



**Report from the Field**  
March 20<sup>th</sup> 2008 / KHRG #2008-F4

## **Oppressed twice over: SPDC and DKBA exploitation and violence against villagers in Thaton District**

*Throughout Thaton District the SPDC has persistently worked to expand and entrench military control not only by increasing its own troops, but also by heavily relying on the DKBA as a local proxy force. Both groups exploit the civilian population to support their respective military hierarchies and local villagers thus face a double burden on their lives. This report looks at various forms and specific incidents of forced labour, extortion, violence and other abuse against villagers in Thaton District which SPDC and DKBA personnel have perpetrated up to February 2008.*

Having largely consolidated military control over Thaton District around the start of the present decade<sup>1</sup> the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has since then relied more heavily on the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) as a proxy to maintain control over the civilian population and eradicate the Karen National Union (KNU) and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) presence in the area. With the local geography comprised mostly of flat agricultural land, this district differs from the more mountainous forests in northern Karen State where the SPDC has less control over the indigenous population and where there is a correlatively higher number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in hiding. Relying heavily on civilian



When this photo was taken on October 29<sup>th</sup> 2007 Lah Koh villagers were building a vehicle road from Bp'Nweh Gkalah to Lay Gkay Camp as ordered by commander Min Naing Oo of SPDC LID #44, LIB#9. [Photo: KHRG]

exploitation, both the SPDC and DKBA have applied abusive strategies in Thaton District to maintain control and extract finances, labour and other resources from local villagers. Some of these violations, which are examined in more detail below, include forced labour, extortion and looting, arbitrary arrest, torture and murder for the purpose of extracting information about KNLA troop locations, and restrictions on civilian movement. While many incidents of abuse have involved either SPDC or DKBA troops, since November 2007, these two groups have also been conducting new joint operations in a number of areas of Thaton District with a few DKBA soldiers serving alongside an SPDC column.

### **DKBA and SPDC military deployment**

Active DKBA troops in Thaton District serve under DKBA Brigades #333 and #999. Brigade #333, led by Brigadier Maung Gyi, is comprised of three battalions designated as #1, 2 and 3. The headquarters of Brigade #333 is located at Oh Daw, along the Salween river west of the central DKBA headquarters at Myaing Gyi Ngoo. Brigade #999 is comprised of four battalions designated as #901, 906, 907 and 908. In 2007, DKBA Brigade #999 was not

<sup>1</sup> For details on the SPDC consolidation of Thaton District see KHRG reports around 1999 to 2001, such as *Thaton District: SPDC using violence against villagers to consolidate control*, KHRG, March 2001. Available at [www.khrg.org/khrg2001/khrg01u2.html](http://www.khrg.org/khrg2001/khrg01u2.html).

conducting its own operations but rather assisting Brigade #333 as needed. A full breakdown of the organisational structure of DKBA Brigade #333 is as follows:

#	Brigade / Battalion	Officer names	Rank / Title	# of soldiers
1	Brigade # 333	Maung Gyi	Brigade Commander (Brigadier)	N/A
2		Maung Doo	Brigade Headquarter Commander	
3		Ohn Thaug	Brigade Chief of Intelligence	
4		Sein Aung	Brigade Head of Office	
5		Moe Nyo	Brigade Operation Commander	
6		Henry	Headquarter Column Commander	
7	Battalion # 1	Poe Law Eh	Battalion Commander	75
8		Thaw M'Nah	Deputy Commander	
9		Puh Nah Gyi	Head of Office	
10		Than Htun, Po Lin and Moh Doh	Column Commanders	
11	Battalion # 2	Bee	Battalion Commander	80
12		Than Mya (Plaw Poe)	Deputy Commander	
13		Mya Win	Headquarter Commander	
14		Pah Gker Ler, Gk'Maw, and Gkaw Loo	Column Commanders	
15	Battalion # 3	Bo Lweh	Battalion Commander	90
16		Myint Win	Deputy Commander	
17		Maung Nyee	Head of Office	
18		Tin Win, Gk'Maw and Than Htun	Column Commanders	

Notwithstanding the increased use of DKBA forces, the SPDC Army remains active in Thaton District and continues to expand and strengthen its presence. On November 21<sup>st</sup> 2007, SPDC Military Operation Command (MOC) #19 dispatched seven additional battalions to begin operations in Thaton District. On February 7<sup>th</sup> 2007, the SPDC deployed Light Infantry Division (LID) #44 to replace LID #101. As a consequence of recent deployment, there are fourteen SPDC battalions currently active in Thaton District. Each battalion, in turn, has two columns identified as column #1 and column #2 respectively. The SPDC has no separate commanders for these columns. Rather, the battalion commander also serves as commander of column #1 and the deputy battalion commander serves as the commander of column #2. SPDC battalions and columns operating in Thaton rotate their areas of operation once every two months or sooner in accordance with specific orders. They never operate permanently in one area. This may partly be motivated by a desire to prevent any kind of familiarity developing between local villagers and army personnel, as army personnel might then be more reluctant to implement abusive orders. The table below lists current SPDC Army units active in Thaton District along with their respective commanders and deputy commanders where known.

