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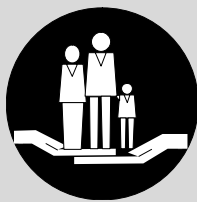
June

2009

*They bombed  
our home...*



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE COMMITTEE FOR INTERNALLY DISPLACED KAREN PEOPLE (CIDKP)



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A Karen mother and her  
sick baby take refuge in  
a temporary clinic in  
Thailand

# Road map to nowhere

The Burmese regime earned the wrath of the international community when it arrested Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in May 2009 in what many see as a blatant attempt to remove her from the internal political process. Meanwhile, as the media track her trial, and miles away from the glare of the television cameras, the regime has stepped up its attacks on Karen villagers. As many as 3,556 Karen civilians have taken refuge in Thailand after DKBA and Burmese army soldiers shelled their villages and destroyed their homes.

The Burmese army also fired mortars into Thailand villages in what many see as another example of the arrogance of the regime. The regime has tried to portray the attacks on Karen people as between 'warring Karen factions'. But the facts contradict that lie. Two Karen women, Naw Pay, 18 and eight months pregnant and Naw Wah Lah, 17, were both raped and murdered by Burmese army soldiers. The soldiers responsible were from Light Infantry Brigade 205, led by Lieutenant Colonel Than Hteh and Captain Kyi Nyo Thant.

The Burmese regime is attempting to wipe out any resistance to its planned national elections to be held in 2010. The regime has fooled nobody with its bogus 'Road Map to Democracy' and elections, dubbed by international observers as the 'road map to nowhere'. The regime plans to use the elections to install a civilian party to be its proxy.

The regime forced through a national referendum during the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis while millions of Burmese people were destitute and in desperate need of help.

Human Rights Watch (New York) said the regime respond to the cyclone as a national security threat instead of as a national disaster.

This callous regime is a disaster for the people of Burma. It has turned the country into an economic basket case, corruption is rife, it's a health disaster, organized crime is on the increase, trafficking of people and it is one of the biggest illicit producers of narcotics.

The UN and the international community have issued strong words over Suu Kyi's arrest, as they have done so for the last 19 years, but so far no action.

This regime is willing to play word games for as long as the international community wants, but meanwhile Suu Kyi rots in jail and the Karen people are, burnt from their homes and forced to take refuge in neighboring countries.

## MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

If you want to find out how you can help internally displaced Karen people: email [cidkp@yahoo.com](mailto:cidkp@yahoo.com), [blacktownhacket@hotmail.com](mailto:blacktownhacket@hotmail.com) or write to CIDKP, PO Box 22, Mae Sot, Tak 63110, Thailand.

# Caught in a hard place

*Burmese and DKBA soldiers attacked unarmed villagers in the Htee Baw Dai area in early June 2009. The attacks forced 3556 villagers across the border into Thailand. **Inside News** journalist, **Eray**, reports from the conflict zone.*

Local Thai authorities estimate as many as 1300 Burmese soldiers were involved in the attacks. Villagers had to cross the flood-swollen River Moei in boats to get to safety in Thailand. Burmese troops continued to fire mortars after the fleeing villagers, some shells falling on Thai villages, forcing Thai authorities to evacuate them.

Saw Pa Lu, Htee Baw Dai's village headmen said many villagers had to cross the river by row boat. He said his people are taking refugee in Krei Hta, a Thai village, on the border.

"It not our home, but we are safe here."

Saw Pa Lu says their home across the border in Karen State was a displaced village. The people living in Htee Baw Dai had been displaced by the Burmese army

from their traditional village and plantations. Saw Pa Lu says without their farms, villagers relied on small slash and burn hillside gardens.

**"It's not our home, but we are safe here."**

"Displacement means our children are not getting a proper education because there isn't a school in our village nor can we farm our property."

Saw Pa Lu says villagers were afraid of being taken for forced labor or abused by soldiers.

"We run when we know the armies are close to our village.

Sometime we stay in the jungle for a week and don't have food for two or three days. We avoid the DKBA or SPDC armies as much as possible."

To get from Htee Baw Dai village to the Thai border is a round trip of three hours.

"We don't have money to buy things, if we need salt, MSG or rice we have to exchange our vegetables and betel leaf to pay for them."

The June attacks on Htee Baw Dai has placed an additional burden on villagers as it is the time they should be planting their crops.

Saw Pa Lu says the fighting has been getting worse in recent years.

"We don't want to leave our village, but if we don't, we will face more trouble. We have no other choice."

Htee Baw Dai village is close to the conflict zone and villagers, in Thailand, can hear the sound of gunfire and mortars.

"Villagers are scared when they hear the sound of gun and mortar. Some women are in shock and the children cry out. In the hurry to leave we couldn't take all of our belongings or any food."

The villagers hope they can go back when the Burmese army and DKBA soldiers leave.

"It won't be easy to go back and set up our village. The Burmese army will landmine the village before they leave. If they destroy our food and possessions we won't be able to feed ourselves."



Villagers take refuge in Thailand





# Army makes it hard to earn a living

A direct result of Burmese army and DKB attack on Karen villages in Dooplaya district has resulted in severe food shortages, mass displacement, destruction of homes and properties and other human right violations. *Inside News* reporters visited villages in the area to find out how villagers are coping.

