targeted attacks against Buddhist and Muslim teachers.¹⁵⁸³ There have also been revenge attacks on mosques, Islamic schools and Muslim teashops, allegedly by Buddhist vigilantes and security forces.¹⁵⁸⁴

Elsewhere during the reporting period, Thailand was embroiled in a bitter power struggle between the 'Red Shirts', supporters of Thaksin Shinawatra who had previously been ousted as premier by a military coup, and the anti-Thaksin opposition 'Yellow Shirts' who were supported by the military. This resulted in mass protests and crackdowns.¹⁵⁸⁵ During 2005-

2011, there was a surge in the use of lèse majesté law¹⁵⁸⁶ as a means to prevent criticism of the monarchy and to stifle debate on reform, thus limiting academic freedom and free speech among scholars.¹⁵⁸⁷

Historically, Thai governments have used schools as a tool to assimilate the southern population into the Thai Buddhist mainstream. In the 1940s, the government banned Islamic schools, Islamic attire, the local Malay dialect, Muslim names and the teaching of local history. Malay students were forced to pay their respects to images of the Buddha. Such repression and discrimination gave birth to BRN, which has now become the backbone of the separatist insurgency. Separatist militants still see state schools as imposing Buddhism, Thai as a language of instruction and Thai versions of history.¹⁵⁸⁸ During 2009-2012, in response to ongoing violence, the provincial education authorities switched from using Thai Buddhist teachers to employing more local Muslim teachers and extended the time allowed for Islamic studies.¹⁵⁸⁹ Other new measures included teaching Malay and the local language (see Global overview).¹⁵⁹⁰

Net primary enrolment in Thailand was 90 per cent (2009),¹⁵⁹¹ net secondary enrolment was 82 per cent (2011) and gross tertiary enrolment was 53 per cent (2011).¹⁵⁹² Adult literacy was 94 per cent (2005).¹⁵⁹³

ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS

Government schools in southern Thailand were destroyed and damaged by attacks during 2009-2012, mostly due to buildings being set on fire or bombings. According to the Ministry of Education, at least nine schools were set alight in 2009.¹⁵⁹⁴ The UN reported attacks on at least five schools in 2010,¹⁵⁹⁵ while in 2012, at least 11 schools were partially

damaged or destroyed by improvised explosive devices or arson.¹⁵⁹⁶ Direct attacks on military outposts set up on school grounds were also reported.¹⁵⁹⁷

Some arson cases were linked to specific political activities. For instance, on 13 March 2009, two schools were destroyed by insurgents in Pattani, as authorities boosted security for the anniversary of the founding of the BRN separatist group.¹⁵⁹⁸ Other attacks on schools appeared to be a means to target soldiers or police officers. On 18 April 2012, Ban Ta Ngo School in Cho Ai Rong district, Narathiwat, was set ablaze on the eve of the Deputy Prime Minister and army chief's visit to the area. An explosive was then set off by remote control targeting the team of soldiers and police who responded to the attack.¹⁵⁹⁹ In other cases, the school itself seemed to be the target. On 29 November 2012, a two-storey building was burned down by insurgents. The building contained the school director's office, computer rooms and 11 classrooms.¹⁶⁰⁰

The majority of arson attacks on schools occurred overnight, when students and staff were not present. However, there were some exceptions. On 3 December 2012, a group of 15-20 insurgents entered Ban Thasu School in Panare district during the night, tied up a temporary staff member and set fire to the school.¹⁶⁰¹

Several bombs were detonated on school premises; in some cases, they appeared to be intended to attack units of soldiers assigned to protect teachers. Five teachers and two defence volunteers were wounded by a bomb at the entrance of a school in Muang district, Yala, on 25 July 2012. The explosive was hidden in an iron box in front of the school.¹⁶⁰² In other cases, bombs were found hidden inside fire extinguishers¹⁶⁰³ and other spaces in or near schools. On 27 May 2012, insurgents detonated a bomb

hidden in a rest area inside Ban Kalapor School in Pattani's Saiburi district. The bomb was for an ambush targeting a paramilitary unit that escorted teachers and students. Two soldiers were killed and four others seriously wounded. The school was closed down immediately after the attack. Although the school was reopened two days later, most parents refused to bring their children back for nearly a week.¹⁶⁰⁴ In another case, on 24 September 2012, a bomb exploded at the entrance of Batu Mitrapap 66 School in Bacho district, Narathiwat province. The explosion injured two school directors.¹⁶⁰⁵

ATTACKS ON SCHOOL STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND OTHER EDUCATION PERSONNEL

At least 121 Buddhist and Muslim students, teachers, school officials and janitors were killed or wounded during 2009-2012, according to UN figures.¹⁶⁰⁶ At least 32 students and ten teachers and education personnel were killed or injured in targeted attacks in 2009.¹⁶⁰⁷ In 2010, at least two students and 12 teachers and education personnel were killed and another five students and six teachers or education personnel were injured.¹⁶⁰⁸ At least 31 government teachers and education personnel and one student were killed in the southern border provinces in 2011, and at least five teachers and three students were wounded.¹⁶⁰⁹ In 2012, the UN reported a spike of violence in the final quarter of that year, with six teachers killed and eight injured.¹⁶¹⁰

