



News Bulletin

October 11, 2013 / KHRG #13-1-S1

Thaton Situation Update: Kyeh Htoh and Bilin Townships, November to December 2012

This situation update describes events occurring in Kyeh Htoh and Bilin Townships, Thaton District between November and December 2012, including the closure of schools due to flu outbreak, ongoing militarization and economic migration.

- *During this time, many villagers contracted the flu, which forced local schools to close and temporarily disrupted villager access to education. In addition, communities experienced food shortages due to flooding from rain and pests that ate the crops. The shortage caused some villagers to leave their village and migrate to Bangkok for work in order to support their families.*
 - *Despite the ceasefire with the KNU, the Tatmadaw have reinforced their army camps at Lay Kay and Ta Paw. The community member reported that villagers are now able to pursue their livelihood without disruptions; nevertheless, villagers also expressed concern that fighting will resume.*
 - *In Thaton District, the National League for Democracy (NLD) has been campaigning and recruiting villagers to join their campaign, rather than supporting the Burma government or the KNU.*
-

Situation Update | Kyeh Htoh and Bilin Townships, Thaton District (November to December 2012)

The following situation update was written by a community member in Thaton District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It was submitted to KHRG in January 2013, and is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This report was received along with other information from Thaton District, including two incident reports, two interviews and 10 photographs.²

¹ KHRG trains community members 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 writing situation updates, community members are encouraged to summarise recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important, and present their opinions or perspective on abuse and other local dynamics in their area.

² 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 2013. In the meantime, KHRG's most recently-published field information from Thaton District can be found in the report, "Persistent forced labour demands stop in six villages in Bilin Township as of September 2012," KHRG, July 2013.

Disease, food shortages, school closures and Tatmadaw threats: Thaton District situation update from November 1st 2012 to December 31st 2012

Thaton District is located near an urban area and flatland, so the problems that happen have to do with diseases, food [shortages], education and government military [Tatmadaw] threats. Especially in this year, the most common disease that each village in our district has to face is the flu. After the disease spreads into a village, even the school has to close due to the students getting sick, one by one. When the villagers suffer the disease, they buy medicine in shops. For some people who live near a clinic, they go and get medicine from the clinic.

There was lots of rain this year, so farmers have had to deal with problems, as paddy [farms] flooded. There were many new flat farms planted, so many paddies died. There is a lot of damage, so it can easily cause problems. The problems happened on both sides of the Ba Naw *klo* [river]. Moreover, the paddies were also eaten by rats, so only a little paddy was produced.

In our area, because the paddy was not good due to flooding, there was a food shortage, so many young people in every village had to go and work in Bangkok. In this year, one big tin of rice costs 6,500 kyat (US \$7.49)³ and one basket of rice husk costs 3,000 kyat (US \$3.46). A rice sack that comes from a Burmese town includes two baskets of rice and costs 25,000 kyat (US \$28.01); it is not soft rice. Nowadays, 80%⁴ of civilians depend on the rice sacks that come from town.

Due to the ceasefire⁵ process, some villagers are happy because they said that they can go and sleep in the places they work. There is freedom to work, and we can now also see that there are many rubber plantations. Some people use chemicals to kill grass, some cut grass by themselves, and some hire people to cut it for them. [This caused] a problem for the people who graze cows and buffaloes. Women and children said that they cannot find firewood as easily as they might have in the past. Now, there are a lot of rubber plantation orchards, so to get firewood, we have to go about an hour away. There will be problems with [accessing] firewood in the future.

After the ceasefire talk, the villagers mostly work in freedom, so they are very happy. However, they also worry that conflict will happen again.

In December, the Burmese government military came and built a road from P'Nweh Klah to K'Ter Tee [villages]. In this year, due to the ceasefire, there is no disturbance [fighting]

³ As of March 14th 2013, all conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the official market rate of 868 kyat to the US \$1.

⁴ This number is the community member's estimate, which is based on their knowledge and experience within the community.

