



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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Thaton Situation Update: Bilin Township, February to April 2016

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Bilin Township, Thaton District, during the period between February and April 2016, including drugs, healthcare, development, military activity, and villagers concerns .

- *Drug use has increased in Bilin Township, particularly among young people. Local authorities have not taken any action against drug trafficking, and villagers are concerned that drugs will continue to impact children and youth in the area.*
 - *Clinics were built in Thaton District, however, one clinic that was built in Eu--- village has yet to open. Thus, villagers still cannot access healthcare services from this clinic. Since the clinic is empty, the villagers offered an old grandfather with no home to live in the clinic.*
 - *Community development projects were implemented throughout Thaton District. Bridge Asia Japan (BAJ) organisation built schools, and the Japanese Nippon Foundation distributed paddy rice and solar panels in some villages.*
 - *Military activity did not increase in Thaton District between February and April. However, the Tatmadaw's on-going presence in some villages causes villagers to feel insecure and fear for their safety.*
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Situation Update | Bilin Township, Thaton District (February to April 2016)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in May 2016. It 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.¹ This report was received along with other information from Thaton District, including 70 photographs and six video clips.²

¹ KHRG trains community members in southeast Burma/Myanmar 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 southeast Burma/Myanmar, 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. For additional reports categorised by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's website.

Introduction

This Situation Update took place from February 1st to April 1st 2016. The information was documented in Bilin Township, Thaton District. The information in this Situation Update includes drugs, healthcare, development, military activities, and villager's concerns.

Drugs

In terms of drugs, we have seen a lot of drugs coming to many villages in Bilin Township.³ We also have seen that many young people have been secretly using drugs. If you need to buy or sell them you can find them very easily. We have seen that drugs (yaba)⁴ are coming into the village in two ways. The first way they come is through Baw Kyoh Leh, K'Ter Tee and Htaw Klaw Hkee roads. Second way, they are sent on A--- road and go down to B--- [town] and Eu--- [village]. The result is that disease [addiction] has occurred in Eu--- village, D--- village in E--- village, and F--- village in Noh Ber Baw village tract. We have not seen any organisations [authorities] such as the BGF [Border Guard Force],⁵ the KNU [Karen National Union],⁶ the KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army]⁷ or the Tatmadaw [Burma/Myanmar government military]⁸ take any action. Therefore, some villagers have many concerns and they worry that their children and youths will be impacted by drug use in the future.

Healthcare

We have seen that in April [2016], new clinics were constructed in many villages; in Eu---, G--- village, Ta Auh Hkee village tract and P'Yah Raw village, P'Yah Raw village tract and also in other [villages] that I [KHRG researcher] am not able to reach. The people who provided funding and built these clinics are from an organisation known as the Nippon [Foundation].⁹ [In Eu---

³ KHRG continues to receive reports detailing villagers' concerns over increased drug use and drug trading in their communities. See for example ["Growing drug use and its consequences in Dooplaya and Hpa-an Districts, between February and December 2015,"](#) May 2016.

⁴ *Yaba*, which means 'crazy medicine' in Thai, is a tablet form of methamphetamine. First developed in East Asia during the Second World War to enhance soldiers' performance, methamphetamine has become increasingly popular in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Burma/Myanmar where it is typically manufactured. See, [Yaba, the 'crazy medicine' of East Asia](#), UNODC, May 2008; Chapter IV in [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response in Southeast Myanmar since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, June 2014; "Thaton Situation Update: Bilin Township, July to September 2016," KHRG, April 2017; and ["Dooplaya Field Report: A quasi-ceasefire? Developments after the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, from January to December 2016,"](#) KHRG, September 2017.

⁵ Border Guard Force (BGF) battalions of the Tatmadaw were established in 2010, and they are composed mostly of soldiers from former non-state armed groups, such as older constellations of the DKBA, which have formalised ceasefire agreements with the Burma/Myanmar government and agreed to transform into battalions within the Tatmadaw. BGF battalions are assigned four digit battalion numbers, whereas regular Tatmadaw infantry battalions are assigned two digit battalion numbers and light infantry battalions are identified by two or three-digit battalion numbers. For more information, see ["DKBA officially becomes Border Guard Force"](#) *Democratic Voice of Burma*, August 2010, and ["Exploitation and recruitment under the DKBA in Pa'an District,"](#) KHRG, June 2009.

⁶ The Karen National Union is the main Karen group opposing the government.

⁷ The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the KNU.

⁸ Tatmadaw refers to the Myanmar military throughout KHRG's 25 year reporting period. The Myanmar military were commonly referred to by villagers in KHRG research areas as SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council) from 1988 to 1997 and SPDC (State Peace and Development Council) from 1998 to 2011, which were the Tatmadaw-proclaimed names of the military government of Burma. Villagers also refer to Tatmadaw in some cases as simply "Burmese" or "Burmese soldiers".

