



## Report from the field

March 16<sup>th</sup> 2009 / KHRG #2009-F4

### Extortion and restrictions under the DKBA in Pa'an District

*Recent reports suggest that, in negotiations with State authorities, the DKBA has been able to ensure its long-term political future in Burma by transforming itself into a 'Border Security Force', a title that would nominally place the group within the SPDC hierarchy. Consequently, the DKBA's ongoing restrictions and extortion in T'Nay Hsah and Dta Greh townships of eastern Pa'an District (near the Thai border) may be expected to continue even after the planned 2010 elections. This report examines cases of abuse against villagers by SPDC and DKBA forces in Pa'an District from the end of 2008 to March 2009.*

In eastern Pa'an District, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) all continue to conduct armed operations. However, the DKBA continues to be the most active armed group in this area. As a result, local villagers in eastern Pa'an District, and in particular those living in T'Nay Hsah and Dta Greh townships, face a wide range of restrictions, taxes and ad hoc demands from DKBA soldiers. DKBA forces operating in this area are primarily those under the authority of Brigade #999 (including the Brigade's 'Special Battalion' commanded by Maung Chit Thoo).

The KNLA no longer has a fixed base in T'Nay Hsah Township. In Dta Greh Township, KNLA Battalions #21, 22 and 101 have been largely pushed up against the western flank of the Moei River which, in Pa'an District, forms the border with Thailand.

The SPDC has taken a somewhat reduced role in the region but continues to patrol T'Nay Hsah and Dta Greh townships and, in some cases, has looted villagers' property and demanded porters to carry military supplies. In previous years, SPDC Army units active in Pa'an District generally followed a practice of rotating every three months (except during the rainy season, when the wet conditions would make travel more difficult.) Since the start of 2009, however, SPDC Army units active in Dta Greh Township have rotated every month.



34-year-old Naw T--- shown above, a widow from N--- village, T'Nay Hsah Township, makes charcoal as her sole means of livelihood in order to support her four children and cover DKBA-imposed taxes. In mid-December, while felling a tree with her father, the tree landed on her legs (which are shown here covered with a turmeric-based medicinal compound meant to reduce and prevent swelling), injuring both knees. She had been unable to walk or work for two months since the accident when this photo was taken on February 16<sup>th</sup> 2009; making the payment of DKBA taxes especially difficult. [Photo: KHRG]

On February 20<sup>th</sup> 2009, column #1 of SPDC Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #206 of Light Infantry Division (LID) #22, under the command of Major Soe Win Aung, was rotated out of Wa Mee Gkla village tract, Dta Greh Township. When LIB #206 left the area on February 20<sup>th</sup>, it was replaced by SPDC LIB #205 of LID #22 under the command of Thaug Htaik. Upon arrival on February 20<sup>th</sup>, LIB #205 troops entered Gk--- village and looted property belonging to the following local villagers:

#	Villager's name	Items looted	Approximate value of looted items
1	Saw Gk---	1 hen and the eggs it was incubating	250 Thai baht (US \$7.14)
2	Saw P---	1 duck	250 Thai baht (US \$7.14)
3	Saw Gky---	3 chickens	300 Thai baht (US \$8.57)
4	Saw Dt---	1 musket and 10 bowls of chillies	700 Thai baht (US \$20)
5	Saw D---	3 chickens, 1 mattock and 50 coconuts	745 Thai baht (US \$21.28)
6	Saw P---	An empty 20 litre plastic container and tobacco being laid out to dry	240 Thai baht (US \$6.85)

The following morning (February 21<sup>st</sup> 2009), prior to leaving, LIB #205 troops demanded three Gk--- villagers to accompany the patrol and porter their supplies. Local villagers Saw L---, Saw G--- and Saw P--- went along with the patrol, carrying the soldiers' supplies for three days before they were allowed to return home.

## Extortion and restrictions under DKBA control

Villagers living in T'Nay Hsah and Dta Greh townships continue to face a diverse range of DKBA demands and restrictions that are often employed, it appears, solely for the purpose of extorting funds. Indeed, some villagers have told KHRG that they've had to hurriedly sell off their land and livestock for as little as half their real value in order to cover the amount needed to pay the DKBA's arbitrary taxes.

As KHRG previously reported, DKBA Special Battalion of Brigade #999 began recruiting new soldiers from amongst local villagers in T'Nay Hsah Township in August 2008. Those villagers who did not want to serve as DKBA soldiers and had sufficient cash could pay a fine in lieu of military service.<sup>1</sup>

In the latter half of 2008, DKBA forces under the command of Maung Chit Thoo began enforcing restrictions on the distillation and consumption of alcohol in T'Nay Hsah Township.<sup>2</sup> This was followed by the imposition of additional taxes on the production of charcoal in T'Nay Hsah Township.



