



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Incident report: Four villagers forced to guide Tatmadaw troops in Thaton District

The following incident report was written by a villager trained by KHRG to document human rights abuses, and details an incident that occurred in May 2011 during which Tatmadaw soldiers from LIB #216 arrested four villagers in Bilin Township, including two village headwomen, and forced them to accompany troops on active patrol. The two village headwomen told the villager who wrote this report that the Tatmadaw soldiers did not provide them with water nor allow them to return to their own village at night, forcing them to sleep in a monastery with the soldiers. One of the women said that the Tatmadaw soldiers told her that they were afraid they were going to be shot at by KNLA soldiers at the time she was forced to accompany them. The following morning, the four villagers successfully negotiated with the Tatmadaw commanding officers to secure their release and received 8,000 kyat (US \$ 10.39) split unevenly between the four of them as compensation.

Incident report | Bilin Township, Thaton District (May 2011)

This incident report is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹

On May 4th 2011, two groups of SPDC Army² [Tatmadaw] troops gathered together at the Kh--- temple. It was about 8:00 pm. One of the groups left the village at that time [8.00pm] but the other group left the village the next morning. They met each other at the top of the P--- Mountain. Afterwards that day at 11:00 am, they entered L--- village and they divided into two groups. One went back to A--- army camp. The other group went back to Gk--- army camp. The group that went back to Gk--- army camp was led by Battalion Deputy Commander Aung Ko Ko. On the way that group of soldiers was afraid

¹ KHRG incident reports are written or gathered by villagers in Thaton District who have been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. KHRG trains villagers in eastern Burma to document individual incidents of abuse 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 incident reports, villagers are encouraged to document incidents of abuse that they consider to be important, by verifying information from multiple sources, assessing for potential biases and comparing to local trends.

² In Karen, the Burmese phrases *Na Ah Pa* (SPDC) and *Na Wa Ta* (SLORC) are commonly used to refer to the Burmese government or to Burma's state army, the Tatmadaw. Many older Karen villagers who were accustomed to using the phrase *Na Wa Ta* (SLORC) before 1997 continue to use that phrase, even though the SLORC has not officially existed since 1997. Similarly, despite the official dissolution of the SPDC in March 2011, many Karen villagers continue to use the phrase *Na Ah Pa* (SPDC) to refer to the Burmese government or to the Tatmadaw; see: "Mission Accomplished as SPDC 'dissolved'," Myanmar Times, April 4-10th 2011. The term *Na Ah Pa* was used by the villager who wrote this report and "SPDC" is therefore retained in the translation of this report.

that KNLA soldiers might be waiting to shoot them, so they arrested two of the village heads from L--- village, named *Pee Y---* and *Mu Ghar T---*,³ at 11:00 am on May 5th 2011. The two women were asked to *lan pya* [Burmese term translating literally as ‘show the road’, meaning to guide the soldiers].

They started to go to N--- village but before they arrived at N--- they arrested one more villager from D--- village, but I do not know that person’s name. They [the Tatmadaw] moved around outside [D--- village] in the bushes but they did not enter D--- village. The two village heads asked if they could go into D--- village but the soldiers did not allow them. So they asked if they could go back home to L--- village but the soldiers did not allow either of them to go home. In the evening at about 4:00 pm, the SPDC Army soldiers moved ahead to D--- village. Before they arrived in N---, they also captured another villager who was out finding frogs, but I do not know this villager’s name. They arrested this villager as well and made him follow them, so there were now four arrested villagers [in total].

They [the four arrested villagers] had not eaten any rice and also the two village heads wanted to shine their lights [torches] but they were not allowed. *Pee Y---* mentioned that she fell on the bridge and hit her head against something. It hurt so much that she almost *haw tha pwa* [Karen term, translating literally as ‘cry like adult’ meaning to cry very loudly]. She became hungry and did not have the strength to go on ahead. According to *Pee Y---*, the SPDC Army did not enter the village but continued to move around [the village] through the bushes. She then asked them: “*Why aren’t you entering the village?*” They said they were afraid of the KNLA soldiers. They moved around like this [through the bushes], step-by-step until they arrived at Gk--- army camp late, when it was past 12:00 am.



This photo, taken during October 2011, shows *Pee Y---*, the L--- village headwoman, who told the villager who wrote this report and took this picture that, on May 5th 2011, she was forced to accompany and guide Tatmadaw soldiers from LIB #216 on active patrol, along with three other villagers. [Photo: KHRG]

[At that time] *Pee Y---* said she was hungry and asked the soldiers to give her food and water and so they gave her food to eat. On the way [while walking], *Pee Y---* had asked for some water. Instead they gave her *gk’thee p’doh htee* [literally ‘big water medicine’ meaning saline solution for intravenous rehydration] to drink but she dared not drink it. They had to sleep in the monastery. In the morning *Pee Y---* said to the Tatmadaw Commander: “*Commander, we have taken you so far so give us some payment.*” The Commander gave the two village heads 3,000 kyat (US \$ 3.90)⁴ each and the other two men were given 1,000 kyat (US \$1.30) each.

