

# DAMMED BY BURMA'S GENERALS

**The Karenni Experience with  
Hydropower Development  
*From Lawpita to  
the Salween***

A report by the Karenni Development Research Group



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**The Karenni Experience with Hydropower Development –  
From Lawpita to the Salween**



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KDRG would like to thank all those that helped put this report together, especially Images Asia, Environment Desk.

### **About KDRG**

The Karenni Development Research Group (KDRG) is a forum which consists of nine civil society groups: the Karenni Social Welfare and Development Center (KSWDC), Karenni Evergreen (KEG), Karenni National Women's Organization (KNWO), Karenni National Youth Organization (KNYO), Karenni Mobile Medical Team (KMMT), Karenni Student Union (KSU), Karenni Documentation Group (KDG), Karenni Refugees Committee (KnRC), and Karenni Computer Education Institute (KCEI).

The KDRG is a focal point for these groups to meet and debate about the negative effects of the development projects which have been implemented inside Karenni as well as mega-development projects which are being planned by Burma's military dictatorship with its counterparts, investors and neighboring governments.

All photos courtesy of Dean Chapman may not be reproduced. Dean Chapman's photos are from the book *Karenni: The Forgotten War of a Nation Under Siege*, dewi lewis publishing, 1998, ISBN 1-899235-96-5.

*“If the [hydro] power plant was not built in the first place, I would still be able to see my homeland and live in peace. From the outset, local people were relocated from the power plant sites. We lost good farm land, and most importantly, a way of life that goes back for generations. In the last 10-15 years, there have been thousands of landmines placed where we once lived. We cannot go back or farm there. I lost two nephews to landmines in 1993 within the space of one month.”* - a villager who was displaced by the Lawpita Hydropower Project and is now living in a refugee camp in Thailand

*“We rely on the Salween River for our livelihood: for farming, fishing, and trading. The river is our life.”* - a villager from the Pasaung area along the Salween

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## Acronyms

<b>AFPFL</b>	Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League
<b>BSPB</b>	Burma Socialist Program Party
<b>EGAT</b>	Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand
<b>IB</b>	Infantry Battalion
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Person
<b>ILO</b>	International Labor Organization
<b>KDRG</b>	Karenni Development Research Group
<b>KEG</b>	Karenni Evergreen, a group working to protect the Karenni environment
<b>KNLP</b>	Kayan New Land Party
<b>KNPLF</b>	Karenni Nationalities Peoples’ Liberation Front
<b>KNPP</b>	Karenni National Progressive Party
<b>KnRC</b>	Karenni Refugee Committee
<b>KNWO</b>	Karenni National Women’s Organization
<b>KSWDC</b>	Karenni Social Welfare and Development Center
<b>LIB</b>	Light Infantry Battalion
<b>MW</b>	Megawatt
<b>NLD</b>	National League for Democracy
<b>SLORC</b>	State Law and Order Restoration Council
<b>SPDC</b>	State Peace and Development Council
<b>TBBC</b>	Thailand Burma Border Consortium
<b>TPDC</b>	Township Peace and Development Council, the SPDC at the township level
<b>VOK</b>	Voice of Karenni, a group producing a small Karenni news program on short wave radio from 2000-2002

# FOREWORD

BY PASCAL KHOO THWE,  
AUTHOR OF *FROM THE LAND OF GREEN GHOSTS*

To the peoples of Shan, Karenni (Kayah), and Karen States in eastern Burma, the River Salween is revered as the sacred Mother of Rivers, who has provided for their basic survival needs – from food to herbal medicines – from time immemorial.

Now, this same river and the homelands she nurtures are in danger of being destroyed with the construction of dams. These dams will not only spell the gradual genocide of indigenous peoples, but will also inflict a death sentence on endangered animal and plant species. Governments and businessmen will come and go, but extinct species will never return.

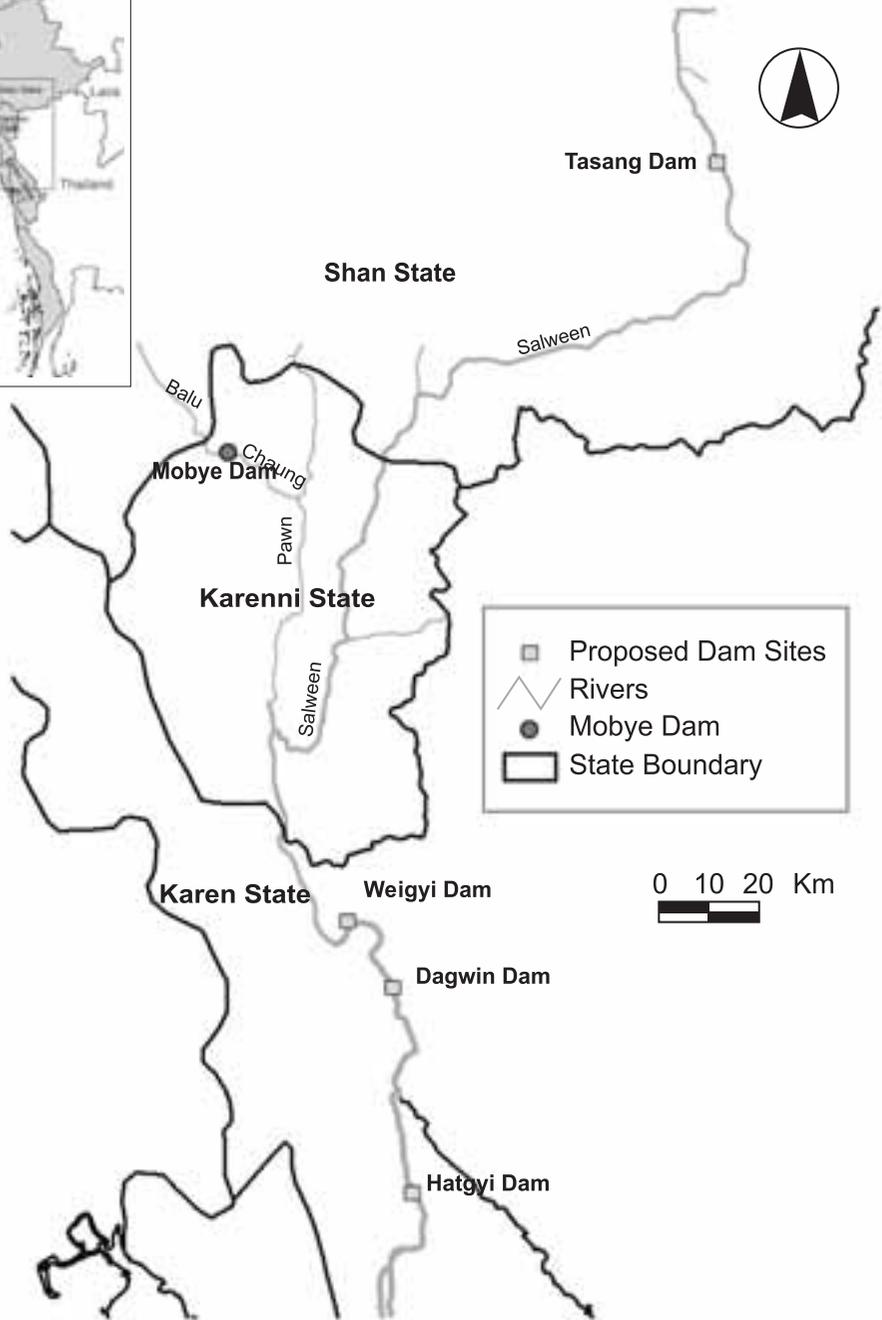
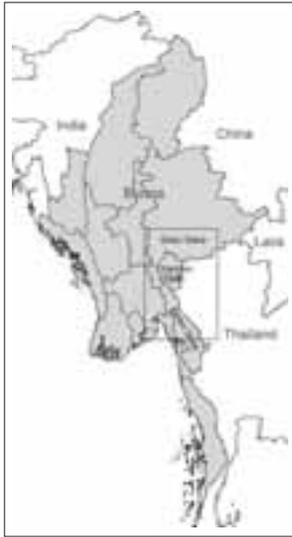
I grew up in Pekhon, situated on the Moby Dam in Shan State at around the time it was built in the late sixties. Much of the wildlife and native plants I knew as a child are now gone forever. There is no better way to destroy a country than by the combined power of bulldozers and guns. Show me a cup of dam water and I will tell you stories of human misery, and cries of dying animals and plants.