#	Unit	Sub unit	Officer(s) in charge	Base or camp location
1	LID #44		Commander Hla Myint Swe, Operation Commander Aung Khin Zaw and also in charge of P'Nweh Gkklah camp, Camp Commander Zaw Maung Thwin	Lay Gkay and Bp'Nweh Gkklah
2		LIB #102	Commander Myo Than Htut, Deputy Commander Min Zaw Oo	
3		LIB #118	Commander Nyan Win, Deputy Commander Thant Zin Oo	
4		LIB #9	Commander Kyaw Swah Oo, Deputy Commander Hla Thwin Thaug	
5		LIB #1	Commander Aung San Oo	
6		IB #8	Commander Myint Naing	
7		IB #2	Deputy Commander Myo Aung	
8		LIB #2	Deputy Commander Aung Soe	
9	MOC #19		Commander Chon Hton Yee, Operation Commander Han Ni Zaw, Camp Commander Ohn Kan Kaung	Yoh Gkklah
10		IB #61	Commander Soe Myint	
11		IB #586	?	
12		IB #237	Commander Khin Zaw Win	
13		IB #299	?	
14		IB #343	?	

Since November 21<sup>st</sup> 2007, each SPDC column operating in Thaton has combined with two to four DKBA soldiers. These joint sub-units have been operating closely together so that the SPDC is able to gain more information regarding the situation on the ground in Thaton as DKBA soldiers, who generally come from the area, are much more knowledgeable about the local context. However, DKBA soldiers in Thaton do not solely operate in this manner and their forces continue to patrol and operate on their own. Those DKBA soldiers that have been operating alongside the SPDC have reportedly been hired by the SPDC for 100,600 kyat (US\$ 91.79) for each military sortie.

According to a KHRG field researcher operating in Thaton District, recent SPDC and DKBA operations since the end of 2007 have involved soldiers setting up temporary camps in the forest, the locations of which they have sought to keep secret. If they see villagers travelling nearby to these camps they detain them; interrogate them regarding the locations and activities of the KNLA; and release them, allowing them to return to their villages, only when they are set to move their camp to a new location. Because of this, many villagers dare not go and work on their farm fields or plantations.

## **Forced labour**

The use of civilian forced labour for military purposes is widespread in every township of Thaton District. The prevalent forms of forced labour demanded in Thaton include portering military rations and supplies, clearing forest overgrowth from the sides of military-controlled vehicle roads, constructing and repairing roads and bridges to be used by soldiers and army vehicles, clearing weeds and undergrowth from SPDC and DKBA-owned plantations, and fabricating and delivering building supplies for army use. The DKBA has also been ordering village tracts to supply new recruits to serve as soldiers. However, many communities have been able to pay cash to DKBA officers in order to avoid providing the recruits. A selection of incidents representing some forms of forced labour are presented in the sections below.



The DKBA's rubber plantation at Dtaw Dt'Lay Koh village. The DKBA forces local villagers to plant young rubber trees and clear weeds and other forest growth in the plantation. *[Photo:KHRG]*



In the photo above two Dtaw Dt'Lay Koh villagers water trees at a DKBA rubber plantation on November 19<sup>th</sup> 2007. Local DKBA personnel force villagers to tend to the plantation located in an area between Dtaw Dt'Lay Koh and Noh Peh Moh villages in Pa'an township. *[Photo: KHRG]*

## **Road and bridge construction and repair**

In an effort to strengthen the infrastructure of militarisation in Thaton District, SPDC soldiers have been forcing villagers to build and repair roads and bridges that will be used for the transport of army rations, soldiers and other military supplies. Typically, army units employ this kind of forced labour shortly before sending out supplies to military camps and bases.



Shown here on November 15<sup>th</sup> 2007, residents of Gkroo See village carry out uncompensated forced labour repairing a vehicle road as ordered by local SPDC personnel. The villagers had to fill in potholes along the roadway using large stones, cover over the stones with earth and flatten out the road's surface.

