

Press release by Ta Long villagers:

Ta Long villagers hold blessing ceremony against controversial dams on Namtu/Myitgne River

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Today, residents of Ta Long and nearby villages in Hsipaw township, northern Shan State, are holding a blessing ceremony for the longevity of their village, to oppose the building of dams on the Namtu or Myitgne river, which would submerge their homes.

About 700 villagers, including twelve monks, from Wan Na Mark Khaw, Ho Na, Marn Hoam, Ton Gaeng, Nai Long, Na Sa Long, Namlan, and Hsipaw are gathering at Ta Long village, on the bank of the Namtu/Myitgne river for the ceremony. Afterwards, villagers will erect banners and put up stickers against ongoing dam building on the Namtu river.

Ta Long village, which has nearly 700 inhabitants, is well-known for its sweet, organically grown oranges. Many villagers own at least 2 acres of orange orchards, earning them 1,960,000 kyats (1,288 USD) income per year.

“We love our village and our farms, which have been benefiting us for generations. We don’t want to move to any other place. We don’t want the dam to submerge our village,” said Nang Lao Kham, a Ta Long villager.

The entire village of Ta Long, west and east of the river, will be submerged -- as well as ancient historical sites, and the fertile agricultural land which villagers have relied on for generations -- if the Upper Yeywa dam is completed. This dam is being built by Chinese, Swiss and Japanese companies, despite its location in an active warzone. Fighting since August 15 between the Burma Army and ethnic armed groups in northern Shan State – in nearby Nawng Khio, Kyaukme, Kutkhai, Hsenwi, and Lashio -- has recently displaced over 3,000 villagers.

Three other large dams are being planned on the Namtu/Myitgne river, including the giant 735 megawatt Middle Yeywa dam by Norway’s state-owned SN Power in conflict-torn Nawng Khio township.

Sai Thumai, one of the organizers, said, “Dam building on the Namtu river should not continue while conflict between the Burma Army and ethnic armed groups is escalating.”

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