Thousands of villagers in Kawkriek and Myawaddy townships have been affected by the consequences of the 2008 military offensives. Villagers say the situation got worse in early 2009 when DKBA and SPDC troops started their intensive attacks on Karen National Union (KNU) controlled areas such as Wale Khi, a long time stronghold

of KNLA Battalion 201 and Special Battalion 103.

The fighting force of villagers from the area Wale Khi village. Many took refuge in neighboring Thailand, others hid in the jungle. Villagers blame the fighting and rigid control of the region by the DKBA and Burmese army soldiers troops for ruining their work prospects.

Tee Taw Thoo 39, a villager from Blah Toeh village in Myawaddy township said that soldiers destroyed everything he owned during their military attacks in April this year.

“The DKBA burned down my house and all our belongings in the house, including rice, household utilities... everything was

destroyed.”

Saw Yan Shin, CIDKP Dooplaya district coordinator who is closely monitoring the IDPs situation in the area, says villagers are always having to keep moving.

“Some villagers flee only once a year, but for those close to the conflict areas, they have to run up to three times a year.”

The hostilities during April lasted for 15 days, forcing villages to leave to avoid getting caught in the crossfire or being taken as forced laborers by the DKBA and SPDC troops.

Saw Yan Shin said that the Burmese troops operating in the area also attacked people living on the Thai side of the border.

*Continue to page (5)...*

“Troops from DKBA 333, 999, 907 and SPDC soldiers from IB 404, 283 and 284, on 26 April, attacked Thai soldiers in Wale Khi village [on the Thai side] and wounded two Thai soldiers and two villagers.”

Saw Yan Shin says it has created an unstable environment where it is impossible for villagers to live a normal life.

“They can’t prepare their farms lands or harvest their crops on time.”

Saw Yan Shin says every year villagers have been losing their properties, belongings and livestock to DKBA soldiers and the Burmese army.

“Whilst on the run, villagers had to abandon their farms. Their cornfields are landmined by the

“...Their cornfields are landmined by soldiers and they can't go back...”

soldiers and they cannot go back to harvest their crops. To survive, villagers sneak back and forth from hiding sites to get what’s left from their destroyed homes.”

Saw Yan Shin explains that during the last harvesting season, many villagers couldn’t harvest their crop because of the conflict. The

price of corn this year has dropped and the excessive taxes imposed by DKBA had caused hardship for villagers.”

As a result of the fighting Thai farm contractors have stopped investing in crops on the Burma side of the border. Yan Shin says villagers will face food shortages this year.

“Villagers in this area have been running from the DKBA and SPDC troops for the last two years and haven’t been able to work their land. This year, the offensives forced them to abandon their homes, farms and other belongings. They now have nothing. This year will be hard for them, they will not be able to get enough food to see out the coming year.”

■ ■ ■ ■



# DKBA scare away Thai investors

Villagers in Dooplaya district are having a hard time working their farms. The villagers can't work because Burmese army soldiers and DKBA militia are force the villagers from their land. In April 2009, a combined Burmese army and the DKBA attacked Karen National Liberation Army positions in the area.

Villagers from Paw Bu La Hta are unable to work because of the fighting and Thai-based investors have been scared away by it. Villages close to the DKBA camp are worst affected because soldiers extort a 'tax' on their crops and use villagers as force labor.

Naw Ah Sa says she doesn't have enough time to work her fields.

"At the beginning of 2008 we had more trouble because DKBA and the Burmese army, forced us to work and made us pay them money." Inside News reporter asked villagers why?



Paw Bu La Hta is not the only Karen to suffer. Since 2006 the Burmese army have deployed a third of their army in Eastern Burma. The Thai Burma Border Consortium estimates that at least 76,000 villagers were made homeless from 2006 to 2007.

The Karen Human Rights Group report that Burmese army patrols have routinely abused villagers and stopped them from working.

"Some villagers tried to find [other] locations for planting hill fields near their hiding sites, but the soil in the areas was unsuitable for cultivation and did not produce much food. As a consequence, since 2008 area residents have suffered from food shortages at their hiding sites."

Paw Bu La Hta village has 50 houses, a monastery and primary school. Villagers earn their living by cultivating vegetables.

Naw Ah Sa explains to *Inside News* how she survives.

"Since 2007, we have grown and sold corn. It has been enough to give us food for a year with some leftover so we can repay our loan.

But since 2008 the DKBA has forced us to work for them. This has restricted our work. If we don't do what they tell us we have trouble.

For years the Thai investors loaned us money for working in our cornfield. But this year, because of the fighting, they worried, we would not be able to pay them back."

KNLA 201 Battalion commander Saw Htee Ku, says the DKBA fine each villager 600 baht.

"If a Thai investor loans money to villagers they also have to pay 10,000 baht to meet the demands of the DKBA."

Paw Bu La Hta villagers say being close to the DKBA camp stops them having access to health care provide by Karen medical teams.

Naw Ah Sa says, "We are scared if the DKBA find out we have been helped. They DKBA don't want us to get any medical aid from across the border."

Naw Ah Sa says the DKBA threaten villagers and find new ways to extort money from them.

"We can't use alcohol or keep it at home. If they see we have alcohol they fine us 500 baht a bottle."



# Militia robs the people

*The DKBA, a militia armed and sponsored by the Burmese regime, attacked and robbed people in Khaw Poe Kee village. Inside News reporter, Saw Kaw Lah spoke to a victim.*

In November 2008, the DKBA troops went to Khaw Poe Khee village to destroy the hospital built by money donated by a humanitarian group. Fearing for their safety, the hospital staff took refuge in neighboring Thailand. The DKBA dismantled the hospital and sold the timber.

