

# 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.*

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## **Offensive columns shell and burn villages, round up villagers in northern Papun and Toungoo districts**

An Independent Report by the Karen Human Rights Group  
June 7, 2006 / KHRG #2006-B7

On June 1<sup>st</sup> 2006, KHRG reported the commencement of a full offensive by State Peace & Development Council (SPDC) forces against civilian villages in Papun district of Karen State (see ***SPDC troops commence full offensive in Papun District***, KHRG #2006-B6). That report described how three SPDC columns had set out in the last days of May to burn and destroy Karen villages in an attempt to force villagers to move to SPDC-controlled areas. A KHRG researcher in the district has provided the following update on the escalation of SPDC activities against villages since that time.

### **Offensive columns north of Ler Mu Plaw**

The northernmost column in Papun district is made up of SPDC Light Infantry Battalions #361, 362, 363 and 370, all operating as part of Military Operations Command (MOC) #10 based at Ler Mu Plaw (see **Papun map**). At the end of May this column headed northward to destroy villages and capture or kill villagers in the Ler Mu Plaw, Naw Yo Hta and Kay Pu areas. In addition to assault rifles, carbines and sniper rifles the column is armed with 60 millimetre and 81 millimetre mortars which it uses to shell villages and suspected hiding places of displaced villagers on its approach. Left behind at Ler Mu Plaw are Light Infantry Battalions #364, 365, 367 and 369 from MOC #10, and Infantry Battalion #60 from Southern Command in Toungoo. The MOC #10 commander is currently based at Htaw Mo Pleh Meh, on a hilltop just outside Ler Mu Plaw, and has set up a 120 millimetre mortar position there. The 120 is the largest of conventional mortars, with a range of 7-10 kilometres and producing a blast large enough to completely destroy several homes at once. Since June 2<sup>nd</sup>, MOC #10 has been using this mortar to shell all village sites and villagers' hiding sites within range. This includes villages as far away as Naw Yo Hta. In addition to using its own smaller mortars, the mobile column has called by radio for this 120mm mortar to shell each village before entering it, even though the villages are undefended.

On May 31<sup>st</sup> the abovementioned column saw Htee Baw Kee villager Saw Yweh Mu, age 40, working in his irrigated ricefield at Pwa Doh Hta, and shot him dead on sight. They then burned down his farmfield hut and his rice storage barn, and also burned a second farmfield hut and rice storage barn belonging to Naw K'Pru Paw, a woman villager who was not there.

On June 1<sup>st</sup> the column was heading for K'Neh Mu Der village when a small KNLA force tried to slow their advance by ambushing them. After an exchange of fire the KNLA troops withdrew, and the SPDC column proceeded to destroy eight hillside ricefields located there by trampling the seedlings and destroying the fences so buffalos and wild pigs will be able to devour any crop before harvest.

On June 2<sup>nd</sup> the column found a group of thirty shelters where displaced villagers had taken refuge near K'Baw Kee, in Ler Mu Plaw area. The villagers fled the shelters before the column arrived, and the troops burned all thirty huts. On June 3<sup>rd</sup>, the column burned Dta Baw Meh Plaw village; exact information on the number of houses burned, the amount of livestock killed and belongings destroyed is not yet available. The villagers fled before the troops arrived.

The Karen National Union chairman of Lu Thaw township, where this column is operating, estimated on June 2<sup>nd</sup> that 2,800 villagers have been displaced in the township by SPDC attacks over the past week. However, a KHRG researcher notes that this does not include the people of Htee Si Kee, Htaw Baw Peh, K'Baw Kee, Dtru Kee and Htee Baw Day villages who have fled their villages in anticipation of probable attacks, and that if these people are included the total rises to 3,500 to 4,000 displaced. This number is expected to increase as the column pushes further north to Kay Pu.

