

# From scorched earth to parched earth



Conflict and dams on the Nam Teng in Shan State



# **From scorched earth to parched earth**

Conflict and dams on the Nam Teng in Shan State



# Contents

Summary .....	4
Historical and cultural significance of the Nam Teng River: flowing through contested lands .....	7
◆ Birthplace of Shan “Romeo and Juliet” .....	9
◆ An artery of Shan resistance .....	11
◆ 1996-1998: forced depopulation along the Nam Teng .....	12
◆ Burma Army build-up in central Shan State .....	14
Background of Kengtawng .....	18
Militarization in Kengtawng .....	20
The Kengtawng hydropower project .....	20
Impacts of the Kengtawng project .....	22
◆ Downsized waterfalls .....	22
◆ Decreased fish stocks .....	24
The Upper Kengtawng dam .....	25
Feared impacts .....	27
◆ Parched agriculture .....	30
◆ Health risks due to changed water quality .....	32
◆ Further decrease in fish stocks .....	34
◆ Disappearance of waterfalls .....	34
◆ Unpredictable water releases .....	35
◆ Dam breakage .....	35
Centralized energy planning and foreign investment fuelling conflict .....	35
Conclusion and recommendations .....	36

## Summary

This report exposes how Burma Army terror campaigns, forced depopulation, and military expansion have paved the way for dam building on the Nam Teng in southern Shan State, and urges the immediate cancellation of the Upper Kengtawng dam, a potentially disastrous project that will inflame the decades-long civil war.

The Nam Teng, one of the main Salween tributaries in Shan State, has special historical and cultural significance for Shan people. It flows through the former Shan principalities of Mong Kung, Laikha, Mong Nai and Mawksai, and ancient Shan stupas line its banks. The best-loved Shan folktale – Khun Sarm Law and Nang Oo Pim – is set along the river. Kengtawng, in eastern Mong Nai, halfway along the river, is famous as Khun Sarm Law's birthplace, and for its large, spectacular waterfalls.

The river has served as an artery of the Shan resistance for decades, linking territories along the Thai border to central Shan State. The Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) regrouped along the Nam Teng in early 1996, after Khun Sa's Mong Tai Army surrendered.

Communities along the Nam Teng were thus primary targets for the Burma Army's massive scorched earth campaign against the newly reformed Shan resistance during 1996-1998. Over 300,000 villagers from eleven townships were forced from rural areas into relocation sites near towns and main roads. Hundreds were tortured, killed and raped. In Kengtawng alone, troops raped 70 women and girls, including as young as five years old.

The depopulation of rural central Shan State paved the way for large-scale Burma Army expansion into the area – including the setting up of the Eastern Central Regional Command in Namzarng. It also paved the way for dam building.

The first large hydropower project in the depopulated area was built on the Nam Teng at Kengtawng, where most of the local population had fled to Thailand after 1996 – only 10 of over 50 original villages remain today - and where three Burma Army bases and a large military training centre have been set up. During the building of the 54 megawatt Kengtawng project, from 2005 to 2009, there were three rape-murders of local women by Burma Army soldiers.

Built directly above the famous waterfalls, the Kengtawng project has dried up the once famous landmark in the summer. Formerly abundant fish stocks – relied on by thousands of villagers above and below the project - have been significantly reduced, with some larger fish species disappearing altogether. The costs of the project appear to far outweigh the supposed benefits, as only one of three turbines is currently running, producing only a fraction of its installed power capacity.

The Upper Kengtawng dam, started in 2009, 40 kilometers above the first project, will have a large reservoir, and therefore much greater impacts. Thousands of villagers in Kengtawng and Larnghkur, who rely on the river for agriculture and fishing, fear critical water shortages – especially with visible climate change. After recent dam disasters in Laos and central Burma, they also fear dam breakage.

Both projects on the Nam Teng violate all principles of responsible development. They have been pushed through by an occupying military force, which has terrorized and driven out the local population. The new dam is now poised to inflict a death blow on the fragile ecology of one of the main rivers in Shan State.

The Nam Teng basin remains a contested war-zone, where the Burma Army continues to launch attacks on the RCSS/SSA, despite an existing ceasefire, and continues to commit violations against local civilians with impunity.

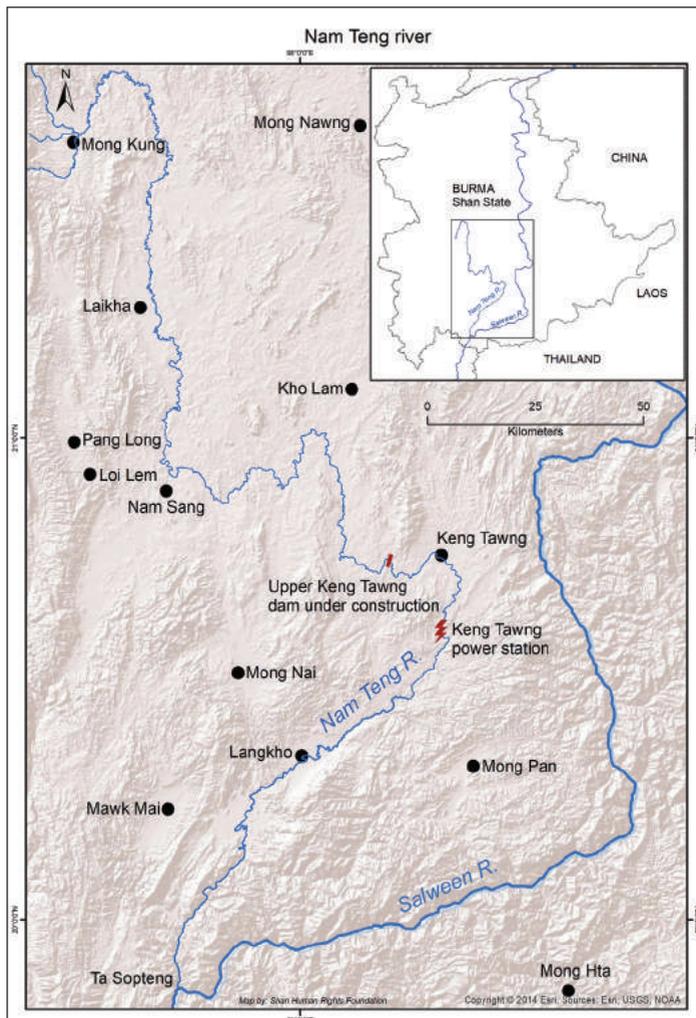
Proceeding with the potentially disastrous Upper Kengtawng dam under these conditions will be sure to fuel local resentment against the Naypyidaw authorities, and inflame the decades-long conflict.