The vast majority of teachers and other education personnel killed have been Thai Buddhists, but ethnic Malay Muslim teachers at government schools and Islamic school administrators were also targeted.¹⁶¹¹ Many teachers requested transfers out of the southern region due to continued insecurity.¹⁶¹²

Many of the teachers who were assassinated were killed while travelling to or from work.¹⁶¹³ For example, Natthapol Janae, a primary school teacher at Nihom Pattana Park Tai School in Bannang Sata district, Yala, was shot dead on 19 May 2009 as he travelled to school via motorcycle. Janae was ambushed by five attackers on motorcycles, six kilometres from the school.¹⁶¹⁴ In another case, a Bango Yuebang school teacher, Samrit Panthadet, was shot in Kapho as he returned home from school on 8 February 2010 and gunmen burned his body.¹⁶¹⁵

Teachers who joined convoys as part of teacher-escort programmes were not spared. On 2 June 2009, suspected Muslim insurgents, disguised as government soldiers, attacked a pick-up truck carrying six teachers home from schools in Ja Nae district, Narathiwat province. The men forced the truck to stop at a fake roadblock set up by other gunmen in their group. One Buddhist Thai teacher was shot dead and three were wounded including Atcharapon Tehpsor who was eight months pregnant. She died on her way to hospital.¹⁶¹⁶ A more typical tactic was the detonation of roadside bombs by mobile phone as security convoys carrying teachers passed by, wounding or killing both teachers and security personnel.¹⁶¹⁷

Some teachers were killed in ambushes on school grounds. For example, on 11 December 2012, five men wearing camouflage, some of them carrying assault rifles, invaded the canteen of Ban Ba Ngo School in Mayo district, Pattani. They shot dead two Buddhist teachers after isolating them from five Muslim teachers. At one point, the school's Buddhist head teacher tried to hide behind one of the Muslim teachers, but he was still shot at close range. The other Buddhist teacher was also shot dead.¹⁶¹⁸ According to insurgent sources, this attack was in retaliation for an alleged Buddhist vigilante attack on

a Muslim teashop in Narathiwath's Ra Ngae district earlier that day.¹⁶¹⁹

Attacks on teachers often forced school closures in response. For instance, after the head teacher of the Tha Kam Cham School in Nong Chik district, Pattani province, was killed in November 2012, the Confederation of Teachers of Southern Border Provinces closed 332 schools in the region for 10 days.¹⁶²⁰ As a result of the 11 December 2012 killings, the Confederation closed 1,300 government schools serving more than 200,000 students in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat provinces. The Confederation additionally closed four districts of Songkhla for another two days.¹⁶²¹

Other education personnel, such as teacher assistants and janitors, have also been targeted by separatist insurgents. For example, a Muslim teacher assistant at Ban Budee School in Pattani's Yaring district was shot dead by insurgents while returning home on his motorcycle in Pattani's Mayo district on 26 May 2013.¹⁶²² On 11 June 2013, a janitor at Ban Than Mali School in Yala's Betong district was shot dead by insurgents as he was riding his motorcycle back home.¹⁶²³

Generally, students were not targeted, but sometimes they were casualties. On 27 September 2011, for instance, two students were wounded by shrapnel when a roadside bomb hit their school bus while being escorted by a military vehicle in Narathiwat's Yee Ngor district. Police believed that insurgents intended the bomb to hit soldiers escorting the students.¹⁶²⁴

MILITARY USE OF SCHOOLS

To accommodate the additional military and paramilitary forces that the Thai government deployed in the southern provinces of Narathiwat,

Pattani, and Yala, camps were established inside school buildings and compounds. Security forces occupied at least 79 schools in 2010,¹⁶²⁵ and continued to use schools as barracks and bases for at least the next year.¹⁶²⁶ In 2011, reacting to domestic and international concerns, the army reportedly ordered security units to stop using government schools as barracks.¹⁶²⁷

Military outposts at schools were targeted for attack, putting the schools at risk. On 18 March 2011, ethnic Malay Muslim insurgents attacked an outpost of the Pattani Task Force 21 at a school in Yarang district, killing one soldier. Attackers climbed over the fence of Sano Pitthayakhom School in Tambon and opened fire at the operations base of the 3rd Rifle Platoon of the 8023rd Infantry Company; they fled after soldiers returned fire.¹⁶²⁸ The military base at Ban Langsad School in Tambon Ka Sor was attacked by suspected insurgents on 6 December 2012. M-79 grenade explosions damaged the school wall.¹⁶²⁹ Grenades were also used in June 2012 to attack a school in Krongpinang district during a security briefing in the schoolyard; three soldiers were killed.¹⁶³⁰

