



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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**News Bulletin**

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**Thaton Interview: Daw Ny---, April 2011**

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*This report contains the full transcript of an interview conducted during April 2011 in Pa'an Township, Thaton District by a villager trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. The villager interviewed Daw Ny---, who described an incident which occurred in November 2010, during which Tatmadaw Border Guard soldiers fired small-arms at her husband without warning and without attempting to hail him, seriously injuring his leg and necessitating 3,800,000 kyat [US \$4,935.06] in medical expenses, which has had a deleterious effect on her family's financial situation. Daw Ny--- told the villager who conducted this interview that her husband was visited in hospital by government officials investigating the incident but that no compensation or redress was offered. Daw Ny--- also described arbitrary demands for food and money, and the illegal logging of teak trees from A--- village by Border Guard soldiers; she mentioned that the imbalance in local power dynamics between armed soldiers and unarmed villagers deters villagers from attempting to engage and negotiate with perpetrators. Daw Ny--- raised concerns about the lack of livelihoods opportunities, and corresponding food insecurity, for villagers who do not own farmland; she notes that, in spite of these challenges, villagers offer voluntary material support to schoolteachers and often attempt to support their livelihoods by selling firewood or cutting bamboo. Daw Ny--- notes that some villagers choose to seek employment opportunities in larger towns but strongly expresses her unwillingness to move to an urban area, believing that food insecurity would only be exacerbated by a lack of money and an absence of alternative livelihood opportunities.*

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**Interview | Daw Ny---, (female, 51), A--- Village, Pa'an Township, Thaton District (August, 2011)**

*The following interview was conducted by a villager in Thaton District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.<sup>1</sup> This interview was received along with other information from Thaton District, including, thirteen other interviews, one situation update and 136 photographs.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> KHRG trains villagers in eastern Burma to document individual human rights abuses using a standardised reporting format; conduct interviews with other villagers; and write general updates on the situation in areas with which they are familiar. When conducting interviews, villagers are trained to use loose question guidelines, but also to encourage interviewees to speak freely about recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important and share their opinions or perspectives on abuse and other local dynamics.

<sup>2</sup> In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in eastern Burma, KHRG aims to make all field information received available on the KHRG website once it has been processed and translated, subject only to security considerations. As companion to this, a redesigned website will be released in 2012. In the meantime, KHRG's most recently-published field information from Thaton District can be found in the Report, "Thaton Situation Update: Thaton Township, August 2011," KHRG, January 2012.

**Ethnicity:** Burmese  
**Religion:** Buddhist  
**Marital Status:** Married  
**Occupation:** Farmer  
**Position:** Wife of village head

**How many years has your husband been serving as village head?**

Eight years.

**Does he serve as a village head appointed by the Tatmadaw, the KNU [Karen National Union] or the villagers?**

The villagers elected him.

**So [was] he was elected by the Tatmadaw or the KNU?**

No. First he was asked [by the villagers] to take responsibility temporarily for two years, but it's already been eight years now.

**Do the villagers like him?**

Yes, they like him. They won't let him quit.

**How many houses are there in A--- village?**

In the past, there were about 40 houses but there aren't as many [houses] now. There are 28 houses [now].

**What is the population of the village?**

The population has also become smaller. I guess there are over a hundred people.

**What do villagers do in the village?**

Now, people don't have jobs. They rent farms from other people and farm in the farming season. They pull out peanuts and *chway* [shake the peanut plant to separate the nuts from the stem]. Now, there are no jobs, so people move to places where there are jobs. For example, they go and work in Myawaddy.

**What about the people who have stayed?**

The people who have stayed sell *htin* [firewood] and cut bamboo. It is their livelihood. They farm in the rainy season. They work when people hire them.

**How are the villagers' livelihoods in your village?**

They aren't doing well.

**How many people's livelihoods are stable?**

Only people who [have] farms can eat. People who don't [have farms] buy a bowl or four milk tins of rice once a day.

**How many people [have their own] farm?**

There are four or five people [who own] farms. Many people don't [own] farms, so it is difficult for them to make a living.