U Kyaw, a villager speaking to *Inside News* in the Thai village of To Per Pu said having a hospital in the village was important.

“When our families were sick it was easier and cheaper for me and other villagers to access than going to Thailand.”

U Kyaw says to get to a clinic on the Thai side villagers have to hire a truck.

“Sometimes we have to pay over 100 baht a trip. We only earn 80-100 baht a day. Now our clinic is gone we have to travel to get care.”

At least five villagers a day cross to the clinic in To Per Pu.

Many villagers suffer from malaria and other fevers. U Kyaw say it takes most of the day for villagers to get treatment.

“We need a clinic and medics in our village. We are ashamed that we have to depend on Thailand for health care.”

The Karen Human Rights Group has documented abuses by the DKBA in Pa'an and Dooplaya districts. These abuses include forced labor, forced relocation,



Heavily armed DKBA militia

extortion, attacks on villages and burning and destroying property.

U Kyaw says villagers in DKBA control areas have no freedom.

“Whenever they call we have to do something for them. They use us as forced laborers to carry their supplies or build their camp or roadways.”

In April 2009 the DKBA attacked U Kyaw's neighbors in Wale Khi village.

The DKBA, fighting the Karen National Liberation Army, ordered villagers to carry their ammunitions and food supplies to the frontline. U Kyaw was forced to be their porter.

“Sometimes they took us for a

week or two or three days. We had to follow them to the conflict area and cook for the DKBA soldiers.”

DKBA has also forced villagers in the area to relocate. U Kyaw says he has been ordered to move.

“The DKBA ordered 500 households to relocate. We have been warned to start looking for a place to build a house and garden.”

U Kyaw worries about the affect of the relocation on his family.

“If the situation continues like this the life for our future generations will not be any better. Our children will have little education and our health will be worse.” ■ ■ ■ ■



## DKBA tortured villagers

The Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, a militia, armed by the Burmese military regime is accused by human rights groups of persecuting villagers suspected of being sympathetic to the Karen National Union.

*Inside News* investigates the numerous reports of villagers being tortured, fined and threatened by DKBA soldiers in areas they control.

Saw Maung Soe from Mae Plae village says.

“One evening there was a fighting between DKBA and KNLA troops near the village temple. Next morning DKBA troops came my house, dragged me out and tied my hands with rope. One of them kicked me and pushed his gun into my chest.”

Saw Maung Soe says the DKBA soldier was from battalion 907, and was led by Kyaw Thet and Pa Htaw.

The Mon Human Rights Foundation says the Burmese regime is worried villagers will give support to the KNU.

“Both DKBA and SPDC troops want to keep tight security in these KNU influenced areas. They don’t want KNU soldiers receiving any support from the villagers. So they instruct their informants or spies to watch people closely. When they get information about suspected villagers believed to be KNU supporters, the soldiers arrest them, tie them up, torture them and interrogate them about the rebel’s activities. In some cases the

DKBA find that the arrested villagers are not linked with any armed groups but they still demand money for their release.” Saw Maung Soe, 30, says he was accused of hiding guns for the KNLA.

“DKBA soldier threatened me and asked me to find the gun. I told him that I am just an ordinary villager. They tied my hands and took me to the place where the fighting broke out.”

Saw Maung Soe continues,

“They took me there several times and then took me to another village and tied me to a pole and kicked me. They accused me of exploding a landmine. They tied me up for one day and one night and fined me 600,000 kyats before they let me go.”

Saw Maung Soe says he did not have the money to pay the fine.

“The village headman came and talked to them about my case and I have to pay 500,000 kyats. I had to borrow the money. I just had to find the money to pay for my freedom.”

Saw Hai was also beaten by the DKBA.

“On 6 April troops caught me in the village and they hit me with a stick. One soldier hit me on the neck with his gun and another one pointed his pistol at me and accused me of hiding guns for the KNLA.

Soldiers interrogated Saw Hai, asking him if he was ready to die.

“I answered, ‘I am not ready to die yet’. They continue questioning me along the same lines. They told me to give them the guns. I told them I am a villager not a soldier and asked them to let me go. Once they had the money they released me.”

■ ■ ■ ■



# “I don't want to fight for them...”

Regime soldiers from the Burmese aligned, Democratic Karen Buddhist Army threatened to forcibly recruit villagers from Kler Ka to be soldiers or forced labor. To avoid the force conscription the villagers took refuge across the River Moei in Thailand.

*Villagers explained to Inside News reporter Eray why they took refuge in Thailand.*

Kler Ka village is close to the DKBA militia camp and their patrols pass through the village. Saw Pa Nu, 60, has five daughters and two sons. He says he is very old, but that did not stop the DKBA using him as a porter.

“In 2007 I was forced to work by DKBA and the Burmese armies. I carried their supplies to their new camp. They forced us to carry very heavy baskets. In

2009, they forced villagers to become DKBA soldiers. We come here to Khri Hta, on Thai side, to escape from them.”

Saw Maw Kwei, 41, the Hlangbwe Township secretary said the DKBA not only attacked Karen soliders, but they also attack ordinary villagers.

“Because of their attacks thousands of people become displaced or refugees.”

Villagers used to think it would be safer to stay under the control of the DKBA than under the Burmese army, but years of abuse and the recent events have proved them wrong.

Saw Ter Hei from Kler Ka village tells of his experience getting to the Thai side of the border.