The picture above, taken on February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009, shows the former plantation of the 54-year-old mother of Saw T---, of M---- village, T'Nay Hsah Township. Saw T---'s mother had to sell the plantation because her 28-year-old son, who had been recruited into the DKBA, refused to serve as a soldier. Along with this plantation, Saw T---'s mother also had to sell her farm field in order to collect the 900,000 kyat (US \$913.70) needed to hire someone else to take her son's place. [Photo: KHRG]

<sup>1</sup> For more details of DKBA forced recruitment, see *Forced recruitment by DKBA forces in Pa'an District*, KHRG, September 2008

<sup>2</sup> For more details on this incident, see *DKBA bans alcohol consumption to justify human rights abuses in Pa'an District*, KHRG, October 2008

Then, at the end of 2008, Maung Chit Thoo imposed new restrictions on the sale of corn to buyers in Thailand. The reasons behind these restrictions are unclear. However, according to a May 2007 agreement between Burmese and Thai authorities, Thai agribusinesses were to be allowed to contract out tax-free cultivation of corn and other crops to farmers in designated areas of eastern Burma including parts of Karen State with the produce being exported to Thailand.<sup>3</sup> Continued taxation of the designated crops by the SPDC, DKBA and KNU reportedly stalled the initiative, with conflict over these taxes being a cause of fighting between KNLA and DKBA forces in late 2008. Following the DKBA-imposed restrictions, local villagers who had just finished their corn harvests were worried that they would be unable to sell their corn elsewhere. For fear of seeing their corn rot unsold, some corn farmers secretly travelled to Thailand to make deals with Thai buyers. Although Maung Chit Thoo finally relaxed the restrictions on the sale of corn to buyers in Thailand in early 2009, much of the corn harvest in T'Nay Hsah Township had already begun to rot and buyers in Thailand were largely uninterested in purchasing it.

At the start of 2009, Maung Chit Thoo, commander of DKBA Special Battalion of Brigade #999, had soldiers under his command distribute photos of himself and his wife to villagers living in T'Nay Hsah Township – the villagers were forced to buy them at a cost of 2,000 kyat (US \$2.03) each. Some villagers did not have sufficient cash on hand to buy the photos and one complained to KHRG, saying “*Maung Chit Thoo is a human like us, but we have to buy his picture. We could take pictures of ourselves as well and sell them like he does since we're also humans. But could we also sell our pictures for 2,000 kyat like him?*”



53-year-old Saw N--- of Gk---village, Lu Pleh Township, Pa'an District, is carving a wooden spoon at an IDP site in Pa'an District on February 6<sup>th</sup> 2009. He told KHRG that, because he had to do forced labour for the SPDC and DKBA almost every day, he had no time to do his own work and therefore fled to this IDP site at the start of 2009. [Photo: KHRG]



The above photo, taken on February 9<sup>th</sup> 2009, shows a close-up of a picture of Maung Chit Thoo and his wife. Maung Chit Thoo had DKBA personnel under his command forcibly sell this picture to individual households in T'Nay Hsah Township at a cost of 2,000 kyat (US \$2.03) each. [Photo: KHRG]

On March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2009, DKBA Brigade #999 Brigadier Pah Nwee, Deputy Brigadier Gkya Aye and Special Battalion (of DKBA Brigade #999) commander Maung Chit Thoo arrived in the Gkyaw Gkay Hta area of Dta Greh township with three trucks and approximately 20 soldiers. The soldiers then began patrolling Wa Mee Gkla and Thay Maw Gkoo village tracts in order to establish and strengthen DKBA authority over local communities. The authorities of DKBA Brigade #999 also plan to build a new pagoda on the western side of the Dawna Mountains at a site near the Naw T'Ya vehicle road in Dta Greh Township. To raise funds for the construction of the new pagoda, Brigadier Pah Nwee was ordained as a monk when he arrived in the area and subsequently travelled from village to village to meet with local villagers and collect donations.

<sup>3</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/KB25Ae01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/KB25Ae01.html) on March 16<sup>th</sup> 2009.

## Conclusion

The ongoing pattern of restrictions, arbitrary taxation and ad hoc extortion by DKBA forces operating in eastern Pa'an District shows no sign of abating in the lead-up to Burma's 2010 elections. If, as some sources have reported, the DKBA is intending to position itself within the post-2010 election political arrangement as a 'Border Security Force' under the nominal authority of the SPDC, the pattern of exploitative abuse confronted by local villagers will likely continue.

For more information on the situation in Pa'an district, see the following previously published KHRG reports:

- *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)
- *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.khrg.org>.



# Karen Districts



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