



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Thaton Situation Updates: May 2010 to January 2011

This report includes two situation updates written by villagers describing events in Thaton District during the period between May 13th 2010 and January 31st 2011. The villagers writing the updates chose to focus on issues including: updates on recent military activity, specifically the rebuilding of Tatmadaw camps, and the following human rights abuses: demands for forced labour, including the provision of building materials; and movement restrictions, including road closure and requirements for travel permission documents. In these situation updates, villagers also express serious concerns regarding food security due to abnormal weather in 2010; rising food prices; the unavailability of health care; and the cost and quality of children's education.

Situation Update | Bilin Township, Thaton District (Received by KHRG in February 2011)

The following situation update was written by a villager 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 update was received along with other information from Thaton District, including three interviews, 67 photographs and photograph notes.²

In Bilin Township in 1st Brigade³ [Thaton District] villagers are still facing many problems and the Tatmadaw occupies army camps in many different places. Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #701, led by Htun Htun Naing under Military Operations Command (MOC) #4, came and stayed in Ht--- village in Bilin Township. To rebuild their army camp, they [LIB #701] demanded bamboo from the villages that are close to the army camp. Each village had to give 1,000 bamboo poles; the bamboo poles had to be the same length as 5 fingertips to elbow [five cubits long]. Villagers did not get paid the price of the bamboo, and had to give the bamboo free. When the Tatmadaw asked for the bamboo poles, they said they were to rebuild a new fence for the school. In addition to that, they also call the village heads to meet with them and send news to them once a week, so the villagers are annoyed.

¹ 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 writing situation updates, villagers 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 When these documents have been processed and translated by KHRG and when sufficient information has been compiled and analysed, a full Field Report on the situation in Thaton District will be available on the KHRG website. Until then, KHRG's most recent analysis of the situation in Thaton District can be found in the recent Field Report, "Exploitative abuse and villager responses in Thaton District," KHRG, November 2009.

³ Villagers, particularly those living in areas beyond government control, often refer to geographic areas by Brigade numbers corresponding to the number used by Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) units. Use of this phrase does not imply membership in a non-State armed group.

In the same way, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), which is working with the Tatmadaw, also asks the villagers to provide roofing thatch every year. The villagers have to send the thatch to Myaing Gyi Ngu, so villagers face suffering. The DKBA asks for 1,000 thatch [shingles] from each village, and villagers do not get paid the price of the thatch. What is more, if villagers don't provide thatch, they have to give 10,000 kyat (US \$12.15) for each 100 thatch [shingles] that they do not provide, and 100,000 kyat (US \$121.50) for each 1,000 thatch [shingles] that they do not provide.

This year [2010] villagers have faced one more problem because there has not been much rain. There was not much rain, so the paddy fields did not have enough water and farmers could not plant their fields full of paddy. The same thing also happened for people who farm hill fields. Their paddy became yellow and some was destroyed. In Burma the price of rice is so expensive for the coming year that villagers do not know how they will face this problem and are very worried.

The villagers are also worried that the SPDC⁴ will come and abuse their rights. For example, they need education and ask the SPDC government, and then the government comes and occupies the school. Villagers have a problem getting education because the villages that are close to Ht--- village only have government schools. The government sends a few teachers but the villagers need more teachers and have to find some themselves. The teachers sent by the government get a salary from the government. They teach the children for one month and then go back to their homes for a month. When the government teachers go back, the teachers from the village have to try to fill in for them. This is one problem. Also some children who should attend school do not attend school. We know that it is because the parents of those children cannot cover the school fees. The reason they cannot afford it is because the SPDC government requires them to pay fees for school admission and for books.

We see also many health problems. Nowadays, we see that many diseases are happening and villagers cannot afford to buy medicine to cure themselves or to send patients to the 1st Brigade [KNU] clinic because the distance is very far. Because the villagers see these problems, when KHRG comes to give training, many of the villagers are eager to attend.