“For three days and three nights we didn't get food. The DKBA patrolled the mountain and we had

no water to cook. The Burmese forced me to porter for them.”

Karen National Liberation Army, 201 battalion commander, Saw Htee Ku said.

“DKBA 307 battalion, led by Bla Na arrested Maw Khee village headman Saw Kyaw Mun and Mae Poe Klo headman, Po Yu Gaw, because they refused to give villagers to the DKBA army. All the young men fled to Thailand, they didn't want to be forced to join the DKBA.”

Saw Ter Hei says. “They forced me to porter. They didn't give me any food. They order us to go in front of them and if landmines explode we will get injured first. This year we know they want to make a big army so they will come and recruit villagers and they will force us to attack our Karen soldiers. I don't want to join.”



# Karen struggle kept busy assisting displaced communities

A report by the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) estimated that 66,000 people were forced to leave their home as a result of, or in order to avoid, the effects of armed conflict and human rights abuses during the past year.

At the time of writing displacement as a result of conflict and human right violations is still ongoing in Eastern Burma, especially in ethnic areas. The ongoing attacks by Burmese army and DKBA troops in Karen State has forced as many as 4,000 villagers in Pa An district alone to seek refuge.

As the situation in Rangoon is getting worse with pro-democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi being sent to prison, the Burmese

Army and their militia allies are launching fresh attacks in Northern and Southern Karen state causing displacement to thousands of villagers.

Karen Internally Displaced People (IDP) are facing huge difficulties in every aspect of their survival, there's no food, health care is poor, there's a lack of education opportunities, and there's little access to humanitarian assistance.

A report by the Karen Human Right Group (KHRG) on the food crisis found that the systematic civilian exploitation and regular human right abuses, combined with the absence of state social services or welfare provisions, has served to severely undermine the humanitarian situation of rural communities in Karen state.

## There's no food

Severe food shortages are a major problem for displaced communities. This is due to long term displacement and because of security issues IDP communities are repeatedly on the move because of Burma Army's operations. Under these circumstances it is impossible for villagers to settle and grow enough food.

## The clinic's three days walk

Health problems such as malaria, dengue, diarrhea, fevers, respiratory diseases and skin diseases are common in displaced communities as they have limited access to health care. In some regions, people have to walk up to three days to get to a clinic and

*Continue to page (11)...*





the only transportation available to them is by foot.

The KHRG report also pointed out that villagers have an inadequate supply of food and a severe lack of diversity in their diets means many villagers having to survive for long periods of time on meals of consisting of rice and salt ...this also undermines villagers' resistance to infectious diseases.

#### **We want education**

Schools in displaced communities are unable to keep open, as children have to run when Burmese soldiers attack. The TBBC report found that only one out of ten households in hiding areas had unrestricted access to primary school for the whole year.

The International Displaced Monitor Centre (IDMC) also reported in 2008 that IDP children in hiding areas have few learning resources, and open-air classes have often been disrupted by army offensives.

A large percentage of children in

areas of conflict have to leave school after primary level, and in areas under the Burmese government control they have been prevented from studying their own culture or languages, having instead to study Burmese.

#### **We need help**

It is difficult for humanitarian agents to reach displaced communities because of the restrictions of cross border aid delivery and having to navigate their way through conflict zones. The Burmese army also blocks IDP communities from trading, getting access to food and communication.

A Human Right Watch (HRW) report confirms that Burmese army offensives have increase displacement in Karen state.

“One result of the *Tatmadaw's* [Burmese Army] brutal behavior has been the creation of large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees among Burma's ethnic minority communities.”

#### **We need help**

An human rights analyst based in Mae Sot spoke to *Inside News* on the condition of guaranteeing his anonymity says the Burmese army is strategically creating large numbers of displaced people while blocking international aid agencies efforts to deliver assistance.

“The regime is keeping the Karen busy. That means Karen communities have to look after the IDPs by themselves. They will have to put all their resources, financial and human, into trying to help communities in need. This leave the Karen with no time or resources to fight or maintain the level of their for political struggle” The root cause of displacement is political instability. As long as the military regime is in power and continues it systematic efforts to displace Karen people with little hope of political change, it is unlikely that displacement in Eastern Burma will end.

■ ■ ■ ■



# Regime policies are destructive

The scorched earth offensive launched in 2006 against Karen villagers forced as many as 76,000 from their homes according to research by the Thai Burma Border Consortium. A field officer working in the region explained to *Inside News* about the impact of the offensive on villagers.

Villagers in Taungoo district in Northern Karen State and Eastern Pegu division suffered the most abuses during the recent Burmese army attacks.

By late 2008, the Burmese army reduced the number of its troops in Taungoo district, but continued attacks on villagers into 2009.

The patrolling troops shelled

displaced villagers hiding in jungles and destroyed their farms. During the dry season the soldiers burnt the jungles to destroy villagers' hideouts, plantations and farms.

Displaced villagers rely on selling their fruit and other plantation products for money to buy essentials such as cooking oil, salt and rice.

After the 2006 Burmese army offensive, 80 per cent of plantations or income earning agricultural resources were destroyed by troops shelling, burning, building army camps, and building roads in farming areas. Patrolling troops blocked trading routes with landmines and their

'shoot-on-sight' policy.