This report warns of the disasters to come for not only the indigenous people who live along the Salween but also for both Burma and Thailand if the dams are to be built without consideration of the irreparable damage to the environment, and the long-term social and political impacts on both countries.

The Salween has been exploited in the past and she will continue to be exploited by future generations, but it should not be at the expense of its guardians, the indigenous people, and their environment.

To those who have the power and those who care – read this report and refrain from acts of wanton destruction before it is too late. Don't kill our sacred Mother of Rivers, the Salween, by building destructive dams. Alternative, sustainable methods to harness her potential must be found.

# PROPOSED DAM SITES ON THE SALWEEN RIVER IN BURMA



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The first large-scale hydropower project ever built in Burma harnessed the Balu Chaung River in Karenni State at the Lawpita Falls. After it was begun in the early 1960s, government-owned newspapers and regime leaders boasted that the Lawpita project would provide irrigation, electricity, and development for the state. What the Karenni people actually received were water shortages and destructive floods that destroyed their crops, as well as a reservoir that displaced thousands and disrupted fish habitats. Still today, eighty percent of the population has no access to electricity.

Worse than these broken promises, however, was the arrival in the state of thousands of Burma Army soldiers that came to secure the regime's main hydropower source. Further forced displacements, forced labor, extensive laying of landmines on farm fields, sexual violence, and extrajudicial killings followed.

Despite these ongoing abuses, Thailand has now agreed to join with Burma's military regime in building a series of new dams on the Salween River in eastern Burma, which will provide electricity to Thailand and revenue to the regime. One of these dams, the Weigyi Dam, will be at least ten times higher than Lawpita's main dam, and will submerge many of the best lowland farming areas of Karenni State, impacting 30,000 people and causing irreversible environmental damage.

## *The Lawpita Experience*

The Moby dam, which feeds the Lawpita hydropower plants, flooded out approximately 8,000 people and created a reservoir 207 square kilometers in size. Fertile and scarce farm fields as well as forests were submerged. Water use was then prioritized for the power plants, causing water shortages that ruined subsistence crops. Floods caused by releasing water from the dam during rainy seasons also destroyed crops. Fish populations were radically altered; several species that were commonly seen before the dam are now rare or have disappeared altogether.

Electricity, even for those villages lying just under the transmission lines, was – and remains – inaccessible. Just three towns in the state have power supply, but this primarily goes to military personnel. For most ordinary residents, the price is unaffordable and in the evening light-bulbs cast merely a dim glow.

In all, the Lawpita hydropower project has caused an estimated 12,500 people to permanently lose their homes and farmlands, the vast majority without compensation. People near the power plants were forced under threat of violence to leave and found their fields had been planted with landmines for the security of the power plants. Over the years, thousands of landmines have been laid around the plants and at the base of cable towers. Injured victims, instead of getting treatment, have been fined the cost of exploded mines.

Largely to control the Lawpita project area, since 1960 the Burmese military has increased its presence in Karenni State from rotational patrols to over 24 permanently based battalions. This increased militarization has resulted in a growing terrorization of the population. Sexual violence, including gang rape, by Burma Army soldiers based at Lawpita has been documented, as well as arbitrary killings committed by patrolling battalions. Interviews with ex-Burma Army soldiers and refugees that fled the area confirm the systematic use of forced labor, portering, and extortion against the local population.

### *The Salween Dams*

In 2005 Burma's regime signed an agreement with Thailand to build four dams on the Salween River, with construction slated to begin in 2007. One of the dams – Weigyi – will be built near the border of Burma's Karen and Karenni states. The height of the dam will be at least ten times larger than the Lawpita project's Moby dam and the surface area of the reservoir at least an estimated three times larger, submerging over 640 square kilometers of land along the most important farming valley and transportation route of Karenni State.

Even though much of the expected flood area has already been cleared out by military offensives and forced relocations, approximately 30,000 people will be impacted. In addition, an entire tribe of people – the Yintalai, who now number a mere 1,000 – will have to flee the rising waters and permanently lose their homelands.

The dam's impact on livelihoods will directly threaten the survival of local people. Fertile and scarce lowland farm fields along the river's valley as well as thick forests and mineral resource sites will be submerged. Fish breeding and spawning sites in rapids and caves will likely be destroyed by changing a once fast-flowing river into a stagnant lake. In addition to 26 villages, two entire towns will be submerged; both are important trading centers and provide education and medical services for the surrounding rural population. One of the towns, Bawlake, is a historical capital of the Karenni. Old royal living quarters and stupas will go under water.

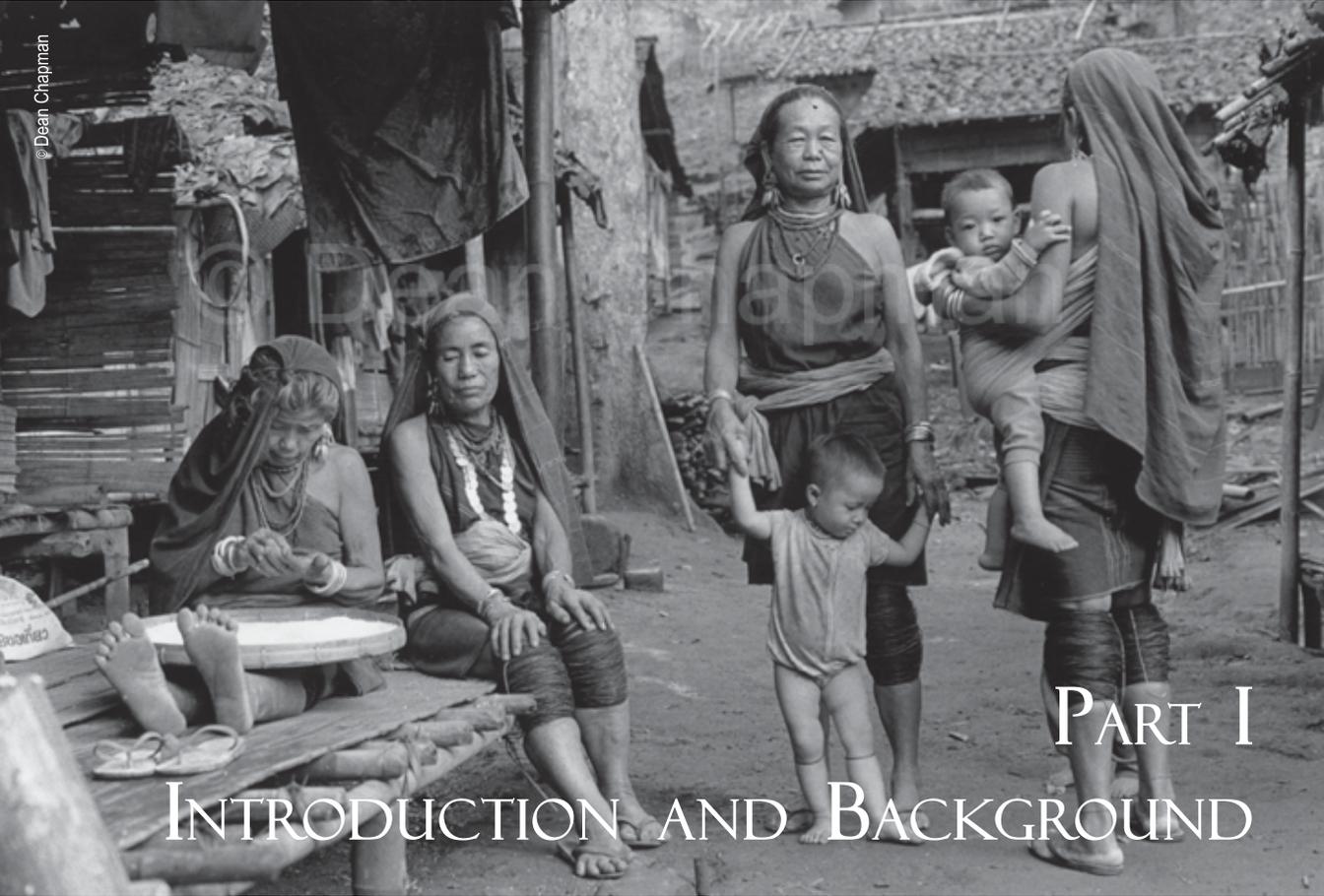
The environmental impact of the dam could be equally devastating, flooding grazing areas and habitats for wild animals in an area recognized for its outstanding biodiversity. Displacement will likely cause encroachment on remaining forests and new roads may encourage logging in previously inaccessible areas. A region rich in untold species of plants and animals will be destroyed before it is adequately studied.