⁹ [The Nippon Foundation](#) is a Japanese NGO currently implementing social innovation and development projects in Burma/Myanmar. KHRG commonly receives updates from community members on The Nippon Foundation's recent activities in Karen State, see more at ["Nyaunglebin Field Report: Militarisation, land confiscation, violent abuse, 're-relocated' IDPs, landmines, and development projects, December 2015 to December 2016,"](#) October

village] the clinic was already built and the opening ceremony also was already held but until the present time, the lock [on the clinic] has never opened. There are also no medics or patients. The villagers were mainly talking about this clinic. A villager from Eu--- village said that the clinic looks very beautiful but you cannot use it for anything. Villagers in Eu--- village also said that there is no [change], only the clinic has been built and nothing is inside. Therefore, they went to one old grandfather who does not have any relatives to live with, and they asked him to live in the clinic because the grandfather doesn't have any house and he also cannot work.

The Burma/Myanmar government also does not place any health workers in the clinic and the Karen Healthcare Department faces a lack of human resources and faces problems with medicine [supply], therefore, the villagers can only gaze at the clinic. A villager from Eu--- village joked that if you have a headache and you get malaria, if you look at that clinic, then you will recover.

Road construction

A main road is being constructed from P'Nweh Klah to Lay Kay, but until now it has not been completed. Some small bridges were constructed, but many bridges also have not been constructed, therefore, we cannot travel in the rainy season. The people [and companies] who construct the road are U Ye Tun, Kyi Tun and Win Laing (who is from Wa Pa village) and Mo Ze company. Another road also was constructed in Peh Wa Hta, Meh Naw Ther village tract. It passes through Khoh Hpoh Mountain to P'Yah Raw [village]. It was constructed in 2015 and we can travel on it only in summer. [U Ye Tun] has also planned to construct another road starting from Lay Kay village, Lay Kay village tract to Htaw Kla Hpoh Hkee village, Noh Ber Baw village tract, in 2017. The people who take responsibility for implementing this road construction are U Ye Tun Company. All roads which have been constructed were agreed by the KNU and they [oversaw the] construction.

School construction

An organisation called BAJ [Bridge Asia Japan] came to build schools in many villages. They constructed the schools in large villages which have high numbers of villagers. This organisation also installed water for the villagers. If we look at this, it is very useful for the villagers. This year in the summer a water shortage happened because of a heatwave that caused the streams and wells, which are usually used by villagers, to dry up. The villagers did not worry about the water shortage because they received water installations [from BAJ]. They also constructed a concrete school. This is very useful because if the villagers had to build a school by themselves, there would be no trees or bamboo [to construct it with] because there are few trees and bamboo. Two more primary schools will be built in Noh Ber Baw village and Klwee Lay Tha Waw Pya Kyoh village. These two schools also will be built with concrete. As far as I know, the people who take responsibility to build the schools are Saw A'Ngeh Lay in Eu--- village, and Brigade #1 [Thaton] Adjutant General Aee Tha. We do not know where the [financial] support comes from.

Paddy rice and solar panel aid

In terms of aid, paddy rice has been donated by the Nippon Foundation. In Thaton District, the people responsible [for distributing the aid] were Saw A'Ngeh Lay in Eu--- village (who is a trader), Brigade 1 Adjutant General Aee Tha and other responsible people from the village tract. This year, the amount of paddy rice donated was one basket per person. The rice was not donated to people who live or work very far away [from the village], or [extra for families with] one year old babies, monks, or to revolutionary people such as the KNU and the KNLA.

Therefore, some villagers and village leaders talked with each other and collected rice donations from the villagers who received rice donations and redistributed it to people who did not receive any aid. In regards to the solar panels, the villagers have not received them until the present time. The information that I was not able to confirm is that there was a lucky draw [lottery] to decide which villagers would get solar panels.

House construction for Internally Displaced People [IDPs]

Regarding this issue, Adjutant General Aee Tha and Saw A'Ngeh Lay took responsibility to lead [this project]. They will build very cheap toilets in three villages, such as Htee Lay Kaw village, P'Yah Raw village tract, and Htee Ber Hkee village, Htee Hsee Baw village tract. I went to Htee Lay Hkaw village and saw the villagers have not built houses yet [for IDPs to return]. I told them, *"The rainy season will come soon, why have you not built your houses?"* The person who [will implement this project] is Saw A'Ngeh Lay, but even by April 15th 2016 the trees [for building the houses] had not been cut down yet. In order to build houses for Internally Displaced People, Adjutant General Aee Tha came up with the idea to cut down the trees from Toh Teh Hkee Forest and Ta Auh Hkee Forest. The total [weight] of the trees cut down will be 600 tonnes. The villagers from Toh Teh Hkee village did not want to permit them to take the logs but the KNU leader came to take it, therefore they agreed with the leaders.