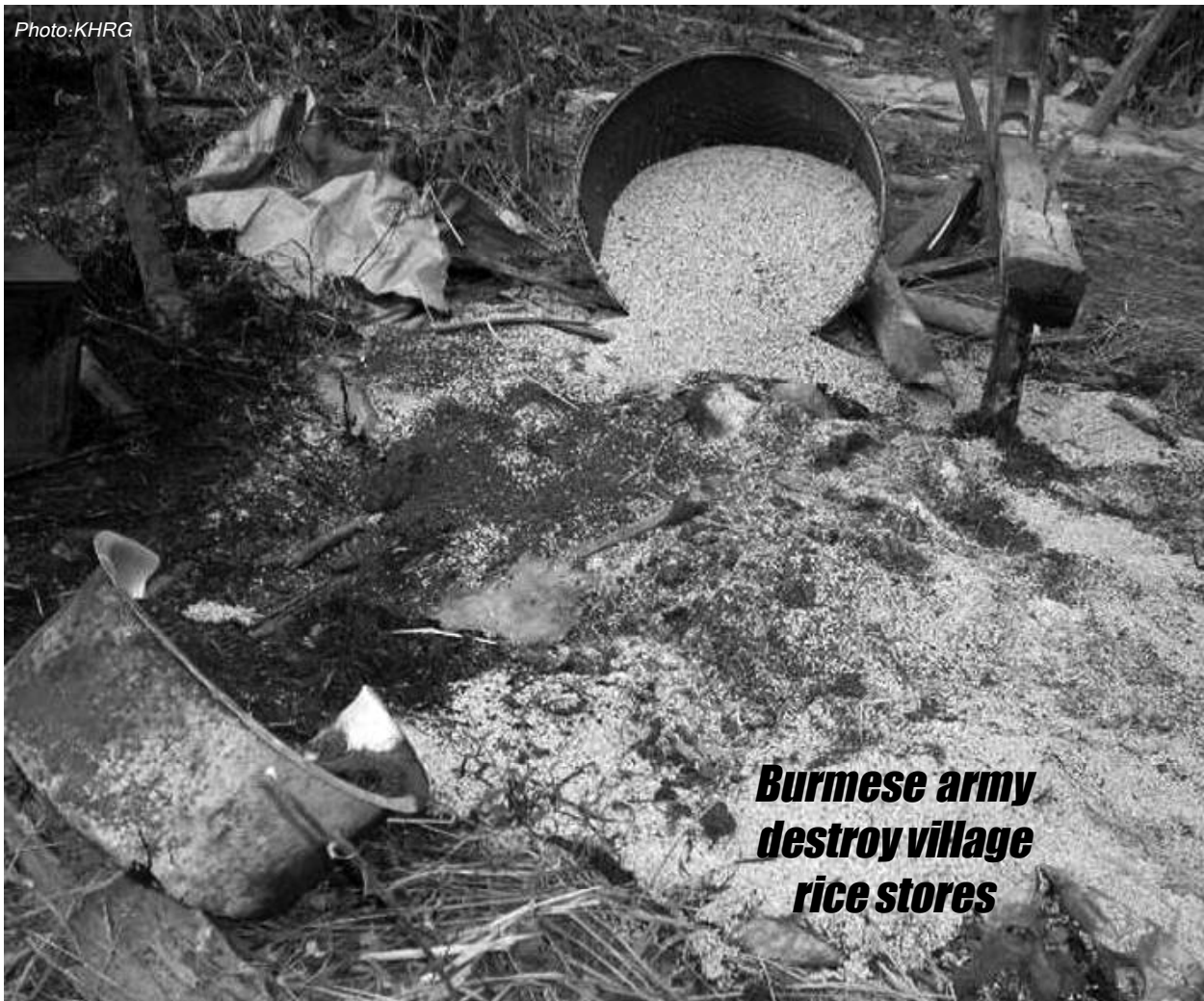
Saw Eh Wah, a Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP) relief team member and Taungoo district coordinator explained to *Inside News* about the difficulty people had in getting enough food, health care and education for their children.

Eh Wah said getting food to displaced people is difficult because of access to their hiding places and risks of landmines and running into Burmese army soldiers.

"Bringing food supplies to highland areas, because there's no transport makes it difficulty. If

*Continue on page (13)...*

Photo:KHRG



**Burmese army  
destroy village  
rice stores**

Burmese army patrols see us they confiscate the supplies. We also have to avoid their tax gates, landmines and being shot on sight.”

Eh Wah said that the price of rice had been forced up by the attacks on the villagers.

“The price for a tin of rice has increased by as many as five times. Villagers can’t afford to buy enough food with the small amount of money they earn.”

Saw Eh Wah says not only villagers in hiding are having problems getting enough food, but villagers in government controlled forced relocation sites are also suffering. These villagers are being forced to work for the Burmese army and their movements are severely restricted.

“Everyday villagers in Play Hsa Lo relocation site are forced to work as laborers for the army. The Burmese army restricted the movement of people by fencing villages and closely controlling their travel. Whenever villagers go to work, they have to get a written traveling permission, which costs up to 1,000 Kyat (nearly half a days pay), from the army.”

Saw Eh Wah concludes this undermines the livelihood of the villagers in the area and says while getting enough food is the biggest problem, it is not the only one. He cites a lack of health care as also critical.

Eh Wah says people have little access to health care and medicine, which are also prohibited by the Burmese army. Most people treat diseases with herbs or by traditional methods. Common diseases people suffer are malnutrition, gastro, malaria, diarrhea, fever and dizziness, skin infections and respiratory



diseases. Saw Eh Wah says the ban on modern medicine is causing many treatable illnesses to develop into chronic conditions.

