

**More Energy—Tragically Unnecessary**

*Decentralised, small-scale options (micro hydro, home-scale solar electric systems, and wind and biomass system) based on local renewable sources offer an important near-term, and possibly long-term, potential particularly in rural areas far away from centralised supply networks.*  
 – World Commission on Dams, 2000

The supposed purpose of the Tasang Dam is to provide energy for Thailand. However, the Thai government has consistently over-estimated the country's energy needs which has led to an energy glut. Energy from the Tasang Dam, like that from the Yadana and Yetagun pipeline projects, is completely unnecessary. The Tasang Dam should be scrapped on the basis of this factor alone.

The era of large dams is ending. Thai energy planners have bought into the myth that "bigger is better," but large-scale projects' lack of flexibility to meet shifting demand levels outweighs advantages of centralizing production costs. Alternatives—such as demand-side management (DSM), small-scale power generation such as a reciprocating engine, renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power, biomass, and fuel cells—are available and affordable and should be considered much more seriously by Thai energy planners.

## resisting the dam

*We oppose the privatization of rivers and water resources. We also oppose the control of rivers and water resources by illegitimate and repressive governments, as in Burma. Access to water is a basic human right. Rivers must be in the hands of the people, not the private sector or military regimes.*  
 – Pak Mun Declaration, signed by RWESA members and allies, 2000

The obstacles faced by those resisting the Tasang Dam are considerable: an entrenched military regime bent on crushing minority groups' desires for autonomy, an authoritarian system of governance that renders dissent a death-wish, lack of transparency regarding the funding of the project, and self-interested "constructive engagement" policies pursued by governments and companies. Nonetheless, indigenous community groups and international organizations have succeeded in mobilizing a powerful challenge to the Tasang Dam. This challenge is also an appeal to the consciences of governments, financial institutions, citizens in Thailand, the United States, Japan, and Europe: avoid complicity in the human rights crimes of the Burmese military; avoid association with the Tasang Dam; help prevent this tragedy *before* it escalates. The people of Shan State must take great risks to oppose this threat to their lives and their environment. We must support them.

### for more information or to join a campaign against the Tasang Dam, please contact ERI or the groups and organizations listed below.

**Shan Sapawa Environmental Organization**  
*The recently formed Sapawa is the first Shan organization dedicated solely to the preservation of the environment in Shan State. Contact: sh\_sapawa@hotmail.com*

**Salween Watch**  
*Founded in 1998, Salween Watch is a coalition of local groups from Burma concerned about the fate of the Salween River. Contact: salweenwatch@hotmail.com*

**Rivers Watch East and Southeast Asia**  
*Rivers Watch East and Southeast Asia (RWESA) has been working to publicize the damaging effects of large dams in the region. Contact: contact@hk-sanxia.org*

**Mekong Watch (Japan)**  
*Mekong Watch is a Japanese organization established in 1993 to monitor and research social and environmental impacts of Japanese development initiatives in the Mekong region, including the Salween River. Contact: mekong-w@path.ne.jp; www.jca.apc.org/mekongwatch*

**International Rivers Network**  
*International Rivers Network supports local communities working to protect their rivers and watersheds. Contact: irn@irn.org; www.irn.org*

*For more information on the World Commission on Dams, see [www.dams.org](http://www.dams.org).  
 For more information on the International Labour Organization, see [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org).*



**EarthRights International (ERI)**  
*combines the power of law and the power of people to protect human rights and the environment.*

**U.S. Office**  
 2012 Massachusetts Ave., N.W.  
 Washington, D.C. 20036  
 Tel: (202) 466-5188  
 Fax: (202) 466-5189  
 email: infousa@earthrights.org

**Southeast Asia Office**  
 P.O. Box 12 Lard Phrao Junction  
 Bangkok 10901 Thailand  
 Tel/Fax: 66 2 512 2051  
 email: infoasia@earthrights.org

[www.earthrights.org](http://www.earthrights.org)

# fatally flawed

## The Tasang Dam on the Salween River

*"If the dam is constructed blocking the river, not only will the Salween River stop flowing but so will Shan history. Our culture will disappear as our houses, temples, and farms are flooded."*  
 –Shan refugee, 2000

**f**ar from the public spotlight in northeast Burma lies Shan State, home to indigenous groups, diverse forests and animals, and Southeast Asia's longest undammed river, the Salween.

In this remote zone of civil war and conflict over resources, the Burmese military and an energy company from Thailand are developing the Tasang Dam, slated to be the tallest dam in Southeast Asia. Given the Burmese regime's predilection for violence and disregard for human rights and environmental standards, the Tasang Dam, if built, would provoke forced labor, forced relocations, environmental destruction, and suppression of dissent. To date, public participation has been absent surrounding the project, and forced labor and portering have already been linked to the project and its security. The Tasang Dam project would be not only destructive but *entirely unnecessary*, a boondoggle that would benefit the Burmese generals and a few private companies while doing nothing to provide for the needs and aspirations of the people of Burma or Thailand.

An inspiring resistance to the Tasang Dam in Burma is active, if underground, despite the notorious repression of the Burmese military regime. It is not too late to stop the Tasang Dam. It is not too late to save the Salween.



*Above: Map showing the Salween River and the planned site of the Tasang Dam*

## the facts

### what

The Tasang Dam would be a hydroelectric dam with a likely generating capacity of at least 3,300 megawatts and a cost of at least US\$3 billion. It would be the tallest dam in Southeast Asia, at least 188 meters high. The flood area caused by the dam would cover at least 640 square kilometers.

### where

The Salween River is the longest free-flowing river in Southeast Asia, running through China, Burma, and along the Thai-Burmese border before emptying into the Andaman Sea. The planned location of the dam is in Shan State in Burma at Tasang. The dam would flood areas along the Salween River as well as its tributaries.

