



Situation Update

July 21th, 2023 / KHRG # 22-376-S2

Doo Tha Htoo District Situation Update: Killings, landmine injuries, and insecurity in Bilin Township, January to June 2022

This Situation Update describes events that occurred in Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District, from January to June 2022, covering the killing of one villager by the State Administration Council (SAC) military and another one by unidentifiable perpetrators, the public torture and killing of three People's Defence Force (PDF) members by SAC soldiers, three landmine incidents, and the destruction of a bridge by local Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) soldiers. Due to these incidents, villagers have been living in constant fear and insecurity.¹

Killing of a villager by SAC soldiers in Aee Soo Hkee village tract

In June 2022 [unspecified date], State Administration Council (SAC)² soldiers under Light Infantry Division (LID)³ #44 killed a villager [unknown name] in a temporary SAC army camp [that they set in villagers' houses] near H--- village, Aee Soo Hkee village tract,⁴ Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo District. Local villagers assumed the victim was a villager from Shwegyi Town, Hsaw Htee (Shwegyin) Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District, who was going to Meh Way gold mining area, in

¹ The present document is based on information received in July and September 2022. It was provided by a community member in Doo Tha Htoo District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions on the ground. The names of the victims, their photos and the exact locations are censored for security reasons. The parts in square brackets are explanations added by KHRG.

² The State Administration Council (SAC) is the executive governing body created in the aftermath of the February 1st 2021 military coup. It was established by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on February 2nd 2021, and is composed of eight military officers and eight civilians. The chairperson serves as the de facto head of government of Burma/Myanmar and leads the Military Cabinet of Myanmar, the executive branch of the government. Min Aung Hlaing assumed the role of SAC chairperson following the coup.

³ A Light Infantry Division (LID) of the Tatmadaw is commanded by a brigadier general, and consists of ten light infantry battalions specially trained in counter-insurgency, jungle warfare, search and destroy operations against ethnic insurgents. They were first incorporated into the Tatmadaw in 1966. LIDs are organised under three Tactical Operations Commands, commanded by a colonel, three battalions each and one reserve, one field artillery battalion, one armoured squadron and other support units. Each division is directly under the command of the Chief of Staff (Army).

⁴ A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

Mu Traw District, as they received information about one villager who disappeared in Shwegyi Town.

After the victim passed by the SAC temporary camp at I--- hill [located outside of H--- village], he took the wrong way and went [down] a road closed by the SAC where there is no bridge to cross the river. When he was about to reach J--- village, Meh Pray Hkee village tract, Bilin Township, he could not go ahead [continue] anymore. He asked a villager [he encountered] beside the road for directions and then he had to turn back. When he passed the gate heading to the closed road, SAC soldiers shouted at him to stop but [, as explained by Saw⁵ K---, a local villager from H--- village, to a KHRG researcher,] he might not have heard it. Then, when he returned and arrived at the SAC checkpoint beside their temporary army camp, the SAC immediately arrested him. A local villager, [who was working in that location as] a car driver, witnessed the SAC soldiers arresting this villager, pointing a gun at him, taking out his motorbike key, and then beating and punching him. The driver informed Saw K--- [a villager from H--- village] about the incident and asked him to go and see the incident. The witness [car driver] said that the arrested villager was about 20 years old, that he was wearing a sport shirt and a jacket, and that the brand of the man's motorbike was RCS.

Saw K--- wanted to give a recommendation [to vouch] for the release of the victim, but he did not dare to go to the checkpoint on that day. He [Saw K--] went to the checkpoint the next day, but the SAC did not allow him to enter the house garden [where the temporary camp was set]. So, he [Saw K---] believed that the villager was killed [because the SAC soldiers did not want him to witness the incident]. When the SAC left [a few days later], he [Saw K---] went back to the incident place. There, Saw K--- saw where the victim was [allegedly] buried and where the victim and his motorbike were burned.

Public torture and killing of three arrested PDF members

On June 18th 2022, more soldiers from SAC Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)⁶ #207, LIB #102, and Infantry Battalion (IB)⁷ #2, under the control of SAC LID #44, left from Na Kyee army camp and approached and patrolled in Karen National Union (KNU)⁸-controlled territory in Bilin Township, to go to Lay Kay army camp for troop reinforcement. On June 22nd 2022, these SAC troops arrived at Paw Hkee road area, where they encountered three Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM)⁹

⁵ Saw is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

⁶ A Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) comprises 500 soldiers. Most Light Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers, yet up-to-date information regarding the size of battalions is hard to come by, particularly following the signing of the NCA. LIBs are primarily used for offensive operations, but they are sometimes used for garrison duties.

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⁸ The Karen National Union is the main Karen group opposing the government.