[Photo: KHRG]

On November 20<sup>th</sup> 2007, SPDC LID #44, LIB #9 commander Min Naing Oo began operating along with 60 soldiers under his command in Dtah Bpaw and Ee Heh village tracts, Pa'an township. Previously Min Naing Oo received an order from LID #44 that he would have to organise the reparation of relevant vehicle roads and send out military rations to every camp before the end of December. Therefore, on November 20<sup>th</sup> 2007, Min Naing Oo ordered the residents of Pwah Ghaw, Noh Aw Lah, Gkroo See, Ee Heh, Lah Koh, Gkah Meh and Dtah Bpaw villages to repair the vehicle road from Bp'Nweh Gkalah village to Gkway Lay camp within 15 days. Fifteen villagers from Pwah Ghaw, for example, went to work on the road on November 20<sup>th</sup> 2007, and 18 villagers went to work on the road on November 22<sup>nd</sup>. These villagers departed from the village in the morning and returned in the evening without any compensation and, furthermore, had to bring their own food.

*"Yes, we've already done it. We took two days to construct the vehicle road. We were ordered by the SPDC soldiers to make the road flat and to cut down the small trees which grew beside the road. If there were any holes we had to fill them with soil. It was not just my village which had to go to construct the road but also the other villages such as Pwah Ghaw, Dtah Thoo Kee, Noh Aw Lah and Gkaw Khay Kee. We have to construct and repair this road every year and we also had to fence in their military camp at Bpoh. I didn't go there but I asked my children to go instead of me... Now it is left for us to rebuild the bridge. The vehicle road was from Bp'Nweh Gkalah and continued up to Lay Gkay. When the soldiers change their location they use this road to come by vehicle. Sometimes when we are not free we have to hire people to go for us. We have had to pay them 1,500 kyat per day."*

- Naw M--- (female, 41), --- village, Pa'an township (Nov 2007)

### **Fabrication and delivery of building materials**

Forced labour producing and delivering building materials, typically bamboo poles and thatch shingles, to army camps is common across SPDC and DKBA-controlled areas of Karen State. Such labour involves work finding the necessary raw materials (whether bamboo or thatch), fabricating the material (cutting bamboo to size, weaving and binding thatch), and delivering the finished product to specified locations either on foot, by ox cart or by floating the items down riverways where possible.

On February 19<sup>th</sup> 2008, SPDC Infantry Battalion (IB) #96 commander Aung Khaing Htun forced villagers from Bpaw Paw Bpoo, Kyaikto township to cut down and deliver 1,000 bamboo poles. On that same day SPDC LID #44, LIB #2 battalion commander Aung Naing Oo ordered Bpaw Paw Bpoo villagers to prepare and deliver 3,000 bamboo poles.

On August 1<sup>st</sup> 2007, Corporal Maung Aye Lwin of DKBA Brigade #333, Battalion #2 forced local villagers to fabricate short sharpened bamboo poles to be used for fencing in their

army camp. According to a KHRG field researcher operating in Thaton District, the villages which had to provide sharpened bamboo were as follows:

#	Village name	# of bamboo poles
1	Shwe Ohn	2,000
2	Th'Waw Pyah	2,000
3	Kaw Heh	1,500
4	Mya Lay	2,000
5	Gkway Lay	1,500
6	Mah Kyoo Htaw	1,500
7	Hter Hser Kee	1,500

The villagers prepared and delivered the bamboo poles to the DKBA camp at Meh Say within the stipulated five days time in which they were ordered to do so.

*"We received the order on October 1<sup>st</sup> 2007. They [DKBA] ordered the village head to meet them but the village head was not well so they asked a set tha<sup>2</sup> to inform the village head to send 1,500 sharpened bamboo poles to their camp. It was not only our village. Villages such as Shwe Ohn, Gkway Lay, Mah Kyoo Htaw and Mya Lay, also had to send 1,500 bamboo [some villagers reported the number was 2,000] sharpened bamboo poles."*

- Saw Ht--- (male, 31), --- village, Bilin township (Oct 2007)

On February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2008, SPDC LIB #9 company 2<sup>nd</sup>-in-command Nay Myo Aung demanded 200 thatch shingles from Mi Chaung Aing village and 100 thatch shingles from M'Yan Kohn. On that same day, the DKBA demanded 500 thatch shingles from Mya Lay village and ordered one person from each household to deliver them.