⁵ The ceasefire agreement signed between the KNU and Burma government officials on January 12th 2011 in Hpa-an Town, was an agreement in principle on '11 key points', to be followed by more in-depth talks after 45 days. Senior KNU officials had since announced that the deadline of 45 days was unlikely to be met; see: "KNU ceasefire meeting with government behind schedule," Karen News, February 23rd 2012. Meanwhile, as-yet-unpublished KHRG information received on February 19th 2012, suggests that there have been clashes between government forces and non-state armed groups in Hpa-an District in February 2012 and that recent re-supply operations carried out by Tatmadaw forces in Nyaunglebin District exceeded the amount of supplies usually sent, and included heavy artillery. Local media sources have also reported ongoing fighting in Hpa-an and Nyaunglebin Districts since January 12th 2012; see: "Killings and attacks between DKBA and BGF drives villagers from their homes," Karen News, February 24th 2012; "Ceasefires, Continued Attacks and a Friendly Encounter Between Enemies," Free Burma Rangers, February 3rd 2012.

and they also don't ask villagers [to work for them]. They came with bulldozers and soldiers, and did it [built the road] by themselves. Some villagers' work places were near the road, so they stopped their work because they worried that they would be arrested. They made the vehicle road, but they did not do it properly. Currently, they still are sending their food [ration resupply]. In this dry season, we heard that some villagers said that they [Tatmadaw] will build a vehicle road up to Lay Kay [village]. They are building the road from Kyeh Kaw to P'Nweh Klah.

Another thing in 2012, there is one disease that is called the flu, and it happens once a month. If it reaches a village, even schools have to close because many children [are sick] and not cured. Mostly, the villagers buy medicine from shops. For people who stay near a clinic that a healthcare worker has opened, they go to the clinic. Some meet with Backpack health workers [Back Pack Health Worker Team (BPHWT)]. Because [people] come from Yangon and Hpa-an⁶ and give malaria medicine and check villagers, they [villagers] understand about medicine.

On January 7th or 8th, many cows and buffaloes died suddenly. It started from Htee Ther Lay, Htee Law Thee Hta, and now to Htaw Klaw Hkee. The villagers had to close their animal farms.

In Kyet Htoh Township, Hku La Poo village, K'Per Hkee village tract, in October, the NLD [National League for Democracy] came and asked villagers to join their campaign. They also told villagers that, "*If you believe [in the NLD], don't give anything [financial support] to the Government or the KNU as well.*" We know that there are 30 households in Hku La Poo village and there are 20 households that already joined the NLD campaign.

Due to the upcoming dry season, more companies have come to work, such as gold and stone-mining companies in Bilin Township.

Due to the ceasefire, the villagers hope that the Government military will withdraw back [out of the Karen areas]. However, if we look at Yo Klah camp, they [Tatmadaw troops] have not withdrawn. Instead, they improved it and widened their fences. They removed a monastery and widened their camp on the other side. Lay Kay camp was also improved, as well as Ta Paw camp. There is a ceasefire in this year and they [soldiers] dare to cut bamboo for themselves, so they do not force villagers.

There are many armed groups in Thaton District. They are the Burma government military, the *Pyit Thu Sit* [people's militia], the BGF [Border Guard Force] and the KNLA [Karen National Library Army]. For the KNLA, Battalion #1 is in Hpa-an Township, Battalion #2 is in Th'Htoo Township, KNDO [Karen National Defence Organization] Battalion #2 is in Kyeh Htoh Township and the protection column is in Bilin Township. In Kyeh Htoh Township, the *Pyit Thu Sit* is located in every village; there is no *Pyit Thu Sit* in other townships.

The BGF are based in Hpa-an Township in Khoh Loh Nee Hkoh [village]. In Bilin, [their base] is in Bu Nee Hkoh [village]. For the Government military, LID [Light Infantry Division] #44, [under] LID Commander Kin Maw Than is based in P'Nweh Klah camp; the G3 [ranking commander] is That Maung. LIB [Light Infantry Battalion] #9, [under] Battalion Commander Ko Ko Lwin and Deputy Battalion Commander Shwe Lah Cho, is also based in P'Nweh Klah camp. LIB #207, [under] Battalion Commander Maung Maung Win, is based in Lay Kay camp.

⁶As of January 2013, KHRG began to use the common spelling for "Hpa-an" District to reflect the standardized transliteration developed in 2012; past KHRG reports used "Pa'an."

LIB #118, [under] Battalion Commander Myo Min La, is based in Meh Pray Hkee camp. Deputy Battalion Commander Soe Myit Thin is based in Yo Klah camp. They are active on the vehicle road as they received permission from the KNLA. They started to repair and widen Yo Klah camp on December 14th 2012.