⁹ On February 2nd 2021, healthcare workers at state-run hospitals and medical facilities across Myanmar spearheaded what is being referred to as a Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) consisting of labour strikes in protest against the February 1st 2021 military coup. The movement quickly spread to include civil servants from all sectors of the government who are walking off their jobs as a way of non-recognition and non-participation in the military regime. Because of the popularity of the movement, and its seminal role in wider protests across the country, some people have begun using it as a catch-all phrase to include other protest forms like boycotts and pot-banging.

members, who were also members of the People's Defence Force (PDF)¹⁰, carrying guns, and one villager, Saw L---, from M--- village, Ta Au Hkee village tract, Bilin Township. The villager was the driver of the PDF members. SAC troops arrested all of them and tied their hands behind their back. The villager from M--- village was able to escape the next day, but both of his hands were injured by the rope. The three PDF members are PDF leaders [unknown rank] in Bilin Township.

[The SAC soldiers travelled through neighbouring villages with the detainees, so many villagers saw how] the SAC brutally tortured the three PDF members for several days. They were forced to walk between SAC soldiers only wearing shorts, without being provided [much] food. They [SAC soldiers] sometimes served [the detainees] some rice and water on the way. The SAC tortured them for about nine days. They asked for more information, but all of them were too tired and weak from the torture and insufficient food and water to catch up with the questioning. After that, the SAC fatally shot them outside of N--- village, Khaw Hpoeh Pleh village tract, Bilin Township, on June 29th 2022. One witness, Daw¹¹ O---, from N--- village, reported to KHRG, *"They fainted when they spoke [answered the SAC]. Because they were tortured, they sustained bruises all over their body. They were tied with nylon ropes around the neck, the armpits and their hands. We dared not look at it because it was so terrible. They [the detainees] were full of bruises. The SAC killed them when they left the [N---] village. The SAC didn't even cover all their corpses [with soil] when burying them. We could see their hands and legs. Their hands and legs were cut off [dismembered]."*

A villager was found dead in the jungle

In June 2022 [exact date unknown], a villager named Saw P--- was found dead in the forest nearby H--- village, Aee Soo Hkee village tract, Bilin Township. Saw P--- had [previously] been arrested and used as a human shield by SAC soldiers in July 2021 together with [another villager called] Saw Q--- [, and they were both released at a later date]. Villagers do not know how Saw P--- died. [According to local villagers,] Saw P--- did not follow village rules [recommendations to ensure villagers' safety]; for example, even if village leaders told villagers not to travel due to SAC soldiers' presence in the area or not to go to an area contaminated by landmines, Saw P--- would still go there. He also drank alcohol every day. Villagers found his corpse about a week after he died, so his corpse already [started to] decompose, making it hard for villagers to identify whether he was shot or beaten to death. The incident happened during increased military activities [in the area]. Villagers continuously heard gunfire in their community area during the day and night, so villagers did not feel secure to go outside the village. The victim's body did not present missing limbs, so villagers could confirm that he did not die because of a landmine explosion. Villagers also did not know if he went to the jungle to collect wild vegetables or 'dog fruit' [also known as jengkol, or 'stinky beans']. Villagers had to bury his corpse nearby the incident place because his body already [started to] decompose. They [local villagers] then held his funeral in H--- village

¹⁰ The People's Defence Force (PDF) is an armed resistance established independently as local civilian militias operating across the country. Following the February 1st 2021 military coup and the ongoing brutal violence enacted by the junta, the majority of these groups began working with the National Unity Government (NUG), a body claiming to be the legitimate government of Burma/Myanmar, which then formalized the PDF on May 5th 2021 as a precursor to a federal army.

¹¹ Daw is a Burmese female honorific title used before a person's name.

without his corpse. The incident made villagers feel more insecure to travel outside of their village for their families' livelihoods and personal needs.



This photo was taken in June 2022 by a local villager in H--- village, Aee Soo Hkee village tract, Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo District. This photo shows the corpse of Saw P--- in a jungle near H--- village. [Photo: villager]

Landmine explosion incidents

On January 26th 2022, at about 11:50 am, Saw R---, a 36-year-old mahout¹² from Htee Hpa Doh Hta village tract, Mu Traw District, stepped on a handmade landmine on Hpapun Road, between K'Ma Moe Town and Meh Pray Hkee army camp, in Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo District. His [Saw R---'s] right leg was injured, including the knee. The incident happened when he was travelling with his elephant. He stepped on the landmine while his elephant was walking in the bushes beside the road and he was trying to get his elephant to return on the road. Villagers believed that the landmine was planted by local Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)¹³ soldiers because the SAC always used this road for their military operations [and because this type of handmade landmine is mostly used by the KNLA]. Local KNLA soldiers also informed local villagers who live close to the landmine-contaminated area [about the presence of planted landmines] so local villagers do not go close to the [contaminated] places. However, there were no signs [placed on the road] indicating landmine danger, so villagers from other villages, like Saw R---, are unaware of the landmine-contaminated area. After the incident, local villagers took him to the hospital in Thaton Town, Tha Htoo Township, by car for medical treatment. He recovered, and his leg did not have to be amputated.