### **Porters and escorts**

While SPDC and DKBA forces exploit the forced labour of the local civilian population to repair and construct vehicle roads for the transportation of army rations and other supplies, where sufficiently adequate roads have yet to be built or when army trucks are unavailable, both groups have utilised the uncompensated forced labour of villagers in Thaton District as porters to transport rations along more rural routes. Moreover, soldiers also force civilians to act as escorts, typically walking in front or alongside soldiers, while they are transporting military rations and supplies. In this way the soldiers utilise the civilians as a deterrent and shield against potential KNLA ambushes.

On November 8<sup>th</sup> 2007, DKBA Battalion #3 deputy commander Myint Win went to Dtah Thoo Kee village and ordered the village head to conscript ten villagers to serve as porters. The DKBA also demanded porters from other villages in the area including Pwah Ghaw, Gkroo See, and Noh Aw Lah villages. Every three days, each group of ten villagers was replaced with a new group of ten from the same village. There were about 30 DKBA soldiers overseeing seventy villager porters.

Since January 29<sup>th</sup> 2008, SPDC IB #96 commander Yay Moo and Maung Doo of the Special People's Militia (*Ahtoo Pyithusit*) have ordered villagers to work as escorts for SPDC soldiers along the vehicle road from Dt'Gkwee Bpoo to Bpaw Baw Htah villages. In one incident on February 1<sup>st</sup> 2008, SPDC IB #96 commander Yay Moo and Maung Doo ordered twenty villagers each from Bpaw Paw Bpoo, Htee Nuh Bpoo, Noh Lah Kee, Theh Kaw Htah, Bpoh Gklaw Law, Bpee Dtee Kee, Bpaw Baw Htah and Wah May Koh villages to serve as escorts while the soldiers were delivering their military rations.

On February 12<sup>th</sup> 2008, DKBA Battalion #3 commander Kyaw Noh ordered villagers from Mya Lay, Th'Waw Pu, Gkaw Heh and Htee Hser Kee to carry supplies for them. Thirty villagers had to carry military supplies over multiple days.

<sup>2</sup> 'Set tha' is a Burmese term for forced labour as a messenger at army camps, but also involving other tasks when no messages are in need of delivery.

## Forced recruitment

On September 28<sup>th</sup> 2007, DKBA Brigade #333 Battalion #1 deputy commander Thaw M'Nah demanded village tracts in Pa'an township and Bilin township to provide new recruits to serve in the DKBA, in order to increase their troop strength. Each village tract had to provide three people to serve as soldiers and if they did not meet their quota they were required to pay 600,000 to 700,000 kyat (US\$ 547.45 to 638.69) per person. The four village tracts in Bilin township which DKBA Brigade #333 ordered to provide soldiers were Htee Hsih Baw, Gkaw Heh, Shwe Ohn and Dtah Bpaw. In Pa'an township, the DKBA implemented the mandatory conscription of soldiers in Hah Dt'Reh, Dt'Gkaw Boh, and Ee Heh village tracts. However, as the villagers did not want to serve as soldiers in the DKBA, they chose instead to pay monetary 'fines'. Despite the fine for non-compliance being 600,000 kyat per person, many communities were able to negotiate for a reduced amount or simply ignore the stated amount and instead pay a lower sum. The following is a partial list of villages in Bilin and Pa'an township that paid fees to the DKBA in lieu of providing recruits from their village as ordered by DKBA Brigade #333 Battalion #1 commander Thaw M'Nah.

#	Date	Village name	Amount paid (kyat)
1	August 25 <sup>th</sup> 2007	Noh Naw Wah	800,000
2	September 10 <sup>th</sup> 2007	Ler Kheh Khaw	1,000,000
3	September 20 <sup>th</sup> 2007	Meh Leh Kee	900,000
4	September 28 <sup>th</sup> 2007	Gway Lay	700,000
5	October 10 <sup>th</sup> 2007	Htoo Dtaw	1,000,000
6	October 10 <sup>th</sup> 2007	Thay Lah Baw	900,000
7	October 15 <sup>th</sup> 2007	Bp'Yah Raw	900,000
8	October 18 <sup>th</sup> 2007	Dt'Gkaw Boh	1,000,000
9	October 19 <sup>th</sup> 2007	Gkwee Dt'Kaw	1,500,000
10	November 6 <sup>th</sup> 2007	Khaw Poh Bpleh	750,000
11	November 7 <sup>th</sup> 2007	Htee Hsih Baw	1,000,000
12	November 26 <sup>th</sup> 2007	Pwah Ghaw	1,000,000

