



Short Update

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Fighting breaks out between Tatmadaw and KNLA breaks out near the proposed Hatgyi dam site

This Short Update describes fighting that broke out between Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) Company #4 and the Tatmadaw Light Infantry Division #44 subordinated Infantry Battalion #2.

- *The fighting took place on 28th August 2018 in Htee Meh Klar area, and east of T'lar Aw Koh village the following morning.*
 - *On 31st August, the Tatmadaw resorted to indiscriminate shelling around Ka Nyee Naw village. These skirmishes were triggered by the Tatmadaw entering into KNLA controlled territory in search of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army splinter group, without obtaining prior consent from the KNLA. However, a KNLA commander believes that the Tatmadaw was trying to establish control of the areas in proximity to the proposed Hatgyi dam site.*
 - *The fighting displaced people from neighbouring villages, who sought shelter in Mar Lar Yut, Moe Aye Myaing, Moe San Myaing, Lay Lone Myaing and Deh Htaw villages and Oh Taung monastery. The threat of ongoing fighting has prevented a number of displaced people from returning to their villages.*
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The following Short Update was written by KHRG staff, based on reports from the field. KHRG trains community members to local human rights conditions.¹

On 28th August 2018 at 9:30 AM, fighting broke out between the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) Company #4 and the Tatmadaw Light Infantry Division (LID) #44 subordinated Infantry Battalion (IB) #2.² A first skirmish occurred at Htee Meh Klar, located between Noh Hta village and T'lar Aw Koh village.

The tension between the two armed groups had increased after the KNLA rejected a request from the Tatmadaw to patrol the area to look for soldiers from the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) splinter group.³

¹ KHRG trains community members in southeastern Burma/Myanmar to document individual human rights abuses using a standardised reporting format; conduct interviews with other villagers; and write general updates on the situation in areas with which they are familiar.

² The LID # 44 Tactical Operation Commander is Min Min Htun, based in Ka Ma Moh Town. The subordinated IB # 2, comprised of 110 troops, is led by battalion commander Ko Ko Win and deputy battalion commander Win Thu.

³ The Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) was re-formed on January 16th 2016 as a splinter group from the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (2010 – present), and is also referred to as Na Ma Kya ('Deaf Ear'). During fighting between the Tatmadaw and DKBA Benevolent throughout 2015, there was internal disagreement within the DKBA Benevolent which resulted in a number of commanders being dismissed in July 2015. These former commanders then issued a statement in January 2016 declaring the formation of a new splinter group. This

The following morning, at 7:50 AM, a second skirmish occurred to the east of T'lar Aw Koh village.

On the morning of August 31, the Tatmadaw resorted to the indiscriminate firing of 81 mm and 61 mm mortar shells around Ka Nyee Naw village. They fired 20 mortars in the surroundings of the village, with the goal of clearing the area of the DKBA splinter group.

Context of the fighting

A group of soldiers from the DKBA splinter group has been hiding in the area around Htee Tha Dawt Hta village tract.

On July 12 2018, Tatmadaw LID #44 organised patrols in the area to wipe out the DKBA soldiers. The KNLA Company # 4 had given them permission to enter the area under their control. They patrolled the area for a week without finding any DKBA soldiers. On July 19 and July 20, the LID #44 IB #2 withdrew from the area.

On August 23, the Tatmadaw LID #44 IB #2 returned to the area. They came to Htee Lah Beh Hta, a strategic site where a bridge crosses the Yuzaline river. They communicated with the commander of KNLA Company # 4, Saw Hsa Yu Moo, to ask for permission to enter the area again.

This time, the KNLA Company # 4 did not give permission to the Tatmadaw to patrol the area in search of DKBA splinter soldiers. The KNLA told the Tatmadaw LID #44 IB #2 Commander that they will look for the DKBA splinter soldiers themselves.

Despite this, the Tatmadaw LID #44 IB #2 entered into the area under KNLA control. This led to tensions between the Tatmadaw and the KNLA, which erupted into a series of skirmishes.

According to reports received by KHRG, these skirmishes did not result in any deaths on either side. A KNLA commander believes that the Tatmadaw was claiming to patrol in search of the DKBA, when in reality, they wanted to gain more control over the area because of its proximity to the proposed Hatgyi dam site.