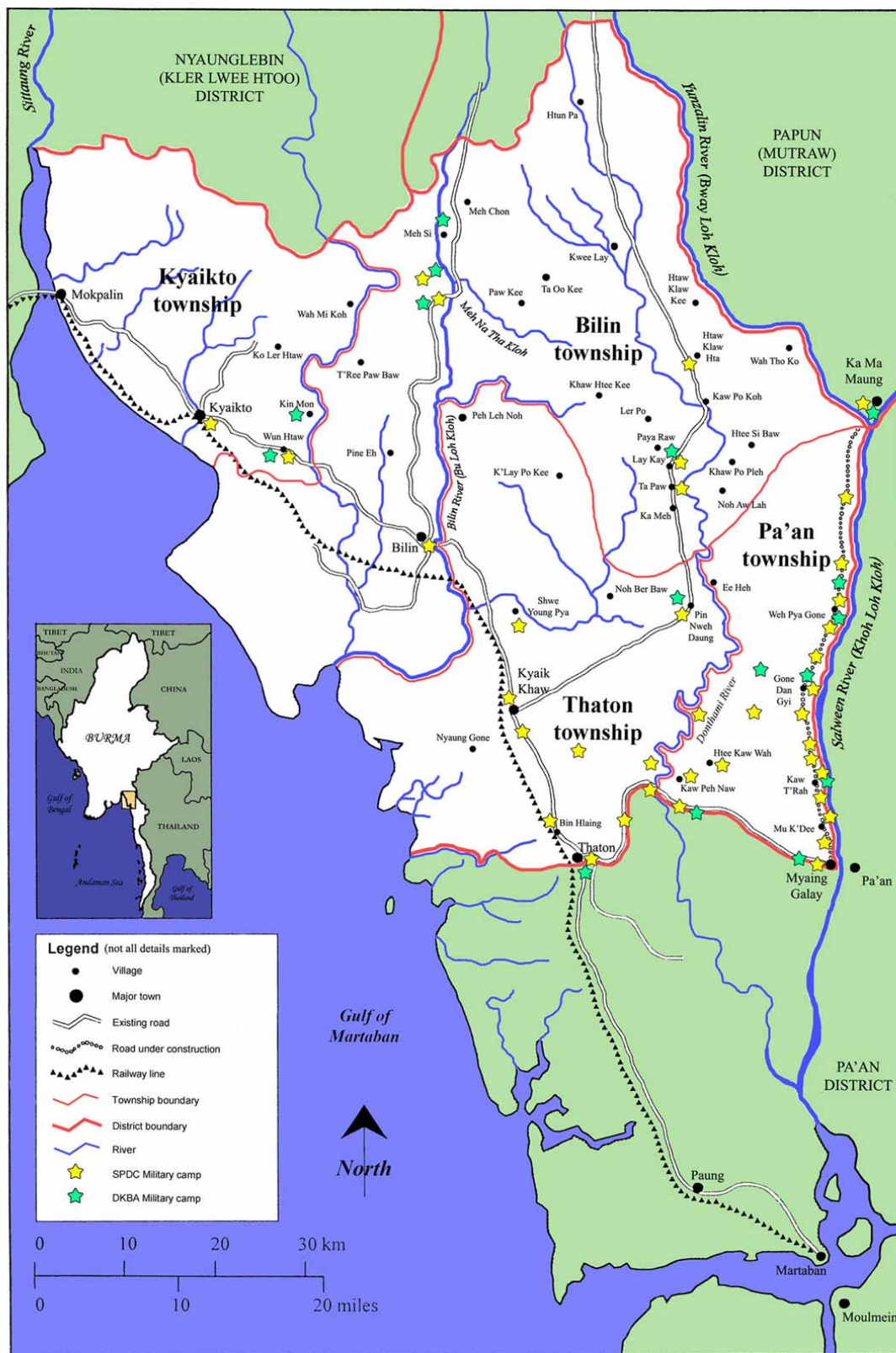
In every township in Thaton District, the civilians are worried conflict will happen and they are afraid that wealthy people will come to confiscate their lands and plant rubber [trees]. We also see that the villagers are stronger in speaking [out] than in the past.

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

Further reading:

- “Persistent forced labour demands stop in six villages in Bilin Township as of September 2012,” (July, 2013)
- “Thaton Photo Set: Gold mining in Bilin Township, January 2013,” (June 2013)
- “BGF Battalion #1014 forced labour and forced recruitment,” April to May 2012, (May 2013)
- “Thaton Situation Update: Hpa-an Township, January to June 2012,” (May 2013)
- “Incident Report: Forced recruitment in Thaton District #2,” May 2012, (May 2012)

Thaton (Doo Tha Htoo) District



©Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), 2005