

Press release by Action for Shan State Rivers

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Political instability and community resistance hamper SMEC's efforts to conduct Salween dam EIA/SIA in eastern Shan State

Blocked by local communities from conducting surveys in Kunhing and Mong Ton townships, Australia's Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation (SMEC) has been attempting during July 2015 to carry out its EIA/SIA for the Upper Salween (Mong Ton) dam in several eastern Shan State townships, but has been hampered by political instability and growing community resistance.

On July 6, 2015, four SMEC representatives went to the Wa capital Pang Sang, on the China-Burma border, to request permission to carry out surveys in the Wa Special Administrative Region, but they were told by leaders of the United Wa State Army (UWSA) that the situation was too unstable at the moment, and they should return in a few months to discuss the matter. This is likely due to the growing political and military tension between the UWSA and the Burmese government, which led to an outbreak of fighting in Mong Ton township in early June.

Forbidden from entering the UWSA area, SMEC is now unable to carry out surveys in a large swathe of Wa-controlled territory along the eastern bank of the Salween above the planned Mong Ton dam.



Ho Leung temple

However, SMEC has been proceeding with surveys in Mong Paeng township, south of the Wa Special Administrative Region. In the first week of July, SMEC surveyors travelled to the area near the Ho Leung Temple, north of Ta Kaw, on the eastern bank of the Salween. The 700-year-old pagoda, which will be flooded if the Mong Ton dam is built, is famous throughout Shan State, with tens of thousands of people travelling here in March each year to join the temple's annual ceremony.

SMEC surveyed four Shan villages in the Ho Leung area -- Ho Na, Wan Saw, Wan Khong Jang and Wan Mon-- giving gifts of cloth bags, bottled drinks and snacks to people they interviewed.

From July 17 to 26, SMEC went to the area of Mong Pu Long, in southern Mong Paeng township to conduct its EIA/SIA. Mong Pu Long is directly northeast of the Mong Ton dam, and its lowland areas will be completely flooded if the dam is built.

On July 18, SMEC called a meeting in the temple of Weng Hong village in Mong Pu Long. They invited one person from each household of 14 Shan, Lahu and Palaung villages, but only 30 people attended the meeting. SMEC told them the area would be flooded if the dam was built, and they wanted to collect information about the impacted villages. They gave out bags, bottled drinks and snacks at the meeting.

Many villagers were alarmed at the news of the meeting, and refused to allow SMEC to enter their villages to conduct the surveys. Finally, SMEC was only able to conduct surveys in four out of the 14 villages. They conducted surveys in the villages of Keng Hin, Wan Tong, Weng Hong and Koon Kawk. They were blocked from conducting surveys in the following villages: Jawm Tawng, Weng Chan, Weng Gao, Peng Zang, Lawn Kaew, Na Lay, Wan Khoom, Wan Mai, Ta Ku and Koong Lin. The latter two villages lie directly on the Salween river bank.



Mong Pu Long villagers showing opposition to the Mong Ton dam

On July 21, the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) opened an office in Weng Hong village in Mong Pu Long. In the evening, over 300 people from various villages joined a training organized by the SNLD at Weng Hong temple. On being asked whether they wanted the Mong Ton dam to be built, all villagers unanimously raised their hands to say they did not.

During this time, on July 18-21, 2015, SMEC carried out surveys in the village of Sawng Lak (meaning “Two Miles” in Shan), two miles east of the Ta Kaw bridge across the Salween. This village will be submerged if the dam is built. SMEC was only able to survey about two-thirds of the 120 households of the village, as about 40 households refused to answer their survey. During the survey, SMEC field workers gave out cloth bags, bottled drinks and snacks to surveyed households.

Many villagers were fearful about the dam as a result of the survey, and about 80 villagers gathered at a meeting in the Sawng Lak temple in the evening of July 21, to voice their opposition to the dam. The next day, on July 22, a group of villagers returned the bags they had been given to the SMEC surveyors, and also presented them with anti-dam posters.



Sawng Lak villagers showing opposition to the Mong Ton dam



Sawng Lak villagers giving an anti-dam poster to SMEC field workers

The Mong Ton dam is a joint project between China's Three Gorges Corporation, the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand, and Myanmar's Ministry of Electric Power and International Group of Entrepreneurs. The giant 241 meter high dam will produce 7000 MW of power, 90% of which will be exported to Thailand and China. Its over 640 square km reservoir will stretch two thirds the length of Shan State.

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SMEC's planned survey area in E. Shan State in July 2015

