

Bangkok Post

www.bangkokpost.com

SALWEEN RIVER / HUTGYI DAM

Egat workers warned their lives are at risk

APINYA WIPATAYOTIN

Environmentalists have warned staff of the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (Egat) that it is not safe to work on the construction of the Hutgyi dam on the Salween river in Burma. The warning follows the death of a member of the Egat survey team, Saman Kantameun, 53, on Sunday when a group of rebels shelled their camp.

He was the second victim since the power company began to survey the site for what will be the largest hydropower dam in Southeast Asia.

A geologist stepped on a landmine near the project site last May.

The company evacuated the remaining 42 workers, including engineers and geologists, to Thailand on Monday following the incident.

Montree Chantawong, coordinator of the Foundation for Ecological Recovery, said the attacks were a protest against the project, a joint venture by the Burmese and Thai governments.

The dam and lake will destroy a large area of land traditionally occupied by minority groups.

"Once before we warned Egat about safety concerns," Mr Montree said. "These two incidents confirm the fact that the government and Egat did not realise the reality of the threat.

"They should stop the project because no one can guarantee that this will not happen again."

Tianporn Deetes, a coordinator of the Southeast Asia Rivers Network, said not only the Hutgyi project but four other dam projects along the Salween and

Tanintharyi (Tenasserim) rivers must also be cancelled as they would pose threats to the ecological system and violate the rights of people living in those areas.

Salween Watch, a coalition based in Chiang Mai, said work should be suspended until democracy returns to Burma and the Burmese have enough information to make their own decision.

In a press statement it said the Hutgyi project is located in a very politically sensitive area, and this could lead to security problems in ensuring energy supplies in the future if the situation in Burma flares up. The project also completely ignores the "cost of human rights violations from the fighting" in the area.

The Hutgyi dam is being built under the terms of a memorandum of understanding on hydropower cooperation between the Burmese and Thai governments, signed in 2005. Construction is due to begin by the end of the year.

A member of the Egat dam site team admitted the situation was getting worse.

"We were very shocked [by Saman's death]. We were never really told what the situation is like there," he said.

"Frankly speaking, we don't want to be there again, but we have no choice. We just follow policy set by people in authority."

© Copyright The Post Publishing Public Co., Ltd. 2006

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Comments to: Webmaster](#)

[Advertising enquiries to: Internet Marketing](#)

[Printed display ad enquiries to: Display Ads](#)

[Full contact details: Contact us](#)