On November 25<sup>th</sup> 2007, DKBA Brigade #333, Battalion #1 commander Thaw M'Nah, acting under the orders of commander Saw Maung Gyi issued a directive that all villages in eastern Baw Naw river area had to provide one to three people to serve as DKBA soldiers. If anyone did not want to be a DKBA soldier, he would have to pay a fine of 150,000 kyat. All of the villages paid the money in lieu of serving as DKBA soldiers. For those who could not afford to pay, Thaw M'Nah personally came and threatened them. As a consequence, their respective village heads tried to find money from others to cover the stated amount. Some villagers had to sell their houses and/or other property in order to meet the amount required. At Ht--- village commander Thaw M'Nah came at midnight and ordered the village head, Saw M---, to come out of his house and tell the villagers that if they did not pay the 150,000 kyat demanded, then he would kill the village head. Villagers therefore collected money and gave it to him on November 28<sup>th</sup> 2007.

*"The order was from commander Thaw M'Nah, he was from #333, Battalion #2, and his position was a battalion deputy commander. Previously, he ordered our village to send a person to be a soldier. They sent an order letter to the village head which said that the village head had to meet with him. The letter arrived on October 10<sup>th</sup> 2007. It was the second order letter. They sent us the first order letter on September 28<sup>th</sup> 2007. If the village couldn't provide a villager, then they had to give 700,000 kyat."*

- Saw Ht--- (male, 31), G--- village, Bilin township (Oct 2007)

## Looting

As most civilians in Thaton District now reside under SPDC and/or DKBA control, both groups have been able to exploit the local population to support individual army personnel and their wider military hierarchies. While exploitative demands are often made explicit, at other times soldiers simply loot whatever property they want.

On February 1<sup>st</sup> 2008, SPDC IB #96 commander San Yu Aung looted four head of cattle from Gk'Bper Kee village. The soldiers looted two oxen belonging to Saw Maung Hla, one ox belonging to Myint Win, and one ox belonging to Maung Hla Ya.

On February 13<sup>th</sup> 2008, SPDC MOC #19, LIB #587 battalion deputy commander Myint Win entered Kyo Weh village, fired at villagers attempting to flee and then forcibly searched villagers' houses. At this time he destroyed boxes belonging to Htoh Gkloh and Bpoo Shwe and looted 29,000 kyat, one knife, two sarongs, a pair of trousers and one shirt from the house of Naw Moo Ner.

## Arbitrary arrest, torture and killings

*"Before they [DKBA] tied me they hit my head three times and after they tied me they continued to hit my head three times. It was about 7:00 pm. They ordered me to come out from my house and when I was on the ground they tied my hands with rope. They asked me about the location of the KNU and I answered them that I hadn't seen their [KNU] place. I was afraid of them so when they hit me, I soiled myself. The name of the person who hit me was column commander Pah Klay. After that I felt dizzy from the pain for four days. They didn't give me any medicine. They released me when they arrived in Meh Theh."*

- Saw P--- (male, 35), M--- village, Bilin township (Oct 2007)

In an unrelenting push to eradicate all KNU and KNLA personnel from Thaton District, SPDC and DKBA forces regularly utilise the civilian population, often violently, as a means to obtain relevant information. The soldiers committing these arbitrary detentions, generally do not refer to any specific legal grounds for doing so, in violation of civilians' rights to the presumption of innocence and freedom from arbitrary arrest.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Burma's 1908 Unlawful Associations Act serves as a quasi-legal basis for the arbitrary detention and interrogation of civilians across Burma. As the regime includes the KNU amongst other "anti-government groups"<sup>4</sup>, the Army freely detains civilians on the grounds that she or he "in any way assists the operations of any such association."<sup>5</sup> This, however, is made irrelevant as SPDC and DKBA soldiers do not refer to the Act as the legal basis for the arrest and, furthermore, typically lack any grounds for accusing villagers of in any way aiding KNU or KNLA personnel. Some instances of such arbitrary arrest, torture and killing are presented below.

