



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

April 2nd, 2024 / KHRG # 23-430-S1

Hpa-an District Situation Update: Extortion of villagers by the BGF, increased gambling, and teenage drug abuse in Ta Kreh Township (August to October 2023)

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Ta Kreh Township, Hpa-an District, during the period between August to October 2023. It highlights the livelihood difficulties faced by villagers due to extortion by the Border Guard Force (BGF) at checkpoints. In addition, there has been a rise in gambling activities and drug use, specifically amphetamines, which have increased theft and looting. Although villagers have reported these problems to the local village authorities, no action has been taken to address them. Teenage drug abuse has also risen, as yaba is highly accessible in the Township. With the increased use of drugs among students, parents worry about the future of their children.¹

Extortion by the Border Guard Force (BGF) causing livelihood difficulties

Although there have been no new Border Guard Force (BGF)² checkpoints set up in Ta Kreh Township during the period between August to October 2023, the BGF has been extorting money from villagers at three existing checkpoints. These three checkpoints are controlled by BGF Battalion #1015 and #1016, and are located in Na Bu Town and on Kaw T'Ree highway, in Ta Kreh Township. Money is extorted from people passing the checkpoints in vehicles such as trucks and cars. This extortion has become a difficulty not only for those who travel for work to secure their livelihoods, but also for those who reside in Ta Kreh Town. In some cases, the BGF demanded 5,000 to 10,000 kyat [2.38 - 4.76 USD³] from cars being driven to be sold without the necessary [ownership] licenses, 5,000 kyat [2.38 USD] from trucks [crossing the checkpoint], and 1,000 kyat [0.48 USD] from [family] cars [crossing the checkpoint]; the amounts extorted depend on the types of vehicles passing through the checkpoints. When car drivers offer a lower amount of money than what the BGF specifies, villagers are sometimes sworn at and scolded by the BGF soldiers at the checkpoints.

¹ The present document is based on information received in November 2023. It was provided by a community member in Hpa-an 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 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.

³ All conversion estimates for the kyat are based on the March 12th 2024 mid-market exchange rate of 1,000 kyat to USD 0.48 (taken from wise.com/gb/currency-converter/mmk-to-usd-rate).

Increased gambling in Ta Kreh Township

It is common practice at the end of the rainy season [usually in October] for the BGF to allow gambling activities [in a small festival]. These activities include games such as ‘fish table’ games [in which coins are inserted into a machine to complete a challenge to ‘kill’ fish] and other games run by those who travel to different parts of the country and are contracted by the BGF to run the games for villagers. These stallholders were asked to share their benefits with the BGF. Nearby villagers from various village tracts located in Ta Kreh Township have reported being disturbed by the noise from the gatherings and gambling, especially older people who are sick and find it difficult to sleep at night.

The BGF has been forcing some villagers to build stages for the festival and has sworn at them while they were working. Additionally, there has been increased selling and drinking of beer, other alcohol, locally-produced alcohol, and drugs including *yaba*⁴, at the restaurant in the place where the festival is held. Villagers have reported belongings from their shops being stolen, including motorcycles. The thefts have occurred at nighttime, which has made them afraid to sleep. These villagers reported their stolen property to the local village head but no action has been taken to address these thefts.

Rise in teenage drug abuse in Ta Kreh Township

Although [there has been an increase of] adults using drugs in previous years, it is becoming more noticeable that, currently, teenagers of school-age have also been [increasingly] using drugs. [In conversations with a KHRG researcher,] parents explained they are concerned about their children’s education and health, especially since *yaba* use has become so widespread and easy to purchase in Ta Kreh Township. The students who are using drugs have exhibited concerning behaviour because of the effects of the drug on the brain and have been rude while speaking with their teachers. Parents and other villagers living in the area are worried about the younger generations. They fear that children may become addicted to drugs and lose interest in continuing their education. Additionally, parents worry that drug use will negatively impact their children’s health.

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; and “[Dooplaya Field Report: A quasi-ceasefire? Developments after the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, from January to December 2016](#),” KHRG, September 2017.

Further background reading on the situation of the human rights situation in areas near Ta Kreh Township, Hpa-an District, can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [“Dooplaya District Short Update: SAC shelling into villages causing displacement in Kaw T’Ree Township, November 2023.”](#), February 2024.
- [Striking Fear: Impacts of State Administration Council \(SAC\) shelling on villagers’ lives in Southeast Burma \(January to October 2023\)](#), December 2023.
- [“Hpa-an District Short Update: SAC military activity frightens local civilians and raises fears of forced portering, April to May 2022”](#), June 2022
- Chapter: [“Looting, Extortion and Arbitrary Taxation”](#), in [Foundations of Fear: 25 Years of Villagers’ Voices from Southeast Burma](#), October 2017

About KHRG

Founded in 1992, 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.

