



## News Bulletin

June 7<sup>th</sup> 2009 / KHRG #2009-B6

### Over 3,000 villagers flee to Thailand amidst ongoing SPDC/DKBA attacks

As of Saturday June 6<sup>th</sup>, over 3,000 villagers have fled the area of Ler Per Her IDP camp in Dta Greh Township, Pa'an District to seek refuge in neighbouring Thailand. This includes villagers fleeing joint SPDC/DKBA attacks against the KNLA as well as those fleeing forced recruitment as porters to carry supplies for SPDC and DKBA troops engaged in the fighting. This is the largest refugee exodus from Karen State on a single occasion since 1997. Also, more refugees are expected as joint SPDC/DKBA forces have advanced towards the camp of KNLA Battalion #202, about 30 kilometres north of Ler Per Her.

On June 5<sup>th</sup> 2009, KHRG reported that over 700 villagers had fled to Thailand between June 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> in order to avoid forced labour carrying military supplies for joint State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) / Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) forces in an attack on a Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) camp.<sup>1</sup> This KNLA camp is located near to Ler Per Her camp for Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in Dta Greh Township, Pa'an District. At the time, displaced villagers residing at Ler Per Her had already begun to leave in expectation of the coming SPDC/DKBA attack. By the end of June 5<sup>th</sup>, the entire civilian population of Ler Per Her had fled to Thailand.



Residents of Ler Per Her IDP camp leave the area by boat as they flee to Thailand on June 5<sup>th</sup> 2009 to avoid joint SPDC/DKBA attacks. [Photo: KHRG]

Subsequently, on Saturday, June 6<sup>th</sup>, according to KHRG field researchers operating in the area, SPDC soldiers from Light Infantry Battalions #202 and 205 and Infantry Battalion (IB) #81, under Light Infantry Division (LID) #22, along with DKBA soldiers from Brigade #999 began attacks on KNLA Battalions #101, 21 and 22, of Brigade #7, based near to Ler Per Her IDP camp. At approximately 1:00 pm on June 6<sup>th</sup>, SPDC soldiers located atop Bpoo Loo Htoo hill overlooking both Ler Per Her and the KNLA camp, began shelling the KNLA camp with multiple 81 mm mortars. Then at about 3:40 pm, the SPDC and DKBA soldiers advanced in a ground attack on the KNLA camp. The Dta Greh Township chairperson, himself a local villager, has estimated that over 900 combined SPDC and DKBA soldiers are involved in the current attacks. At around 6:00 pm the same day, the fighting died down somewhat but occasional rifle shots continued. On the morning of Sunday, June 7<sup>th</sup> 2009, local KHRG field researchers had reported that fighting had resumed in the Ler Per Her area.

<sup>1</sup> Over 700 villagers flee to Thailand amidst fears of SPDC/DKBA attacks on a KNLA camp and an IDP camp in Pa'an District, KHRG, June 5<sup>th</sup> 2009

Including those villagers from the surrounding area, over 3,000 refugees have now fled to avoid the attacks as well as forced labour carrying military supplies for SPDC and DKBA soldiers. This is the largest refugee exodus from Karen State on a single occasion since the SPDC's massive 1997 offensive in Dooplaya District further south. The villagers from Ler Per Her and the surrounding area are now taking refuge at numerous areas in Tha Song Yang District of Thailand's Tak Province. As many villagers have fled to different locations, KHRG field researchers operating in the areas do not yet have the exact number of refugees from some of the abandoned villages. Available numbers of the people and households from Ler Per Her and nearby villages who have recently fled to Thailand are indicated in the table below.