**So what do they do when they are faced with livelihood problems?**

They're unhappy. They sell *htin* but people can buy a bundle of *htin* for just 5,000 kyat [US \$6.49].<sup>3</sup> For other jobs, there are no other jobs after peanut season. Now they cut bamboo. This is the only work.

**Is your village close to the Tatmadaw camp?**

No, it isn't close.

**What about the police station?**

No, it isn't close.

**What [about] the KNLA camp?**

No, it isn't close.

**Have the Tatmadaw been to your village?**

Yes, they came. They came within this [past] year. They said that they were mistaken and they shot my husband.

**What month was it?**

It was five [months] ago. He spent three months in hospital.

**Did they shoot your husband by mistake?**

[When] they came and stayed, right?

**Can you tell me who?**

People said they were the Border Guard. They came and stayed. There is a school in front of *A Daw's*<sup>4</sup> house. They stayed there. It was the night of *Ta Khon Ng'Tah Bpyah*<sup>5</sup> [Thief's Day]. I am not sure, but I guess it was the first day of November and there was a full moon. People in the village were boiling rice and villagers came and delivered boiled rice to my house, so I invited them to come and drink here. After I gave them food, they said that they would go and sleep outside, so they went outside. *A Daw* was fearful when they stayed [in the house]. I was going to go sleep at my parent-in-laws' house because I was worried that I wouldn't know where to run if people [the KNLA] came [and

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<sup>3</sup> All conversion estimates for the Kyat in this interview are based on the fluctuating informal exchange rate rather than the government's official fixed rate of 6.5 kyat to US \$1. As of January 26<sup>th</sup> 2012, this unofficial rate of exchange was US \$1 = 770 kyat. This figure is used for all calculations above.

<sup>4</sup> In this section of the interview the interviewee refers to herself in the third person as '*A Daw*', meaning 'aunt' in Burmese.

<sup>5</sup> This is a Burmese term, which is used, particularly in rural areas to refer to a traditional event called 'Thief's Day' during which people make jokes and play pranks on each other, like hiding their shoes or other belongings. This event is also called '*Kyi Ma Noe*' Festival in urban areas and is akin to the Western 'April Fool's Day'.

started] shooting. They said: “A Daw, *sleep at your house. We will go out and sleep outside.*” So A Daw slept at her house. At about 10:00 pm, I heard gunfire. What happened? Why were they firing? My husband and I stayed and listened to the gunfire. They fired at the entrance of the village. They fired a gun and mortars. I ran down. My husband also ran down to the *kan nan* [waterfront]. I told him not to go back there. He was worried about his cows that he had fastened at the front of the house [because on Thief’s Day, it is legal to hide other people’s belongings]. The gunfire had stopped when he got back [to the house]. After he had finished eating betelnut in the house, he climbed down from the house. The moon was shining brightly. He was standing in front of the house, wearing a white undershirt with a longyi. You could see it because the moon was shining. From the place that they [the Border Guard] were staying, they swore and fired. He looked at them and thought about what was happening. They could see him but they fired. He shouted: “*Civilian, civilian!*” but they fired and the bullets came [down] like heavy rain in front of him. He was hit. A Daw didn’t know [that he was shot]. I stayed at the *kan nan* [waterfront] but a neighbour called: “A Ma [*Sister*], U Ht--- [*husband’s name*] was shot here.” I fell unconscious. My son brought his father up to the house. He didn’t let me see. There was a *Saya Ma* [literally ‘female teacher’, in this case meaning female medic] at home. They sent him to O--- hospital but the hospital didn’t accept him so they went to R--- hospital. I went to R--- in the morning.

### **What part of his body was hit?**

He was hit in his calf. His calf muscle and bone had become a chasm [the bone had broken into pieces]. The muscle healed. He had to stay in hospital for over three months. Now, he has to go back to hospital to have his wound seen to. It has already cost over 3,000,000 kyat [US \$3,896.10]. 3,800,000 kyat [US \$4,935.06] is already gone. We don’t have the money to go there again.

