



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Toungoo District: Update on the Dam on the Day Loh River

In August 2005 KHRG reported on the construction of a new dam in western Toungoo District of northern Karen State (see ***Toungoo District: Civilians displaced by dams, roads, and military control*** [KHRG #2005-F7, 19/8/05]). To secure the dam area, an estimated 2,000 SPDC troops had flooded the area and were inflicting serious human rights abuses on the population. This report updates the dam situation, particularly as it may have some relation to the progress of the offensive against Karen villages throughout Toungoo District.

KHRG first reported plans for a dam on the lower Day Loh River (known in Burmese as the Thauk Yay Ka River) in 2000 (see ***Peace Villages and Hiding Villages*** [KHRG #2000-05, 15/10/2000]). At that time, local villagers reported that three Japanese engineers had visited the area to survey the site and commence plans for dam construction. The site is at the western edge of the hills in Tantabin township of Toungoo District, just east of the plain surrounding Toungoo town (see ***Map***). According to information gathered from local people by the Free Burma Rangers (FBR), in 2002 four foreign engineers from “Japan and France” visited the site, and in May 2005 six Japanese engineers visited Day Say Hta village in Tantabin township to oversee preparations for the construction of the dam and its associated 150 Megawatt hydroelectric power plant, known officially as the Thaukyegat Hydropower Project.¹ KHRG had already reported in August 2005 the arrival of 2,000 SPDC Army soldiers from Light Infantry Division #66 who swarmed into western Tantabin township along with troops from Infantry Battalion #73 to patrol and secure the area surrounding the dam site from Tun Boh to Pa Leh Wah (see ***Toungoo District: Civilians displaced by dams, roads, and military control***, KHRG #2005-F7, 19/8/05). The increased military presence brought with it an increase in human rights violations being committed against the villagers living there. SPDC Army soldiers regularly patrolled the villages, consistently demanding food and labour from the villages that they entered. New military access roads were built and new security checkpoints and sentry posts were built at regular intervals along these and other nearby roads. Villagers’ movements were restricted and those who were allowed to travel were forced to pay exorbitant taxes as a form of extortion at each of these checkpoints before being permitted to pass. The arrival of the Japanese engineers in May 2005 was not known to KHRG at the time of writing that report, although their presence there at that time does explain why the SPDC would employ such a large force to secure a

¹ See “FBR Team Activities: Toungoo District, Northern Karen State, Burma. Mission: December 2005 – February 2006.” Released April 15, 2006. www.freeburmarangers.org.

relatively small area where there is little activity by the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) due to its proximity to the plains.

According to the Myanmar Ministry of Electric Power,² all of the preliminary studies performed for the project thus far have been conducted by the Japanese firm, Tokyo Electric Power Services Co. Ltd. (TEPSCO). To this, the ASEAN Centre for Energy adds that a “*pre-design report had [been] completed by ECI*”.³ This reference gives no further details on this company, and KHRG has only been able to identify two companies working in related sectors with ECI in their name: ECI (Electro Composites Inc) or Hydro ECI Inc (Hydro Electricity, Control-protection, and Instrumentation), both Canadian companies based in Québec. Hydro ECI provides consulting services on hydro power system design, and has written to KHRG to state “*clearly and unequivocally that Hydro ECI Inc has no relationship, and never has had any relationship, with any dam projects in Burma.*”⁴ The other company, ECI (Electro Composites Inc), supplies components for the energy sector, but also manufactures military communications equipment and high-technology defensive shields for military vehicles and personnel.⁵ Neither company’s web site mentions any involvement in Burma, so the ECI referred to by the ASEAN Centre report may be a completely different agency, and its involvement may have been temporary at the ‘pre-design’ stage.⁶ The Japanese engineers who visited the dam site in 2002 and again in 2005 were probably representatives of TEPSCO, while the ‘French’ engineers in 2002 could have been francophone Québécois representatives of ECI, mistaken by local people for French nationals, or French-speaking consultants from elsewhere. KHRG has not yet received any reply from the ASEAN Centre for Energy to clarify what company or agency is meant by ‘ECI’.