To the Burmese regime and Thai government, the Salween dams represent merely a “win-win” situation – electricity supply for the latter and needed income for the former. This simple equation ignores the regime's internationally condemned human rights and corruption record. It also once again excludes the Karenni from any decision-making process about their own resources, leaving them to bear the costs of power being provided to people in faraway places. Suffering from

forced relocations that have left a third of the population internally displaced, with some of the worst rates of disease and literacy in the country, the Karenni clearly do not need further “development” of this kind.

This report urges international investors – including neighboring Thai and Chinese interests – to halt all support for and plans to build dams on the Salween River in Burma. The dams will lead to further human rights abuses and those investing in the projects will necessarily be complicit in those abuses. The projects will simply provide revenue to the military regime and further its grip on power. There will be no benefits for local people. The Lawpita experience is a testament to this.





# PART I INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND



# INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

*“We have a deep fear that if we are long exiled from our land and our people, our Yaula (guardian spirits) might be irretrievably lost, and with it all our happiness and good fortune.”<sup>1</sup>*

The first large hydropower project in Burma was built on the Balu Chaung River at Lawpita Falls in Karenni State nearly fifty years ago, without any consultation with the Karenni people. Most had no idea what building a dam and hydropower plants would mean. Some residents could not believe that their land would be flooded and only fled when the reservoir water reached their doorsteps.

Over the years, many refugees from Lawpita have fled for their safety and survival. They have no recourse for what has been stolen from them. The Karenni Development Research Group (KDRG) therefore feels compelled to tell their story. Now that dams are planned for the Salween River, we hope that the Karenni experience with the Lawpita project can serve as a warning to our brothers and sisters in the Salween basin on both sides of the border. More importantly, we hope it can reach those who want to do business with the military regime ruling Burma, so they can see what “development” will mean to people living along the Salween.

## METHODOLOGY

In-depth interviews about the impacts of the Lawpita hydropower project were carried out over the last five years. Interviewees included people intimately involved with the project, including ex-Burma Army soldiers stationed for project security, local community leaders, and people who worked at the power plants. Those directly impacted by the project, such as local land owners, farmers, fishermen, relatives of landmine victims, and long-term Karenni refugees from the Lawpita area, many of whom had been relocated several times, were also interviewed. KDRG conducted research inside Karenni State in the Lawpita area and along the Salween and Pavn rivers to make an accurate assessment of conditions and population figures. For the Salween section of the report, the livelihoods and environment of each affected township were then summarized into field reports,

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<sup>1</sup> *From the Land of Green Ghosts*, Pascal Khoo Thwe, 2002, p. 62-3.

and additional interviews with traders who travel frequently between Karenni and Thailand and refugees from the flood zone were conducted.

KDRG collected data and analyzed government, company, and civil society documents, including historical records, design studies, newspaper articles, and research reports. The calculation of the flood zone of the Weigyi dam was based on contours derived from 90 meter Digital Elevation Model data acquired during the NASA/NGAA Shuttle Radar Topography Mission (Feb 2000).<sup>2</sup> Areas with ground elevations below the high water level of the proposed dam fall within the flood zone.

## BACKGROUND<sup>3</sup>

### **Burma and its Military Rulers since Independence**

Civil war began soon after the assassination of the Burmese independence leader Aung San in 1947. A military coup in 1962 put the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP) in power and they ruled until 1988. Student demonstrations in 1988 were violently crushed throughout the country and a new junta, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), took over and renamed the country “Myanmar”. A general election was held in 1990 in order to transfer power democratically. The National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi, overwhelmingly won the election but the SLORC refused to acknowledge the results. In 1997 SLORC changed its name to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and has ruled since. The United Nations General Assembly has repeatedly called on the SPDC to honor the 1990 elections and improve its human rights record, but to no avail.

The Karenni continue to fight for their freedom from dictatorial rule. Military offensives by the regime continue to drive people into hiding and across borders seeking refuge. According to Human Rights Watch, “as of late 2004, an estimated 650,000 people were internally displaced in eastern Burma alone....Some 2 million Burmese have moved to Thailand, including 145,000 refugees living in camps.”<sup>4</sup> There are over 22,000 Karenni among the refugees living in the camps.<sup>5</sup>

### **Hydropower in Burma**

In order to finance its military grip on the people, the ruling junta has opened its borders to unsustainable natural resource extraction. It is increasingly realizing that its untapped hydropower potential is also an attractive option for foreign income generation as neighboring countries hungry for electricity seek to build dams inside the reclusive state.

According to official government statistics, Burma had a total of over 1,300 megawatts (MW) of installed generating capacity of electric power as of the end of March 2005, feeding electricity into the national grid system.<sup>6</sup> Hydropower accounts for approximately 30-35% of this capacity.

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<sup>2</sup> *Digital Elevation Model Data*, U.S. Geological Survey, published by University of Maryland, version 1.0. Source for this dataset was the Global Land Cover Facility, <http://www.landcover.org>.

<sup>3</sup> Some of this background draws on the report *Conflict and Displacement in Karenni: The Need for Considered Responses*, Burma Ethnic Research Group (BERG), 2000.

<sup>4</sup> *UN Security Council Should Take Up Burma's Human Rights Crisis*, Human Rights Watch release, October 14, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Thailand Burma Border Consortium December 2005 population figures.

<sup>6</sup> *Myanmar, Thailand to implement hydropower project*, People's Daily Online, December 12, 2005. The megawatt is a unit for measuring power corresponding to one million watts. For reference, about ten thousand 100 watt light bulbs or 2,000 computer systems use 1 megawatt of power.

Until recently, Lawpita (Balu Chaung) Hydropower Plant No. 2 was the single largest source of hydropower in the country.<sup>7</sup> The basic design study for repairs to the power plants in 2002 estimated that they still generated 28% of Burma's total electricity supply.<sup>8</sup> Since 1990, however, the regime has been racing to build bigger and bigger dams with more electricity generation potential.

After discussions with the Director General of the Department of Hydroelectric Power (DHP), U Win Kyaw, about its short and long term plans, *The International Journal of Hydropower and Dams* in its second issue of 2005 described the current development of hydropower in Burma this way:

*“With eight major schemes under construction and 16 more planned, Myanmar is moving ahead with a major programme of hydropower development. The Ministry of Electric Power regards hydro development as a priority, both to meet domestic needs and for export to neighbouring countries. With only about 2 percent of hydro resources currently developed, the ministry’s Department of Hydroelectric Power has much work ahead.”*<sup>9</sup>

### **Karenni State: A General Overview**

Karenni State is located on the eastern edge of Burma, between Thailand's Mae Hong Son province to the east, Shan State to the north, and Karen State to the south (see map). It covers an area of 11,867 square kilometers and is relatively the smallest and least populated state in Burma. The state has seven townships with a total population of approximately 300,000<sup>10</sup> and a very low population density. The seven townships are Demawso, Pruso, Loikaw, Pasaung, Bawlake, Shadaw, and Mae Set. The capital city of Loikaw, with a population of approximately 50,000, is the largest town in the state.