“Modern oral or injection medicines are banned as ‘forbidden goods’ and villagers dare not carry, transport or use them. If villagers were caught with this kind of medicine, they would be punished up to the death penalty or be accused of carrying medicine for rebel groups.”

Free Burma Rangers, Back Pack medics and Karen Health department workers try to reach the area to give treatment and collect information about health related issues.

According to Eh Wah, the

offensive in 2006 had caused destruction to one high school, three middle schools and as many as 80 primary schools in Taungoo district.

“Thousands of children in Taungoo district can’t go to school because of the attacks. This means generations of uneducated children. In the future this will have created huge social issues for the community.”

Eh Wah says unless there is regime change in Burma and a change of the regime’s scorched earth policy, communities and villages in the country will continue to be undeveloped and people will continue to die needlessly.

■ ■ ■ ■



*A slash and burn farm destroyed by Burmese army*



Photo:KHRG

## **Burmese army act like bandits:** *destroy farms steal animals and villagers property*

The Burmese army has set up more military camps and intensified their operation in Keh Der and Kwee Lah villages. In a series of systematic operations the army has destroyed more than a hundred slash and burn farms in the area. **Saw Ber Htoo**, the CIDKP Nyaunglebin district coordinator, has documented the destruction and spoke to *Inside News* about what he witnessed.

Saw Ber Htoo says that in early April, 2009, the Burmese army Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 115, 501 and 502 set up three new camps in Nyaunglebin district in Karen State.

“The patrolling troops destroyed, stole and looted villagers’ belongings. They trashed farms, took food supplies, livestock, money and other valuable things.

They left the villagers with nothing.”

Saw Ber Htoo says the Burmese army has also shot at villagers working in the fields, causing them to abandon their farms.

“When the Burmese army launched their offensive in the area, villagers fled and hid in the jungle.”

Saw Ber Htoo says the attacks could not have come at a worse time for the villagers. “April is when they prepare their slash and burn farms, but this year villagers had to abandon their plots of land. Now the wet season has started it will be impossible to prepare.”

Ber Htoo says this places additional hardship on the villagers.

“If villagers cannot grow rice this season they will face food

shortages in the coming year and they will not have enough rice for their families.”

Ber Htoo explains that as villagers’ livestock and other possessions were destroyed and stolen by the Burmese army soldiers, people will have nothing to trade for food. Ber Htoo lists the stolen goods.

“Burmese soldiers from LIB 501 led by Battalion commander Col. Mya Moe Oo stole nine pigs, 96 chickens, six goats and three cattle. They destroyed three food stores containing 38 tins of rice, 126 tins of paddy, 50 viss of salt, 45 viss of fish paste, 20 viss of tobacco, 65 viss of betel nut and other household goods in Keh Der village alone.”

Ber Htoo says that similar destruction and looting also

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happened to Mu Khi, Ta Kaw Der and Thaw Nge Der villages and villages in Kwee Lah tract in Kyauk Gyi Township.

Ber Htoo said the soldiers acted like bandits and stole what they wanted and destroyed everything else.

“The Burmese soldiers took valuables and items that were easy to carry. Heavy goods like rice, fish-paste, and salt they just poured on the ground and destroyed them.”

Ber Htoo says the destruction is still going on. A recently released report by Karen Human Right Group (KHRG) confirms Ber Htoo’s eyewitness accounts. KHRG say that on 15<sup>th</sup> of May, 2009 Burmese Army patrols have posed a tangible threat to local communities in the hills of Nyaunglebin District. KHRG report that the soldiers’ shoot-on-sight policy and deployment of landmines in and around civilian areas has made it impossible for people to live safely in the region.

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## Forced recruitment

The Burmese regime continues to force villagers to join their ‘pyithusit’ the so-called ‘People’s Militia’.

KHRG reports that on February 23 2009, administrative sections for Papun Town were ordered to send villagers for a 15-day militia training. Villagers were not paid but were fed. The recruited men were unable to provide income for their families. ■ ■ ■ ■

## They steal our lands

The Karen Human Rights Group reported that in Bu Tho Township, in early 2009, “Light Infantry Division (LID) 11, forced villagers to fill potholes, transport dirt and stones, cut trees and perform other maintenance activities.” The report says villagers were also forced to be human mine sweepers by Burmese army patrols. The army also destroyed land belonging to farmers.

Burmese army battalions based near Papun Town took more than 50 acres of paddy fields from farmers in Meh T’Roh village, Meh Gklaw village tract. No landowners were compensated for their losses. KHRG named the army units responsible as; “Infantry Battalion (IB) #19, Light Infantry Battalions (LIBs) #642, 340, 341, 434 and a Tactical Operation Command unit.” ■ ■ ■ ■

**Burmese Army camp built on confiscated land in**

**Thay Wah Gkyo village, Lu Thaw Township**



Photo:KHRG



*Villagers forced to leave their homes*

## "I'm worried..."

In early June 2009, the Burmese army and their militia allies, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), launched a series of attacks on Karen National Union (KNU) positions and camps in Brigade area 7. The attacks displaced over 3,500 villagers in Pa-an district many crossed the Moei River into Thailand to seek refuge.

*Inside News* reporters spoke to displaced villagers during the fighting.

Kyaw Winn (not his real name) says they left their village because of the attacks and forced recruitment by the DKBA.