Villagers hope that, in the future, these problems will become less. If not, villagers will lose their personal rights and will continue to live with many problems. The biggest problem is the military government that governs the country. We need other countries to pressure the government more, and then they will govern in truth.

Situation Update | Bilin Township, Thaton District (Received by KHRG in February 2011)

The following situation update was written by a villager 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. This update was received along with other information from Thaton District, including two interviews, 24 photographs, and 1 forced labour order document with research notes.

This is the situation in the military-controlled areas of Bilin Township of Thaton District that the Tatmadaw occupies.

⁴ The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) was officially 'dissolved' on March 30th 2011; see: "Mission Accomplished as SPDC 'dissolved'," Myanmar Times, April 4-10 2011. The term 'SPDC' was used by the villager who submitted this report to KHRG, and is therefore retained in this translation.

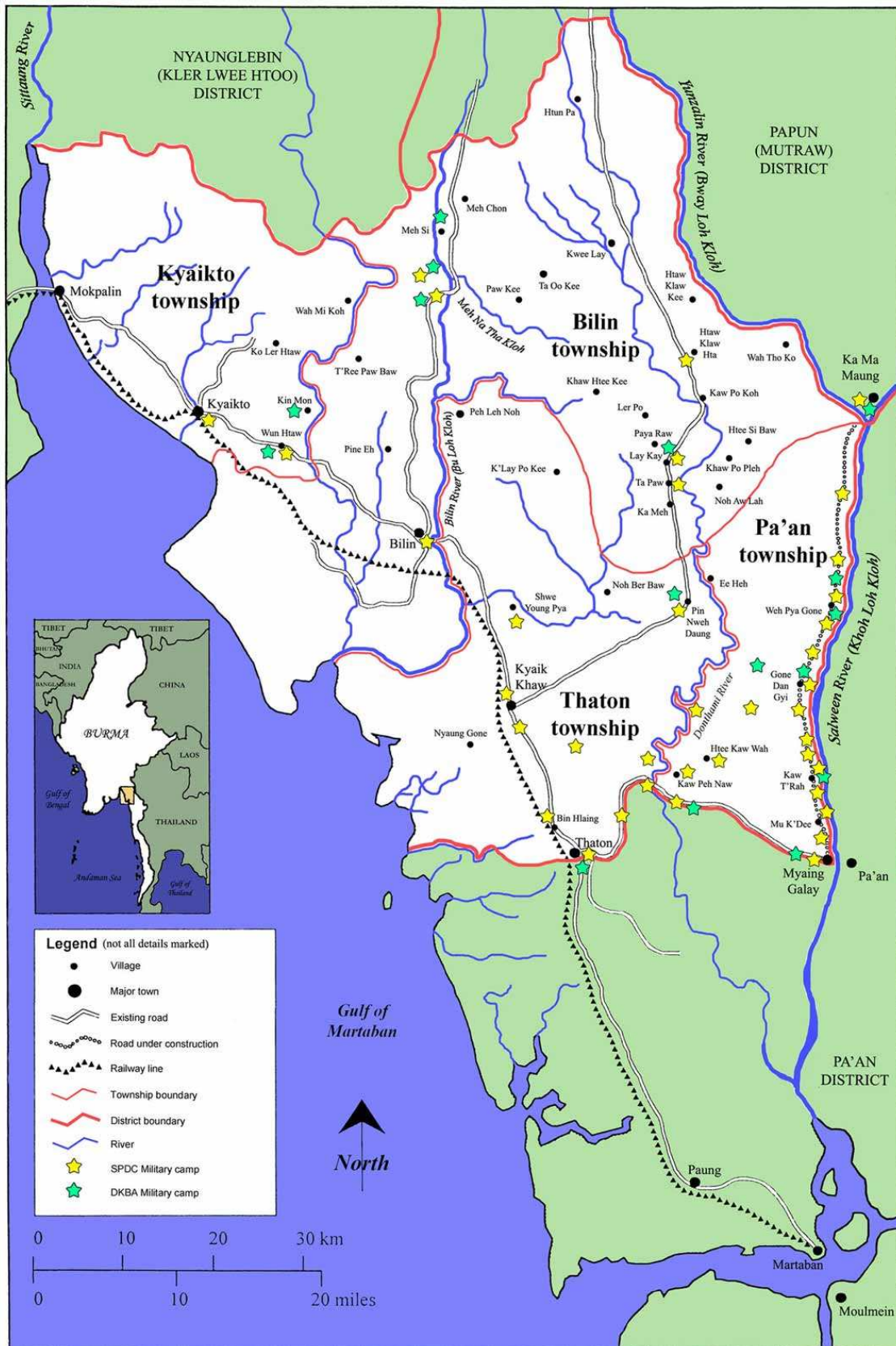
This year, villagers have to face many restrictions on their food supply. This is especially because in 2010 the weather was not normal. During the time when it should have been raining all the time [the rainy season] there was no rain, and it was so hot and dry when people needed to work on their farms. In order to plant paddy [in flat fields] there needs to be water in the fields, so villagers had a problem to plant paddy because there was no water. In some places, we saw that farms had to use a machine [water pump] to get water. In other places, some people planted paddy and, because there was no water in the beginning [of the rainy season], that paddy died later. Also, in other places, when it became the time to harvest the paddy, we saw that the paddy seeds had not matured⁵ and could not become rice. A paddy field in which we originally plant two to three baskets (43 – 63 kg. / 90 – 135 lb.) of paddy seeds as the input, usually should give an output of 80, 90 or 100 baskets of paddy (1672 – 2090 kg. / 3606 – 4508 lb.). This year, from the same field that should produce 100 baskets, we will only get 30 to 40 baskets (627 – 836 kg. / 1352 – 1803 lb.). In these areas, villagers are facing a big problem.

