



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

June 27, 2012/ KHRG #2012-B61

Villagers return home four months after DKBA and Border Guard clash, killing one civilian, injuring two in Pa'an

On February 19th 2012, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) ambushed a truck carrying a group of soldiers from Border Guard Battalion #1015 near Myaing Gyi Ngu town in Pa'an District, after the Border Guard soldiers stole weapons from the DKBA base at M--- village. Two villagers living near the site of the ambush were injured, and one was killed. Since then, movement restrictions have been imposed on Border Guard and DKBA troops operating in the Myaing Gyi Ngu area by the Burma government, which prohibits military units in possession of weapons from travelling within three miles of Myaing Gyi Ngu town. As of June 6th 2012, villagers living near Border Guard and DKBA camps, including the two villagers who were injured on February 19th, were reported to have returned to their villages, after having previously moved away. Directly after the clash in February, community members described their safety concerns and the possible consequences for civilians should the January 12th ceasefire agreement between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Tatmadaw be broken.

Border Guard and DKBA *Kloh Htoo Lah* troops clash in February

On February 19th 2012, three trucks carrying Border Guard Battalion #1015¹ soldiers came to the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) *Kloh Htoo Lah*'s² base in M--- village and stole a cache of weapons.

During the return to their headquarters in Myaing Gyi Ngu town, two of the Border Guard trucks travelled together along one road and the third truck travelled on a different road. The truck travelling alone reached a junction where the road from Pa'an, the road constructed

¹ It should be noted that a report on this incident by the Karen Information Center (KIC) states the units of the Border Guard Battalions involved as being #1011, see "Killings and attacks between DKBA and BGF drives villagers from their homes," *Karen News*, February 24th 2012; and "Two women killed in fighting between the DKBA and Government's militia," *Karen News*, March 2nd 2012. KHRG's information is provided by a community member in the local area.

² *Kloh Htoo Lah* is one of two DKBA Battalions, the other being *Kloh Htoo Wah*, created following a reconfiguration of *Kloh Htoo Baw* in September 2011, and is under the command of Battalion Commander *Bo* (Officer) Bee. DKBA forces in Pa'an and Dooplaya districts that refused to transform into Tatmadaw Border Guard battalions and which, in November 2010, began fighting Tatmadaw forces have been variously referred to as DKBA #907, *Kloh Htoo Baw* (Golden Drum), and Brigade #5.

under the command of U Thuzana,³ and the road to the Salween riverbank at Mae Th'Waw meet. At that point, DKBA soldiers who were waiting near Myaing Gyi Ngu, attacked the truck with rocket-propelled grenades and other small arms in retaliation for the theft of the weapons.

Several villagers lived near to this junction, where they had built houses, and some had set up small shops. One unmarried woman, approximately 17 or 18 years of age, and one man were injured in the attack. Another woman, about 24 years of age, was killed during the skirmish. She was married with two kids and her husband was working in Bangkok at the time of the incident. The man injured in the attack received medical treatment at Pa'an Hospital. According to a member of a local media organisation who spoke to DKBA soldiers in the area, the man who was injured is not only a villager, but is also a member of the Border Guard.

Movement restrictions after the attack

The Burma government sought to prevent further conflict between the DKBA and the Border Guard by prohibiting armed groups in possession of weapons from coming within three miles of Myaing Gyi Ngu town. If any group wishes to travel there, they must adhere to this prohibition and refrain from carrying weapons. For approximately one week at the end of February 2012, the Border Guard prevented DKBA troops from travelling to Myaing Gyi Ngu and the DKBA also prevented the Border Guard from coming within areas under their control, closer to the Moei River on the Thailand-Burma border. Myaing Gyi Ngu is where the DKBA's headquarters were formerly located, and some DKBA soldiers wished to go back and regain control of the area.

Impacts on villagers

As a consequence of the attack on February 19th 2012, villagers living close to the Border Guard Battalion #1015 and DKBA *Kloh Htoo Lah* camps, including those from the villages of H---, N---, S---, A---, Y--- and T---, moved away from their homes, as they were afraid of being injured during fighting between the two groups. Villagers were also reported to be concerned that the situation could deteriorate if the ceasefire agreed on January 12th 2012 between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Tatmadaw is broken.

Current Situation in Myaing Gyi Ngu

³ U Thuzana is an influential Buddhist monk based in Myaing Gyi Ngu who was instrumental in the formation of the DKBA in 1994; see: "Inside the DKBA," KHRG, March 1996.

As of June 6th 2012, a local community member described the Border Guard and DKBA as no longer active in Myaing Gyi Ngu town or in villages nearby, with the result that villagers were not being ordered to perform forced labour and there had been a reduction in looting of livestock and other belongings. All villagers who fled the fighting between the Border Guard and DKBA have now returned to their villages. The two villagers who were injured by the fighting have recovered and are living in their village now. The community member described increased freedom of movement for villagers to travel and earn their livelihoods.

Further background on the current situation in Pa'an District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- "Photo Set: Villagers register concerns about proposed Hatgyi Dam," (June 2012)
- "Forced labour and extortion in Pa'an District," (June 2012)
- "Pa'an Interview: Saw Bw---, September 2011," (June 2012)
- "Pa'an Interview: Saw P---, March 2012," (June 2012)
- "Pa'an Situation Update: Dta Greh and Lu Pleh Townships, Septmeber 2011," (June 2012)
- "Saw Hs---, March 2012," (May 2012)
- "Pa'an Interview: Saw T---, September 2011," (June 2012)