The Myanmar Ministry of Electric Power claims on its web site that construction is due to commence at some point later this year.⁷ Though speculative, it is possible that the construction of this and other hydroelectric power projects in the region is partly motivating the ongoing attacks on Karen villages in Toungoo, Nyaunglebin, and Papun Districts. In Nyaunglebin District, the SPDC plans to build two more hydropower plants, officially referred to as the Bawgata (Baw Ka Hta) Hydropower Project and the Shwe Kyin (Shwegyin) Hydropower Project, the latter of which is very near sites of renewed attacks on villages in the Ler Wah area of Shwegyin township. Both of these projects are also commissioned to begin construction later this year and are reportedly presently “*under feasibility study and design by Kansai Electric Power Co. Japan*”.⁸ In addition, some of the attacks in northern Papun District are along routes to the planned dams at Weh Gyi, Dagwin, and Hat Gyi on the Salween River. By destroying all hill villages and forcing villagers to sites under direct SPDC control, the dam environs and access routes would be ‘secured’ and the villagers would become available for exploitation – primarily to provide forced labour, food, materials and extortion money to support the troops sent in to secure the dam access routes, but possibly also on the dam projects themselves. One indication supporting this possibility is that some villages in the hills surrounding Kler Lah have been ordered to relocate not to Kler Lah, but to Klaw Mi Der, a site much further from their villages but quite close to the Thaukyegat dam site. In January 2006 a number of the villages from the area around Tun Boh (just below the dam site) were reportedly issued orders to relocate to the Law Gha Inn

² Accessed at: http://www.myanmar.com/Ministry/Electric_Power/moep/expension.htm on 12/5/06.

³ Accessed at: http://www.aseanenergy.org/energy_sector/electricity/myanmar/future_electricity_projects.htm on 12/5/06.

⁴ Letter from Gilles Roy of Hydro ECI to KHRG dated January 15, 2007.

⁵ If Electro Composites Inc. (ECI) were to supply any defense-related equipment they would be in violation of Canadian restrictions on exports to Burma. KHRG has no evidence of any such activity by ECI.

⁶ See <http://www.hydro-eci.com> and <http://www.eci-co.com> respectively.

⁷ Accessed at: http://www.myanmar.com/Ministry/Electric_Power/moep/expension.htm on 12/5/06

⁸ *Ibid.*

relocation site, an area not too far from the dam site with scarce water resources, few trees, and poor soil which cannot support adequate crops.

This development requires continued observation because not only will many villagers lose their livelihoods as many of the plantations and fields upstream from the dam site are inundated, but also because SPDC 'development projects' invariably bring with them an increase in human rights abuses. As has been seen time and time again on different development projects, all nearby villages that are not forcibly relocated away from the area are utilised as forced labour for the project. If not used to work directly on the dam and power plant itself, the villagers will almost certainly be ordered to work on related infrastructure projects, such as building and maintaining access roads to the dam site, building new SPDC Army camps along those roads, and then keeping those camps stocked with provisions by portering food and munitions for the soldiers based there. Since the beginning of 2006, the SPDC has already been ordering one villager per household from nearby villages to go and stand sentry at the dam site. Those who have been unable to go have had to pay 1,000 Kyat. Saw T---, a villager from a nearby village told KHRG upon arriving in a refugee camp in Thailand that, "*since December 2005, forced portering has increased rather than decrease. They have demanded five people from our village every day. ... This did not only occur in our village but also in other villages.*" One of his companions, Saw N---, added that, "*the SPDC soldiers from IB [Infantry Battalion] #48 have been trying to establish new camps in many places and they have ordered the villagers to cut a lot of bamboo for them. Sometimes they demanded 100 pieces and sometimes they demanded 200 pieces. We have to get wood and thatch for them as well. On top of this, we also have to be 'set tha' [messengers and camp servants] for them. Five people have to go and carry water for them ten or twenty times a day.*"

