



## News Bulletin

December 20, 2013 / KHRG #13-78-S1

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## Thaton Situation Update: Hpa-an, Thaton and Bilin townships, January to July 2013

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*This Situation Update describes events occurring in Thaton District between January and July 2013, including forced labour for a development project, land confiscation and increased local opportunities for education and healthcare during the ceasefire process.*

- *Villagers were ordered to clear rubber plantations for a joint project between BGF #1014 and the Shwe Tha Lwin and Hein Naing Win companies; villagers were paid 2,000 kyat per day for their labour, but had to pay 2,000 kyat to the BGF if unable to work.*
  - *The Burma government gave permission to Win Hlaing and Thaug Htin to cultivate 500 acres of rubber plantations in a protected forest area; villagers who previously worked there now have to pay 50,000 kyat to obtain a land grant to work the land.*
  - *In February, the KNU gave permission to the Ko Cho/Maung Maung Yi company to mine gold on the Boo Loh River on the condition that the company will give 11 million kyat per month to the KNU; drilling has encroached upon villagers' work places and negatively impacted the environment.*
  - *Starting in January, Max Myanmar started building three schools and one clinic, however, villagers reported that no medics or medicine have been brought to the clinic.*
  - *In March 2013, actor Wai Lu Kyaw came to Thaton District to discuss regional development projects with the local KNU leadership. Wai Lu Kyaw would like to provide education, health, and solar powered electricity training to young people in the area.*
  - *Villagers' expressed concerns regarding the Burma government increasing its sovereignty over local villages by establishing a leader for every 10 households and one head leader for every one hundred households. The villagers believe this is a strategy of the Burma government to collect more votes in the 2015 election.*
  - *Over the past year, villagers acknowledge increased access to better schools with material support for the students from the Karen Education Department and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund.*
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## Situation Update | Hpa-an, Thaton and Bilin Township, Thaton District (January to July 2013)

*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 is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

## The situation update from January to July 2013

### Villagers face problems after the ceasefire

Since the ceasefire, a lot of private businessmen and companies have entered the area [Hpa-an, Thaton and Bilin townships]. These people come and carry out long-term agriculture (long-term crop projects), mine natural resources and work on infrastructure development such as vehicle roads, bridges, schools and clinics. This work impacts villagers' livelihood in some areas.

In March 2013, BGF [Border Guard Force] Battalion #1014 and the cooperating companies, Shwe Tha Lwin Company and Hein Naing Win Company, ordered villagers to clear the vegetation in their rubber plantations that they planted in 2012. They still order villagers. The villages that they order are: a big part of P--- and a small part of P---, R---, C---, B---, D---, Y--- and Z--- villages. They [Shwe Tha Lwin and Hein Naing Win Company] pay the villagers who they order 2,000 kyat (US \$2.06)<sup>2</sup> per day. One person per household has to go and if they cannot go, they have to pay 2,000 kyat to the BGF. The villagers that have to go and work for the BGF are located in Meh K'Na Hkee village tract and Weh Pya village tract, Hpa-an Township, Thaton District. The location where they had to go and work was in between Meh K'Na Hkee and Hpa Paw [village tracts]. Regarding this rubber plantation, the KNU-KNLA [Karen National Union-Karen National Liberation Army] Peace Council leaders discussed and decided not to give permission [to the BGF and companies] to work on it anymore. They gave orders to the township leaders and brigade leaders to prohibit it decisively, but it could not be forbidden. The BGF soldiers always guard [the rubber plantations]. One of the township leaders from Hpa-an Township reported that fighting might happen if people go and destroy the plants.

### Rubber plantations

Since the ceasefire, many companies and rich people entered and planted rubber plantations. Some of the rubber plantations included villagers' land and villagers had to sell their land. Some villagers had to give up [their land without compensation] because of the explicit threats. Individual rich people, Win Hlaing and Thauung Htin, went to request the land from the [Burma government] in order to work on the land for 30 years, and the Burma government gave them permission to work in the Paw Kyoh Weh and Hpah Paw protected forest areas, which are located in S--- village, T--- village and H--- village. There is a total of 500 acres of land [that were granted by the Burma government to the individual rich people]. The Burma government [department] that leases the location for them [the business people] did not come and investigate the information systematically, so it [the land that was leased] included many villagers' work places. People, whose land is included in the area where it was leased for the rich people, have to pay 50,000 kyat (US \$51.60) to redeem their land. If the land is one acre wide, they have to pay 50,000 kyat, and if the land is 10 acres wide, they will also have to pay 50,000 kyat. If they do not redeem their land [grant], they cannot get their land back. Therefore, the villagers reported to the KNU government in order to get back their land and the people [KNU] who are in charge could only solve the problem for them as the rich people do [demanded the villagers redeem their land for 50,000 kyat]. So, villagers who do not have money had to forfeit their land. Nowadays, mostly the rich people report land as uncultivated and the Government gives many of them permission [to work on the land] as reported on above. The issue started in 2005 and it happens more and more.