### who

Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Power Co. Ltd. of Thailand is studying the potential for the project with its Burmese partner, Myanmar Economic Corporation. Most of the power generated by the dam is probably for export to Thailand. It is still unknown who will finance the project, but outside loans will be necessary.

### when

The Tasang Dam is in the late stages of pre-construction planning. The next stages include the Detailed Design (D/D), Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), and a financial plan. The timeline for the dam depends on negotiations among the companies and governments for the sale of the electricity. A buyer for the energy produced by the dam and a price for the power will be necessary to secure financing.

### why

The energy produced by the Tasang Dam is slated for use in Thailand. Just before GMS contracted to begin project studies, Thailand signed a Memorandum of Understanding to explore the possibility of purchasing up to 1,500 megawatts of electricity power from Burma by 2010. The dam would earn money for the companies when it starts generating electricity that they can sell. The Burmese regime would gain income by taxing the companies' profits and perhaps as a joint venturer.

# five fatal flaws of the tasang dam

## Forced Labor and Violence

In Burma, increased military presence in an area means enormous hardship for the local population. At Tasang, the military presence has already grown as the companies have conducted surveys, leading to forced labor and portering by villagers.

The Burmese military regime is notorious for its use of violence and forced labor for development projects. The military troops providing security for the infamous Yadana and Yetagun pipeline projects inflicted forced labor, violence, rape, forced relocations, and extrajudicial killings on the local population. Other major dam projects in Burma, such as those in Pegu Division, Rakhine State, and Shan State have involved thousands of forced laborers.

The Tasang Dam project is following this same pattern of abuse. In fact, forced labor in Burma is so widespread, brutal, and systematic that the International Labour Organization has called on its constituents (governments, workers, and employers) to review any projects that could contribute to the practice. In light of the ILO decision, the Thai government and GMS Power should halt the Tasang Dam project, recognizing it as a venture that will lead to more forced labor.

## Environmental and Cultural Destruction

*The Salween River sustains the rainforest that supports the survival of different kinds of animals. The forest not only protects us from natural disaster and climate change but also provides cool shelter for people and animals.* – Shan woman in exile, 2000

*Large dams generally have a range of extensive impacts on rivers, watersheds and aquatic ecosystems—these impacts are more negative than positive and, in many cases, have led to irreversible loss of species and ecosystems.* – World Commission on Dams, 2000



The beauty of the free-flowing Salween River will be lost if the Tasang Dam is built.

The Salween River is at the heart of Shan State, both symbolically and geographically, supporting the biodiversity of the area as well as the agriculture, fisheries, and the culture of the people of Shan State. The Tasang Dam would lead to fragmentation of the ecosystem, decreasing biodiversity in the area. The dam would also reduce the

***“I helped construct a building near the dam site for the did not want to do the work. But I knew that if I refused***

replenishment of nutrients downstream and other benefits that come from natural flooding. Additional effects would likely include erosion of the riverbed downstream of the dam, logging in the reservoir area before it is flooded, malaria breeding in the reservoir, and the degradation of forests by people with no other resources. The weight of the dam's reservoir would also increase the threat of major earthquakes in the region.

The harmful cultural and social effects are indisputable. Even at this early stage of the project, the army has restricted movements of river-dependent communities, hindering their livelihoods and cultural practices—essentially, the peoples' earth rights. Earth rights are those rights that demonstrate the connection between human well-being and a sound environment and include the right to a healthy environment, the right to speak out and act to protect the environment, and the right to participate in development decisions.

## No Participatory Decision-Making

*The Tasang Dam in Shan State represents an extreme case of lack of public participation. The military junta's record on this issue is consistent. They will abuse or kill anyone who dissents.* – Sai Win Pay, elected and exiled Member of Parliament from Shan State, 2000

Meaningful public participation in environmental decisions is both impossible and useless under the brutal military regime whose repressive practices make open opposition to their plans dangerous, even deadly. Consultation with the affected communities has not taken place, and the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, which won the largest number of Shan State seats in the 1990 election has not been contacted about the project. The rule of law does not function in Burma. The military junta rules arbitrarily and without transparency, the field of environmental regulation is severely underdeveloped, and there is no access to legal remedies.

## Financing Brutality

*What [investment] did was give the military authorities and those connected with them a chance to consolidate their economic position in the same way in which they had consolidated their power base.* – Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, 1999

Money flowing into Burma through foreign investment does not reach the ordinary citizen; instead, it helps the military regime keep its grip on power and reduces its incentive to negotiate a peaceful transfer of power. From 1990-97, the regime spent 264% more on its military than it did on health and education combined. The National League for Democracy (NLD), headed by Nobel Peace Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, won over 80% of the parliamentary seats in the 1990 elections, but the military regime refused to recognize the election results. The NLD has called for international sanctions against the regime and for foreign companies not to operate in the country until democracy is restored.

The Thai government has disregarded this appeal in favor of business interests. Like Thai businesses' timber deals and participation in the controversial Yadana and Yetagun pipeline consortiums, GMS Power's involvement in the Tasang Dam project perpetuates a pattern of Thai companies taking advantage of Burma's political crisis for profit under the guise of “constructive engagement.” There is no evidence to support claims by companies investing in Burma that their constructive engagement benefits the country. The Tasang Dam is yet another case of *destructive* engagement, with the military and the investing companies as the only beneficiaries.

***soldiers . . . I received no payment for my work, and I to work, I would be arrested.”*** –Shan villager, 2001

***“[I]t appeared that forced labour was used by the Government [of Burma] in relation to . . . projects and public works such as dams.”***  
–International Labour Organization, 1999