The Kayah peoples are the majority inhabitants in the state but there are several other ethnic groups including the Gekho, Geba, Karen, Kayan (Padaung), Kayaw, Bre, Manumanaw, Shan, Yinbaw, and Yintalai. Several of these groups have some common ancestors but descended down different lines.<sup>11</sup> Each group possesses its own language, customs, and beliefs. Within each group several dialects and other differences may also exist. Some tribes today are very few in number; the population of the Yintalai now is approximately 1,000.

The cultural diversity in Karenni is born of its mountainous regions, diversity of land surfaces, micro-climates, and natural resources. Most of the state lies on the southernmost point of the Shan

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<sup>7</sup> As Burma races to increase its hydropower capacity, Lawpita (generating a total of 196 megawatts (MW)) has been surpassed by recent projects. The Paunglaung scheme is expected to generate 280 MW; its final unit was under commissioning in early 2005. The Shweli dam in northern Shan State has a capacity of 400 MW and is also nearing completion. The Yewa dam is the largest project to date with the capacity of 745 MW; it is still under construction. Information from *International Journal of Hydropower and Dams*, Issue Two, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> *Basic Design Study on the Project for Rehabilitation of Baluchaung No. 2 Hydro Power Plant*, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Nippon Koei, Co. Ltd., Tokyo Power Electric Co., Ltd., January 2002.

<sup>9</sup> *Hydropower plays a leading role in Myanmar's power development plans*, *International Journal of Hydropower and Dams*, Issue Two, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> KNPP Census, 2004 report submitted during KNPP's 10<sup>th</sup> Congress in 2005. There has been no official census done in Burma since 1983. However, it is generally agreed that the population of the state is over 250,000 (see for example [www.dpsmap.com](http://www.dpsmap.com)). The figure of 300,000 is most accurate in including internally displaced populations.

<sup>11</sup> Today all these peoples are referred to as “Karenni” as they live in Karenni State. Originally, Karenni meant “the red Karen” (the Kayah).



*The Pawn River Photo: KDRG*

plateau except for strips of lowland areas which lie along river valleys. The Salween is the major waterway; it runs north to south in the eastern part of the state as does its main tributary, the Pawn River. A major tributary of the Pawn is the Balu Chaung River, on which the Moby dam has been built. The Pawn River is not navigable but the Salween is deep enough to accommodate boats in all seasons, therefore making it a major transport-

ation route in the state. Other streams and rivers also flow indirectly or directly into the Salween River, creating a full network of waterways in Karenni.

The majority of people in the state subsist on upland and lowland rice production together with hunting, fishing, and foraging for forest products. Other occupations include small-scale logging and trading along the rivers, especially with Thailand on the Salween. KDRG estimates that approximately 100,000 people, or one third of the state's population, rely on the Salween, Pawn, and Pai rivers in some way for their livelihood, either fishing, trading, or farming. The floods and subsequent reservoir caused by the Salween dams will profoundly affect this dependence.

Forest resources, especially teak, have historically formed a major part of the economic resources of Karenni. Deposits of tin and tungsten are also significant, especially around the mine at Mawchi. Other minerals found in the state include marble, antimony, gold, and sapphire.

Due to its geographic inaccessibility, poor transportation infrastructure, and long-term conflict (see history section), Karenni has lagged behind in terms of human development. The literacy rate in Karenni State is substantially lower than in the rest of Burma.<sup>12</sup> According to the Ministry of Education, in 1998 there were just ten high schools in all of Karenni State; Mae Set and Shadaw townships have no high school at all, and only one middle school each. Among the seven townships, children who reside in the remote reaches of Shadaw, Bawlake and Pasaung have the least opportunities. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) necessarily have worse education services and conditions as children are in constant fear and need to move often.

The overall health status of the population is poor; malnutrition and food shortages are serious in some areas. Access to public health services is restricted, with services primarily limited to small towns that act as "urban" areas. Communicable diseases are the leading causes of morbidity and forced relocations have led to a further increase in these diseases. Karenni has one of the highest figures for malaria morbidity and mortality in Burma. Immunisation rates are significantly lower than national averages, as is access to safe drinking water.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> BERG, *op.cit.* 3, p. 93.

<sup>13</sup> BERG, *op.cit.* 3, p. 7.

## Brief Background History of the Karenni States<sup>14</sup>

The seven townships of Karenni roughly correspond to kingdoms under Karenni kings or Sawphyas that ruled independently but cooperated with each other against outside forces. The states were never subjugated by an outside power under the Sawphyas. Even under British colonial rule, Karenni independence was recognized, and an agreement to that effect was signed by representatives of the British and Burmese governments in 1875. The Karenni states remained separate and independent until 1948, when the Burmese gained independence from Britain.

Upon independence, the Burmese set up the Anti-Facist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) government, while the Karenni formed a parallel government, the Karenni Resistance Government (KRG), led by U Be Tu Re. On August 9, 1948, Burmese troops invaded the Karenni States; on September 8 they captured U Be Tu Re, shoved him in a gunny sack, speared him through with bayonets, and threw him into the Balu Chaung River in Loikaw. Fighting between Karenni resistance forces and successive Burmese military rulers has continued ever since.

The KRG was reformed as the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) in 1957. Over the years, several armed Karenni resistance forces have fought the Burmese as splinter groups, most notably the Karenni Nationalities Peoples' Liberation Front or KNPLF, a splinter group that left the KNPP in 1978. As of 2002, however, all groups except the KNPP had signed ceasefire agreements with the SPDC.

## Militarization in Karenni State

From 1948 to 1961, Burma Army troops were only rotationally brought into Karenni State. After the completion of the power plant at Lawpita in 1961, however, a Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) was permanently based in Loikaw and more followed in other parts of the state. After the 1988 student demonstrations, military operations increased even more. Currently, a total of 24 army battalions - fourteen regional battalions, nine mobile battalions, and one battalion for the security of Operational Control Headquarters in Bawlake - are based and operating in Karenni State (see maps).<sup>15</sup>



