

Press release by Ta Long villagers:

Ta Long villagers mark World Day of Action for Rivers at Namtu/Myitnge riverside, call for a stop to all dams and mining along the river

March 14, 2020

To mark the International Day of Action for Rivers, villagers from Talong and nearby townships are holding a blessing ceremony for the Namtu or Myitnge river in Hsipaw, northern Shan State, and calling for a stop to all dam building and mining on the river.

Today about 500 villagers, including monks, farmers and youth from various townships are gathering at the Namtu river bank at Talong to pray for the health and longevity of the river, and for a halt to four planned large hydropower dams and to the restarting of the giant Bawdwin-Namtu lead-silver mine by an Australian-led consortium near the source of the river.

The most advanced dam project, the Upper Yeywa – being built by Chinese, Japanese, Swiss and French companies -- will flood the entire village of Talong, housing nearly 700 inhabitants, as well as ancient historical sites and fertile agricultural land which villagers have relied on for generations.

Construction has also started at the site of another planned project, the 210 megawatt Namtu/Hsipaw dam, about 25 kilometers north of Hsipaw town, despite the fact that no Environmental Impact Assessment has been carried out, and there has been no formal approval of the project. The project holder is Natural Current Energy Hydropower Co. Ltd. (NCEH).

The Namtu-Hsipaw dam will submerge the village of Lilu, with 212 residents. Downstream Hsipaw residents fear disrupted water flows, and flooding from sudden dam releases. They also fear lead pollution in the dam reservoir, from the Bawdwin-Namtu mines about 40 kilometers upstream – which will have particularly damaging impacts on children. Australia-based Myanmar Metals, with 51% shares in the Bawdwin mine, plans to process two million tonnes of lead ore a year, making it the third largest producing lead mine in the world.

Namtu MP Nang Kham Aye has raised questions twice in the Naypyidaw parliament about unauthorized construction at the Namtu/Hsipaw dam site, but no action has been taken by the government.

“The new dams and mining will impact the health and safety of thousands living along the Namtu. We urge the government to stop these projects before it is too late,” said a local villager.

Two other large dams being planned on the Namtu/Myitnge river are the giant 735 megawatt Middle Yeywa dam by Norway’s state-owned SN Power in conflict-torn Nawng Khio township, and the 60 megawatt Dee Doke dam by Austria’s Andritz Hydro GmbH and Japan’s Kansai Electric Power Co.

Contact:

Sai Thum Ai (One of the organizers) +95 (0)9-453-132-755

Nang Lao Kham (Ta Long villager) +95 (0)9-262-108-062