In our Thaton District, we see that there are two areas. The first area is the flat places on the plains where there are many farms, and people mostly work for their livelihoods on these farms. To support their families with food and other basic needs, we see they work a little on bean plantations and a little on sugarcane plantations to fulfil their households' needs. On January 7th 2011, I met with the M--- village tract leader and he said: *"This year it was raining when it wasn't the rainy season [after the rainy season, during the harvest period] so our paddy was destroyed because the plants grew a lot [the rain caused ripe paddy grains to fall onto the ground and sprout]. What is more, we saw that the bean plantations were growing very well but they did not give [produce] bean seeds."*

In the mountainous areas of Bilin Township, villagers are mostly farming hill fields. The irregular rain meant that villagers there also got fewer paddy seeds. The villagers also farm betel leaf plantations and sell betel leaves but, since January 1st 2011, soldiers from the Border Guard Force battalion stationed at K--- village in Noh Ber Baw village tract, led by Bo [Officer] Soe Myit, were stopping villagers from carrying betel leaves, food, rice and paddy seeds. Because they were stopped from carrying things, villagers who live in Noh Ber Baw village tract, Bilin Township, are facing big problems. Villages in Noh Ber Baw tract, such as P---, Gk---, Bp---, Kh---, Kl---, Ky---, T---, S--- and B--- villages cannot go and buy food and rice so villagers have to face problems in the coming year. On January 21st 2011, we heard from a K--- villager, who said: *"Now travel has opened again but everyone who travels has to go and get a permission document. One permission document costs 2,000 kyat (US \$2.43), whether people are doing trade or not doing trade. If people carry things that weigh about 100 viss (160 kg. / 352 lb.), they have to give them [the BGF soldiers] 10,000 kyat (US \$12.15)."*

⁵ The KHRG translator explained that when a paddy seed fails to mature correctly, it is not firm but instead crumbles easily. This prevents it from being harvested in the customary method, which is to dislodge the seeds by beating the paddy stalks.

Thaton (Doo Tha Htoo) District



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