I did not just hear about these villagers arrested to be guides. I also experienced it when I walked around in this [L---] village and I saw the SPDC [Tatmadaw] Army soldiers

³ ‘*Pee*’ and ‘*Mu Ghar*’ are Karen prefixes for women meaning ‘Grandmother’ and ‘Aunt’ respectively. They are commonly used to address older women and do not necessarily signify any familial ties between the woman and the person addressing them.

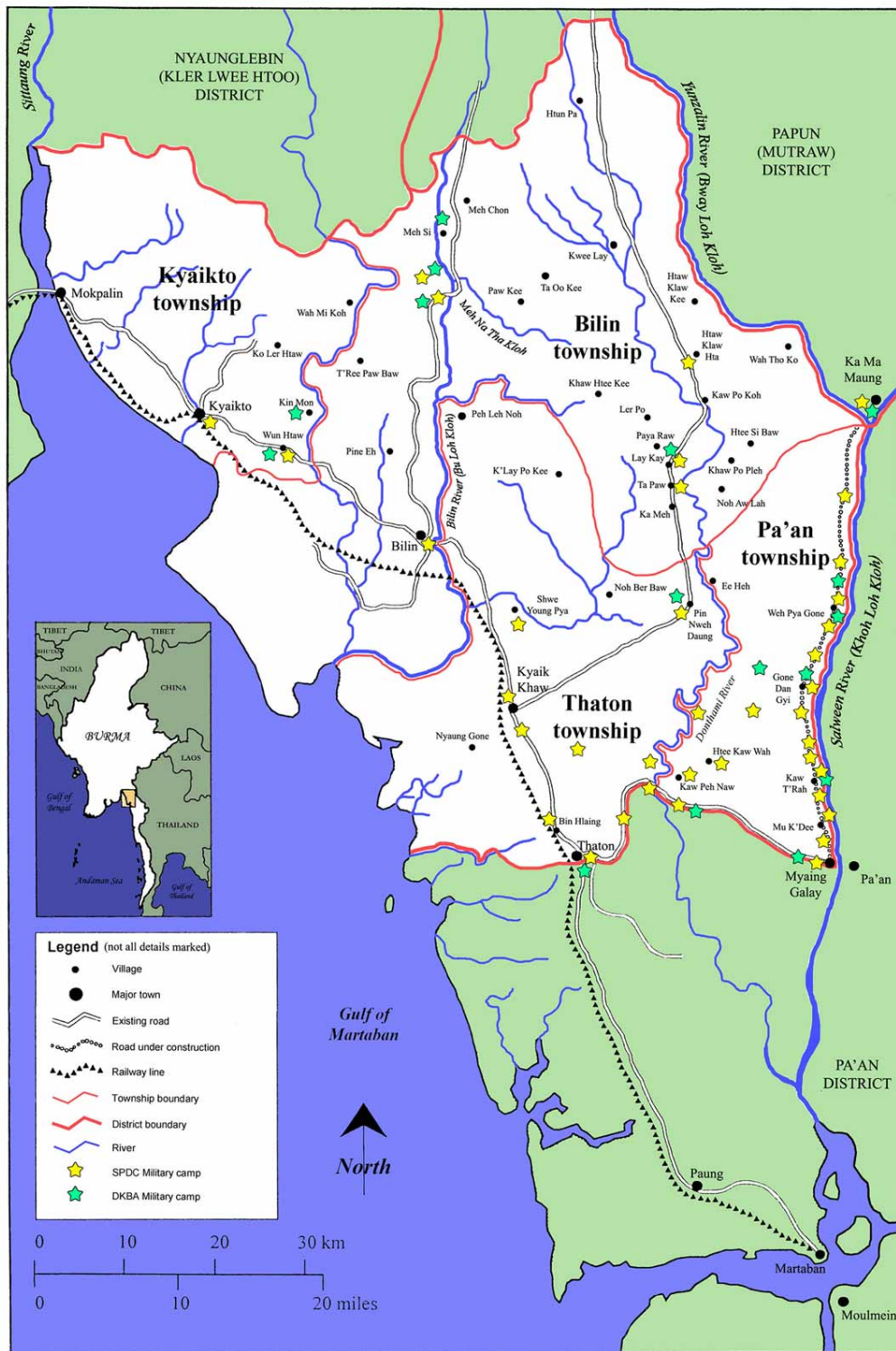
⁴ All conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the fluctuating informal exchange rate rather than the government’s official fixed rate of 6.5 kyat to US \$1. As of January 17th 2012, this unofficial rate of exchange was US \$1 = 770 kyat. This figure is used for all calculations above.

arrest those two villagers [headwomen] in L--- village. When those two women came back I met them, talked with them and also took photos.

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

- “Thaton Interview: Naw L---, February 2011” (January 2012)
- “Thaton Situation Updates: June to October 2011” (November 2011)
- “Thaton Situation Updates: May 2010 to January 2011” (May 2011)
- Exploitative abuse and villager responses in Thaton District (November 2009)
- Land confiscation and the business of human rights abuse in Thaton District (April 2009)
- SPDC and DKBA extortion and forced labour in Thaton District (November 2008)
- Villagers’ responses to forced labour, torture and other demands in Thaton District (October 2008)

Thaton (Doo Tha Htoo) District



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