#	Village name	# of households	# of villagers	Arrival date
1	Maw Kwee	N/A	N/A	June 2 <sup>nd</sup> – 5 <sup>th</sup> 2009
2	Lay Gkuh Yaw	56	405 (including 129 IDP students)	June 3 <sup>rd</sup> 2009
3	Mae La Ah Kee	50	305	June 4 <sup>th</sup> 2009
4	Mae La Ah Hta	57	412	
5	Hsee Poh Kee	21	132	June 5 <sup>th</sup> 2009
6	Bp`Nweh Bpoo	27	164	
7	Ler Per Her (IDP camp)	200+	1,265	June 5 <sup>th</sup> 2009
8	Wa Mee Gkla	60	346	June 6 <sup>th</sup> 2009
9	Gklay Moh Kee	N/A	N/A	N/A
10	Gklay Poh Kee	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Total</b>		<b>415+</b>	<b>3029+</b>	

Other sources reporting the recent displacement have cited similar figures. According to the Karen-language news agency *Kwekalu*, more than 3,400 villagers have fled to Thailand from the area and have taken shelter at Htoo Hta, Mae Ploo, Au Thoo Hta and Mae Salik.<sup>2</sup> The Free Burma Rangers have reported that 3,295 villagers have fled to Thailand from the Ler Per Her area and have taken refuge at Mae U Su and Noh Bo as well.<sup>3</sup>



This photo, taken in July 2008, shows the current locations of the SPDC and DKBA camps in the background. In the foreground lies the now empty Ler Per Her IDP camp. Between Ler Per Her and the SPDC/DKBA camps lies the KNLA camp. [Photo: KHRG]



Displaced villagers from Ler Per Her IDP camp leave the area by boat as they flee to Thailand on June 5<sup>th</sup> 2009 to avoid joint SPDC/DKBA attacks. [Photo: KHRG]

Meanwhile, as attacks and displacement in the Ler Per Her area continue, combined soldiers from DKBA Brigade #555, under the command of Bya Bya, and SPDC LIB #201, also under LID #22, have advanced towards the camp of KNLA Battalion #202, which is

<sup>2</sup> "As the SPDC attacks, more than 3,000 villagers flee to Thailand," *Kwekalu*, June 6<sup>th</sup> 2009.

<sup>3</sup> "Thousands of Refugees Flee Ler Per Her Camp as Burma Army Attack Begins," Free Burma Rangers, June 6<sup>th</sup> 2009.

located along the Moei River bordering Thailand, about 30 kilometres north of Ler Per Her. Expecting that the joint SPDC/DKBA forces will soon attack this area as well, residents of nearby Kler Khah, Htee Khoh Kee and Meh Gkreh villages began leaving for Thailand on Sunday, June 7<sup>th</sup>. A KHRG field researcher operating in the area has reported that those who have not yet left these villages are planning to flee shortly.

As it is now rainy season, these refugees, including many women and children, face serious humanitarian concerns and are in urgent need of support including blankets, mosquito nets and plastic tarpaulins. They lack sufficient shelter, food and health provisions and schools have had to shut down. Local groups have already provided some assistance, but this has been limited. The Karen Refugee Committee (KRC) has provided about a week's worth of food aid, but as more refugees arrive, this aid will have to be spread between larger numbers of people. The international community must not continue to neglect the ongoing humanitarian and human rights crisis in these areas.<sup>4</sup>