We therefore urge the Burmese government to immediately cancel the Upper Kengtawng dam. Only when there is a political settlement to the conflict, bringing genuine federal reform and enabling local communities to have decision-making power over their own natural resources, should any large development projects be considered.

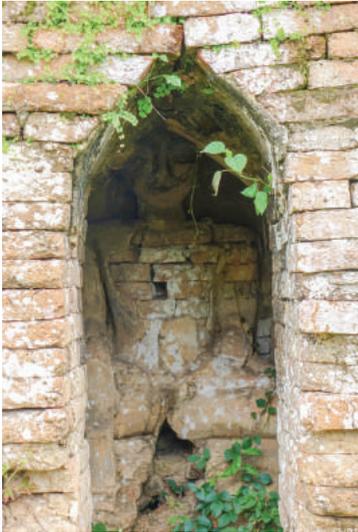
We also urge foreign donors -- particularly Norway, which gave technical assistance to the Upper Kengtawng Dam -- to stop promoting and investing in large dams in contested areas of Burma. Backing unpopular government dams fuels conflict and directly undermines peace-seeking efforts.

## Historical and cultural significance of the Nam Teng

The Nam Teng is one of the main tributaries of the Salween River in Shan State. It originates in Mong Kung township, and flows for 560 kms across the southern Shan plateau through Laikha, Namzarng, Mong Nai and Larngkhur townships, before reaching the Salween river at Ta Sop Teng.



Shan people have for centuries lived in the valleys along the river, cultivating paddy, fruit orchards and other crops, and rearing livestock along its banks. They prospered through trade and built numerous temples and stupas. The Nam Teng communities formerly comprised part of the Shan principalities: Mong Kung, Laikha, Mong Nai and Mawkmai



*Ancient stupas at Nam Toom in Kengtawng*

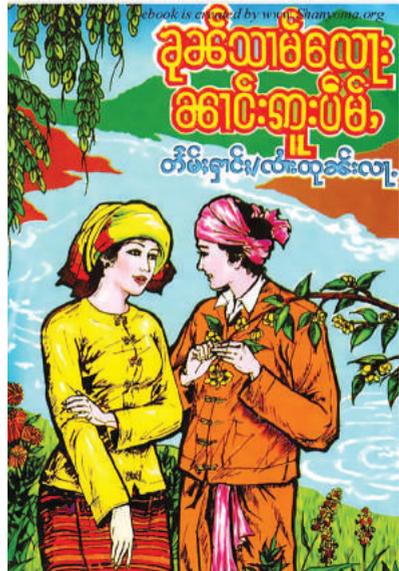


*Palace of the former Laikha ruling prince*

◆ **Birthplace of Shan “Romeo and Juliet”**

The river is immortalized in the beloved Shan folk-tale, “Khun Sam Law and Nang Oo Peim,” written in about 1880 by Nang Kham Ku (the only woman among the eight scholars or “Khu Maw Tai”, honored as the founders of Shan literature).

In the tale, a cattle trader called Khun Sam Law, from Kengtawng, east of Mong Nai, travels north along the Nam Teng, to Mong Kung, where he courts



*Book cover of “Khun Sam Law and Nang Oo Peim”*



*The eight scholars honored as the founders of Shan literature*

and weds a girl called Nang Oo Peim. However, after rejection by her spiteful mother in law, Nang Oo Peim flees back to her home village, miscarrying in the jungle along the way, and dies. Khun Sarm Law then stabs himself to death out of grief.

The tale is said to be based on true events that took place in the 1700s, and there are shrines along the Nam Teng at Khun Sam Law’s birth-place at Pa Hsa village in Kengtawng, and that of Nang Oo Peim at Mark Lang village in Mong Kung. The destiny of the two is linked by the river, which served as a main trading route in olden days. The tale also reflects the feudal Shan past: Khun Saw Law’s mother was the niece of the hereditary prince of Mong Nai, and this was a main reason she rejected her son’s marriage to Nang Oo Peim, whose father was a commoner.

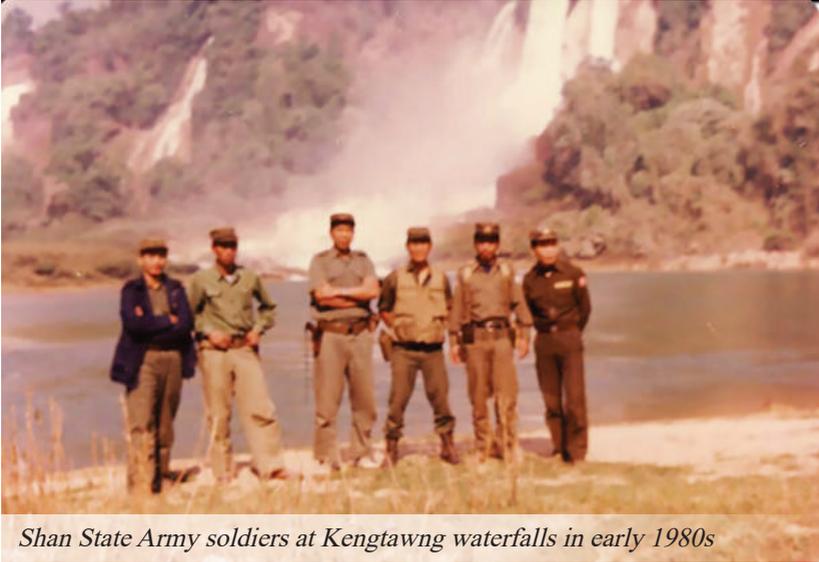
## Renowned purity of Nam Teng water

Larng Khur villagers living along the Nam Teng traditionally relied on the river waters for all their daily needs, including drinking and cooking. Older people were so fond of the taste of the water that they would bottle it and take it with them when they went on journeys. They also believed that the waters had special medicinal properties, and prevented goiter.