On August 13<sup>th</sup> 2007, SPDC LID #44, LIB #9 Battalion #2 Column #2 commander and Chief of Intelligence Hla Thwin Thaung along with four soldiers were travelling at night and encountered 19-year-old Saw Dt--- of Bp'Yah Raw village while he was heading to a monastery to watch a movie. The soldiers arrested him and interrogated him regarding the location of KNLA soldiers. As Saw Dt--- did not know this information, and therefore could not answer the questions put to him, the soldiers punched him once in the chin and hit him in the head once with a flashlight before releasing him. Also on August 13<sup>th</sup>, the same group of SPDC soldiers arrived at the home of Saw K---, also of Bp'Yah Raw village, asked him to come outside and then interrogated him about KNLA locations. Saw K--- was unaware of these locations and could not answer the questions. The soldiers then choked him, punched him once in the chin and kicked him in the ribs with their boots. In a rage over Saw K---'s inability to provide any answers, one of the soldiers took out his pistol from his waist holster, shoved it into Saw K---'s mouth then took it out and hit him with it in the head. After this the soldiers released Saw K---. In yet another incident involving the same SPDC personnel on August 13<sup>th</sup>, the soldiers encountered Ko M--- and Ko Ma--- as the two villagers were going to the market to buy food for their mother's funeral. The SPDC soldiers saw them and questioned them about the KNLA. Again, as these villagers knew no details

<sup>3</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights Articles 11 and 9.

<sup>4</sup> SPDC Press Conference, June 11th 2006. Accessed at [www.myanmar.com/press\\_conference/2006/11-6a.html](http://www.myanmar.com/press_conference/2006/11-6a.html) on January 16th 2008.

<sup>5</sup> The Unlawful Associations Act, Article 17. (1). Accessed in English on the Burma Lawyers' Council website at [www.blc-burma.org/html/Suppressive%20Law/ulaa\\_e.html](http://www.blc-burma.org/html/Suppressive%20Law/ulaa_e.html) on January 15th 2008.

about KNLA operations and thus could not answer the questions, the soldiers punched both Ko M--- and Ko Ma--- in the face before releasing them.

On September 24<sup>th</sup> 2007, DKBA Brigade #333, Battalion #1 deputy commander Thaw M'Nah and 25 soldiers operating in Dt'Gkaw Boh village tract entered into Gkwee Dt'Kaw village at 10:00 pm and arrested all male villagers. They tied up 39-year-old Maung Nge, 63-year-old Saw Maung Sein Win, and Saw Gkwee Gkwee, with ropes, tied hoods over their heads and beat them. The soldiers asked the villagers to show them the locations of KNLA soldiers operating in the area. When the three men replied that they knew nothing about this the soldiers severely tortured them. In order to gain their release, the local village head had to guarantee that they were telling the truth and also give the soldiers a payment of 700,000 kyat. Although they initially released the villagers, the soldiers ordered Maung Sein Win to follow them to Lah Gkaw Kher village and cut the weeds growing in the rubber plantation for two weeks. After this the soldiers allowed him to return to his village.

On October 9<sup>th</sup> 2007, DKBA column commander Pah Klay and nine soldiers under his command operating under deputy commander Thaw M'Nah of Brigade #333, Battalion #1 entered into M--- village at 7:00 pm. The soldiers went to the house of 35-year-old Saw P--- and ordered him to come out of his home. They then tied his hands behind his back with rope and questioned him about KNLA locations. However, Saw P--- had no information about this and so he could not answer them. They then hit him seven times with a rifle until Saw P--- was so frightened that he soiled himself. On that same night, these soldiers also went to the house of 35-year-old Saw Bp--- and ordered him to come out of his house immediately and, without asking any questions, they began torturing him.

*"Yes, they [DKBA] caught me at my home at 8:00 pm. They didn't question me and immediately they beat me with their guns and kicked me with their boots. Moreover, they tied me with rope including my neck and after they tied me they covered my face with a plastic raincoat and they accused me of hiding KNU soldiers. I was unconscious when they covered my face so I didn't know anything [didn't know what was happening]. They insisted that I show them the locations of KNU soldiers. They beat me more than 20 times. I had to cure my wounds and I had to borrow money from other people and now I have a debt of 13,000 kyat. I had to ask people to inject me with medicine. They also hit my back and the whole of my body."*

- Saw Bp--- (male, 35), M--- village, Bilin township (Oct 2007)

On November 25<sup>th</sup> 2007, a DKBA Brigade #333 soldier named Saw Myat Shwe, under the direction of headquarter column commander Henry, arrested 35-year-old Saw Wah Hsoh from Mih Gkyaw Eh village, claiming that he was a KNLA soldier. Saw Myat Shwe ordered the villager to hand over his gun, but since he was not a soldier, he had none. Saw Myat Shwe then questioned him about KNLA locations but Saw Wah Hsoh could provide no answers. Saw Myat Shwe then tortured the villager and killed him on that same day.