"The DKBA ordered us to provide them with 30 villagers in every area to join their army. People didn't want to join the DKBA and leave their villages." Mae La Ah Kee villager, Kyaw

Winn, explains why he made the decision to leave his village.

"The DKBA told us there would be no more fighting in this area. But now without any warning they attacked. Landmines and mortars are booming all around us. We are scared, so we left our village."

A report by the Karen Human Right Group says systematic militarization and widespread exploitation of the civilian population by military forces has created poverty, malnutrition and a severe food crisis in Karen state. Kyaw Winn, 41, adds that many villagers leave without taking their belongings.

"Some villagers leave in the day and others at night. I got my wife and five children and just left quickly. We knew the way and nobody guided or led us here. We took only a few clothes and

necessary things on our back and crossed the river Moei by boats and took shelter in Oo Thu Hta village in Tha Song Yang Township, in Thailand."

The DKBA special force, 999, led by Hsan Pyote, and its brigadier Maung Chit Thu, led the attack.

Kyaw Winn, says,

"They [DKBA] came with about 300 soldiers and forced adult men from the villages to do their portering."

Kyaw Winn says the soldiers make life hard for villagers'.

"They increase taxes. Villagers have to pay land, machine and elephant taxes. They enter our villages and demand chickens, pigs and we even have to buy cans of fish for them."

Kyaw Winn says the situation fills him with despair.

"We would have tried to stay and pay them if there was no fighting. But because of the heavy weapons we had to leave our village, I feel poor and my heart is broken. I don't want to think of anything." Kyaw Winn explains that it won't be safe for villager to return to their homes.

"It will be not be safe to return to Burma if the fighting is still going on. The DKBA contacted us and said we should go back to our villages. Many landmines have been planted and they don't promise us that they will remove them. I don't trust them anymore." Kyaw Winn says he does not see any changes or freedom in Burma in the near future.

"It will still be more of the same unless the powerful countries put pressure on the Burmese government. I urge them [international community] to come and bring peace to our country."

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# Food crisis in Karen state

Karen people are renowned for their farming skills. But in parts of northern Karen state people are facing severe food shortages. A recent report by the Karen Human Rights Group says civilians are the main target of the Burmese army offensive. According to KHRGs research people forced from their homes... “had to leave belongings, homes and farmland to stay in forest hiding sites; others travelled further afield to refugee camps in Thailand.”

Villagers taking refuge in jungle hideouts have little chance of being able to plant and harvest enough food to feed their families. KHRG says farmers have to contend with the risk of being shot at by

Burmese army patrols if they are seen tending to their crops.

“Restricted access to farmland has meant that crops are vulnerable to damage by disease, wild animals, insects and weeds. Farmland and paddy stores have also been deliberately destroyed by SPDC patrols.”

In spite of the risks villagers keep working. They have little choice, as help is limited. KHRG reports that even if they do manage to get their crop harvested it yields little considering the risks and time spent working in the fields.

The KHRG report estimates that “as of June 2009, about 7,000 villagers in Lu Thaw Township faced severe food shortages.

Villagers in Lu Thaw have been able to receive some support from the Karen Office for Relief and Development (KORD) and the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP).”

Getting outside help to displaced villagers is tough. The Burmese army patrols make it a daunting task for relief to get through as they are also at risk from being shot on sight. KHRG says some villagers have reported “that they have only been able to receive support on one or two occasions over the past year.”

The start of the 2009 wet season is when the farmers begin their rice planting, however, KHRG say villagers are worried.

“...if the Burma Army troops return, they will be forced to abandon their crops if they farm in places that were vacated by the SPDC. Increasing numbers of villagers seeking refuge at IDP sites, meanwhile, means that land for rotational hillside agriculture has also become limited.”

KHRG reports that another difficulty facing villagers trying to survive is that soldiers kill farm animals and destroy food stores. One villager from Lu Thaw Township and interviewed by KHRG said.

“Whenever they [soldiers] come, they kill our livestock, burn whatever they see and attack our villagers. We have to flee up and down the mountain and sleep under the trees and in bushes. Whenever the SPDC comes, we can never go and work in the fields. They’ve made our lives very difficult.”





# Educating Naw Wan

Getting an education in Karen state is hard, especially if you are from a displaced community. **Inside News** reporter Cecilia looks at the challenges facing a father as he struggles to get his daughter to school.

Uncle Li Lay is from Moe Township - at least a two-day bus ride from the Burma Thai border - but he is determined to get his daughter, Naw Wan a decent education.

Uncle Li Lay says sending Naw Wan to school in Burma is more than he can afford, especially when the Burmese army extorts 'special taxes' from villagers.

"We are forced to give a lot of taxes to the SPDC every year. We must pay. We have no choice. This is money I could be spending on my daughter's education.

Uncle Li Lay's story confirms what other villagers said in interviews for a report by the Karen Human Right Group. A villager told KHRG even though the government supplied two teachers the parents had to find the money to pay for another six teachers. The woman said.

"The students have to buy materials by themselves, ... some children can't afford their school fees. We've tried to help the children who really want to attend the school, but whose parents can't support them."

Villagers living in Karen state face forced relocation, forced labor, displacement, destruction of schools and homes, burning off crops and massive disruption to their lives.

According to a report by the Thai Burma Border Consortium



(TBBC) "...more than 3,200 settlements were destroyed, forcibly relocated or otherwise abandoned in eastern Burma between 1996 and 2007."