### **Who do you mean by ‘they’ [the people who shot at him]? Was it the Border Guard or the Tatmadaw?**

‘They’ are the Border Guard soldiers. They didn’t come to see [him] to give [him] a stipend [compensation or support]. People asked them whether they would give [him] a stipend or not and they said: “*No, we won’t give.*” The Tatmadaw came to see [my husband] at the hospital. They investigated [asked him questions about] who did the shooting. I told them that the Border Guard had shot him. They just investigated [things]. [He] got no support.

### **So it happened at the end of 2010?**

Yes, it was in *Ta Saung Mon* [November], on *Ng’Tah Bpyah* [Thief’s] night.

### **Did they [the Border Guard] come in 2011?**

They came. There are teak trees in our village. They came to steal the teak trees. I don’t know. Villagers came and told the village head: “[*Do*] you know people come and cut the teak [*trees*] there?” He went to see who it was. It was Thaw M’Nah<sup>6</sup>. He [the village

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<sup>6</sup> Thaw M’Nah was described as the Battalion Deputy Commander of DKBA Battalion #1 in Brigade #333 in the previous KHRG report “Villagers responses to forced labour, torture and other demands in Thaton District,” KHRG, October 2008. As of September 2010, most DKBA Battalions had transformed to Border Guard Battalions within the Tatmadaw command and salary structure, with the notable exception of DKBA Battalion #999, also known as Brigade 5, which re-commenced resistance against government troops in Dooplaya and Pa’an Districts, following the November 2010 election, and subsequently signed a ceasefire

head] gathered the villagers to go to tell them [not to cut the trees], but they were too afraid to say [that] because they [the Border Guard soldiers] have guns. So they came back.

**Where are the teak trees, at the village entrance?**

Yes, they are at the entrance to the village, in front of the school.

**Have they done [any] other things in the village?**

They haven't come and done anything to the village since the incident that happened to your uncle [the interviewee's husband]. But they came and demanded money. They said that their livelihoods aren't doing well. They came and demanded 100,000 kyat [US \$129.87] after we left the hospital.

**When was that?**

It was when we left the hospital. We stayed in the hospital for over three months, so it was in the fourth month.

**Did you know who demanded the money?**

It was [Battalion Deputy Commander] Thaw M'Nah.

**So only the Border Guard is active in your village?**

Yes,

**What other things do they demand? For example, bamboo poles, logs or thatch shingles?**

They haven't demanded those things

**Did the Tatmadaw come in 2009 and 2010?**

Yes, they did.

**What did they do when they came?**

They stayed in the village on their patrol. We bought [food for them] when they didn't have food.

**Didn't they buy [food] themselves?**

They had rice. We gave them things like chilli and fish paste. We didn't take money from them. We gave [them] what we had.

**Was it like a donation?**

Yes.

**Did they loot chickens, pigs, and ducks from villagers?**

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agreement in November 2011. See "DKBA Brigade 5 Reaches Ceasefire with Naypyidaw," *The Irrawaddy*, November 4th 2011.

They didn't ask for those things.

**Did they arrest porters?**

No, they didn't.

**Have the KNLA been to your village?**

No, they haven't. Maybe I was on a trip [when they came].

**Who is the leader of the Border Guard?**

Thaw M'Nah.

**What religions do people follow in your village?**

Buddhism. There is a monastery.

**How many years ago was the monastery built?**

[It was built] a long time ago, when I was a child.

**Are there Christians, Hindus and Muslims?**

No.

**Do villagers have freedom to worship?**

Yes, they do.

**Is there a school in your village?**

Yes, there is. The school goes up to the eighth standard. There are eight school teachers.

**Are they from the government or the villagers?**

They are from the government. All of them were appointed by the government.

**How is food managed for them?**

They can't buy enough food with their salary. We treat them as a part of the family. We buy fish for them. We go and check what they have to eat. We invite them to come and eat at home. We buy rice for them.

**Does the government provide some rice for them?**

No, the government doesn't. Only villagers who understand [the teachers' situation] as I [do] provide support. We buy curry for them out of goodwill.

