



# Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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## News Bulletin

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### **Commander Pah Mee implicated in violent abuse, disappearance, and killing of village tract leader in Hpapun District, July 2015**

*This news bulletin describes the disappearance and killing of Htee Tha Daw Hta village tract leader, Kyaw Dah Dah. Kyaw Dah Dah was appointed village tract leader of Htee Tha Daw Hta village tract in 2011. During his four years of service as village tract leader he suffered under the oppression of former Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) Commander Pah Mee, until ultimately his life was taken. Based on the testimonies of local people and witnesses, it is apparent that Commander Pah Mee was abusing Kyaw Dah Dah for some time, and it is thought that he is responsible for ordering the village tract leader's death. This information was collected by a KHRG Community Member who visited the area and spoke to people about the case.<sup>1</sup>*

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Htee Tha Daw Htah village tract leader Kyaw Dah Dah disappeared in April, 2015. At the time of his disappearance, Kyaw Dah Dah was 52 years old. He was originally from Meh Lah village and had a wife and four children. According to the suspicions of local people, former Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) Commander Pah Mee<sup>2</sup> was behind Kyaw Dah Dah's disappearance. KNLA Commander Pah Mee is notorious in Hpapun District and is well known as being associated with several armed groups: the KNLA, the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA)<sup>3</sup> and the Border Guard Force (BGF).<sup>4</sup> He has committed serious human rights violations

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<sup>1</sup> This News Bulletin was written by KHRG office staff and is based on information from a community member from Hapapun District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It summarises information from two situation updates and 11 interviews received by KHRG in July 2015. In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in southeast Burma/Myanmar, KHRG aims to make all field information received available on the KHRG website once it has been processed and translated, subject only to security considerations. For additional reports categorised by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's website.

<sup>2</sup> It is not clear exactly what rank was held by Commander Pah Mee, as he had affiliations with several armed groups active in Hpapun District. According to a statement released by the KNU on October 14<sup>th</sup> 2015, Commander Pah Mee was dismissed from his position with the KNLA in response to his having committed numerous human rights violations and his failure to meet the commands of his KNLA superiors. The statement is available online at "[KNU Brigade 5 respond to the media, regarding media reports of forced recruitment in Brigade 5](#)," Thaw Thi Kho, October 2015 (Burmese version); English translation available at "[Clarification from the Karen National Union \(KNU\) Mutraw District Regarding Media reports on Forced Recruitment and Other Issues in Mutraw District October 14, 2015](#)," Karen Kwe News Group, October 2015.

<sup>3</sup> The Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), formerly the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, was formed in December 1994 and was originally a breakaway group from the KNU/KNLA that signed a ceasefire agreement with the Burma/Myanmar government and directly cooperated at times with Tatmadaw forces. The formation of the DKBA was led by monk U Thuzana with the help and support of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the name of the military government in Burma/Myanmar at that time. For more information on the formation of the DKBA, see "Inside the DKBA," KHRG, 1996. The DKBA now refers to a splinter group from those

in the area and reports of Commander Pah Mee's actions have caused widespread fear amongst villagers in Hpapun District and beyond.<sup>5</sup> According to the KHRG Community Member who collected the information, it is known locally in Bu Tho Township that prior to Kyaw Dah Dah's disappearance, Commander Pah Mee ordered that the village tract leader be arrested on April 15<sup>th</sup> 2015. There is some speculation as to the reasons behind Commander Pah Mee's order to arrest Kyaw Dah Dah, however villagers have indicated that the problems between the two men may have initially stemmed from Commander Pah Mee's displeasure with the village tract leader over discrepancies in Kyaw Dah Dah's collection of elephant tax, his supposed lack of support in running a newly established Brigade 5 headquarters, and a dispute over the number of guns distributed to Kyaw Dah Dah by Commander Pah Mee. These suspicions are supported by the testimony of a witness familiar with the situation in Bu Tho Township, who spoke to the KHRG community member. The witness visited Commander Pah Mee at his house on April 16<sup>th</sup> 2015. Travelling to Commander Pah Mee's house by boat, the witness explained that as they docked the boat, they saw the head of the local Home Guard<sup>6</sup> Kyaw Heh Noh, who had recently been appointed to the position by Commander Pah Mee, drag Kyaw Dah Dah along the ground to Commander Pah Mee's house and then tie him to a post. The witness met with Commander Pah Mee as planned. Also at Commander Pah Mee's house were Commander Eh Roe, Pah Htee Ghay, Pah Naw Day and DKBA Company Commander Maung Thein Win.<sup>7</sup> After the visit, as the witness left, they saw that Kyaw Dah Dah had been moved and was tied to a tree which was in the sun. His hands were tied behind his back and he was sweating.