Military activity

On February 23rd 2016 we learned that Ta Pa (Win Ta Ma) Army Camp, Lay Kay Army Camp, Yoh Klah Army Camp, Meh Pree Hkee Army Camp and BGF Battalion #1014¹⁰ and #1011 were patrolling. The Burma/Myanmar government military [Tatmadaw] which is based nearby is LID [Light Infantry Division] #44. LIB [Light Infantry Battalion] #118 is patrolling and stays in the villages. The villages where they are patrolling are Lah Hkoh (Pa Ri Ko) village in P'Nweh Klah village tract, Peh Wa Hta village in Meh Naw Ther village tract, and Noh Ber Baw village and Htaw Klaw Hkee village in Noh Ber village tract. The villagers said that they thought the Tatmadaw would relocate, but in reality, they came to stay in their villages. A--- village head also said that they did not do anything [cause any problems] when they stayed in the village, but that they [villagers] have concerns for the women who live in the villages because they [the soldiers] all said they were bachelors. I [KHRG researcher] saw that when they patrol village by village, two of their intelligence personnel go to villagers' working places and to the villagers which are situated close to where they are staying. They [intelligence personnel] follow villagers and do not wear army uniforms. The BGF soldiers are staying in their own army camps.

Bilin Township is KNU-controlled and the territory of KNLA Battalion #3, therefore, Battalion #3 operates there. Because they operate there, Battalion Commander Dah Nay Htoo had to meet with the LID #44 Commanders because their soldiers were patrolling [in the KNLA territory]. LID and camp commanders told him [KNLA commander] that they were allowed to patrol because they did not bring any armed equipment with them. In this case, it disturbed the villagers [because of potential conflict].

The Township [leaders] intend to set up checkpoints along Kah Meh Road, and Htaw Klaw Hpoh Hkee, Buh Nee Hkoh and Baw Paw Hta, but the Burma/Myanmar government military did

¹⁰ KHRG has received numerous reports of human rights violations committed by soldiers from Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalion #1014, including killing, torture, violent abuse, explicit threats, arbitrary taxation and demands and land confiscation. For more information, see ["BGF Battalion #1014 demands forced labour, asserts heavily militarised presence in villages in Hpapun District, June 2015,"](#) KHRG, December 2015; ["Human rights violations by Border Guard Force \(BGF\) Battalion #1014 in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, May 2012 to March 2014,"](#) KHRG, July 2015.

not permit them to. After, Battalion #3 commanders and responsible people in the township held a discussion with the Burma/Myanmar government military, and the Burma/Myanmar government military confirmed details of the checkpoint, including that if they set up checkpoints they [the KNLA] should not raise their flag, they should set up a barrier in front of checkpoints, and the checkpoint keepers are not allowed to bring any armed equipment.

Conclusion and villagers' concern

This information was collected when I [KHRG community member] travelled from place to place, and some of the events I saw with my eyes, and some I heard from the villagers, particularly about military activity [patrolling] and development projects that occurred in April 2016. This year, the weather is very hot, therefore, villagers' crops such as betel nut trees and betel nut leaves, and their water sources, dried out. This year, the paddy rice market price is very high. One basket of paddy rice costs 20,000 kyat [US\$15.16]¹¹. The food shortage problem has not happened only in summer season, it can even happen in the rainy season. This is a concern for the villagers.



This photograph was taken on April 10th 2016. This photo shows a primary school being built in Kwee Lay Tha Wa Pya, Noh Ber Baw village tract, Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo [Thaton] District. I [KHRG community member] do not know who funded this school, but the people who led [the project] were Saw A'Ngeh (a trader from Htee Pa Doh Hta village) and Brigade (#1) Adjutant General Aee Tha (IDB) director. *[Photo: KHRG]*



This picture was taken on April 20th 2016. It shows a road that was constructed from Na Kgyi village, through Khaw Htee Hkee village, to Peh Wa Hta village, and up through a mountain to Lay Kay village. U Ye Tun Company built the road between 2014 and 2015, and completed it in the summer season. The picture was taken on April 20th 2016. It is a new road in Bilin Township. *[Photo: KHRG]*

¹¹ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the 29 January 2018 official market rate of 1,328 kyats to US \$1.



This picture was taken on April 20th 2016. It shows concrete and sand that will be used to build cheap toilets. The toilets will be built in Htee Lay Hkaw village, P'Yah Raw village tract, Doo Tha Htoo [Thaton] District. The people who led this project were Saw A'Ngeh Lay, who is a Htee Hpa Doh Hta villager, and Officer [Adjutant General] Aee Tha. *[Photo: KHRG]*



This picture shows paddy rice about to be distributed to villagers. On March 23rd 2016, it was distributed to Wa Khaw Hta, La Kyoh Hkaw Htee, La Kyoh Hkoh, Ta Meh Hkee, Suh Hkee, Baw Naw Hkee [villagers in] Noh Ber Baw village tract, Bilin Township. None of the representatives from the Nippon Foundation came [for the paddy distribution]. Only village tract leaders and responsible people distributed the paddy. *[Photo: KHRG]*

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

- "Thaton Situation Updated: Billin Township, March to May 2017," (November 30)
- "Thaton Situation Update: Bilin Township, July to September," (April 2017)
- "Thaton Interview: Ma N---, July 2015," (February 2017)
- "Thaton Interview: U A---, 2016," (November 2016)
- "Thaton Interview: Naw C—, June 2015," (October 2016)

Doo Tha Htoo (Karen)



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