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<sup>2</sup> As of October 8<sup>th</sup> 2013, all conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the official market rate of 968.99 kyat to the US \$1.

## **Production of mineral resources**

Starting on February 4<sup>th</sup> 2013, the company named Ko Cho/Maung Maung Yi arrived and placed a boat in the Boo Loh River. They placed six boats from Baw Paw Hta to See Koh in order to start [mining] gold. They asked permission from the KNU government and they were given permission by the local business committee. The location is Ee Hkoo Hkee and P'Da Daw village tract, Bilin Township, Thaton District. The boats that mine gold are given permission to mine for six months and one boat has to pay 11 million [kyat] (US \$11,352) per month as a tax to the KNU. Because of the monsoon season and because the Ko Cho/Maung Maung company did not want to pay the tax, work stopped after one month. Regarding this gold mining, they [Ko Cho/Maung Maung company] produced gold in Boo Loh River and they drilled the sand from the river and dumped [the sand] on the top of the steep bank, which covers villagers' work places and damages the environment.

## **Regional development project**

From January to June 2013, we saw a company [called] Max Myanmar arrive and carry out village development [projects] related to health and education in many villages. We do not know if they got permission from the Burma government. But on the KNU side, we know that they got permission, so they entered and did it [the development project]. The locations and villages where they carry it out are in the villages in Thaton Township and Hpa-an Township. On May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2013, they started building one primary school and one clinic in Wa Poo village, Neh Hpaw Hta village tract, Th'Htoo [Thaton] Township. They are still in the process of building it [the school]. On May 6<sup>th</sup> 2013, they also started building up one kindergarten school in Neh Hpaw Hta village. In 2012, they also built up one middle school and one clinic in T'Maw Daw village and they finished in May 2013. There is no medicine or medics in the clinic. People do not know anything yet about whether the Government will come and assign [medics and medicines] in the future, or who they [Max Myanmar Company] will select to come and assign them [medics]. In Hpa-an Township, Zin Yaung Htun Taung Company came and built up one clinic in Ee Heh village. They started building it [the clinic] on February 16<sup>th</sup> 2013 and they are finished now. The villagers are very happy because the clinic has been built for them and they believe that if they are sick, they can access the medicine freely. Though the clinic has been built, there is still silence [no one has started work in the clinic]. The villagers are hopeless because nothing can be seen in the clinic and there are no medics.

## **The situation of actor Wai Lu Kyaw**

In March 2013, the actor Wai Lu Kyaw came and met with one of the local KNLA intelligence [officers]. They met and discussed the issue about whether it is possible for them to enter and carry out regional development projects such as education, health and running electricity projects in Thaton District. Regarding these issues, in the township permanent committee meeting on April 6<sup>th</sup> 2013, this leader raised this issue and the permanent committee congress decided to accept Wai Lu Kyaw's project. The projects that they will do are: 1) Education. He would like to select Karen people from the mountain ranges who finished at least 10<sup>th</sup> Standard<sup>3</sup>, and then support them to study at a university for two years before returning to help their village. He did not say anything about the number of students who would be selected. It will depend on what can be organized. 2) Health. He also would like to select Karen people on the mountain ranges who finished 10<sup>th</sup> Standard and ask [support] them to go to study [attend medical

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<sup>3</sup> This refers to the 10<sup>th</sup> school grade in the Burmese school system.

training] in the city for one year, before going back and looking after things in their village. 3) Electricity. He would like to select Karen people who finished at least four standards to attend the solar electric power training in order to study to be skillful and [the purpose] is for the villages to build access to electricity. If people can find [money] for them and if they start studying, he told them that they would be given the salary of 80,000 to 100,000 kyat (US \$82.56 to \$103.20) per month. However, until now, we have not seen anything about the reality of his projects.

### **Burma government increases its reign in our area**

The Burma government has also increased its sovereignty in almost every village tract and township. We have known that they already established all village tract administrators on the flat land, in the lower areas. But for Bilin Township, because it is located close to the mountain range, they could not establish it [sovereignty] in the villages and village tracts of the upper areas. The [administrative] structures that were established were a village tract administrator, a secretary and an accountant, these three people. They provide salary to one village tract administrator with 70,000 kyat (US \$72.24) per month, and 40,000 kyat (US \$41.28) for the office expenditures, in total 110,000 kyat (US \$113.52). But for the secretary and accountant, they do not provide the salary for these positions. They asked the three people that they selected to go to a training in the city. The training is about land policy and forestry policy. Another thing, they [Burma government officials] have also established a leader for every 10 households and one head leader for every one hundred households in this area. The Burma government has established the sovereignty like this to get more votes for the 2015 election.