### ◆ An artery of the Shan resistance

The Shan resistance has operated in the valleys and forests along the Nam Teng for decades. The river has served as a vital artery, linking resistance territories along the Thai border with central and northern Shan State. When the northern-based Shan State Army came down to join Shan forces along the Thai border in the early 1980s (which merged to form the Mong Tai Army in 1985), they journeyed along the Nam Teng, basing themselves for years near Kengtawng.

After the Mong Tai Army officially surrendered to the military regime on January 25, 1996, about 300 former MTA soldiers, led by Lieutenant General Yawd Serk, secretly broke away and began marching north from the Thai border to central Shan State. They were surrounded by the Burma Army near Kengtawng, but pretended they were surrendering, and managed to cross the Nam Teng and continue north.



*Shan State Army soldiers at Kengtawng waterfalls in early 1980s*

Along the way, they rallied former MTA troops in southern and central Shan State, and on April 27 announced themselves as the newly reformed Shan United Revolutionary Army (SURA) – using the name of one of the armies which had originally jointly formed the MTA. This group later became the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA), the main Shan resistance army in southern Shan State today.

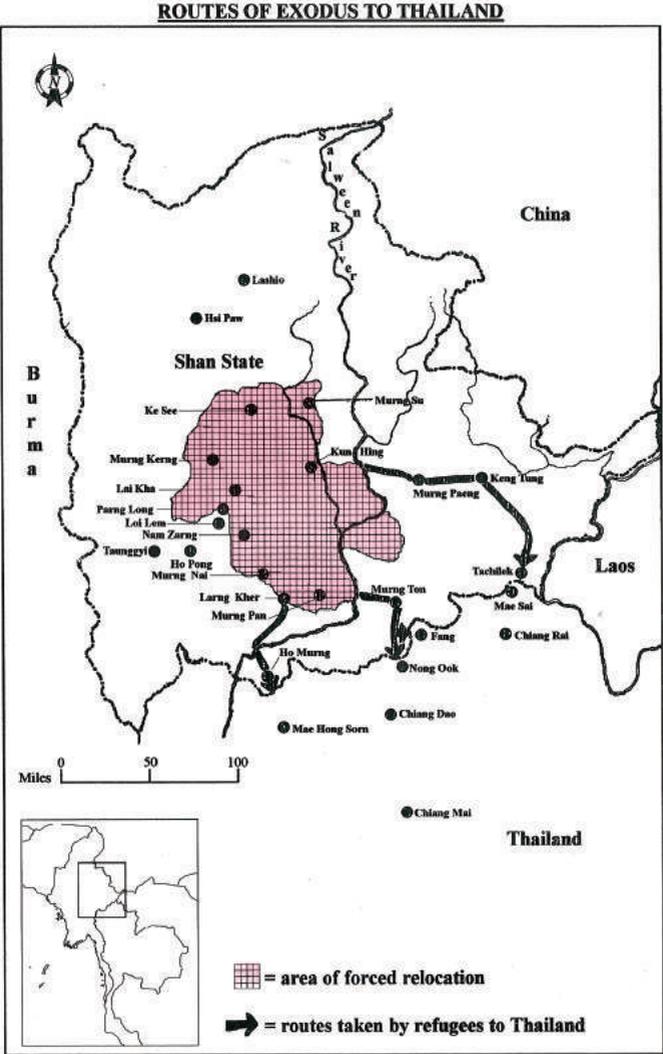
#### ◆ 1996-1998: forced depopulation along the Nam Teng

Aiming to cut off support for the newly reborn Shan army, the Burma Army started a massive scorched earth operation in March 1996. During 1996 to 1998, over 300,000 villagers from over 1,400 villages in eleven townships were uprooted from their homes, and forced into guarded relocation sites near towns and main roads.<sup>1</sup> Villagers caught

---

1 <http://www.shanhumanrights.org/eng/index.php/shrf-archives/shrf-english-newsletter/327-dispossessed>

hiding in or near their homes were tortured, killed and raped. Cut off from their farms, and given no support, the majority of relocated villagers fled to Thailand, where many remain till this day. Unlike the



*Forced relocation in Shan State 1996-1998*

Karen, Karenni and Mon, these fleeing villagers were never recognized as refugees, and most were forced to survive as migrant workers. Thousands settled in unofficial camps on the Shan-Thai border.

About half of the villagers uprooted were from townships along the Nam Teng. One of the first villages burned was Pa Hsa in Kengtawng (birthplace of the Shan folk hero Khun Sarm Law), because it was close to where the Shan army had crossed the Nam Teng as they headed north to central Shan State. Troops from six Burma Army battalions, including the notorious Infantry Division 99, attacked Pa Hsar. Twenty houses in Pa Hsar were burned to the ground, 40 villagers were forced to be porters, and women and children scattered in terror into the nearby jungle – where some died of exposure.

