



## News Bulletin

May 27<sup>th</sup> 2009 / KHRG #2009-B3

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### **Joint SPDC/DKBA attacks, recruitment and the impact on villagers in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts**

*Following a joint SPDC/DKBA attack on the camp of KNLA Battalion #201 at Ghaw Lay Kee in Dooplaya District on April 19<sup>th</sup> 2009, around 200 villagers living in the area fled to Thailand. This and other recent attacks against KNLA targets – and the forced recruitment used to support them – have negatively impacted villagers in both Dooplaya and Pa'an districts. Recent DKBA attacks on KNLA targets have also crossed over into Thailand. Meanwhile, new DKBA recruits from Pa'an District will reportedly be sent for training at an SPDC training centre in Magwe Division in central Burma. This bulletin looks at the impact of the attacks and forced recruitment in these areas during April and May 2009.*

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Since late 2008, joint State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) troops have stepped up attacks against Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) positions located in contested areas of north-eastern Kawkaik Township of Dooplaya District, Karen State, opposite Phobpra and Umphang districts of Thailand's Tak Province. Fighting has spilled over into Thailand on numerous occasions and villagers living in the area have repeatedly fled due to attacks.<sup>1</sup>

On April 19<sup>th</sup> 2009, combined SPDC #IB 231 and DKBA Brigade #907 forces began attacks on the KNLA Battalion #201 camp at Ghaw Lay Kee, Kawkaik Township, Dooplaya District. According to the Karen-language news agency *Kwekalu*, there were over 200 SPDC and DKBA soldiers involved in the attacks, of whom around 50 were injured and more than 10 were killed. Of the KNLA troops involved in the fighting there were reportedly two soldiers injured and two killed.<sup>2</sup>

According to the Thailand-based newspaper *The Nation*, as the attacks continued, 81-mm mortar shells which SPDC troops fired at KNLA targets, overshot their mark and landed in Baan Padee village of Thailand's Pobpra District, on April 27<sup>th</sup> 2009, injuring two Thai Army soldiers. Thai Army forces evacuated the local villagers as the fighting continued on the Burma side of the border over the following days. After the incident, Thai Army officials in Tak Province submitted a letter to the Thailand-Myanmar Joint Border Committee in protest of the Burma Army mortar fire into Thailand.<sup>3</sup>

On April 28<sup>th</sup> 2009, after a week and a half of fighting, the Ghaw Lay Kee camp of KNLA Battalion #201 fell to the joint DKBA and SPDC troops. Since that time, local villagers who fled the initial fighting have been unwilling to return to reclaim their farm lands. Most villagers from Ghaw Lay Kee had been cultivating corn and peanut crops. While some have since tried to return to check on their fields there is a continued risk of stepping on landmines deployed in the

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<sup>1</sup> See, *DKBA soldiers attack Karen village in Thailand*, KHRG, October 2008 and *DKBA soldiers burn down huts, detain villagers and loot property in Thailand*, KHRG, January 2009.

<sup>2</sup> "DKBA and Burmese soldiers take control of Gkaw Lee Kee," *Kwekalu*, April 29<sup>th</sup> 2009.

<sup>3</sup> "Thai army protests after Burma's mortar shells injured two soldiers," *The Nation*, April 29<sup>th</sup> 2009. Accessed at [http://nationmultimedia.com/2009/04/29/national/national\\_30101649.php](http://nationmultimedia.com/2009/04/29/national/national_30101649.php) on May 26<sup>th</sup> 2009.

area. Two of the displaced villagers from Ghaw Lay Kee village were reportedly injured by landmines on April 30<sup>th</sup> 2009 while they were travelling back to access their farm fields.

The refugees from Ghaw Lay Kee now remain displaced at a Thai-Karen village on the Thailand side of the border. One of the displaced villagers confirmed with KHRG that around 200 civilians had fled to Thailand from the April 19<sup>th</sup> – April 28<sup>th</sup> attacks on Ghaw Lay Kee and that the community has since built over 30 huts at the Thai-Karen village where they are taking temporary refuge.



