

# Karen Human Rights Group

## News Bulletin

*News Bulletin is regularly produced by KHRG in order to provide up to date information on recent developments taking place within Karen and other areas of Burma, particularly when urgent action may be required. To receive News Bulletin by email, subscribe to the mailing list by following the links on the KHRG Homepage. Topics covered in News Bulletin will generally be documented in more detail in future KHRG reports.*

---

### **SPDC troops commence full offensive in Papun district**

An Independent Report by the Karen Human Rights Group  
June 1, 2006 / KHRG #2006-B6

In April 2006, State Peace & Development Council (SPDC) Army units in Papun district of northern Karen State began attacking civilian villages, leading to fears that the offensive in neighbouring Toungoo and Nyaunglebin districts was likely to expand. On May 16<sup>th</sup> KHRG reported the arrival of seven new SPDC battalions in Papun district, bringing the number of battalions in the district to at least 27,<sup>1</sup> and predicted an imminent wave of new attacks against villages (see ***Villagers displaced as SPDC offensive expands into Papun district***, 16/5/06). In the past week these troops have begun to move and to attack villages. A KHRG researcher in the district reports that at present three SPDC columns are sweeping in three directions throughout the northern half of the district, burning houses and destroying food supplies. More troops are expected to arrive soon to extend these attacks further, and the offensive is now almost certain to continue through the rainy season.

### **Offensive movements**

Since 2005 the SPDC has been building up its troop presence in Papun district, establishing new Army camps and strengthening and stockpiling existing camps. In the past week a series of coordinated sweeps has begun, as three SPDC columns have set out from three bases to depopulate villages.

From Ler Mu Plaw camp, which is west of the Yunzalin River and north of the Kyauk Kyi – Saw Hta road (see **map**), a column under Military Operations Command (MOC) #10 set out on May 28 or 29.<sup>2</sup> This column is heading slowly northward, burning, destroying and landmining villages and ricefields. The column has already burned rice storage barns and farmfield

---

<sup>1</sup> A full strength SPDC battalion is 400-500 men, but the regime's rush to create more battalions has led most new and old battalions to become extremely undermanned; most of these battalions now only have 120-150 men.

<sup>2</sup> A Military Operations Command (MOC) has ten battalions divided into three Tactical Operations Command units. MOCs are used for offensive purposes and operate under orders of the Regional Command (in this case, Southern Regional Command in Toungoo). There are 13 MOCs in Burma. MOCs #10 and #15 presently have forces in Papun district, while MOC #16 is attacking villages in neighbouring Nyaunglebin district and MOC #21 in Nyaunglebin and Thaton districts.

huts in the Naw Yo Hta area. This same column already burned and destroyed villages, farmfield huts and food supplies in the P'Nah Ay Per Ko and Saw Mu Plaw areas east and west of their base at Ler Mu Plaw in the first half of May (see ***Villagers displaced as SPDC offensive expands into Papun district***, 16/5/06), but in this new sweep they appear to be heading into areas further north in the direction of Toungoo district, where Light Infantry Division #66 is currently destroying villages.<sup>3</sup>

The new troops in the district have also begun to move. In mid-May KHRG reported that seven new battalions under Military Operations Command #15 had arrived at Pwa Ghaw camp on the Kyauk Kyi – Saw Hta road. MOC #15 has now established a Tactical Operations Command at Pwa Ghaw, and in the past week sent a column southward along the Bilin River. The column is moving slowly, only a few kilometres per day, so that it can seek out and destroy farmfield huts and hidden rice storage barns along the way. The apparent objective is to clear the many villages along the Bilin River down to Baw Kwaw, where they will probably meet with another column presently heading up from the south.

This third column comes from MOC #15's other Tactical Operations Command base near Maw Law, south of Baw Kwaw on the Bilin River. This column is moving slowly up the Bilin River toward Baw Kwaw, also destroying villages and food supplies. The objective appears to be a 'pincer movement', with the two columns expected to meet at Baw Kwaw by next week.

According to Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) intelligence, troops from SPDC Light Infantry Division #77 or #99 are about to be sent up to Papun town to attack from yet another direction – in this case, heading northward from Papun up the Yunzalin River to Day Pu Noh (see ***map***). This suggests that the offensive will continue at full force throughout the rainy season, which has already begun and will continue until October. Another indication of this is that Army units presently to the north attacking villages in Toungoo district have received orders to remain in the district until the end of December, rather than being pulled out in August on the normal rotation. This order makes it unlikely that Light Infantry Division #99 is going to Toungoo district to replace Light Infantry Division #66 as formerly reported by KHRG (see ***Villagers displaced as SPDC offensive expands into Papun district***, 16/5/06).

### **Effects on villagers**

There are very few KNLA soldiers in the Ler Mu Plaw or Baw Kwaw areas. These SPDC columns are not attacking the KNLA, they are attacking villages, food supplies and ricefields in an attempt to force the villagers to move to SPDC-controlled areas along vehicle roads. KHRG has not yet been able to receive information on the direct effects on villagers of these new

---

<sup>3</sup> Like a Military Operations Command, a Light Infantry Division has ten (Light Infantry) battalions divided into three Tactical Operations Commands and is used for offensive operations. However, LIDs take their orders from the Ministry of Defence rather than the Regional Command.

attacks over the past few days, but it is likely that they are fleeing their villages ahead of the slow advance of the columns and establishing hiding sites further up the forested hillsides near the Yunzalin and Bilin Rivers. Both the Ler Mu Plaw and upper Bilin areas are dotted with many small villages, and it is likely that several thousand people will be displaced by these new columns in the coming week. The rains make conditions very difficult, people will not be able to carry much food with them up the steep mountainsides, and disease will be a constant threat particularly to the children, the elderly, and pregnant or nursing women. Returning to their villages or rice storage barns is extremely risky as these are usually landmined by SPDC troops before moving on. Once the two 'pincer' columns of MOC #15 meet in Baw Kwaw on the Bilin River they may send units into the surrounding hills to hunt out displaced villagers, which would make the situation much more dangerous.