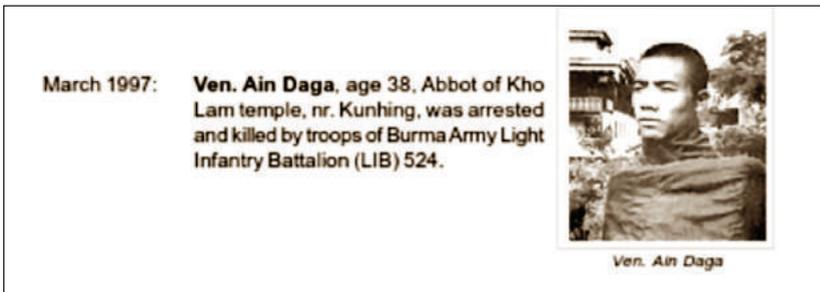
#### ◆ **Burma Army build-up in central Shan State**

After the depopulation of rural central Shan State in 1996-1998, the Burma Army set up many new bases in the main towns and villages



*Bodies of 5 victims, two of them children, who were killed by SLORC shells in Kho Lam relocation site on February 21, 1997*

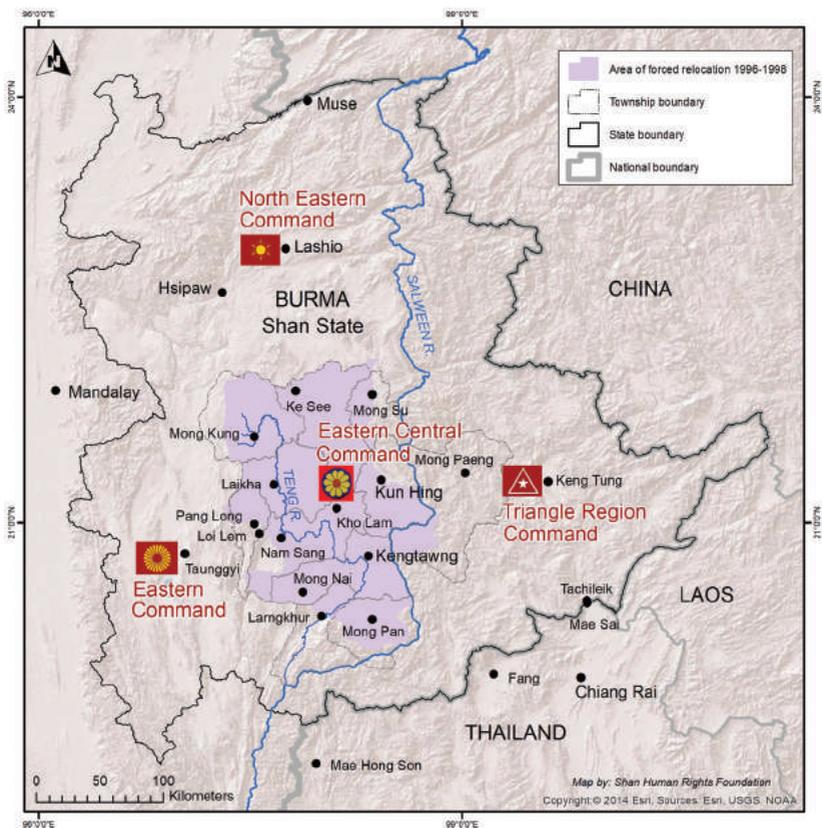
in the area, including along the Nam Teng. In 2010, a new Regional Army Command – the Eastern Central Command - was set up at Kho Lam village in Namzarng township, a strategic crossroads linking all parts of Shan State. Kho Lam was one of the sites to which thousands of villagers were forcibly relocated in 1996. It was also where Burma Army troops inflicted some of the worst brutality. Between February and September 1997 alone, 159 Namzarng villagers, including monks, women and children, were killed; some were tortured to death in the Kho Lam military base.



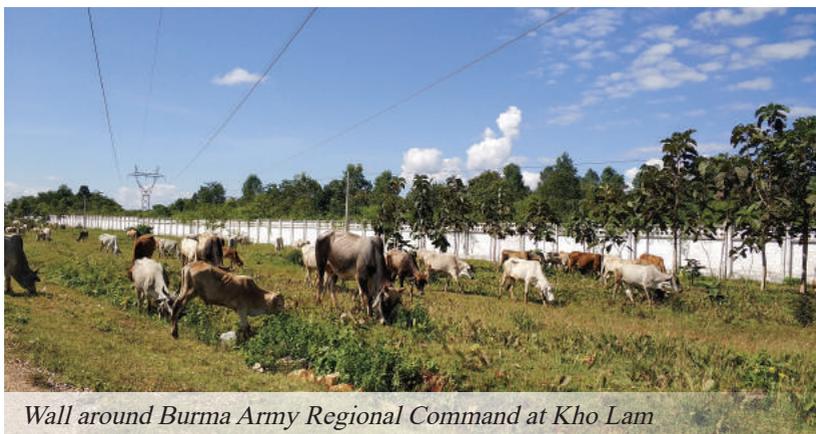
The Eastern Central Command is the 14th Regional Army Command in Burma, and the fourth in Shan State, the other three being the North-east Command at Lashio, the Eastern Command at Taunggyi, and the Triangle Command at Kengtung.

There are at least 26 battalions under the Eastern Central Command. Large areas of land were confiscated to set up this military command centre.

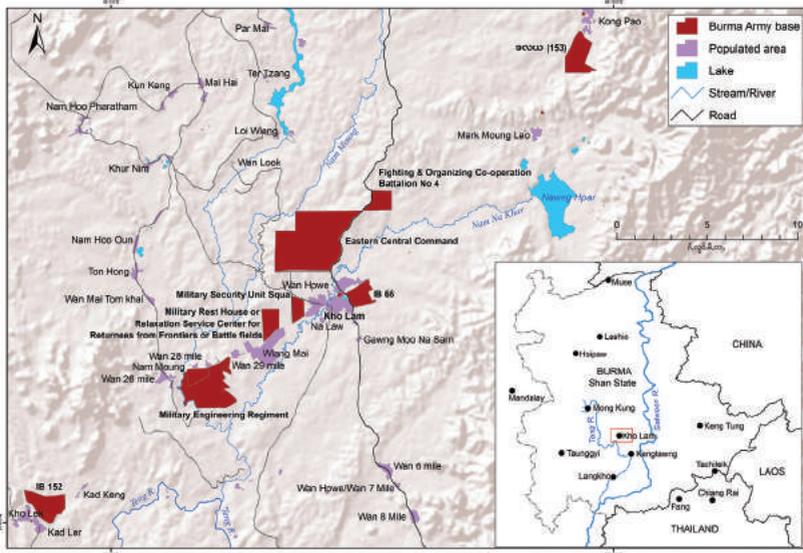
Despite the Burma Army's scorched earth campaigns and expansion in central Shan State, the RCSS/SSA continued to operate in the rural areas, including along the Nam Teng. There were frequent clashes, and violations committed against local civilians suspected of supporting the Shan resistance.