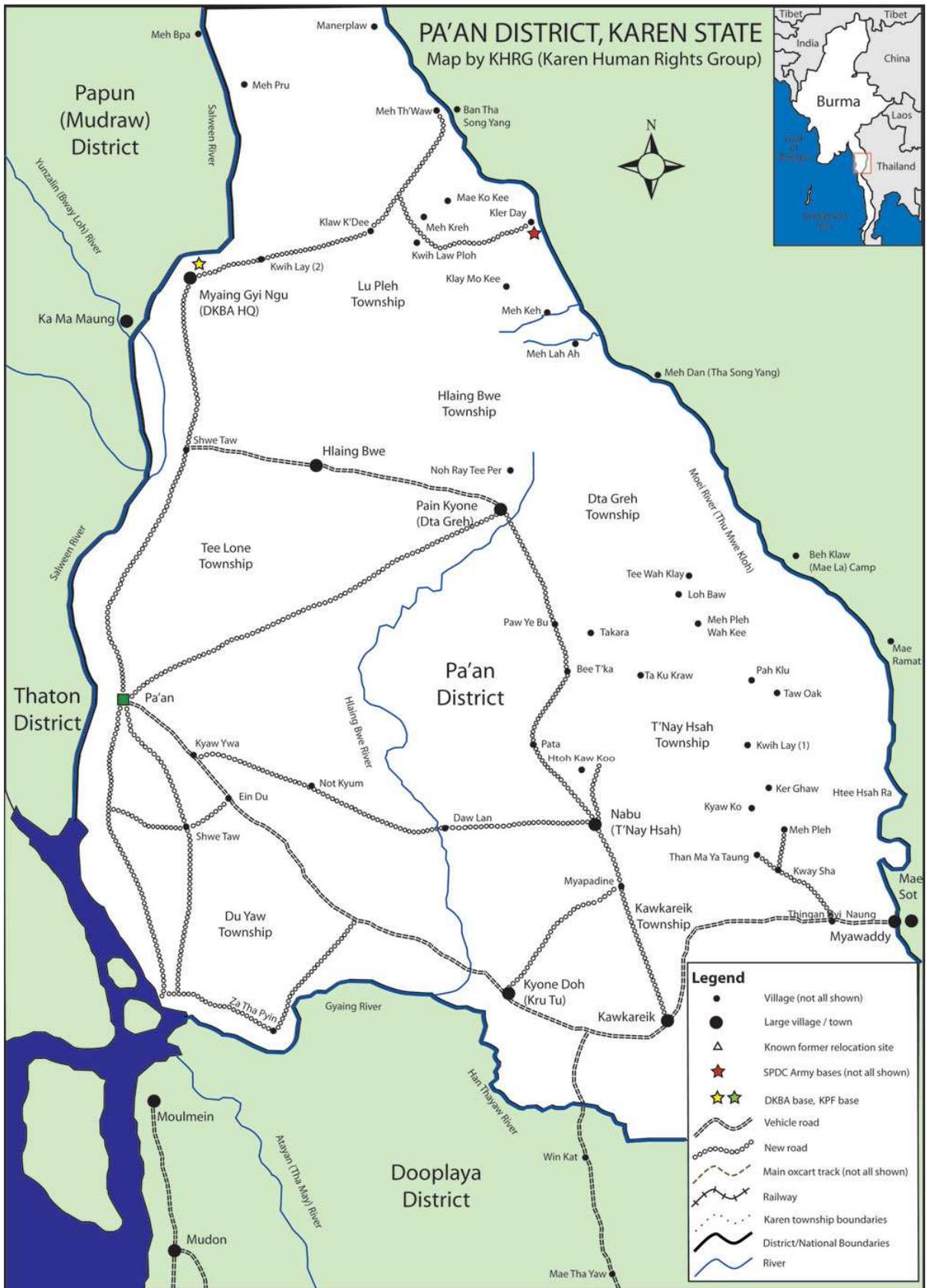
For more information on the impact of the DKBA and SPDC on villagers in Pa'an District, see the following previously published KHRG reports:

- *Over 700 villagers flee to Thailand amidst fears of SPDC/DKBA attacks on a KNLA camp and an IDP camp in Pa'an District* (June 2009)
- *Joint SPDC/DKBA attacks, recruitment and the impact on villagers in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts* (May 2009)
- *Extortion and restrictions under the DKBA in Pa'an District* (March 2009)
- *Insecurity amidst the DKBA -KNLA conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an Districts* (February 2009)
- *Forced recruitment by DKBA forces in Pa'an District* (September 2008)
- *Daily demands and exploitation: Life under the control of SPDC and DKBA forces in Pa'an District* (September 2008)

Recent photos from the area are presented in *KHRG Photo Gallery 2008* and *KHRG Photo Gallery 2007*. This and other KHRG reports and maps of the region can be found on the KHRG website at <http://www.khrq.org>.

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<sup>4</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of the limits of the recent international focus on Burma, see *Don't neglect rural Burma in calling for Suu Kyi's release*, KHRG, June 4<sup>th</sup> 2009.



# Karen Districts



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Scale: 1 cm to 22 km  
1 in. to 35 miles