### **Education condition**

During this year, starting from January to July, regarding education, we have seen that the schools became better and there are more schools because the Burma government and companies came and started doing the projects. The school materials come from the KED [Karen Education Department] and go to the students' parents. The assistance is a relief for the parents. And also, UNICEF [United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund], which came along through the Burma government, also supports the students in primary school, which is related to the Government, [and] they supported one backpack, 10 notebooks and 1,000 kyat (US \$1.03) for each student. The schools that are not related to the Government schools are never supported.

### **Conclusion**

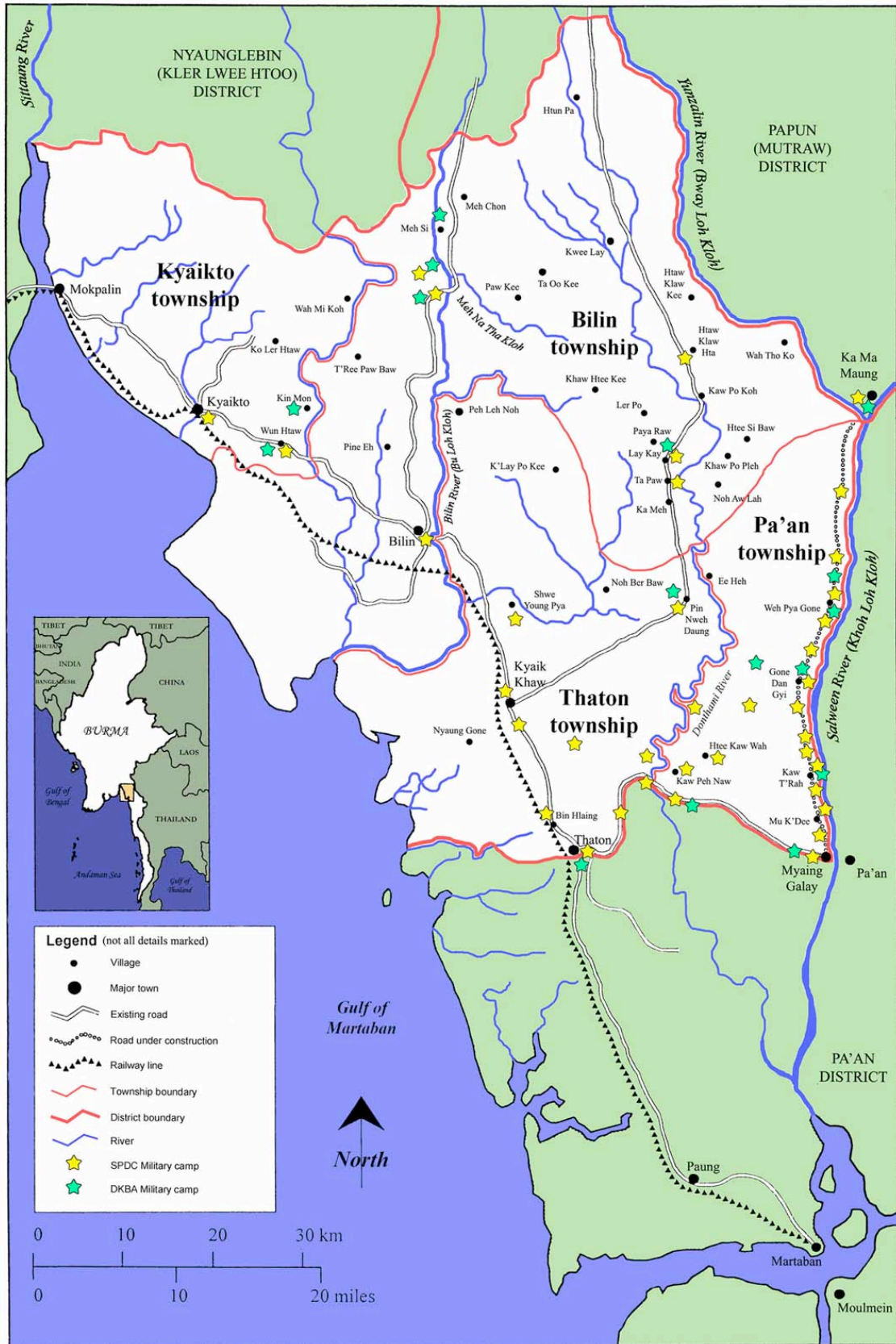
Regarding this report that I wrote, we went in to the area and experienced this for ourselves, and some villagers who had to suffer things told us and we collected and compiled all the information in the situation update above. In some cases, because we did not get the full issue, it will require the readers to think more. It depends on the situation. Nowadays, the situation and information are not as apparent as in the past.

Further reading:

- "Thaton Situation Update: Kyeh Htoh and Bilin Townships, November to December 2012," (October 2013)
- "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)

# Thaton (Doo Tha Htoo) District



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