On December 2<sup>nd</sup> 2007, SPDC MOC #19, IB #61 Column #1 commander Soe Myint and four soldiers under the control of DKBA Brigade #333 Battalion #1 commander Thaw M'Nah, arrested 28-year-old Lay Gkay villager Saw Pah Yu. They claimed that he was a KNLA soldier and asked him to hand over his gun, which he did not have. Saw Pah Yuh then had to follow the soldiers for four days. The soldiers severely tortured him and on December 6<sup>th</sup> 2007, they shot him dead in the Pway Poh Gkalah area between Khaw Poh Bpleh village and Bp'Yah Raw village and buried his body at Lay Gkay village, Maw Hta area.

## **Restrictions on movement**

Movement restrictions in Karen State primarily serve to confine civilians within fenced-in sites where soldiers can more easily enforce exploitative demands such as forced labour and arbitrary 'taxation'. Due to these restrictions, villagers are unable to travel freely out to their farm fields or plantations for work as they risk being shot on sight by soldiers operating in the area. Beginning on September 1<sup>st</sup> 2007, SPDC LID #44, LIB #118, battalion commander Nyan Win and LIB #1 battalion commander Aung Soe Oo issued restrictions to

residents of Bp'Yah Raw, Htee Pah Doh Htah, Yoh Gkiah, and Lay Gkay villages whereby they were only allowed to work in their fields between the limited time of 6:00 am to 5:00 pm. Furthermore, no villagers were allowed to travel to or stay at other houses during the night. In cases of emergency during the night time, villagers were only allowed to light torches made of bamboo poles (as opposed to using battery operated flashlights) and at least two people had to travel together. The villagers were informed that anyone caught violating this order, would be declared an enemy and shot on sight.

*"They don't allow the villagers to travel at night time. They said that their soldiers might shoot them by mistake [i.e. would assume the villagers were KNLA soldiers]. In cases of emergency, we have to light torches made of bamboo poles and we have to travel as two or three people. We cannot travel alone. We're able to go outside the village from 6:00 am and return home at 5:30 pm. The order was from LID #44, LIB #118 and the commander's name is Nyan Win. LIB #1, Column #2 commander Aung Soe Oo also gave the same order as Nyan Win."*

- Naw Y--- (female, 43), Bp--- village, Bilin township (Oct 2007)

On December 2<sup>nd</sup> 2007, Brigadier General Hla Myint Hsway, commander of SPDC LID #44, and Brigadier General Chon Hton Yee, commander of MOC #19, conducted a meeting with local village heads at Lay Gkay military camp. At this time they told the village heads to inform villagers not to store their paddy in their farm field huts and, furthermore, to return following the paddy harvest to stay in their villages before the end of December. All paddy supplies were to be stored inside the village confines. If the soldiers found the villagers' rice supplies inside their farm huts, field huts or in the forest, they would burn them all. In addition, the villagers who had to work outside the village were to be present within the village before 4:30 pm. No villagers were allowed to sleep in their farm field huts as is the traditional agricultural practice in the area. If the soldiers found anyone asleep in their hut, they would not question them as before; rather, they would immediately deem them to be KNLA soldiers. The threat of execution was implicit.

*"They told us once, 'don't keep your rice or other things in the forest.' If they see [these supplies], they will deem it be the property of their enemies."*

- Ko M--- (male, 35), Ht--- village, Bilin township (Jan 2008)

## Conclusion

Persistent military abuses by both SPDC and DKBA forces have placed a heavy burden on the local civilian community in Thaton District. Demands for uncompensated forced labour, the payment of arbitrary fees to local army personnel, and the general looting of villagers' property by soldiers operating in the area in combination with restrictions on movement have made it increasingly difficult for villagers to maintain their livelihoods. Villagers have, therefore, resisted such abuse with varying degrees of non-compliance. As one local village head in Thaton District told KHRG, he never fully complies with the demands of army personnel. For example, when his village was recently ordered to provide 300 bamboo poles, the village head said the villagers simply delivered 200 of these and left it at that. The SPDC soldiers who had made the demand took what they could get and did not follow up regarding the remaining poles. Nevertheless, exploitation and violent abuses are rife and villagers cannot always avoid compliance. While these abuses do have established legal provisions against them, both domestically and internationally, consistent impunity from legal prosecution serves as an encouragement and authorisation for army personnel to commit such crimes against the civilian population.