*An IDP family struggles to make do in the forests, Pasaung Photo: KSWDC*

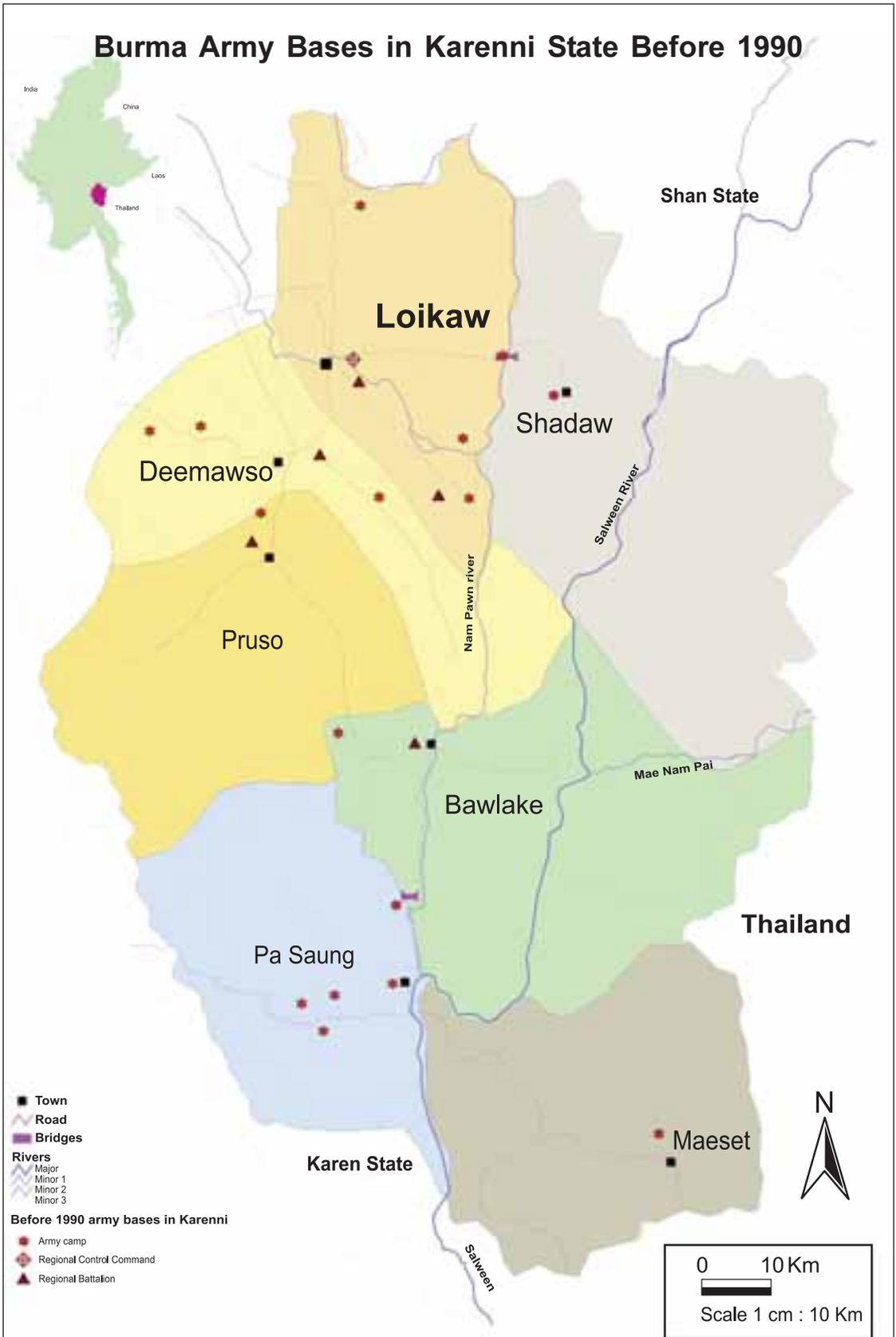
## A Terrorized People

Since fighting commenced in 1948, military leaders in Rangoon have tried to control the Karenni. Since roughly 1960, the Burma Army has employed the “four cuts” tactic in ethnic areas, targeting

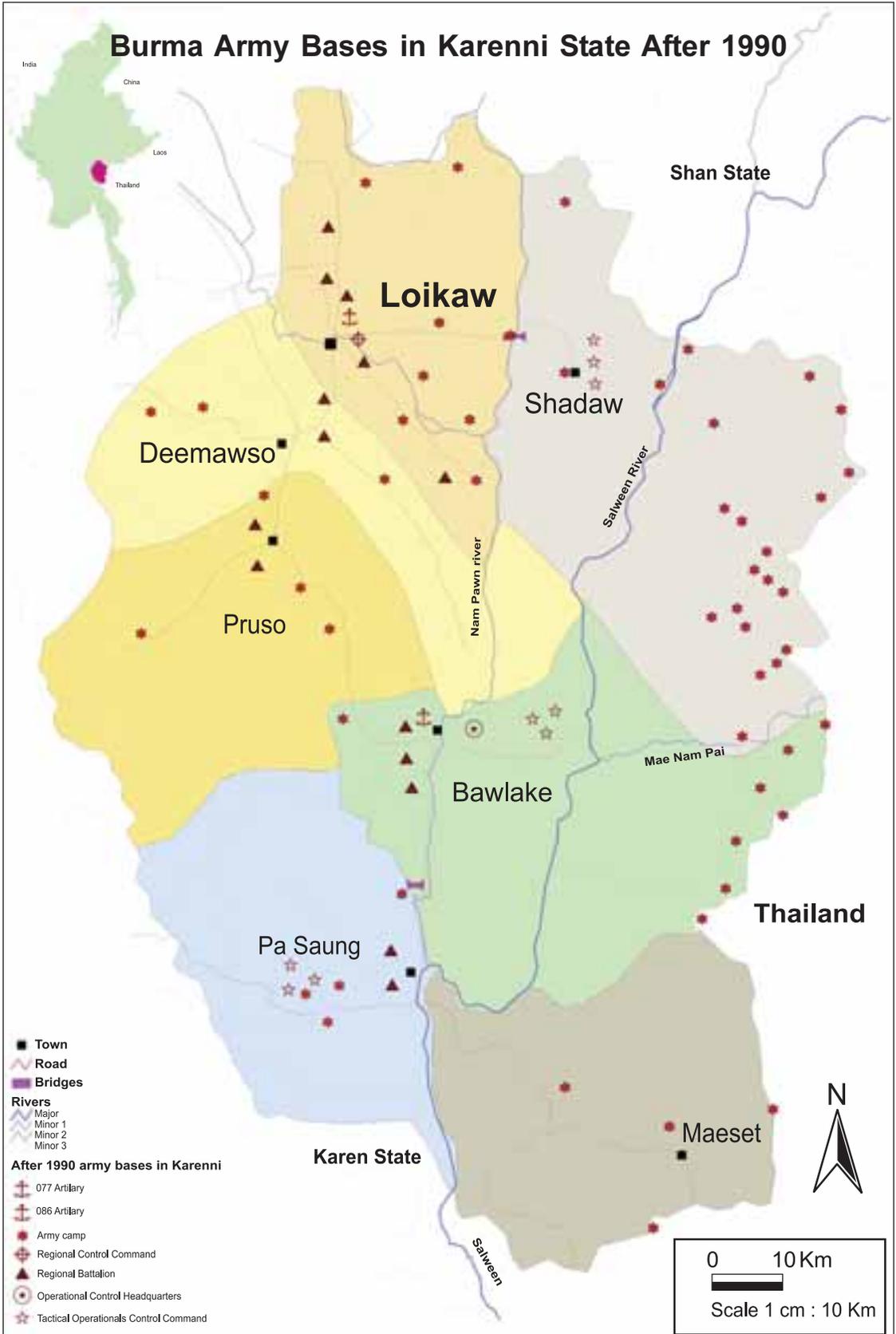
<sup>14</sup> This history section in part draws on *Independence and Self-Determination of the Karenni States*, the Karenni Resistant National Revolutionary Council, 1974 and reprinted in 1997.

<sup>15</sup> KNPP military sources.

# Burma Army Bases in Karenni State Before 1990



# Burma Army Bases in Karenni State After 1990





*IDP children in Shadaw Township Photo: KSWDC Relief Team*

civilians in order to cut off supplies and support for armed resistance forces. The first large-scale scorched earth operations in Karenni State under the BSPP's *four cuts* policy were carried out in 1974-75 with the mandate to clear out areas along the Pai and Salween rivers. Twenty four villages along the Pai and Salween were destroyed in these operations, making approximately 3,270 people homeless.<sup>16</sup> Fighting continued throughout the 1980s; areas

around the Salween River continued to be strategically important for both sides.

Displacement of civilians in Karenni State became, and still is, a common fact of life. Villages are relocated by force and often burned down to prevent return. Civilians either move to prescribed military controlled sites or hide in small groups, seeking sustenance from the forests and waterways. When the situation stabilizes, they sometimes return to their home villages or try to settle in a new area. In this way, people move back and forth from jungle to village, straining their physical and psychological health.

Assistance during the displacement process is most often not provided. Even those that comply with relocation orders and manage to move to prescribed sites may die along the way. For example, in 1992, over 12,000 civilians from 57 villages to the west of Pruso and over 8,000 civilians from Demawso Township were driven down from highland and rural areas to Pruso and Demawso towns respectively. No means of transportation, food, or medicines were provided for them. During 3 months over 40 people died due to food shortages and contagious diseases.<sup>17</sup>

After the breakdown of the 1995 ceasefire between the SPDC and the KNPP, the SPDC launched an all-out offensive to exert greater control over the Karenni. Over the past ten years the SPDC has employed several tactics, including direct military attacks, mass forced relocation, and pressuring ceasefire and militia groups to fight the remaining armed resistance, the KNPP. Throughout this campaign, human rights abuses by the regime have further fortified its position of control and increased the numbers of Karenni living in hiding and escaping as refugees to Thailand. Within this context, the construction of mega-dams on the Salween will allow the military regime's forces to increase their numbers in the name of project security. Ultimately, the dams and the electricity they produce will provide revenue that will further support the regime's grip on power.