Uncle Li Lay has four sons and four daughters, the older ones are working and says to get Naw Wan a better education he was prepared to send her to Thailand. "I only make 100,000 kyat in a year, but to send Naw Wan to high school I needed at least 500,000 kyat."

Uncle Li Lay was worried his daughter would lose her Karen language as it is forbidden to be taught in schools by the military regime. The result of this policy has resulted in millions of Karen people not being able to speak their own language.

While she is in Thailand studying Naw Wan will be cared for by

staff of the Karen Youth Organization (KYO). A

"KYO help Karen youth to get an education, especially those in displaced communities," a KYO spokesperson told *Inside News*. KHRG also identified a number of factors that caused children to drop out of school. The report listed the high cost of education, parents needing their children to work in the fields and the constant disruption caused by the Burmese army.

In spite of all the problems of getting Naw Wan a Karen education, Uncle Li Lay is willing to put up with the long trip to Thailand and the hardship.

"If she [Naw Wan] stayed in the village I would have to worry much more, at least I know I won't have to worry about her safety."

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# Shoot on sight

A report by the Karen Human Rights Group, says Burmese army control over the Papun District of northern Karen State varies. In areas like Lu Thaw and some part of Bu Tho township, that are not under the control of the Burma army, a shoot-on-sight policy targeting villagers is in place.

Saw Lah Soe, a CIDKP field worker explained how Burmese army and Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) soldiers treat villagers in different areas.

“Villagers are targeted as enemy or rebels. They are shot on-sight. In areas close to Papun, villagers are being forced to work for the Burmese and DKBA soldiers.”

A Free Burma Ranger's (FBR) report also confirmed the shoot-on-sight policy. The report released on 23 of July 2009 says. “On June 18, DKBA and the Burma Army shot five villagers in Bray Day (also known as Paw Ler Loh) village, eastern Karen State, killing one of them. Saw Toe Lo, 70, was killed in the attack in the village in Bu Tho Township, ...Naw Wee Shi Paw, 36, Naw Ma Htit, 60, Saw Eh K'Nyaw, 7, and Saw Boh Heh, 38, were all injured.”

KHRG says that in controlled townships such as Bu Tho and Dweh Loh, DKBA and the Burmese army, demand forced labor, steal property and extort food, money and supplies from villagers.

Saw Lah Soe says villagers have to work for the army and give them food.

“They work as sentries, messengers, carrying their supplies, fencing and building the

camp. DKBA and Burmese soldiers demand pigs, goats or chickens. They also demand money for various kinds of 'fees' or 'taxes'.”

Soldiers from DKBA Brigades #333, 555 and Special Battalion #666, have become more active in Bu Tho and Dweh Loh townships, KHRG says.

“...much of the SPDC and DKBA activity in Papun District has involved abuses against civilians rather than military attacks against the KNLA. During recent months, DKBA soldiers in Papun have demanded forced labour and issued new movement restrictions

to villagers which have been backed up by threats against non-compliance.”

KHRG say villagers have taken refuge in the jungle to avoid the abuse. “However, because of the difficulties of maintaining their livelihoods and the humanitarian challenges of living in hiding, some of those who had fled to the forest subsequently returned to stay in areas under SPDC or DKBA control.”

Saw Lah Soe says the situation is hard for villagers.

“Thousands of villagers are going to face food problems if the situation continues.”



Enemy of the state - Saw Eh K'Nyaw, age 7

photo:FBR



## I thought I would be safe...

Saw Aung Loe Lo and his family were prepared to lose all their possessions to escape forced labor, extortion and other human right abuses from the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) and the Burmese army. The family thought they had found safety in Ler Per Her, a internally displaced persons (IDPs) camp, home to 1,200 people. Ler Per Her sits on the small hills on the Burma side of the Moei River.

Saw Aung Loe Lo's peace and safety was short-lived. In June 2009, the Burmese army and its allied militia, the DKBA, attacked Ler Per Her. They forced thousands of villagers to take refuge in neighboring Thailand.

By crossing the border river Saw Aung Loe Lo went from IDP to refugee.

Aung Loe Lo, 41, is originally from Hti Per village in Pa-an District, Karen State. He fled from his village in 2003. Since then, he and his family have lived at Ler Per Her camp. He tells *Inside News* his story. "I thought we would be safe there [in the camp] until we could go home. But we had to flee again."

Aung Loe Lo, his family and other fellow refugees are taking shelter at Noh Bo village in Tha Song Yang Township, Tak province, Thailand. He says he has

nothing left to lose.

"I've lost everything. The first time I fled from my village, I had to leave behind all my belongings. Once again, I had to run and I can't carry anything except some rice, pots and clothes that are necessary for us to live on."

Aung Loe Lo recalled the abuses committed by DKBA soldiers that made him leave his first home. He spoke of how the DKBA soldiers set up a camp in his village and forced villagers to work on it everyday.

"They [DKBA] ordered us to collect bamboo, wood and other materials to build the camp. Then they forced us to dig ditches and make fences around their camp. They ordered us to make a fence around our village and they planted landmines outside the fence and around the village. Our animals often stepped on them."

The situation was too hard for him so he left and came to Ler Per Her. Saw Aung Loe Lo says he is not happy seeking refugee in Thailand.

"People like to live in their own country in their own homes and work their own land. We feel bad leaving our homeland, but we have no choice. It is not safe anymore to live there."