A week following the events described above, a dead body was found floating in the Salween River. According to the KHRG Community Member, the body was first found by children who were too afraid of the local armed groups to let anyone know. It was later found by a Meh Lah villager, who knew Kyaw Dah Dah and was able to confirm the body was his.

Following Kyaw Dah Dah's death, more information was revealed of his suffering under Commander Pah Mee. According to local people, one incident occurred when Commander Pah Mee had previously arrested Kyaw Dah Dah and beat him with the barrel of an assault rifle. Kyaw

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DKBA forces reformed as Tatmadaw Border Guard Forces, also remaining independent of the KNLA. As of April 2012, the DKBA changed its name from "Buddhist" to "Benevolent" to reflect its secularity.

<sup>4</sup> 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 Burmese/Myanmar government and agreed to transform into battalions within the Tatmadaw. BGF battalions are assigned four digit battalion numbers, whereas regular Tatmadaw infantry battalions are assigned two digit battalion numbers and light infantry battalions are identified by two or three-digit battalion numbers. For more information, see "DKBA officially becomes Border Guard Force" Democratic Voice of Burma, August 2010, and, "Exploitation and recruitment under the DKBA in Pa'an District," KHRG, June 2009.

<sup>5</sup> On October 1<sup>st</sup> 2015, local news source [7 Day Daily](#) reported that Commander Pah Mee arrested and severely tortured three villagers in Hpapun District. One of the villagers later died as result of his injuries upon arrival at Myaing Gyi Ngu Hospital; the report is no longer available online.. KHRG has received previous reports of Commander Pah Mee's abuse of villagers whilst operating with the KNLA in Hpapun District, see "[Incident Report: Violent abuse in Papun District, October 2012](#)," KHRG, April 2013.

<sup>6</sup> 'Home guard' or *gher der* groups have been organised locally in parts of northern Karen State to address Tatmadaw 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.

<sup>7</sup> Commander Maung Thein Win is from the DKBA *Kloh Htoo Lah* Battalion: *Kloh Htoo Lah* is under the command of Bo (Officer) Bee and is one of the three current DKBA Battalions, the others being *Kloh Htoo Wah* and *Kloh Htoo Baw*, that were formed in September 2011 and refused to transform into Tatmadaw Border Guard battalions. *Kloh Htoo Baw* (Golden Drum) referred to the DKBA before 2011, but was then reconfigured to have the two additional battalions as well. DKBA forces in Hpa-an and Dooplaya districts that refused to transform into Tatmadaw Border Guard battalions began fighting Tatmadaw forces in November 2010 and have been variously referred to as DKBA #907, *Kloh Htoo Baw*, Golden Drum, and Brigade #5.

Dah Dah returned to his wife covered in bruises but would not tell her how he got them, saying only that he fell down and asking her to rub ointment on them. Having now learned of her husband's suffering under Commander Pah Mee, Kyaw Dah Dah's wife is in great distress.

The KHRG Community Member spoke to another witness regarding the village tract leader. The witness described how Kyaw Dah Dah had come to him not long before his disappearance, asking for help. He wanted to be replaced as the Htee Tha Daw Htah village tract leader as he was afraid of Commander Pah Mee and felt he could not serve as a village tract leader under him anymore. He appealed to the witness not to let Commander Pah Mee hear about the conversation between them, out of fear he would be beaten again. As he asked the witness to help him, he was emotional and couldn't speak properly.

The KHRG Community Member received information that the individual who carried out the killing of Kyaw Dah Dah, under Commander Pah Mee's orders, was a DKBA soldier under the command of DKBA Commander Maung Thein Win.

Based on the information provided above, it appears that Commander Pah Mee committed serious, violent abuse of the Htee Tha Daw Htah village tract leader Kyaw Dah Dah over a sustained period of time. His order to arrest Kyaw Dah Dah prior to his disappearance, and witness testimony of Kyaw Dah Dah being tied up outside his house, strongly implicate Commander Pah Mee in the village tract leader's murder. KHRG has since received information that Commander Pah Mee, along with his deputy, was killed by his own supporters. Further information regarding this will be published as it is received.

Further background reading on the situation in Hpapun District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- "Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, November 2014 to January 2015," (October 2015)
- "Fighting between Tatmadaw and KNLA soldiers leads to violent abuse and displacement of villagers in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, October 2015," (October 2015)
- "Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho and Dwe Lo townships, April 2014 to February 2015," (September 2015)
- "Hpapun Incident Report: Villager killed by Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalion #1013 in Bu Tho Township, March 2015," (September 2015)
- "Human rights violations by Second Lieutenant Tha Beh of BGF Battalion #1014 in Hpapun District, between 2012 and 2015," (September 2015)

## Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



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