*Burma Army Regional Commands in Shan State*



*Wall around Burma Army Regional Command at Kho Lam*



*Map of Burma Army bases around Kho Lam*

## **Ongoing Burma Army attacks and violations after ceasefires**

In 2011, the RCSS/SSA signed a bilateral ceasefire with the Burma Army, and in 2015 signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. However, there has been no withdrawal of Burma Army troops from central Shan State, and the Burma Army has continued to launch attacks against the RCSS/SSA, and commit violations against local civilians with impunity.

Fighting has also taken place in Kengtawng. On May 8 2018, the Burma Army provoked a clash by entering fully armed into an RCSS/SSA area east of Kengtawng town without informing them.

## **Background of Kengtawng**

Kengtawng was formerly a sub-state of Mong Nai, one of the original Shan principalities. It is now a sub-township of Mong Nai township. Most of the original population were Shan wet rice farmers, living in villages in the Nam Teng valley, surrounded by thickly forested mountains.

Kengtawng is famous among Shan as being the birthplace of the folk hero Khun Sam Law. Ceremonies marking his birthday are held in February each year in his home village of Pa Hsar, near the Nam Teng, attended by thousands of people. There are also annual religious ceremonies held in March at ancient stupas along the river at Phaklit and Wan Nam Toom.

Kengtawng is also famous for the spectacular “Zong Arng” waterfalls (meaning “cobra” falls in Shan) on the Nam Teng, 20 kilometers south of the town. These falls, the largest in Shan State, are a well-known sightseeing attraction.

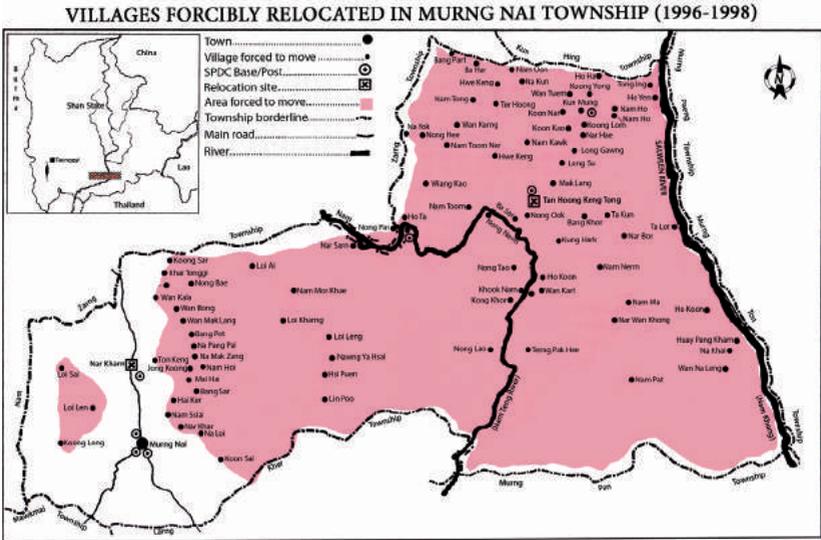
The Burma Army’s scorched earth operations in 1996-1998 devastated Kengtawng. All outlying villages were forced to move to sites near the central village of Tonhoong (now the sub-township capital). This included Pa Hsar village, the birthplace of Khun Sam Law.

There was widespread sexual violence by the regime’s troops. At least 70 women and girls, including as young as five years old, were raped.<sup>2</sup> There was also brutal killing of villagers suspected of supporting the Shan resistance. This fuelled the exodus of refugees to Thailand.

---

2 Shan Human Rights Foundation and Shan Women’s Action Network, 2002 report, Licence to Rape

Loong Min, aged 65, fled to Thailand from Pa Hsar village in 1996, after it was attacked and torched by Burma Army troops. He took refuge in Fang district of Chiang Mai province, where he survives as a migrant agricultural worker till this day. “I lost everything – my house, my farm, my animals. I won’t go back while the Burma Army is still there. I don’t want to risk losing everything again,” he said.



*Villages forcibly relocated in Mong Nai township in 1996-1998*

Of the over 50 original villages in Kengtawng, now only 10 remain. According to the 2014 Myanmar census, 92.5% of the 10,796 population are now “urban” – ie live in the Kengtawng sub-township section, while only 805 people live in three outlying village tracts.<sup>3</sup>

3 The 2014 Myanmar Housing and Population Census, Shan State Linkhe district, Kengtawng Sub-township report, October 2017 presentation by Department of Population, Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population

## **Militarization in Kengtawng**

Before 1996, there were only three small Burma Army outposts in Kengtawng. Now there are three large military camps on the hills around the town, housing Light Infantry Battalions 569, 576 and 579 – which are under Military Operations Command no. 17 in Mong Pan. A Burma Army training camp (No. 3 Regional Military Training Camp) has also been set up west of the town. There are estimated to be over 1,000 troops stationed in Kengtawng, including hundreds brought in to be trained every six months. The large number of troops is reflected in the sex ratio of the area, which was recorded as 122 men to 100 women in the 2014 census.<sup>4</sup>

Having expanded into the area, the Burma Army began authorizing large-scale logging by allied militia groups and military crony companies.<sup>5</sup> During 2002-2006, large areas of teak forest around Kengtawng were felled. Preparations also began for the damming of the Nam Teng.

## **The Kengtawng hydropower project**

The first large hydropower project built by the Burma Army in the areas of central Shan State depopulated by their 1996-1998 scorched earth campaign, was the Kengtawng project, built on the Nam Teng at the famous Zong Arng waterfalls.