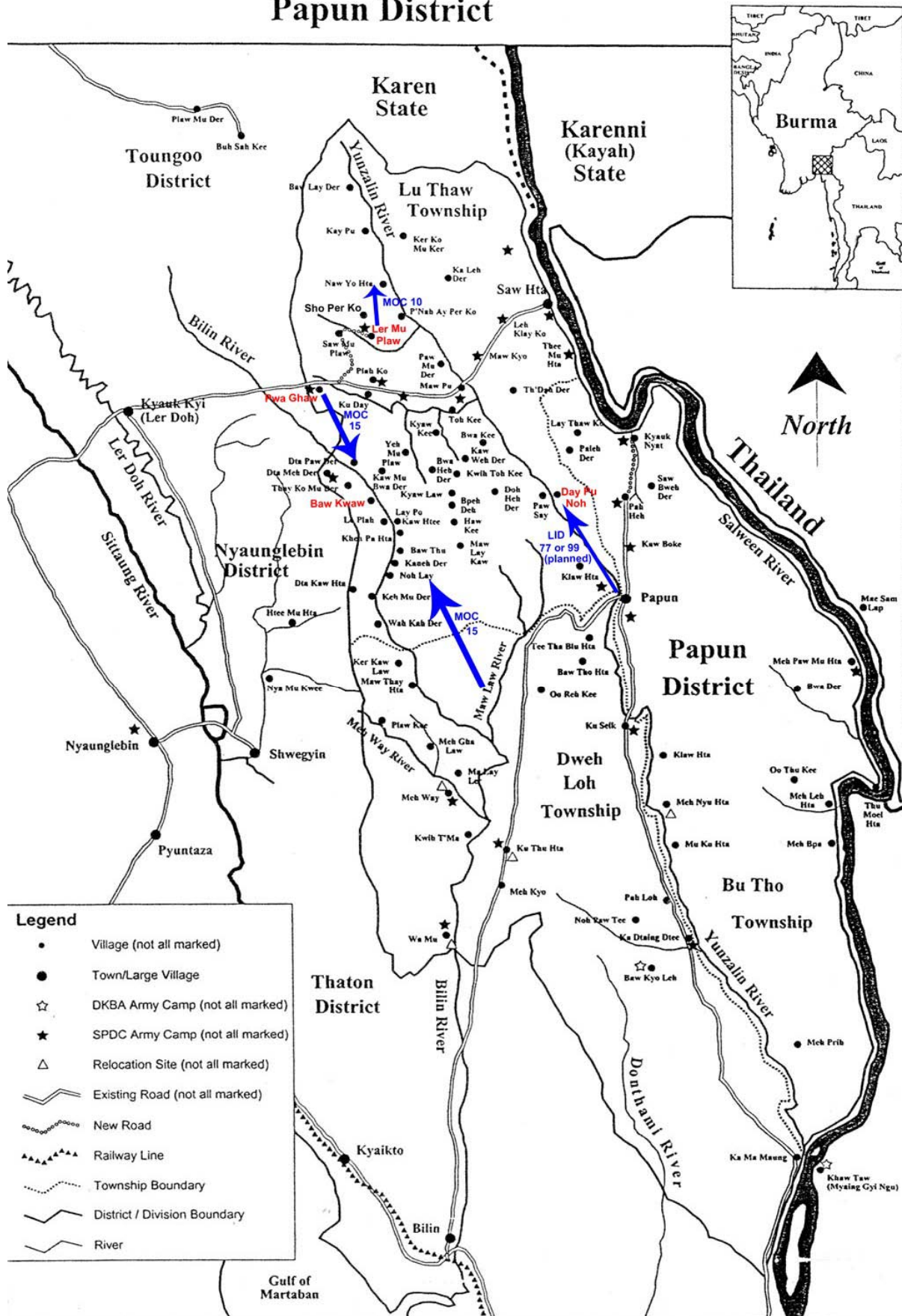
### **Further background**

KHRG will update this situation with further reports as information becomes available. For further background on the situation in Papun District, see:

- ***Villagers displaced as SPDC offensive expands into Papun district*** (KHRG #2006-B4, May 2006)
- ***Abuses in SPDC-controlled areas of Papun district*** (KHRG #2006-F3, April 2006)
- ***Attempted rapes and other abuses in northern Karen districts*** (KHRG #2006-B2, March 2006)
- ***SPDC road construction plans creating problems for civilians*** (KHRG #2006-B1, January 2006)
- ***Flight, Hunger and Survival: Repression and Displacement in the Villages of Papun and Nyaunglebin Districts*** (October 2001).

Photos from Papun and all neighbouring districts are presented in **KHRG Photo Gallery: 2005** (April 2006) and **KHRG Photo Set 2005A** (May 2005). These and other reports are available on the KHRG web site at [www.khrg.org](http://www.khrg.org).

# Papun District



Scale: 1 cm to 7.5 km

Map by KHRG, Karen Human Rights Group



## A map of Burma and its surrounding regions. Burma is shown in white, with a yellow rectangular area in the south. Neighboring countries are labeled: TIBET to the north, INDIA to the west, CHINA to the north and east, LAOS to the east, and THAILAND to the south. Bodies of water are labeled: Gulf of Bengal to the west, Andaman Sea to the south, and Gulf of Thailand to the southeast.



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