The picture on the left shows a father feeding his son at a Thai village near the Burma border on April 30<sup>th</sup> 2009. The father and son were amongst a group of about 200 villagers who fled the joint SPDC/DKBA attacks on Ghaw Lay Kee on April 19<sup>th</sup>. The photo on the right shows the remains of the child's limited meal of rice and fish paste [Photo: KHRG]



The four pictures above, taken on April 30<sup>th</sup> 2009, show displaced villagers from Ghaw Lay Kee staying in their recently built huts at a Thai-Karen village in Thailand's Tak Province after a joint SPDC/DKBA attack on a KNLA army camp near their homes on April 19<sup>th</sup> 2009. [Photo: KHRG]

## Cross-border fighting

The April 27<sup>th</sup> 2009 incident in which SPDC mortar fire landed in Thailand's Baan Padee village of Pobpra District is not the first occasion that fighting in Kawkaeik Township has crossed onto Thai soil this year. KHRG earlier reported on an incident from January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2009, when combined soldiers from DKBA Brigades #999 and #907, based at Th'waw Thaw, Kawkaeik Township, entered Thailand in search of a back route to the camp of KNLA Battalion #103, which was also located in Kawkaeik Township. At the time, DKBA soldiers detained villagers from the Thai-Karen village of Gklaw Htaw, Umphang District, Tak Province, and ordered them to guide the way back across the Thai-Burma border to the camp of KNLA Battalion #103. After an ambush by KNLA troops, the DKBA soldiers withdrew back into Thailand, burned down field huts at Gklaw Htaw and looted the property of local Thai-Karen villagers.<sup>4</sup>

More recently, on May 8<sup>th</sup> 2009, a patrol of more than 10 DKBA Brigade #907 soldiers from Th'waw Thaw, Kawkaeik Township, led by Battalion Commander Bpo Show, arrived at Gklaw Htaw and Noh Pa Htaw Wah villages – both in Thailand's Umphang District – and looted five ducks belonging to a local villager. During the incursion, the DKBA troops encountered Thai Army soldiers stationed in the area. There were reportedly tensions between the two sides, but due to the intervention of local villagers there was no fighting amongst the soldiers.

## Forced recruitment

The increased DKBA attacks against KNLA positions in eastern Karen State have been backed by an aggressive recruitment drive amongst local villagers. In late August 2008, Special Battalion of DKBA Brigade #999, based at Shwe Gko Gkoh in T'Nay Hsah Township, southeastern Pa'an District, began a new round of forced recruitment. At the time, one villager reported to KHRG that, *"Their [the DKBA's] aim is [to send the] new soldiers to Dooplaya District. I heard [this] from a village head. The DKBA has signed an agreement with the SPDC that this year they will attack Dooplaya District until they win."*<sup>5</sup>

The DKBA subsequently initiated renewed forced recruitment in T'Nay Hsah Township during January and February 2009.<sup>6</sup> Then, on May 15<sup>th</sup> 2009, according to KHRG field researchers, DKBA Brigade #999 leaders called a meeting for subordinate company commanders at Shwe Gko Gkoh, T'Nay Hsah Township. At the meeting, company commanders were told that the SPDC had ordered them to increase recruitment and that SPDC authorities would provide salaries and guns for the new recruits. Subsequently, on May 16<sup>th</sup> 2009, Maung Chit Thoo, Operation Commander of Brigade #999 (formerly commander of Special Battalion of Brigade #999), issued an order that village heads and village tract heads in T'Nay Hsah Township were to recruit new soldiers.

Following the recruitment order from Maung Chit Thoo, one male villager from Htee Wah Blaw village tract, T'Nay Hsah Township, who was selected for recruitment, fled to Thailand on May 19<sup>th</sup> in order to avoid serving as a DKBA soldier. DKBA authorities then reportedly detained his wife and demanded that she pay 50,000 Thai Baht. The next day, on May 20<sup>th</sup>, six more male villagers from Htee Wah Blaw village tract fled to Thailand in order to evade forced recruitment into the DKBA. Then, on May 21<sup>st</sup> 2009, after the villagers from Htee Wah Blaw village tract had fled from the DKBA's recruitment efforts, Gkyaw Bloh, Deputy Battalion Commander of DKBA Brigade #999's 'Loyalty' Battalion<sup>7</sup> ordered one person per household in Htee Wah Blaw

<sup>4</sup> *DKBA soldiers burn down huts, detain villagers and loot property in Thailand*, KHRG, January 2009.

<sup>5</sup> *Forced recruitment by DKBA forces in Pa'an District*, KHRG, September 2008.