The project was begun in 2005 and completed in 2009. Construction took place under tight security, due to ongoing conflict with the RCSS/SSA, which continued to operate around Kengtawng.

---

4    ibid

5    Shan Sapawa Environmental Organisation, 2006 report, Warning Signs: An update on plans to dam the Salween in Burma's Shan State

During construction of the project, there were three rape-murders of local women by Burma Army soldiers, between August 2006 and April 2007. Two of the victims were married to Burmese workers at the project-site. Another was a 40-year-old farmer who had been forcibly relocated in 1996. She was tending her cattle near the river, when she found a group of soldiers killing and dismembering one of her cows for meat. When she tried to stop them, they gang-raped and killed her. Her dead body was found beside the carcass of her cow. No one dared seek justice.



*Kengtawng hydropower project*

The project involves blockage and diversion of water above the falls into a channel to the west of the cascade, which powers turbines at the bottom. Its installed capacity is 54 megawatts (3 x 18 MW turbines). However, in 2018, only one of the three turbines has been working, so it has only been producing a fraction of its installed capacity – indicating bad project design, and raising questions about the rationale for building further dams on the same river.

The Kengtawng project is connected to the national grid by a 132 KV transmission line via the Namzarng power station. One of the targeted recipients of the project's power is the Pinpet iron factory in Hopong, near Taunggyi, jointly run by the Burma Army's Myanmar Economic Corporation.

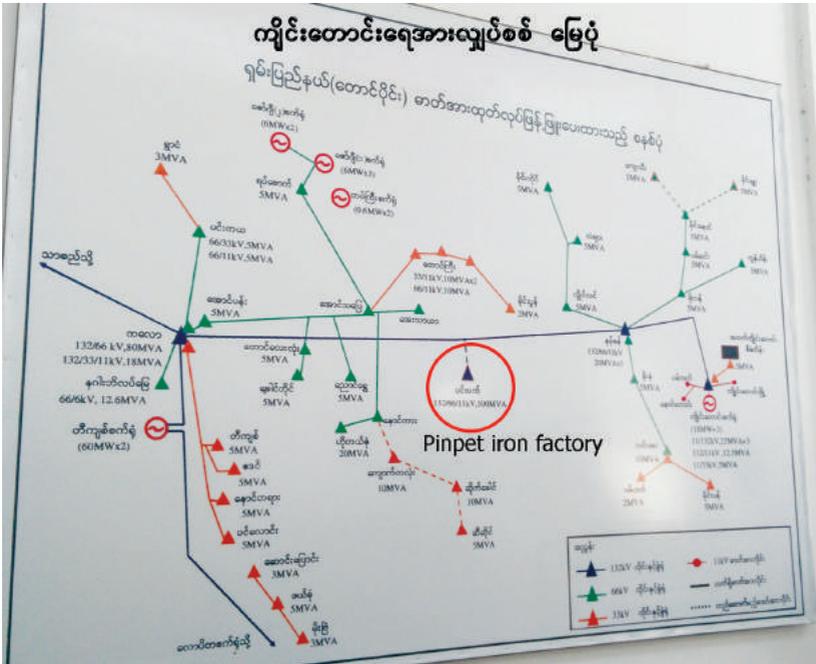


Diagram of electricity distribution from the Kengtawng hydropower projects

## Impacts of the Kengtawng hydropower project

### ◆ Downsized waterfalls

The most noticeable impact of the project has been the decrease in the size of the famous Zong Arng waterfalls in the dry season. There used to be seven parallel cascades forming the waterfalls. However,

due to diversion of water to power the turbines, this has shrunk to only five cascades in the rainy season, and a mere two cascades in the dry season.



*Zong Arng waterfalls before completion of Kengtawng hydropower project*



*Zong Arng waterfalls after completion of Kengtawng hydropower project (in the dry season)*

Aware of local resentment at the damage to the famous landmark, the authorities have started opening the dam gates above the waterfalls in February each year, at the time of Khun Sam Law's birthday celebra-

tion. This is to let the thousands of visitors to the birthday celebration also travel to the waterfalls, according to local tradition. However, after the celebration, the dam gates are blocked again.

#### ◆ **Decreased fisheries**

For generations, fishing has been part of life along the Nam Teng. Villagers eat fish as part of their daily diet, and also sell it in the market. Before completion of the Kengtawng project, villagers living nearby said they could catch about twenty species of fish in the river, including the large fish such as such as Pa Get, Pa Whar Harnng Lieng and Pa Khao Koon.

However, after the project was built, the amount of fish in the river decreased significantly. Kengtawng fisherfolk say there are only about six species left, none of which are big.



*Fish being caught in the Nam Teng (photo by Thai journalist)*

## The Upper Kengtawng Dam

The Upper Kengtawng dam is being constructed about 40 kilometers upstream of the existing Kengtawng hydropower project. It will be a 57 meter high rockfill dam, creating a reservoir about 15 kilometers in length. It is planned to have an installed capacity of 51 megawatts, although actual production is likely to be far less, judging from the inefficiency of the existing Kengtawng project.

The project was begun in 2009, under the former military regime – the State Peace and Development Committee (SPDC). It is solely funded by the Ministry of Electricity and Energy <sup>6</sup>. Norway's Water Resources and Energy Directorate (NVE) has assisted with dam design, through the Norwegian engineering firm Multiconsult <sup>7</sup>, which is also involved in the planned Middle Yeywa dam in northern Shan State.

A Chinese state-owned company, China National Technical Import and Export Corporation (CNTIC), will supply generators, turbines and machinery for the project, under an MOU signed with the SPDC in Naypyidaw in April 2010.

There are about 1,800 workers at the dam site, hired from central Burma. They are employed by Burmese construction companies, including Minn Anawrahta Co. Ltd, Dragon Emperor Group, Myanmar Phan Khar Myae Co. and Myanmar Chancellor Co. A Burma Army outpost at the dam site provides security.