On March 16th 2022, Saw S---, a home guard¹⁴ from T--- village, Aee Soo Hkee village tract, stepped on a landmine beside U--- Bridge, located near the village. The landmine was planted by

¹² Mahout is a term for an elephant trainer or rider.

¹³ The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

¹⁴ 'Home guard' or *gher der* groups have been organised locally in parts of northern Karen State to address Burma Army operations targeting civilians and the resulting acute food insecurity. Villagers interviewed by KHRG have reported that *gher der* were established with the objective of providing security for communities of civilians in hiding, particularly when those communities engage in food production or procurement activities, and when other modes of protection are unavailable. For more on the *gher der* see: "[Self-protection under strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses in northern Karen State](#)," KHRG, August 2010.

an unidentifiable armed group, as both the SAC and Karen [KNLA] forces planted landmines in that area. The incident happened when Saw S--- was going to check on the SAC troops that were marching from Nat Kyee army camp to Meh Pray Hkee army camp. Usually, SAC soldiers do not step on landmines as they have a machine to detect landmine contamination. Saw S--- was sent to T--- hospital, under the KNU administration, for medical treatment. He lost some of his toes, but he did not need to get an amputation. He is able to walk, although with some difficulties. He had to pay for most of his medical treatment fees, but he also received some support from villagers in Aee Soo Hkee village tract.

On May 1st 2022, Saw U---, the 42-year-old village head of V--- village, Aee Soo Hkee village tract, Bilin Township, was injured by a tripwire landmine that impacted the right side of his belly and his right hand. After the incident, he struggled to return to the village by himself for help. The incident was in a landmine-contaminated area where all armed groups active in the area [SAC, Border Guard Forces (BGF)¹⁵ and KNLA/Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO)¹⁶] planted landmines, so villagers do not know which armed group set up this tripwire landmine. Saw U--- had to go to W--- local clinic, in Meh Naw Ther Hkee village tract, Bilin Township, for medical treatment. It took him about one month to recover.

Destruction of a bridge by KNLA soldiers

On February 27th 2022, at about 9:00 am, local KNLA soldiers destroyed the U--- Bridge located close to T--- village, Aee Soo Hkee village tract, between Na Kyi camp [in Na Kyi Town] and Meh Pray Hkee army camp, Meh Pray Hkee village tract, Bilin Township. They [KNLA soldiers] destroyed the bridge because the SAC used it for military purposes. They [KNLA soldiers] did it to block the SAC's way so they [SAC] could no longer use trucks for transportation.

According to a local villager, villagers mainly use motorcycles for their transportation and they can still cross the path by motorcycle. The destruction of the bridge impacts villagers' transportation and travels mildly. Before the coup, villagers and other gold miners used the bridge to go to the gold mining area. However, gold mining projects stopped since the 2021 coup, so villagers do not travel much for their work using the bridge and the vehicle road like before.

On February 27th 2022, at about 3:05 pm, Maung¹⁷ X---, a Bamar villager from Na Kyi Town, came to the destroyed bridge and took pictures for the BGF and SAC soldiers based in Na Kyi army camp. Local villagers around the bridge know that he is working for SAC and BGF as a ration transporter [truck driver], especially when SAC do not feel secure to transport rations. He usually

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ The Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) was formed in 1947 by the Karen National Union and is the precursor to the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Today the KNDO refers to a militia force of local volunteers trained and equipped by the KNLA and incorporated into its battalion and command structure; its members wear uniforms and typically commit to two-year terms of service.

¹⁷ Maung is a Burmese male honorific title used before a person's name.

receives a payment for it [transporting rations for the SAC] of about 40,000 kyat [USD 19.05]¹⁸ from the SAC and BGF.

Further background reading on the security and human rights situation in Doo Tha Htoo District in Southeast Burma can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [“Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: House burning and indiscriminate shelling in Kyeh Htoh Township \(January 2023\)”](#), June 2023.
- [“Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: Forcible collection of logs in Hpa-an Township, July 2022”](#), May 2023.
- [“Doo Tha Htoo District Incident Report: Two villagers were injured as a result of SAC mortar shelling in Bilin Township, June 2022”](#), March 2023.
- [“Why would they target us?": Exploring patterns of the Burma Army's retaliatory abuses against villagers across Southeast Burma”](#), June 2023.

About KHRG

Founded in 1992, the Karen Human Rights Group is an independent local organisation committed to improving the human rights situation in Southeast Burma. KHRG trains local people to document and gather evidence of human rights abuses, and publishes this information to project the voices, experiences and perspectives of local communities. More examples of our work can be seen online at www.khrq.org.

¹⁸ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the June 13th 2023 mid-market rate of 1000 kyats to USD 0.48 (taken from <https://wise.com/gb/currency-converter/mmk-to-usd-rate>).

Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District