<sup>6</sup> *Insecurity amidst the DKBA - KNLA conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts*, KHRG, February 2009.

<sup>7</sup> The Burmese word *Thitsa* is here translated as 'Loyalty' although another possible translation is 'truth'. DKBA Brigade #999, based in Pa'an District, led by Brigadier Pah Nwee, was formerly comprised of 'Special Battalion' (under the command of Maung Chit Thoo), 'Brigade Security Force' and Battalions #1, 2, 3, 4. At one point in 2007/2008, as Special Battalion #999 increased in strength, Maung Chit Thoo was promoted to Brigade Operations

village tract to attend a meeting. At the meeting Gkyaw Bloh informed those in attendance that 35 people from Htee Wah Blaw village tract were to be sent to serve as soldiers with the DKBA for three years. If villagers were unable or unwilling to serve as soldiers, they would have to collect 50,000 Thai Baht amongst themselves to pay to the DKBA to cover the cost of hiring each soldier for a period of three years.

Further north in Pa'an District, Brigadier Pah Nwee, commander of DKBA Brigade #999, called a meeting at Meh The, Lu Pleh Township, on May 15<sup>th</sup> 2009 with village tract heads and village heads from Dta Gre and Lu Pleh townships. At the meeting Pah Nwee informed the village heads that the DKBA would recruit 605 new soldiers from 15 village tracts in the two townships. The village heads were reportedly told that if they did not provide the recruits, the DKBA would have local villagers draw ballots to decide who would serve as soldiers.<sup>8</sup> The recruitment process then began on May 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> 2009.

Following Pah Nwee's May 15<sup>th</sup> announcement, 36 people from 7 households in Htee Bper village, Dta Greh Township, including the village head fled to an IDP camp along the Thailand border in order to avoid recruitment. Subsequently, according to *Kwekalu*, as villagers continued to flee, the total number who arrived at the IDP camp having fled forced recruitment in Dta Greh Township reached 119 people from 19 households by May 25<sup>th</sup>.<sup>9</sup>

Local KHRG field researchers report that on June 15<sup>th</sup> 2009, the new recruits from Pa'an District are to be sent to DKBA Brigade #999 headquarters at Meh The, Lu Pleh Township. These recruits are then to be sent on to an SPDC training centre at Nan Maw, Magwe Division, in central Burma, where they will undergo military training. The SPDC has reportedly agreed to provide each of the recruits with a weapon and a monthly salary of 25,000 kyat (approx. US \$23.36) per month.

## Conclusion

The DKBA now looks set to secure its long-term status as a border security force following Burma's 2010 elections.<sup>10</sup> Some analysts have suggested that the DKBA's attacks since late 2008 have been an attempt to seize KNLA-controlled territories and thus ensure "*administrative control over lucrative border trades, including mining operations and cross-border agribusiness projects*" under the post-2010-election political arrangements.<sup>11</sup> If this is the case, such attacks and their impact on local villagers can be expected to continue in the lead up to the planned 2010 elections.

Elsewhere in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts, where DKBA and SPDC forces have established firm control over the local population, villagers face forced labour, arbitrary taxation and other forms of extortion regularly demanded by both groups. This exploitative precedent – including the forced recruitment of soldiers – may thus foreshadow the coming situation in areas more recently taken over by the DKBA.

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Commander and his 'Special Battalion' was divided into Battalions #5, 6, 7, 8, 999 and 'Loyalty' Battalion, all of which have remained under his command. Brigadier Pah Nwee retains command of Brigade #999's Battalions #1, 2, 3, 4 and 'Brigade Security Force'.

<sup>8</sup> "Over one hundred villagers flee from DKBA military recruitment," *Kwekalu*, May 29<sup>th</sup> 2009.

<sup>9</sup> "Over one hundred villagers flee from DKBA military recruitment," *Kwekalu*, May 29<sup>th</sup> 2009.