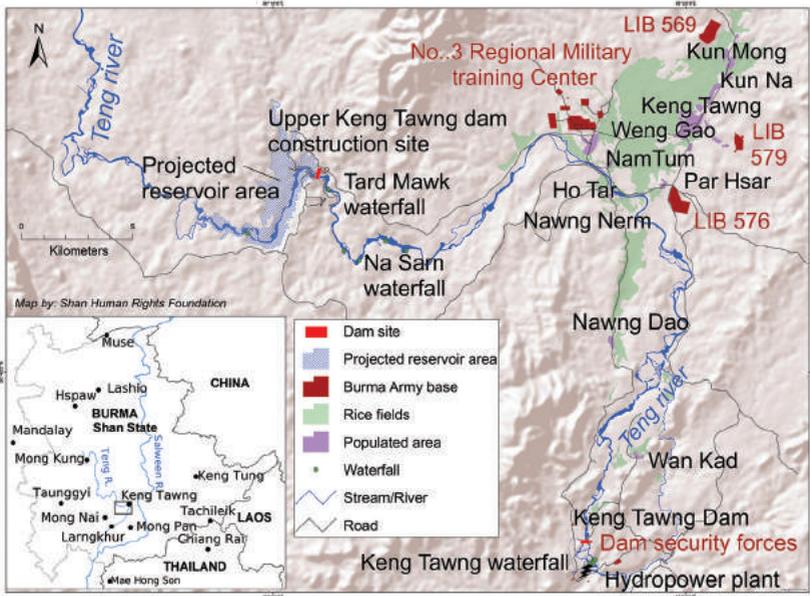
The dam is slated for completion in 2020-2021<sup>8</sup>.

---

6 [https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/f945c8bd-6e5a-4e79-a5c4-ff01d7274d6a/1d+SEA+Workshop+\(Yan-gon,+Myitkyina+and+Loikaw\)+MOEE.pdf?MOD=AJPERES](https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/f945c8bd-6e5a-4e79-a5c4-ff01d7274d6a/1d+SEA+Workshop+(Yan-gon,+Myitkyina+and+Loikaw)+MOEE.pdf?MOD=AJPERES)

7 [www.multiconsultgroup.com/projects/tha-htay-upper-keng-tawng-hpp/](http://www.multiconsultgroup.com/projects/tha-htay-upper-keng-tawng-hpp/)

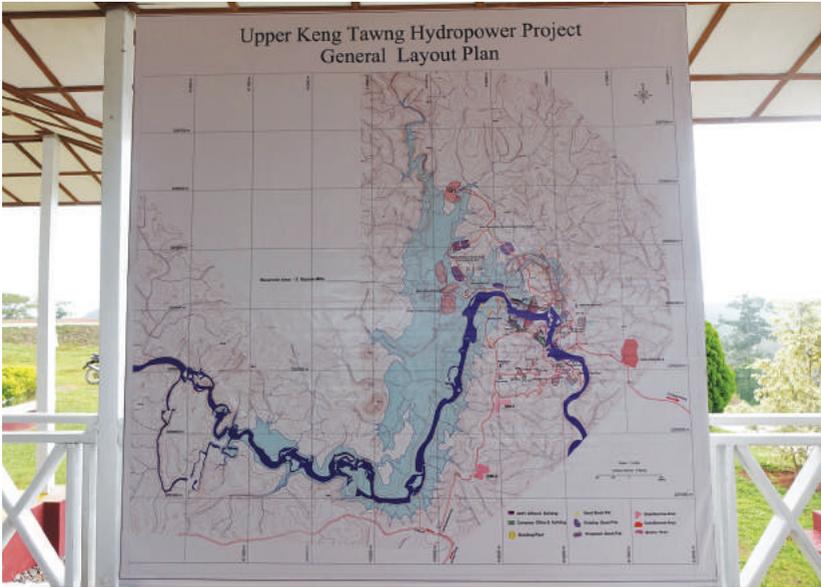
8 <http://www.moee.gov.mm/en/ignite/contentView/438>



Map of Upper Kengtawng dam site and projected reservoir



Upper Kengtawng dam construction site



*Signboard showing projected reservoir of Upper Kengtawng dam*

## **Feared impacts**

Villagers living along the Nam Teng are already aware that the river's health is under threat due to climate change and deforestation, which



*Nam Teng riverbank erosion near Wan Kho Ood temple, Lamgkhour, after 2018 flooding*

have caused unprecedented floods in the rainy season and drought in the dry season. In the first week of September 2018, heavy rain caused the Nam Toom (a stream flowing into the Nam Teng) to flood the villages of Ho Ta and Nam Toom in Kengtawng , destroying 300 acres of crops.

In the hot season months of March to April in recent years, the water level of the Nam Teng has fallen lower than ever before, with previously unseen islands appearing in the middle of the river.



*Nam Teng river in Larngkhur*

Locals are therefore very worried about the potential impacts of the Upper Kengtawng dam on their precious, increasingly fragile water source. The construction has already scarred the landscape along the river, and the scenic Tard Mork falls just below the dam site have been completely destroyed. The water below the site has become muddy and turbid.



*Tard Mork falls before construction of Upper Kengtawng Dam*



*Tard Mork falls during construction of Upper Kengtawng Dam*



*Disappearance of Tard Mork falls beneath Upper Kengtawng Dam*

### **Feared impacts are as follows:**

#### **◆ Parched agriculture**

After the dam begins operation, water flow will be withheld and regulated according to centrally-dictated electricity generation needs – not the livelihood needs of those who have relied on the river for generations.

Water flow from the dam will inevitably be reduced in the dry season, as water will need to be stored to produce electricity. This will impact thousands of downstream farmers relying on the Nam Teng for irrigation of riverside fields in the dry season, when river levels are already at unprecedented low levels. These farmers traditionally divert or pump water from the river to irrigate crops such as garlic, onions and tobacco.