**How much is their salary?**

I don't know. I haven't asked them.

**Does the government donate notebooks and other school materials?**

No, there are no such things.

**So, do you have to buy everything?**

Yes.

**Can children whose parents can't afford to send them to school, go to school for free?**

No.

**What do children who parents can't send them to school do?**

They don't go to school. There is no support.

**In some schools, the government provides materials, like flags. Does the government provide [that] to the schools here?**

I haven't gone to look.

**How many students are [there] at the school?**

There are about 300 students.

**Do they have a chance to go to school freely [without disruptions due to fighting]?**

Yes, they do.

**Do the teachers spend enough time teaching their students?**

Yes, they do.

**Is there a clinic in your village?**

Yes, there is a clinic.

**When was the clinic built?**

The clinic is located in front of my house. The clinic was built three years ago. The villagers built the clinic.

**Does the government provide anything?**

The government provides a medic.

**Did the government provide money for the building?**

No.

**So, villagers built it by themselves.**

We built it for the *Saya Ma* [female medic] to stay [in].

**Do villagers get medical treatment for free?**

There are free treatments, and some people pay money.

**How do they divide it?**

She doesn't take money when villagers don't have any. People who have money give it to her.

**Does the medic have to buy medicine or does the government provide it for free?**

She has to buy medicine.

**Doesn't the government provide [it]?**

The government provides medicine for children. I don't know if they [actually] provide it because I haven't asked. Some people pay but most people don't pay. She has been complaining [about that].

**[There is] only one [medic]?**

Yes.

**Male or female?**

Female.

**Where is she from?**

She is from E---

**How many years has it been [since] the government appointed her there?**

Since last year. It has already [been] over one year.

**Where are patients sent if the illness is serious and they can't be treated in the village?**

They're sent to the closest hospital, in O---. If O--- doesn't accept them, they're sent to R---.

**What is the distance between your village and O---?**

We have to go by *set hlay* [literally 'machine boat', meaning a motorboat]. It takes about an hour.

**How much does it cost when you go to O--- each time?**

You have to bring money with you. You can't get [treated for] free. You must bring at least 100,000 kyat [US \$129.87]

**If they can't cure you in O---, do you have to go to R---?**

Yes. It costs more.

**How much does it cost for a normal patient who doesn't need an operation or other [treatment]?**

You have to hire a car and [pay] the medicine costs. I know because I have stayed in the hospital.

**How much does it cost each time for a normal patient?**

They don't go to hospital. They go to the clinic and it costs 40,000 or 50,000 kyat [US \$51.95 or \$64.94].

**What about a patient who has to have an operation?**

It would cost a lot.

**How much did it cost for your husband?**

The operation day [itself] cost over 600,000 kyat [US \$779.22]. [That was] only for the operation day.

**So how much did it cost while your husband was in the hospital?**

Now, it cost 3,200,000 kyat [US \$4155.84]. After we came home, we had to go back [to hospital] again and again. We had to buy medicine. One packet of medicine cost 4,800 kyat [US \$6.23] but there are only four pills in the packet. We had to buy it. Now, there is 3,800,000 kyat [US \$4,935.06] [of expenses recorded] in my notebook. Now we don't have [any] money left so we can't go. We'll have to [just] go and show up [at the hospital].

**The government doesn't [provide] any support?**

I'm unhappy for that reason. I look at the patient [her husband] and I feel pity.

**What illnesses do villagers commonly face?**

One illness is dengue hemorrhagic fever, but the *Saya Ma* gave [the villagers] vaccinations so it doesn't happen a lot. It happened in the past. After the *Saya Ma* came, she gave vaccinations for dengue hemorrhagic fever and measles, so the illnesses don't affect people.

**We heard that a company came and did gold-mining in other areas. Does this exist around your village?**

No.

**What businesses do villagers do in your village?**

There is no business to do. We don't have [any] money to move to the city. We don't have money, so we stay in our village. My children tell me again and again since their father was shot: "*You just want to stay in a taw [rural area]? Why don't you go and live in the city?*" What will you do for your livelihood when you go and live in the city? It's free to stay in our village. In the city, you can eat when you have money, but you can't eat when you don't have money.