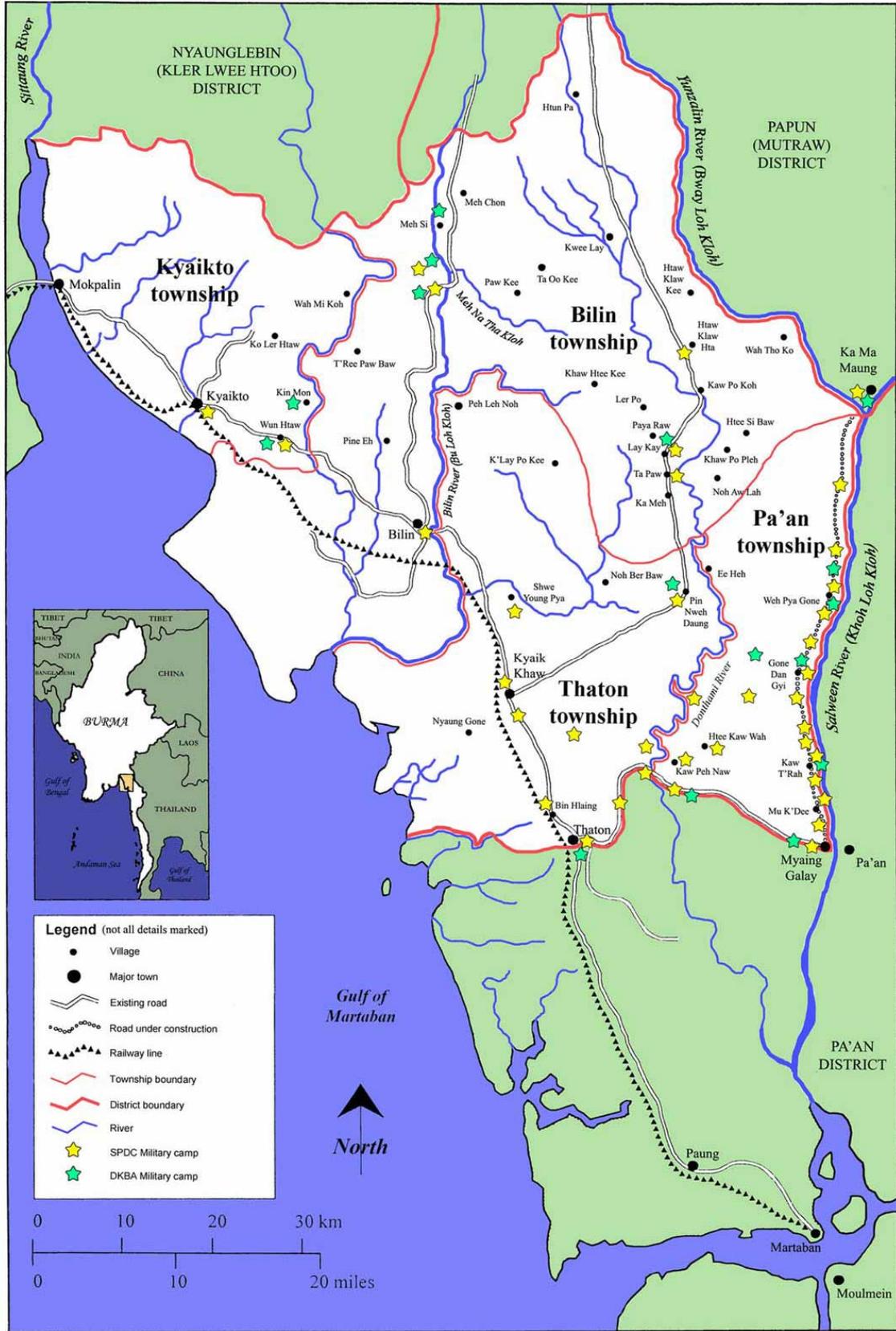
For background on the human rights situation in Thaton District see the following reports:

- *State agencies, armed groups and the proliferation of oppression in Thaton District (KHRG, September 2007)*
- *The Compounding Consequences of DKBA Oppression: Abuse, poverty and food insecurity in Thaton District (KHRG, July 2007)*
- *Oppression by proxy in Thaton District (KHRG, December 2006)*

- *Surviving in Shadow : Widespread Militarization and the Systematic Use of Forced Labour in the Campaign for Control of Thaton District (KHRG, January 2006)*

Photos documenting attacks on villages, displacement and other abuses in Papun District are presented in *KHRG Photo Gallery 2007* (updated November 2007) and *KHRG Photo Gallery2006* (updated March 2007). These and other reports are available on the KHRG web site at [www.khrg.org](http://www.khrg.org).

# Thaton (Doo Tha Htoo) District



# Karen Districts



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Scale: 1 cm to 22 km  
1 in. to 35 miles