Military confrontations around the proposed Hatgyi dam site are not new – they have already occurred several times in 2014, 2015 and 2016. In 2016, the violence has displaced 5,000 people from 30 neighbouring villages in Meh Th' Waw area.⁴ The recent skirmishes come just a few months after an outbreak of violence in April 2018, which displaced a further 2,400 people from 5 villages.⁵

organisation has phrased the formation of this group as the revival of the original Democratic Karen Buddhist Army which was formed in 1994 until it was broken up in 2010 into the BGF and the still-active DKBA Benevolent. The group is led by General Saw Kyaw Thet, Chief of Staff and General Saw Taing Shwe aka Bo Bi, Vice Chief of Staff. Other lower ranking commanders in the DKBA Buddhist splinter group are San Aung and late Kyaw Moh aka Na Ma Kya (reportedly killed on August 26th 2016). The group is currently based in Myaing Gyi Ngu area in Hlaing Bwe Township, Karen State. This DKBA Buddhist (2016 – present) should not be confused with the DKBA Benevolent (2010 – present) from which it broke away in January 2016, or with the original DKBA (1994 – 2010) which was broken up in 2010 into the BGF and the DKBA Benevolent. Importantly, the DKBA Buddhist has not signed the preliminary or nationwide ceasefire with the Myanmar government whereas the DKBA Benevolent has signed both agreements.

⁴ See, "[Recent fighting between newly-reformed DKBA and joint forces of BGF and Tatmadaw soldiers led more than six thousand Karen villagers to flee in Hpa-an District, September 2016](#)," KHRG, December 2016.

⁵ '[Development or Destruction? The human rights impacts of hydropower development on villagers in Southeast Myanmar](#)', KHRG, July 2018.

Impact on local populations



The mother and child in the picture above had to flee to H--- village because the Tatmadaw dug trenches underneath their raised wooden house. [Photo: KHRG]

When the local communities heard about the tension, many families fled the area. These communities have a history of displacement since 1995. At the time, many villagers fled to Myaingyingu, an IDP site established by the monk U Thuzana. Although many families have since returned to their villages, they flee to Myaing Gyi Ngu in cases of renewed violence.

Families from Noh Hta and Ta La Aw Koh villages sought temporary shelter in Oh Taung monastery. After the skirmish ended, they returned to their village.

On September 2, KHRG has received reports that not a single person remained in D--- village, because they had all been displaced from the violence. The D--- village head reported that the KNLA came to the village to hold a meeting with the local community to inform them of the situation. Although the KNLA encouraged villagers not to flee, they left their homes to different areas. *“We are afraid of the growing tension”*, he said. *“By the time the Tatmadaw arrived in the village, not a single person remained. We are afraid of the fighting”*. Many families are afraid to return because of the threat of landmines. They are worried that their cattle, which

they depend on for their livelihoods, will die by stepping on a landmine.

Based on updates KHRG received on September 3, villagers from Weh Gyi and Ka Nyee Naw have not been able to return because of the presence of the Tatmadaw in their villages. They are worried about the threat of ongoing fighting. They have sought shelter in a number of different sections of Myaing Gyi Ngu, including Mar Lar Yut, Moe Aye Myaing, Moe San Myaing, Lay Lone Myaing and Deh Htaw.

KHRG field researchers counted seven households from Ka Nyee Naw have fled to Mar Lar Yut village in Hpa-an District. A further 11 households have fled to Deh Htaw.



These photos were taken on September 3rd 2018 in H-- - village. They show villagers from D--- who fled their homes to seek shelter in H---. [Photo: KHRG]

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

- “Hpapun Incident Report: Tatmadaw road construction results in the indiscriminate firing of mortars and displacement in Lu Thaw Township, March 2018”, (June 2018)
- “Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township and Dwe Lo Township, September 2017 and February 2018”, (June 2018)
- “Hpapun Situation Update: Lu Thaw Township, February to March 2018”, (May 2018)
- “Attacks on villagers, ongoing fighting and displacement in Hpapun and Toungoo districts from January to April 2018”, (May 2018)

Mutraw (Hpapun) District

