



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Three villagers killed, eight injured during fighting in Kyaikdon area

Research submitted by a KHRG field researcher indicates that fighting between DKBA and Tatmadaw troops between April 22nd and April 30th 2011 in Kya In Township has left at least three civilians dead and eight injured. The indiscriminate firing of mortars and small arms in civilian areas by armed groups involved in the conflict, and conflict related abuse including an explicit threat by Tatmadaw forces to burn civilians' homes, caused at least 143 villagers from Gkyaw Hta, Khoh Htoh, T'Aye Shay and Mae Naw Ah villages to seek refuge in the Ra--- area of Thailand between April 22nd and 30th 2011. As of May 13th 2011, KHRG confirmed that the firing of mortars and small arms was ongoing in the areas of K'Lay Kee and Noh Taw Plah, and that some villagers continued to seek refuge at discreet locations in Thailand.

On May 2nd 2011, a KHRG field researcher provided the following update on the military situation and related threats to civilians in the area around Kyaikdon Town, Kya In Township,¹ Dooplaya District. According to the KHRG field researcher, skirmishes between DKBA and Tatmadaw forces between April 22nd and April 30th left three civilians dead and eight injured, and led to at least 143 civilians seeking refuge in Thailand to protect themselves from conflict and conflict-related abuse.

According to villagers that fled Mae Naw Ah village, Kya In Township, on April 22nd 2011 one villager was killed and two others seriously injured during a Tatmadaw-DKBA clash in Mae Naw Ah. The three villagers had been riding on a tractor near the village during the fighting. The two injured villagers were transferred to Pi--- hospital, where one subsequently died. KHRG could not confirm how the villagers were injured and killed. Naw D---, a 55-year-old villager from Mae Naw Ah confirmed that her village head had advised residents to flee after fighting between DKBA and Tatmadaw forces on April 22nd. Naw D--- and her



This photo, taken on April 29th 2011, shows Saw T---, 17, a resident of Sa--- village who was travelling on the road between Kyaikdon and T'Aye Shay on April 24th, when DKBA forces ambushed soldiers from Tatmadaw IB #283. Saw T--- said that many civilians had been returning along the road from a festival at a local pagoda, and that a 17-year-old resident of T'Aye Shay was killed during the clash. [Photo: KHRG]

¹ Villages mentioned in this report are located in the vicinity of Kyaikdon Town. Kyaikdon Town is part of the Burma government-delineated Kya In Township however, according to KHRG researchers, many villagers consider their towns and villages to fall within locally-defined Kawkareik Township.

family fled as advised and arrived to the Ra--- area of Thailand at around 3:00 pm on April 24th 2011.



This photo, taken on April 28th 2011, shows Naw D--- (left), 55, with family members (left to right) Naw Y---, 15; Naw E---, 3; and Naw S---, 19 at a temporary refuge site in the Ra--- area of Thailand. Naw D--- told KHRG that the head of Mae Naw Ah village advised residents to flee after fighting between DKBA and Tatmadaw forces near the village on April 24th. [Photo: KHRG]



This photo, taken on April 25th 2011, shows Naw H---, 37, with children (left to right) Naw A---, 4, and Saw Th---, 3, at a refuge site in the Ra--- area. Naw H--- told KHRG that many residents of Gkyaw Hta village decided to flee after DKBA soldiers fired at and entered the local police station at 2:30 am on April 25th. [Photo: KHRG]

Local sources also told KHRG's researcher that on April 24th 2011, at around 10:30 am, soldiers from DKBA Battalion #907 ambushed troops from Tatmadaw Infantry Battalion (IB) #283 on the vehicle road between Kyaikdon Town and T'Aye Shay village, as IB #283 was rotating to the front line of the current conflict.²

Saw T---, a 17 year-old resident of Sa--- village who was travelling on the road between T'Aye Shay and Sa--- villages on the morning of April 24th, told KHRG that the road was unusually busy as many villagers returned to their homes after attending a festival to honour the pagoda at Ler Paw Wah village, which is near T'Aye Shay. According to Saw T---, a column of Tatmadaw soldiers from IB #283 led by commander Za Ya Lin stopped a 17-year-old resident of T'Aye Shay village, whose name KHRG has not yet verified, who was travelling by motorbike along the road. The soldiers then interrogated the 17-year-old T'Aye Shay villager about where he was going and where he had been.

While the 17-year-old was being questioned, the Tatmadaw column was attacked by a DKBA force commanded by Saw Sah Aw, according to Saw T---. Soldiers from both sides exchanged fire with small arms and rocket-propelled grenade launchers (RPGs) for approximately one hour. During the clash, the 17-year-old T'Aye Shay villager was killed, and Saw T--- was injured in his back by a fragment from an RPG round. Saw T--- was sent to an undisclosed location in Thailand where, as of May 12th 2011, he was still receiving medical treatment for his injury. He also reported that at least one other villager was injured during the skirmish. A KHRG field

² DKBA #907 has been used loosely to refer to DKBA units under the command of Na Kha Mway that refused to transform into Tatmadaw Border Guard Force (BGF) battalions and have been fighting Tatmadaw forces since November 7th 2010. Na Kha Mway left the KNU/KNLA in 1997 and became the commander of DKBA Battalion #907; in 2007 he was promoted to head four DKBA battalions (#901, #906, #907 and a security battalion) as the commander of the *Klo Htoo Baw* [Golden Drum] Tactical Command. In May 2009 this unit was reconfigured as DKBA Brigade #5, with Na Kha Mway commanding Battalions #901, 905, 906, 907 and 909; Brigade #5 was active in the Kya-In Seik Kyi, Kawkareik and Myawaddy areas of Dooplaya and Pa'an districts. For more on the origins of the current conflict and the transformation of DKBA troops into BGF battalions, see "Protection concerns expressed by civilians amidst conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts," KHRG, November 2010.

researcher confirmed that the injured villager was a married man from Ka--- village who was sent to Pi--- hospital, but was unable to confirm his name or other biographical details. The KHRG researcher also reported that four Tatmadaw soldiers were killed and another seven were injured in the ambush.