**So what do villagers do to earn their livelihoods and to earn money?**

They cut bamboo, carry *htin*, harvest peanuts and harvest paddy for other people.

**How much can you earn per day when you harvest paddy for other people?**

[For] one day [you earn] 2,500 kyat [US \$3.25]. [If] planting paddy in the rainy season [you're] also paid 2,500 kyat per day.

**Do some villagers work on plantations?**

Yes, they are also failing.

**What do people plant in their cultivated land?**

They plant round beans and *bpeh bpoh* [literally 'rotten beans'].

**Do they have enough to sell?**

Yes, they can sell at the beginning [during the first months after the harvest]. Now they can't sell [because people don't buy].

**How much can you sell a basket of those beans [for]?**

You can sell for 21,000 kyat [US \$27.27] at the beginning [the first months following the harvest], but [later] you can sell it for [only] 12,000 kyat [US \$15.58].

**Do you plant peanuts?**

No, I don't plant peanuts because they fail.

**What is the amount of peanuts produced in the whole village?**

It depends on each person. If they plant many, they get many. If they plant a little, they get a little.

**How many people do this work in your village?**

There are five people. Only people who have land can do it.

**Aren't there any other jobs to earn money?**

No.

**Like planting vegetables, etc?**

Yes, they do plant [things] like gourds, eggplants, corn and morning glory. They can sell those things.

**Do they sell [things] in the village?**

They will *a'kywin kyat* [have to sell things on credit] if they sell [things] in our village, so they go and sell things in O---.

**How much do you earn in one day if you go and sell [things]?**

You will get 3,000, 4,000 or 5,000 kyat [US \$3.90, 5.19, or 6.49]. One *viss*<sup>7</sup> of eggplant is 600 kyat [US \$0.78]. One *viss* of *bpeh thee* [*long beans*] is 500 kyat [US \$0.65]. We have to buy rice, oil and salt.

**What is the price of rice?**

I know don't how much you have to pay for a bowl. We have paddy, so I don't know the price.

**Can you guess how much?**

It would be 800 kyat [US \$1.04] for a bowl.

**Can villagers survive on their incomes?**

They face difficulties.

**Now, the new government is in power in our country and a president was appointed. What is your opinion of the new government? How much do you trust them? Can you tell me what your opinion is? They said that this is a civilian government and they have already confirmed it. Do you totally trust them?**

What can I say about them? I don't have a connection with them, so I don't know. I just think about what and how I will eat. Is that right? I don't ask them about what they do. It is not our job.

**You are a civilian. You can say what you have on your mind about the new government. Are they really a civilian government? Or did they get in power by malpractice. Are they trustworthy?**

They are *a ku ta myo, nout ta myo* [literally meaning 'one kind now, another kind later' meaning what they say now and what they do later will be different].

**If you look at after they got into power- fighting happened on the Thai-Burma border, in Shan state. Based on that event, what would you guess? Is the government good?**

I can't guess.

**Is it representative of a civilian government, or what kind of government?**

I don't know.

**What else do you want to say or give comment on? You can say if you have [anything else to say].**

I just want my husband to become well and able to walk. We have problems with money for going back to the hospital. I feel unhappy. My family also feels sorry for him. He has needed to go back to hospital for one week now, but we don't have money. My sons carry and sell firewood and paddy. All the money is spent on their father. He has to buy medicine. I feel very sad.