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<sup>16</sup> KDRG interview with and data from Ethnic Migrant Families Society, 2005.

<sup>17</sup> *Aftermath: Three years of dislocation in the Kayah State*, Amnesty International, June 1999.

<sup>18</sup> *Forced Relocation in Karenni: An Independent Report by the Karen Human Rights Group*, Report # KHRG 96-24, Karen Human Rights Group, 1996.

<sup>19</sup> BERG, *op.cit.* 3, p. 50.

### *Large-Scale Forced Relocation*

In 1996 villages thought to be sympathetic to the KNPP throughout the state were forcefully evicted. A total of two hundred and twelve villages were displaced in 1996 alone.<sup>18</sup> This amounted to at least 37,000 civilians either left to fend for themselves in the jungles or trapped in overcrowded relocation sites.<sup>19</sup>

Local people had no option but to follow relocation orders and timelines, and go to the sites prescribed. No means of assistance in transportation was provided and payment for lost farms and possessions was out of the question. Even before the deadline, SPDC soldiers engaged in threatening and manhandling villagers, killed domestic livestock, and burned granaries, looting and destroying things within reach. Children, the elderly, the sick, and pregnant women were all forced to walk to relocation sites. Some villages were burnt down after people moved out to prevent anyone from returning.

Villagers who complied found overcrowded conditions at relocation sites, little or no medical care, a lack of sufficient food, little arable land on which to grow crops, restricted movements, and forced labor. Women were particularly vulnerable in and just outside the sites; interviews with refugees have confirmed attacks and rapes. Some people refused to stay in the sites and fled deep into the jungle; they also suffered from treatable diseases and malnutrition.



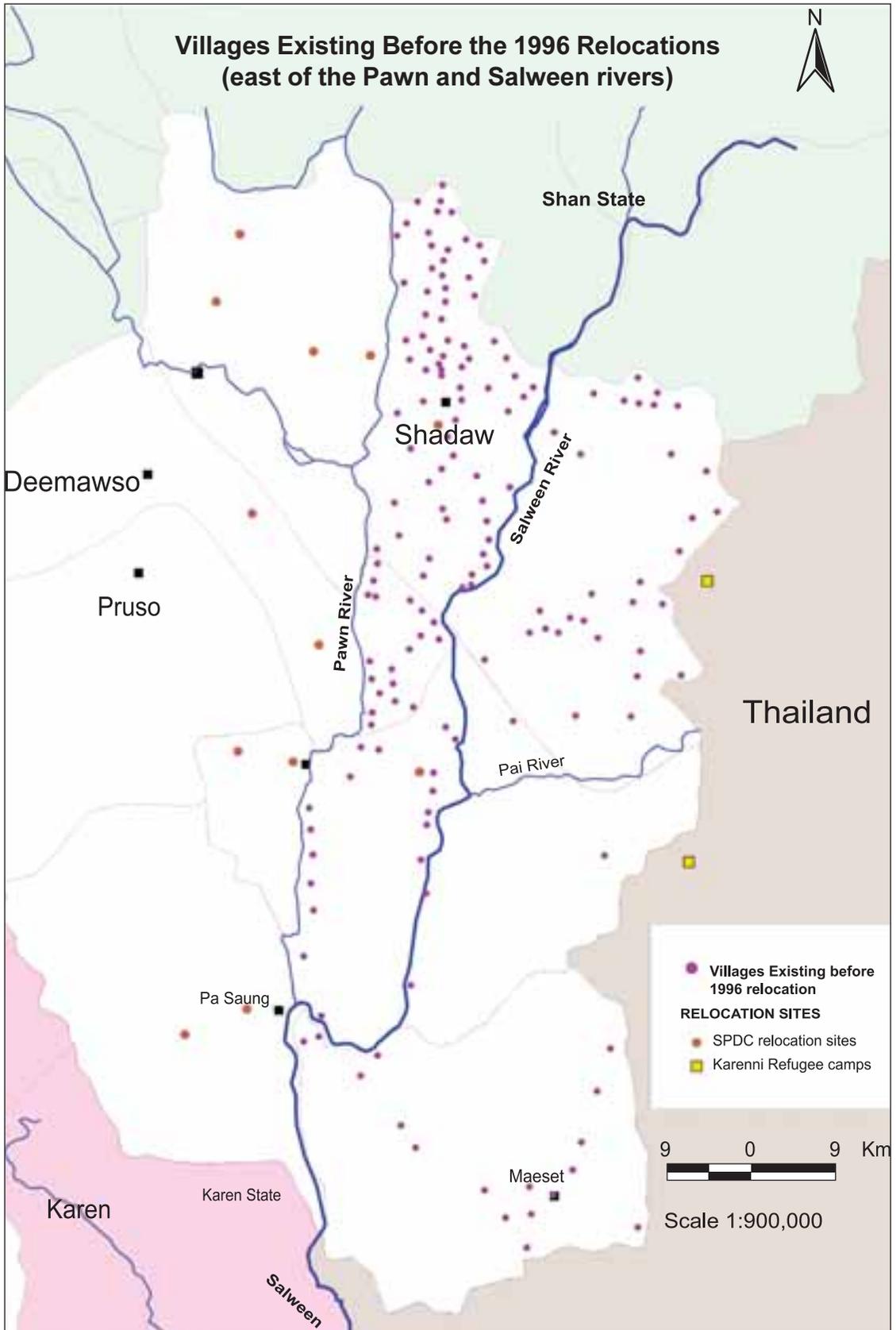
*IDPs prepare a meal in the jungle, Pasaung Photo: KSWDC*

Constant insecurity, as many areas were declared *black zones* or free fire areas, has become a daily reality for Karenni people.<sup>20</sup>

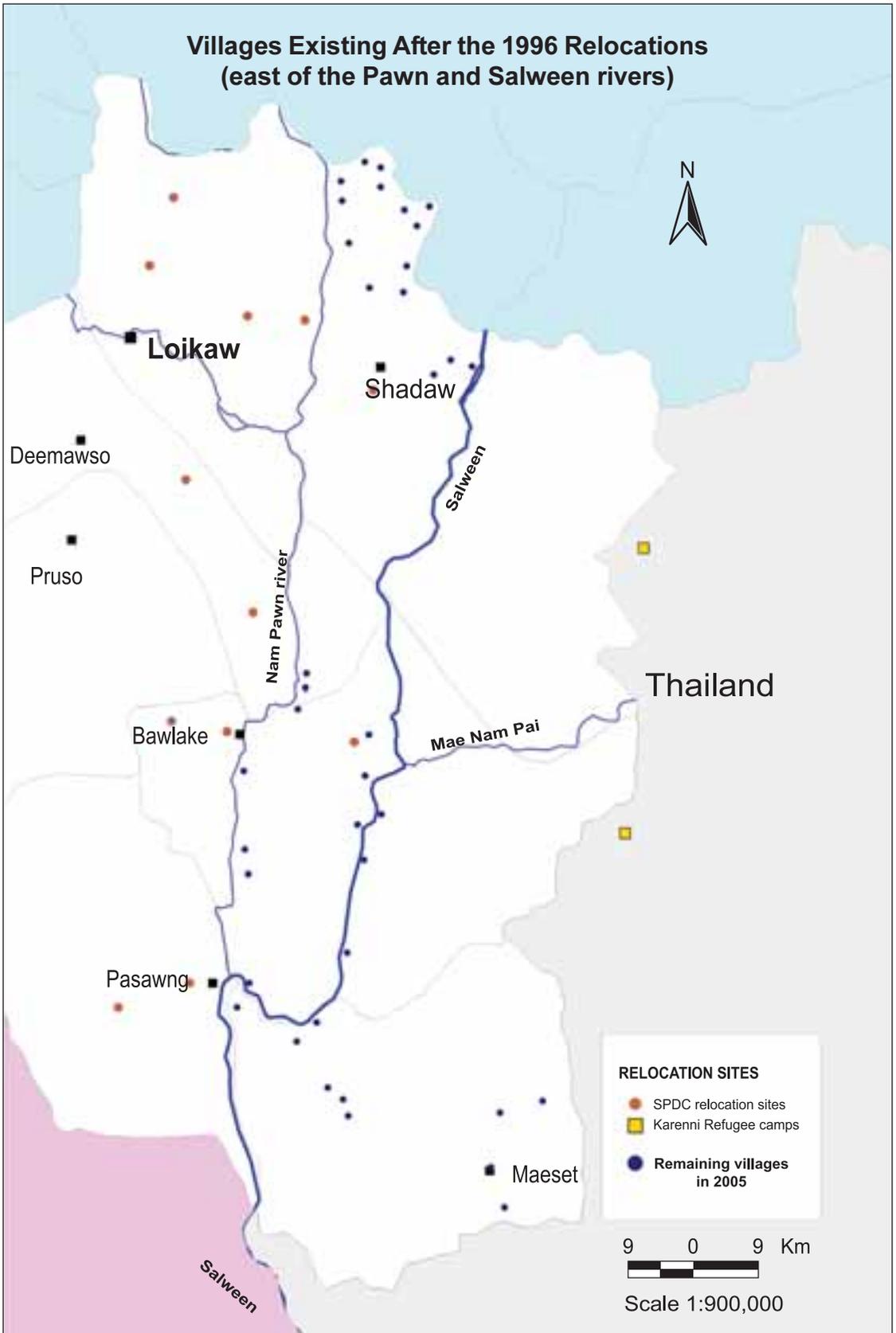
Before 1996, the highland areas between the Pawn and Salween rivers provided a good vantage point for the KNPP to launch attacks. This area, then, was particularly targeted for forced eviction. Of the 212 villages relocated in 1996, ninety-six were located between the Pawn and Salween rivers, almost completely depopulating the area (see maps). This, in addition to the 1974-75 operations, has cleared out the majority of villages along the Salween. **This must be kept in mind when considering the human impact of the flood area of the proposed Salween dams. Even though the current population in the area is low, thousands of people have already been displaced from their homelands and many will never be able to return once the area is submerged.**