### **Squeeze play: troops heading down from Toungoo district**

Meanwhile, a column of three battalions from Tactical Operations Command #3 of SPDC Light Infantry Division #66 set out from their base further north at Kler Lah in central Toungoo District, and headed southeast along the road to Bu Sah Kee (see **Toungoo map**). They have already reached Dta Kwih Soe, near Bu Sah Kee, and are expected to continue heading southeast into Papun district for a possible rendezvous at Kay Pu with the MOC #10 column coming up from Ler Mu Plaw (see **Papun map**). This pincer movement probably aims to catch villagers in the middle, making it impossible for Toungoo district villagers to escape southward into Papun district or vice versa. There is also an unconfirmed report that another column from Mawchi in southern Karenni (Kayah) State might be heading into the area from the east, to cut off any possible escape in that direction. If this is true, it could become virtually impossible for any more villagers from Toungoo district or far northern Papun district to reach the Thai border.

To support its advance down the Bu Sah Kee road, Light Infantry Division #66 rounded up as many men and women as it could from Kler Lah (a.k.a. Bawgali Gyi), Kaw Thay Der (Yay Tho Gyi) and Klay Soe Kee (Yay Tho Lay)

villages and is using them as porters. According to a report released on June 3<sup>rd</sup> by the Free Burma Rangers, approximately 850 villagers from the area were forced to carry the column's supplies along the road starting on May 25<sup>th</sup>. KHRG researchers now report that most of the men who escaped capture for portering duty have now fled the villages, so troops have now rounded up everyone remaining in the villages, mostly women, children and the elderly, and are detaining them under guard in the village schools and churches so they cannot escape. KHRG researchers expect that if more porters are needed, these people will be taken to carry for the troops regardless of age or sex.

Slightly further west in southern Toungoo district, Tactical Operations Command #2 of Military Operations Command #16 is actively restricting all movements of villagers and has established a blockade to prevent any movement of goods or people between the hill villages and the plains areas further west. The apparent intent is to prevent any food or supplies reaching displaced villagers or Karen resistance forces in the hills. This Tactical Operations Command, made up of Infantry Battalion #240 and Light Infantry Battalions #567 and 568, is also implementing a similar blockade just to the south in Mone township of Nyaunglebin district.

### **Offensive columns on the Bilin River**

In the last few days of May, a large column made up of seven newly-arrived battalions organised into two Tactical Operations Command groups set out from their base at Pwa Ghaw (along the Kyauk Kyi – Saw Hta road) and headed south along the Bilin River with the apparent objective of destroying all villages as far as Baw Kwaw (see **Papun map**). This is Military Operations Command #15, made up of SPDC Light Infantry Battalions #352, 353, 535, 537, 552, 564, and 565, each consisting of 120-150 men. The Military Operations Commander is accompanying the column. The advance of the column was slowed for two or three days because several soldiers or officers reportedly stepped on KNLA landmines, but it is still moving toward Baw Kwaw. On June 6<sup>th</sup> the column had reached Thay Ko Mu Der, about 2 to 3 hours' walk north of Baw Kwaw. To prevent villagers escaping southward along the river, SPDC Light Infantry Battalion #536 has been ordered to come in from the south, travelling by road via Thaton to Bilin and then coming upriver to meet the MOC 15 column from the other direction.<sup>1</sup> About 1,500 to 2,000 villagers from Thay Thu Der, Dta Paw Der, Dta Meh Der, Maw Law, Thay Ko Mu Der, Ber Khaw and Baw Kwaw villages have already fled up the hills flanking the river on both sides into the forests.

### **Other offensive columns**

KHRG's June 1<sup>st</sup> bulletin also reported that troops from SPDC Light Infantry Division #77 or 99 were expected to be sent up to Papun town for a possible thrust northward along the Yunzalin River (Bway Loh Kloh) toward Day Pu

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<sup>1</sup> KHRG's previous bulletin mistakenly reported this movement as being a second column of MOC 15, but it is LIB 536.

Noh. At present this is not happening, and neither division has yet sent troops to Papun. If, however, the Light Infantry Division #66 column coming down from Toungoo district meets up with MOC #10 at Kay Pu, the two columns may join and head southward along the Yunzalin, making it logical for the SPDC to send a second column from Papun up the Yunzalin to form yet another 'pincer movement'.