These photos, taken on April 29th 2011, show Saw T---, 17, displaying a burn scar on his back. Saw T--- was hit by a fragment from a rocket-propelled grenade that was fired during an April 24th clash between Tatmadaw IB #283 and DKBA soldiers near the road between T'Aye Shay village and Kyaikdon Town. [Photos: KHRG]

In nearby Gkyaw Hta village, Naw H---, 37, told KHRG's researcher that on April 25th at around 2:30 am, 30 DKBA soldiers led by Bo [commander] San Aung, fired on the police station in Gkyaw Hta for around 30 minutes, before entering the building. Gkyaw Hta is approximately four hours on foot from Mae Naw Ah village. Later that day, at around 9:20 pm, KHRG's field researcher reported that DKBA soldiers entered Kyaikdon Town and fired small arms for approximately 20 minutes at government administration offices and the police station. KHRG has not confirmed whether any civilians or military personnel were injured or killed in either of these incidents.

KHRG's field researcher reported that the next day, on April 26th, at around 4:00 am DKBA soldiers entered Klih village and took control of a Tatmadaw camp at Thay Dtaw; and that on April 28th at around 1:00 pm a further exchange of small arms and mortar fire occurred in the area of Mae Naw Ah Pagoda, causing many Mae Naw Ah residents who remained in the village to flee and seek temporary refuge in Thailand. Five residents of Nu---, who were visiting Mae Naw Ah at the time of the incident, were injured during this skirmish, according to the KHRG researcher. One of the injured was Saw M---, 30, who sustained an injury to his eye from a mortar fragment. He was sent to receive medical attention in Thailand, where his condition remains serious.

KHRG's researcher further reported that on April 30th at around 3:00 pm DKBA soldiers again entered Kyaikdon Town and fired 81 mm mortars at the police station. A local source also told KHRG that the commander of a Tatmadaw camp based in Klih threatened to burn the following villages if the DKBA continued to attack Tatmadaw positions: Klih, Kwih Kalay, Klih Kee, Klih Poe Htah, The Der Koh, Mae Gklaw Wah and Maw Gkay Kee villages. As of approximately 10 am on May 9th 2011 fighting between both sides was ongoing in the area between K'Lay Kee and Noh Taw Plah villages northeast of Kya In Town, with exchanges of 81 mm mortars and

small arms fire occurring once or twice daily. KHRG's researcher reported that DKBA troops under the command of Na Kha Mway are currently in the area of K'Lay Kee and Noh Taw Plah villages, and predicted that fighting in that area would continue.

Displacement

KHRG has confirmed that at least 143 villagers fled fighting in the Mae Naw Ah, Gkyaw Hta and Khoh Htoh areas of Kya In Township between April 22nd and April 30th, seeking refuge at discreet locations in the Ra--- area of Thailand. Local media groups have also reported large numbers of villagers seeking refuge in Thailand, and subsequently facing strong pressure from Thai authorities to return to Burma. Reports by media indicate larger numbers than those documented by KHRG; importantly, the KHRG researcher who estimated the number of villagers displaced did so well prior to reports by media, after which more people could have been displaced.³ As of May 13th 2011 a KHRG field researcher reported that at least some villagers, particularly those with children, had chosen to remain in Thailand due to the continuing instability of the military situation.⁴ Others had already returned to Burma, citing the need to return to agricultural workplaces such as hillside rice fields, where farmers must plant paddy each May.



This photo, taken on April 28th 2011, shows Saw R---, 35, with children (right to left) Naw K---, 8, Saw Ky---, 6, and Saw Z---, 3, at a temporary refuge site in Re---. When this photo was taken, his wife Naw Ht---, 35, was visiting a hospital in Thailand so that their son, Saw H---, 12, could receive medical attention for a fever the boy had developed since the family fled Wa--- village on April 24th. [Photo: KHRG]



This photo, taken on April 29th 2011, shows Maung B---, 22, and Saw F---, 20, who sought refuge in Thailand due to fighting between Tatmadaw and DKBA forces near Wa--- village. Maung B--- told KHRG that he farmed a flat field in Wa--- before he fled. [Photo: KHRG]

Further background on the current military situation in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- *Displacement Monitoring: Regular updates on protection concerns for villagers in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts and adjacent areas in Thailand (May 2011)*
- *Human rights abuses and obstacles to protection: Conditions for civilians amidst ongoing*

³ See: "Karen refugees sent back to Burma," The Irrawaddy, May 2011; "Karen fighting forces 700 to flee," Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), May 2011.

⁴ Underlining the ongoing threats to physical security faced by villagers who choose, or are forced, to return to areas of continuing conflict in eastern Burma, on May 12th 2011, DVB reported mortar fire in Kawkaik Town and damage to buildings in civilian areas, including a hospital. See "Karen hospital hit by artillery fire," DVB, May 2011.

conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an Districts (January 2011)

- *Villagers flee to avoid fighting and portering: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District (December 2010)*
- *More arrests and movement restrictions: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District (November 2010)*
- *Threats to human rights, obstacles to protection: Conditions for civilians seeking refuge in Phop Phra District, Thailand (November 2010)*
- *Villager injured, community flees: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District (November 2010)*
- *Arrest, looting and flight: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District (November 2010)*

Karen Districts



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