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<sup>20</sup> BERG, *op. cit.* 3, p. 92.



## Villages Existing After the 1996 Relocations (east of the Pawn and Salween rivers)



### *Current IDP and Refugee Situation*

According to the Thailand Burma Border Consortium, there were an estimated 92,500 internally displaced persons in Karenni State in 2005, or nearly one third of the entire population of the state. These IDPs live in small groups in the forest, frequently moving from location to location depending on the security situation. Skirmishes and passing patrols make them susceptible to eviction and/or violence at any time.

The greatest area of instability is in Pasaung Township where around 5,000 villagers are constantly hiding in the forests. Out of 1,500 people who fled from SPDC patrols into Karen State in early 2004, around 1,000 have returned to hide in areas surrounding their former villages. However, due to insecurity, they only cultivate small plots of land which yield just 3-4 months' supply of food. SPDC have planted landmines around water sources and jungle paths, deliberately restricting access to forest food.<sup>21</sup>

TABLE: NUMBERS OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN KARENNI, 2005<sup>22</sup>

Township	IDPs in Hiding Sites	IDPs in Ceasefire Areas	IDPs in Relocation Sites	Total IDPs
Shadaw	2,500	0	2,700	5,200
Loikaw	500	21,000	2,000	20,500
Demawso	500	38,000	1,400	41,900
Pruso	500	7,500	0	7,500
Bawlake	500	0	700	1,200
Pasaung	5,000	1,500	700	9,200
Mae Set	0	7,000	0	7,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,500</b>	<b>75,000</b>	<b>7,500</b>	<b>92,500</b>

Note: These total IDP numbers increased from 88,400 documented in 2004.<sup>23</sup>

Many civilians have fled to Thailand for security. The toll of registered Karenni war refugees in Thailand reached to 22,333 within the span of 1990-2005.<sup>24</sup> Over the years, it is not clear how many additional Karenni refugees have entered and remain in Thailand outside the official camps.

### *Human Rights Abuses*

Forced portering, forced labor, extortion of rice, materials and money, torture, extrajudicial killings, and burning of villages, including homes, temples, and rice barns by Burma Army soldiers have all been reported in the Salween area of Karenni State in the past ten years.<sup>25</sup> For example, in 1997

<sup>21</sup> *Displacement and Protection in Eastern Burma*, Thailand Burma Border Consortium, 2005.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Internal Displacement and Vulnerability in Eastern Burma*, Thailand Burma Border Consortium, 2004.

<sup>24</sup> Thailand Burma Border Consortium December 2005 population figures.

<sup>25</sup> *Human Rights Violations in Karenni*, Karenni News and Information Committee, annual reports 1996-2005.

Burmese troops set fire to Wan Loi village, including the village temple. Troops from LIB 250 looted rice and destroyed paddy fields in Paleh Leh village later that same year. In 1998, 3 villagers from Kayeh Kee who were hiding in the jungle met with Burmese troops from LIB 427 and were killed on site. In 2000, ninety-six villages west of Pasaung were burned down by the Burmese military troops during a 2-month operation. All villagers went into hiding in jungles and were struggling for their survival.

In January 2002, SPDC troops based in Bawlake and a group led by U Win Myint and U Kyaw Myint from the agriculture department came to Saw Lon, Hawkam, and Leh Way villages. They ordered villagers to give them four tins of paddy (unmilled rice) per acre. The villagers appealed the demand, but the appeal was rejected and the head of the village tract was threatened with imprisonment if he failed to collect the paddy on time. The situation was particularly difficult because the three villages had previously been forced to relocate to Bawlake and had only just returned to their old villages in 2001.<sup>26</sup>

#### *Divide and Rule through "Ceasefires"*

Although the SPDC praises its ceasefire process with the armed groups as successful in maintaining the country's stability and unity and leading the border areas toward modernization and development, in reality most areas in Karenni State, both in ceasefire areas and non-ceasefire areas, still remain in conflict and suffer from displacement. The KNPLF negotiated a ceasefire with the SPDC in 1994. In 2005 it joined the SPDC in launching an offensive on a KNPP stronghold in order to reap in promises of business opportunities. Similarly, the Karenni National Democratic Party (KNDP) was recruited into the SPDC fold around 1994 in exchange for control over a local area. The KNDP joined SPDC troops in 1997 to attack refugees sheltering on the Thai side of the border. Ceasefire groups have thus been pitted against non-ceasefire groups, causing intra-ethnic conflicts. In addition, the SPDC has granted control of areas and resources to splinter groups and militias, adding to lawlessness in rural areas.<sup>27</sup>

#### *Recent Offensives*

On Dec. 23, 2005, troops from four Burma Army battalions interrupted Christmas festivities and burned down all houses in Gee Gaw Ber village, about 100 km west of the Salween River. The total number of new IDPs in the area is 1,206. Residents have been under constant attack since December 2002 when over 2,000 Karenni and 3,000 Karen suffered under an offensive by 10 Burma Army battalions. The recent offensive focused on IDP populations who had returned to their homes from hiding after the earlier attacks. The stated purpose of the Burma Army in this area was to clear all villagers out of the Karenni-Karen border areas and force them into relocation areas under Burma Army control.<sup>28</sup>

Given these practices of the SPDC, it seems evident that the construction of dams on the Salween will serve the larger strategy of the SPDC to control the area, its people, and its wide range of rich natural resources.

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Displacement and Protection in Eastern Burma*, Thailand Burma Border Consortium, 2005. The report further describes: "... various armed groups have imposed restrictions on travel and the transport of goods in order to control political and economic resources", p. 34.

<sup>28</sup> *Free Burma Rangers Update: Burma Army Attacks Karenni*, Free Burma Rangers, January 2, 2006.

## ECOLOGICAL HOTSPOT OF BIODIVERSITY

The land of Karenni is rich with many natural springs from the valleys that connect the mountain ranges of the Shan plateau. Tropical rain and monsoon forests are found in Loikaw, Demawso, and Pruso. The highest mountain, Elephant Mountain (also known as Thawthikho or Nat Taung), is 8,000 feet above sea level. Karenni State has high plateaus in the east (some over 6,000 feet above sea level), lowlands in the middle part of the state, and mountain ranges in the west.