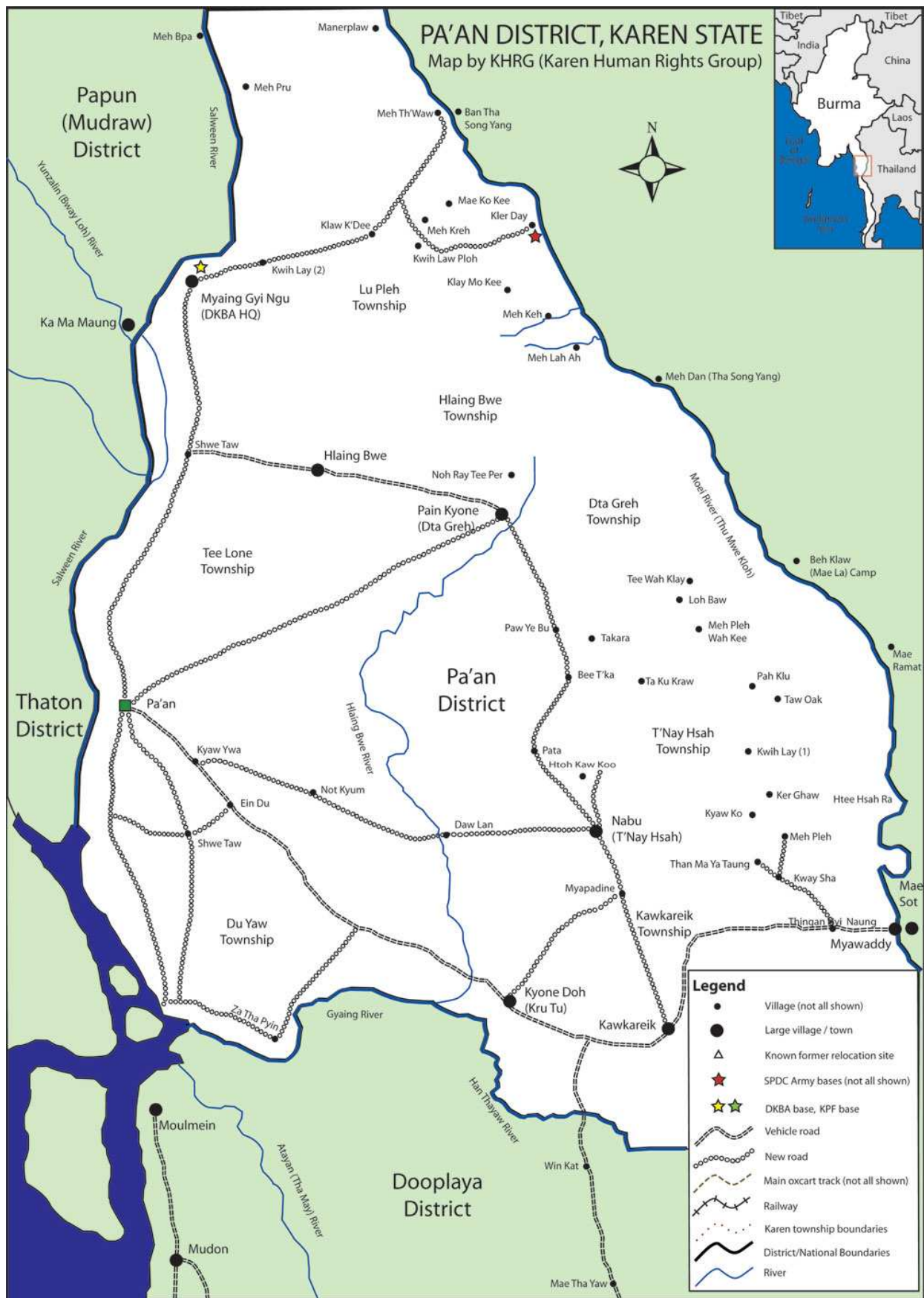
<sup>10</sup> "Armed ceasefire groups to be 'Border Guard Force'", *The Irrawaddy*, May 4<sup>th</sup> 2009. Accessed at [http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art\\_id=15583](http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=15583) on May 26<sup>th</sup> 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Brian McCarten, "Democracy plan fuels war in Myanmar," *Asia Times Online*, February 25<sup>th</sup> 2009. Accessed online at [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/KB25Ae02.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/KB25Ae02.html) on May 26<sup>th</sup> 2009.

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

- *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)
- *DKBA soldiers burn down huts, detain villagers and loot property in Thailand* (January 2009)
- *DKBA soldiers attack Karen village in Thailand* (October 2008)
- *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)
- *DKBA soldiers burn down Ler Bpoo village, Pa'an District* (August 2008)
- *SPDC and DKBA order documents: October 2007 to March 2008* (August 2008)

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





# Karen Districts



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