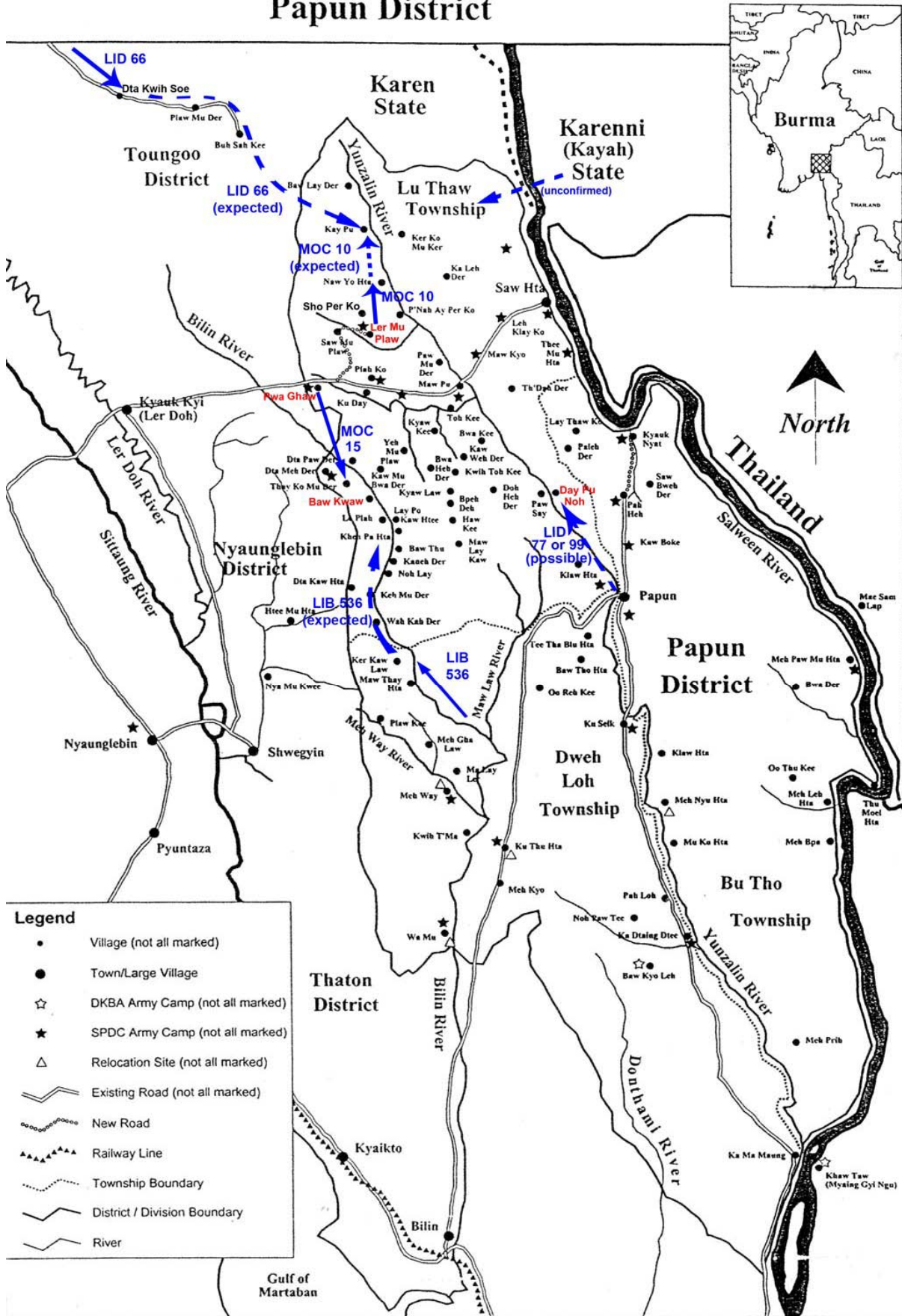
### **Further background**

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

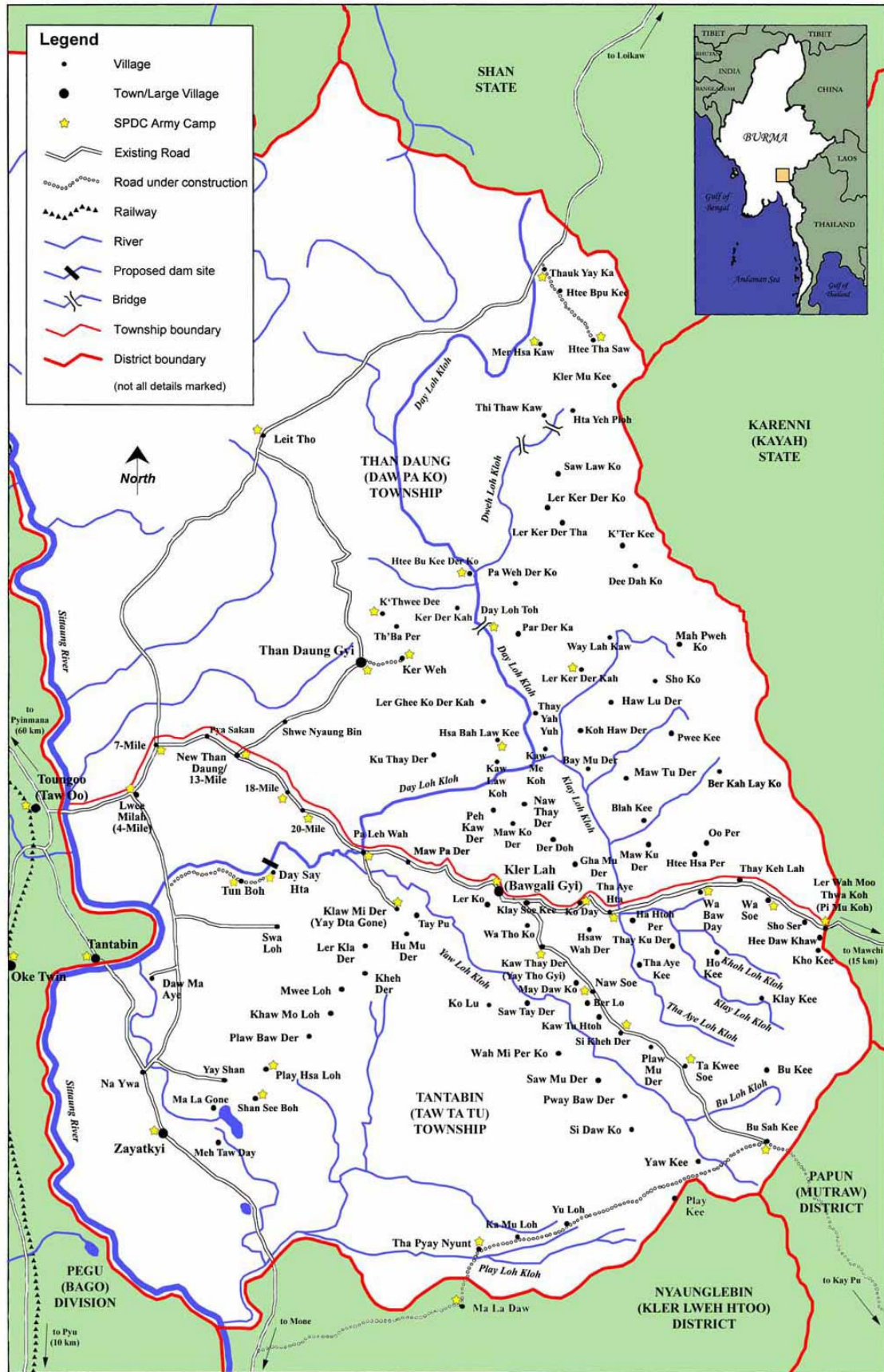
- ***SPDC troops commence full offensive in Papun District*** (KHRG #2006-B6, June 2006)
- ***Villagers displaced as SPDC offensive expands into Papun district*** (KHRG #2006-B4, May 2006)
- ***Abuses in SPDC-controlled areas of Papun district*** (KHRG #2006-F3, April 2006)
- ***Attempted rapes and other 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



# Toungoo (Taw Oo) District



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# Karen Districts



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