The presence of security forces in schools made schools a target for attack and in some cases caused parents to keep their children at home.¹⁶³¹ For instance, local people removed children from Ban Klong Chang elementary school, Pattani, after 30 Rangers established a camp in the back of the school compound in 2010. Parents feared that the presence of soldiers would increase the risk of attack, and staff and students complained of overcrowding, inability to use school latrines and the poor behaviour of soldiers.¹⁶³²

Security forces also conducted raids in search of suspected insurgents and weapons at Islamic schools, some of which turned violent or resulted in

arbitrary mass arrests.¹⁶³³ On 4 September 2012, the government's Anti-Money Laundering Office (AMLO) seized the assets of an Islamic religious school in Narathiwat province for allegedly using the school as a centre for making bombs.¹⁶³⁴

CHILD RECRUITMENT FROM SCHOOLS

The International Crisis Group reported in 2009 that insurgents did much of their recruiting at Islamic schools.¹⁶³⁵ The most active separatist group, the National Revolutionary Front-Coordinate (BRN-C), selected students from Islamic primary schools and private Islamic schools for after-school indoctrination programmes, carried out within special religious lessons, educational trips and team sports activities such as football. Recruiters used the activities to assess who were the most suitable individuals to join the movement. According to a police interview in 2009, a BRN-C plan outlined how school compounds were used to give recruits fitness training before they could progress to military and combat training. Mostly, children were given non-military jobs such as intelligence gathering, laying spikes on the road, graffiti painting and arson.¹⁶³⁶

ATTACKS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Attacks on higher education came largely in the form of threats toward professors related to *lèse majesté* law¹⁶³⁷ and the detention of students following protests.

Several professors were detained or threatened on charges of *lèse majesté* under article 112 of the Penal Code and under the Computer Crime Act. An assistant professor at Chulalongkorn University, Dr Suthachai Yamprasert, was detained by the Thai authorities for seven days in May 2010 and interrogated at the Centre for the Resolution of the Emergency Situation (CRES)¹⁶³⁸ because his name

was on a CRES list of people suspected of conspiring to overthrow the monarchy.¹⁶³⁹ In another case, Somsak Jeamteerasakul, a professor of history at Thammasat University, received threatening phone calls and visits following a speech he made about reforming the monarchy.¹⁶⁴⁰ On 11 May 2011, he reported to police at Bangkok's Nang Lerng Police Station to acknowledge the charges filed by the army over two articles he had written in response to a televised interview by Princess Chulabhorn.¹⁶⁴¹

Two professors were also threatened due to their attempts to reform *lèse majesté* laws. Pavin Chachavalpongpun, an associate professor at Kyoto University, has led a campaign from outside Thailand to modify Article 112 of the laws. On 12 June 2012, he received two anonymous phone calls from Thailand threatening him if he continued the campaign.¹⁶⁴² Worachet Pakeerut, an assistant professor of law at Thammasat University and member of a group of law professors that has campaigned to liberalize *lèse majesté* laws, was assaulted by two men outside his university in March 2012.¹⁶⁴³

Three student leaders, including the secretary-general of the Student Federation of Thailand, were summoned and interrogated by the CRES on 2 May 2010 and were questioned about their political leanings and acquaintances.¹⁶⁴⁴

ATTACKS ON EDUCATION IN 2013

Attacks on teachers, education staff and soldiers protecting schools continued in 2013. On 17 January, a school minivan driver was killed by shots to his head and torso by two men riding a motorcycle. The attack happened while he was taking seven students to kindergarten.¹⁶⁴⁵ On 23 January, two militants walked into a Narathiwat school dining hall and shot dead a teacher in front of dozens of students.¹⁶⁴⁶

In February 2013, the government and insurgents agreed to begin peace talks and in July they announced a 40-day ceasefire during Ramadan,¹⁶⁴⁷ although this did not prevent further abuses against civilians by suspected militants. On 29 April, it was reported that a teacher and another man on security duty at Buke Bakong School in Narathiwat were injured when militants opened fire on them;¹⁶⁴⁸ and on 24 July, two Muslim teachers were killed and one seriously injured when the car they were travelling to school in was blown up.¹⁶⁴⁹ On 21 August, a teacher was killed by gunfire while on his way home, resulting in the temporary closure of 12 schools.¹⁶⁵⁰

Separatist bomb, arson, gun and grenade attacks, both at and near educational establishments, also continued with frequency.¹⁶⁵¹ Often they had fatal consequences for the soldiers protecting schools.¹⁶⁵² Atypically, in what may have been a revenge attack, an Islamic religious teacher who worked at an Islamic school, and who had overseen Islamic elementary schools based in villages for four years, was shot and killed by men riding a motorcycle in Pattani. It was not known who killed him¹⁶⁵³ but Human Rights Watch, citing his case, urged the government to investigate the murders of ethnic Malays to allay fears of state inaction over perceived reprisal attacks.¹⁶⁵⁴

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