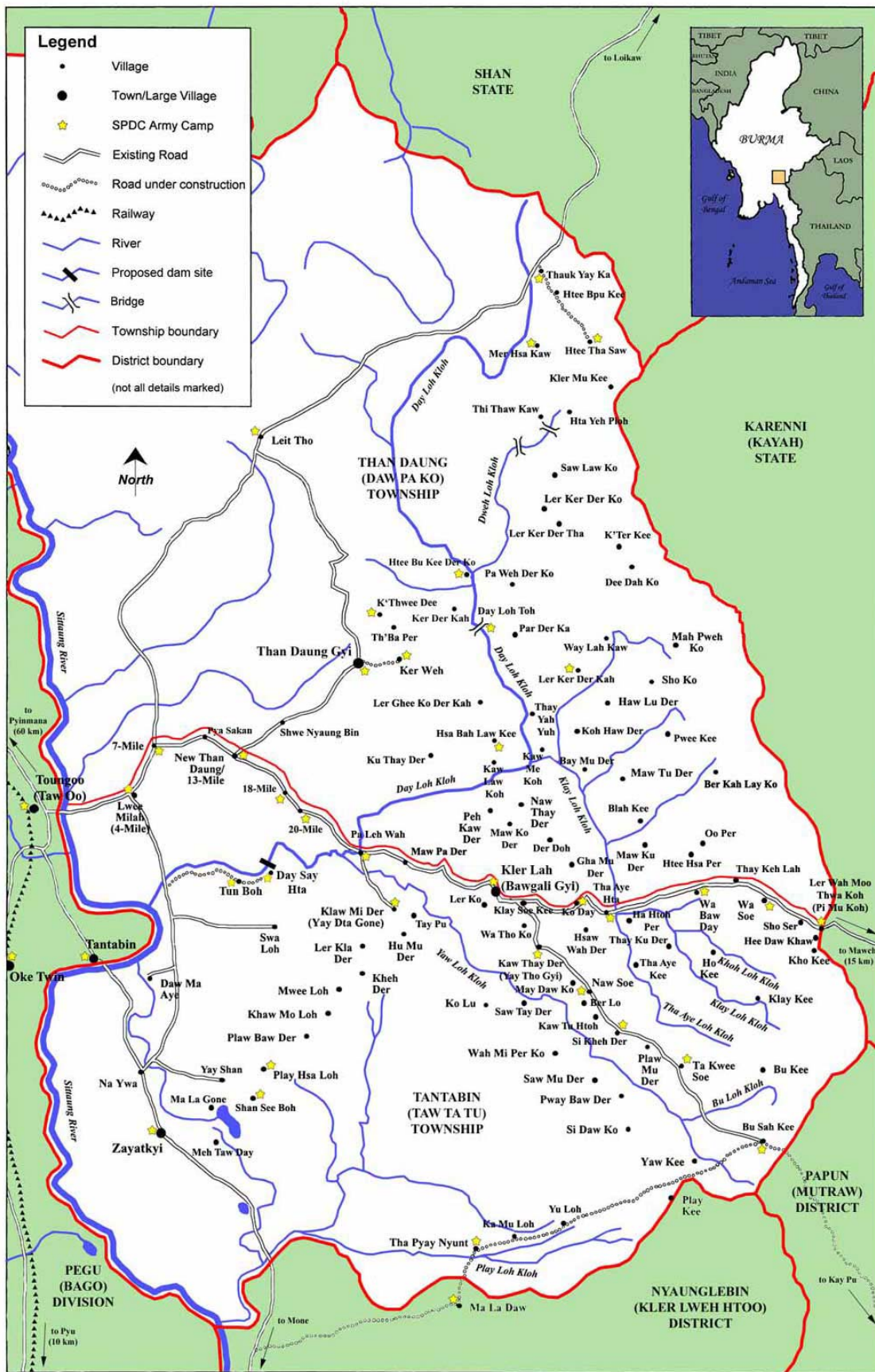
Construction of these dam projects is not the only motivation for the ongoing attacks against villages in northern Karen State, because many of the areas attacked (for example in southeastern Toungoo District) are not located anywhere near planned dam projects. The overall aim appears to be to depopulate the hills which the SPDC has never been able to control, and force civilians into areas where they can be directly controlled and exploited to support the military. However, the dam projects may be providing added impetus to the offensives in the areas where these projects are planned or ongoing.

Additional background information regarding the ongoing offensive and the general situation in Toungoo District can be found in the following previously published KHRG reports:

- ***Recent Attacks on Villages in Southeastern Toungoo District Send Thousands Fleeing into the Forests and to Thailand*** (KHRG #2006-B3, 16/3/06)
- ***'Peace', or Control? The SPDC's use of the Karen ceasefire to expand its control and repression of villagers in Toungoo District, Northern Karen State*** (KHRG #2005-F3, 22/3/05)
- ***Enduring Hunger and Repression: Food Scarcity, Internal Displacement, and the Continued use of Forced Labour in Toungoo District*** (KHRG #2004-01, September 2004).

For specific information regarding the dam, refer to ***Toungoo District: Civilians displaced by dams, roads, and military control*** (KHRG #2005-F7, 19/8/05), and ***Peace Villages and Hiding Villages*** (KHRG #2000-05, 15/10/2000). The Salween dams in Papun district are discussed in ***SPDC road construction plans creating problems for civilians*** (KHRG #2006-B1, 27/1/06). Recent photos from the area are presented in ***KHRG Photo Gallery 2005 [KHRG #2006-P1, 6/4/06]*** and ***KHRG Photo Set 2005-A [KHRG #2005-P1, 27/5/05]***. These and other KHRG reports and maps of the region can be found on the KHRG web site at <http://www.khrq.org>.

Toungoo (Taw Oo) District



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Karen Districts



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