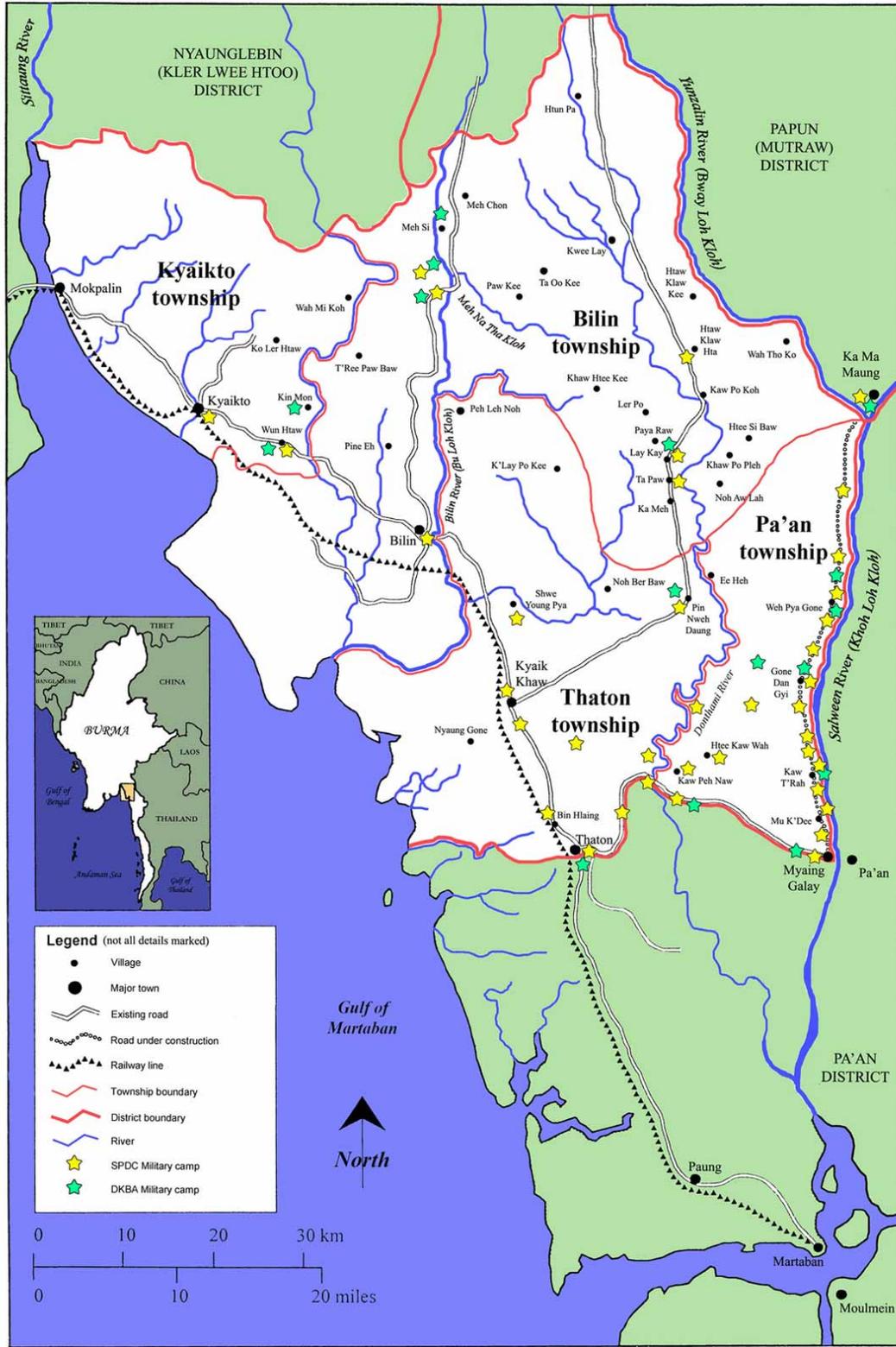
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<sup>7</sup> A *viss* is a unit of weight equivalent to 1.6 kg. / 3.52 lb.

Further background on the current situation in Thaton District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- “Thaton Situation Update: Thaton Township, August 2011,” (January 2012)
- “Incident report: Four villagers forced to guide Tatmadaw troops in Thaton District,” (January 2012)
- “Thaton Interview: Naw L---, February 2011,” (January 2012)
- “Thaton Situation Update: June to October 2011,” (November 2011)
- “Thaton Situation Updates: May 2010 to January 2011,” (May 2011)

# Thaton (Doo Tha Htoo) District



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