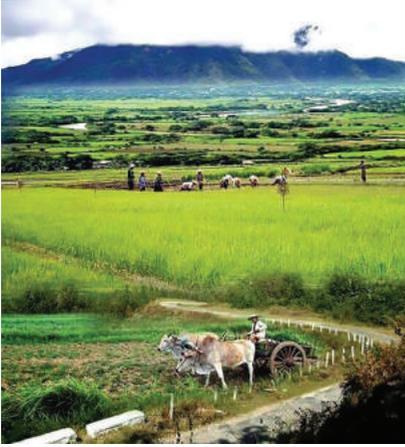
Nutrient-rich sediments that used to flow down the river will also be trapped behind the dam, and will no longer nourish the riverbank soil downstream, likely affecting agricultural yields.



*Traditional water wheels in Nam Teng, used for irrigation*



*Nam Teng river in Larngkhur*



*Agriculture along the Nam Teng*

### ◆ Health risks due to changed water quality

The quality of the water stored in the reservoir, containing large amounts of rotting submerged vegetation – as well as toxic pesticides and herbicides washed down from upstream - will change dramatically from its natural state.

Communities living downstream of dams in other parts of Burma have described how water released from dams is “dirty” and “bad-smelling”

and has caused fish to disappear and affected people's health <sup>9</sup>.

Villagers, particularly women, living along the Nam Teng use the river daily for washing clothes, bathing and cooking. They will therefore be vulnerable to health risks from the changed quality of the water.



*Villagers bathing in the Nam Teng*



*Evening scene along the Nam Teng in Larngkhur*

Photo: Sai Noon Wan Saing

---

9 Kachin Development Networking Group, Saving the Ngo Chang Hka Valley, 2017



*Evening scene along the Nam Teng in Larngkhur*

#### ◆ Further decrease in fish stocks

As mentioned earlier, the first Kengtawng project has already dramatically reduced the number of fish species in the Teng river. Changes in water quality, and further destruction of fish spawning grounds and blockage of fish migration routes caused by the Upper Kengtawng dam are bound to further deplete fish stocks.

#### ◆ Disappearance of waterfalls

With the already visible shrinking of the Zong Arng waterfalls due to the existing Kengtawng project, locals fear that their cherished landmark will dry up even further, and perhaps even disappear completely in the dry season after the Upper Kengtawng dam is built.

### ◆ Unpredictable water releases

Water releases from the dam will be unpredictable, causing sudden fluctuations in water levels downstream and affecting those living along the river. For example, after the Longjiang dam was built in China in 2010, villagers living downstream along the Mao (Shweli) river in northern Shan State found their boats alternately grounded or flooded without warning.<sup>10</sup>

Large amounts of water may suddenly be released in times of heavy rainfall to prevent overspill or breakage. In Kachin State, villagers reported that releases of water from the Chipwi Nge dam caused flooding of their fields and destruction of crops.<sup>11</sup>

### ◆ Dam breakage

Recent dam breakages - in Laos in July 2018, and at Swa in central Burma in August 2018 – have fuelled fears about the stability of the Upper Kengtawng dam. If heavy rain were to cause the dam to break, the lives of over 8,000 people living in the Kengtawng valley directly below the dam would be at risk.

Local residents have little confidence in the dam's construction standards, knowing that government authorities have never prioritized their safety and interests in developing the project.

---

10 <https://burmariversnetwork.org/title/resources/publications/high-and-dry.html>

11 Kachin Development Networking Group, Saving the Ngo Chang Hka Valley, 2017

## **Centralized energy planning and foreign investment fuelling conflict**

The Upper Kengtawng dam is one of fifty large dams planned by Burma's Ministry of Electricity and Energy, under an energy master plan aimed to increase national hydropower capacity from just over 3,000 megawatts to 45,000 megawatts, mainly for export to neighbouring countries.

Most of the planned dams are located in ethnic states, where decades-long conflict is continuing between the government army and ethnic resistance forces. With central exploitation of their natural resources being one of the key grievances of the ethnic peoples, the government's insistence on proceeding with these dams is directly fuelling war.

However, this has not deterred foreign hydropower investors – both private and state-owned – from seizing on the opportunity to partner with the Burmese government and its military in building dams in war zones. Hydropower investment in Burma has in recent years increasingly come from Western countries, who claim to be supporting Burma's "peace process".

The World Bank's International Finance Corporation is clearly supporting the interests of investors over local communities, and ignoring conflict risks. Their recent Strategic Environmental Assessment of Burma's hydropower sector, funded by the Australian government, identified the Nam Teng basin as a "priority sub-basin for hydropower development," despite giving it a "very high" conflict rating.<sup>12</sup>

---

12 [https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/d31f99b4-4a2a-4fe3-a3c7-5c21a7904b18/SDF+Main+Report\\_May+21\\_For+Stakeholder+Review\\_English.pdf?MOD=AJPERES](https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/d31f99b4-4a2a-4fe3-a3c7-5c21a7904b18/SDF+Main+Report_May+21_For+Stakeholder+Review_English.pdf?MOD=AJPERES)

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

The Upper Kengtawng dam is poised to have grave, irreversible social and environmental impacts on thousands of rural villagers living along the Nam Teng. Yet none of these villagers have had any say in the building of the dam. On the contrary, both this new dam and the earlier Kengtawng project have been forced through by an occupying army, which continues to wage war in Shan State and persecute its indigenous inhabitants.

Pushing through with this potentially disastrous dam will be sure to trigger further widespread resentment against the central government and its army, and will undoubtedly fuel the decades-long conflict in Shan State.

**We therefore make the following recommendations:**

### ***To the Burmese government***

Immediately stop construction of the Upper Kengtawng dam and other large hydropower dams in Burma's conflict areas. Only when there is a political settlement to the conflict, bringing genuine federal reform and enabling local communities to have decision-making power over their own natural resources, should any large development projects be considered.

Promote alternative, off-grid energy projects, such as solar, wind and small-scale hydropower, which can be owned and managed by communities to address their own electricity needs.

### ***To foreign governments and hydropower companies:***

Immediately stop promoting and investing in large dams in contested areas of Burma, as they are fuelling conflict and directly undermining peace-seeking efforts.



Shan Human Rights Foundation  
and  
Shan Sapawa Environmental Organization