In its Global 200 Project, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) selected approximately two hundred ecoregions in the world that are outstanding examples of biodiversity.<sup>29</sup> The flood areas of the Weigyi, Hatgyi and Dagwin dams lie fully within one of these ecoregions: the Kayah-Karen Montane Rainforests (see map). Much of the ecoregion that lies in Burma has not been fully surveyed due to the long standing conflict. This is reflected in the following description:

*This area is one of the richest in forest animal life in the Mekong subregion, second richest in bird species, and fourth in mammal species. Even greater biological variety is expected when more of the ecoregion is surveyed...Most of it is rugged, folded, and composed of Paleozoic limestone with overhanging cliffs, sinkholes, and caverns. Plants and animals living in these forests have distinct characteristics and some are unique to the area... The relatively intact and contiguous habitat in these forests makes them a potential area for the conservation of threatened species like the tigers.<sup>30</sup>*

On the Thai side of the river lie both the Salween National Park and Salween Wildlife Sanctuary. The Weigyi dam will inundate part of the Sanctuary; according to local villagers, a road is being built through the Sanctuary to the dam site.

### Forests

The area along the Salween sustains humid dense rainforest with rich fertile soil. The majority of forests in the state are dominated by *Dipterocarpus tuberculatus* as well as teak and other hardwoods that are increasingly coveted in world markets as they become rarer. In the British time, there was a saying “If we begin to cut down the trees from the southern border area of Karenni and go up straight alongside the Salween River to the northern border, by the time we return, trees will be available for us to cut down again for a second round.” Such forests have been a major resource in Karenni State. Small-scale logging has been a source of income throughout history, but became much more commercially oriented after the British arrived.

When the SLORC military dictatorship seized power in 1988, one of the first visitors to the new regime was General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, commander and chief of the Royal Thai Army. He negotiated concessions for Thai companies to log valuable forests from the border areas. In forests between the Thai-Karenni border and the Salween River, six Thai timber companies extracted hardwood timber on a large scale from 1989 to 1995.<sup>31</sup> When the cease-fire agreement between the KNPP and SPDC broke down in 1995, 50,000 tons of teak and 20,000 tons of hardwood logs

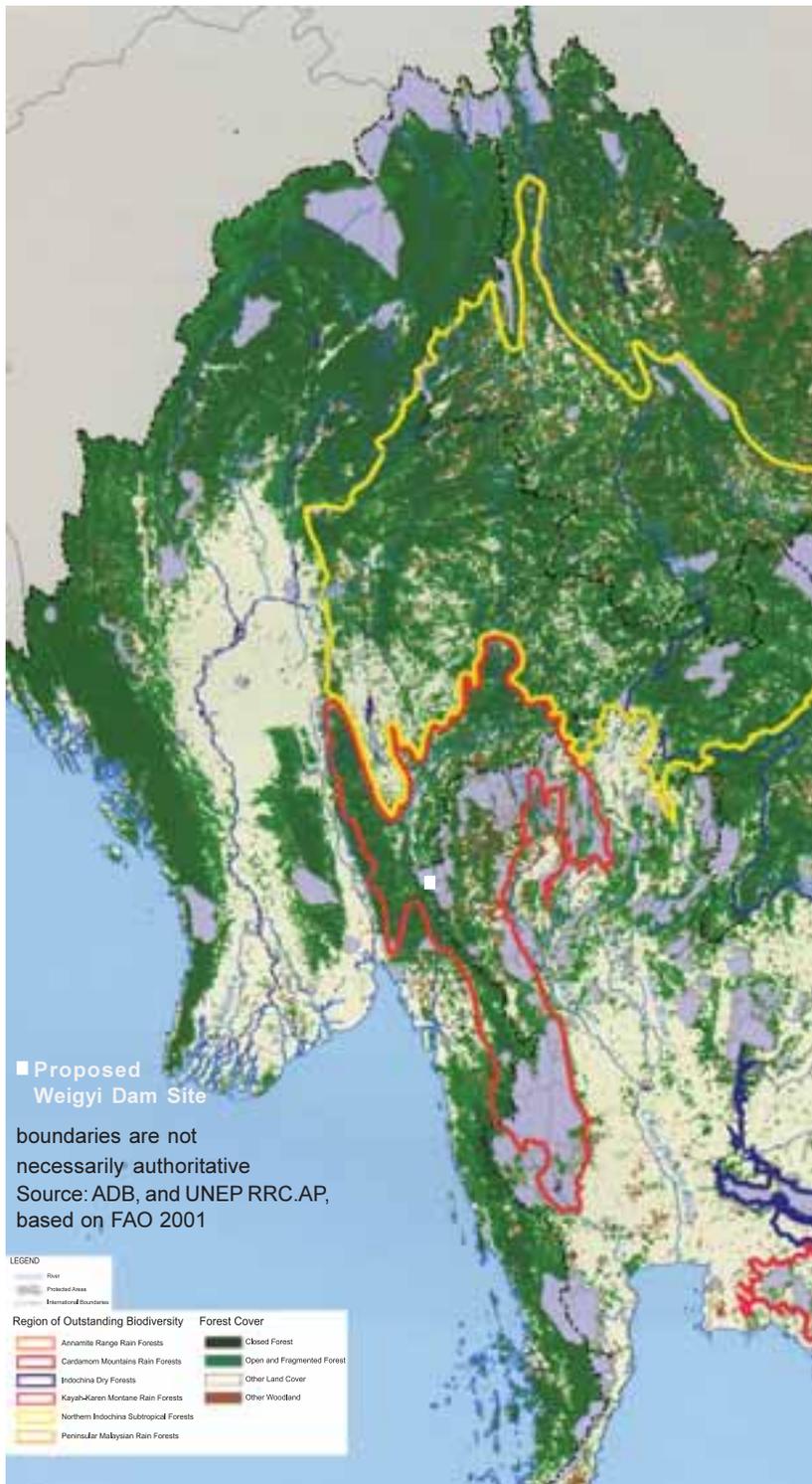
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<sup>29</sup> *Greater Mekong Subregion Atlas of the Environment*, Asian Development Bank and United Nations Environment Programme, 2004.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p. 76.

<sup>31</sup> From 1989 to 1994, the importation of logs by Thai loggers from Burma's concessioned forests into Thailand via the Mae Hong Son border (across from Karenni State) amounted to 610,803 logs of teak and other hardwoods, or 742,917 cubic meters of hard wood. Information from *The Forest Protection in Mae Hong Son Area* by Wanchai Suworakul, Forestry Officer 6, Forest Resource Conservation Division, Mae Sariang Forestry Office, Royal Forestry Department, 1997.

## Ecoregions of Outstanding Biodiversity Value in the Greater Mekong Subregion\*



\* from *Greater Mekong Subregion Atlas of the Environment*, Asian Development Bank and United Nations Environment Programme, 2004.

Inle Lake and Mobyie Reservoir (see Part 2 Lawpita Hydropower Project)\*



3000 0 3000 6000 Meters

Raw data source: Landsat 7 ETM +  
Acquisition date: 24 JAN 2000  
Satellite scene(s) Path/Row: 132/46

Red Band 5  
Green Band 4  
Blue Band 3



Grassland Scrubland Wetland Forest Dam

Satellite image map creation and legend interpretation were done in UNEP RRC.AP by Kyaw Sann Oo.

\* from Greater Mekong Subregion Atlas of the Environment, Asian Development Bank and United Nations Environment Programme, 2004.

were left in piles in the forest.<sup>32</sup>

No proper studies of the forests in Karenni State have been done and estimates of the remaining forests are impossible to confirm given the volatility of the area. However, it is known that the forests that will be inundated by the Weigyi dam include various kinds of hardwood trees such as teak (including the very rare black teak) and ironwood, resinous trees including sal trees, as well as Yemani, Sadaku, and eaglewood trees. In addition to trees, valuable orchids, mushrooms, bamboo shoots, and forest fruits grow wild, as well as many types of culinary and medicinal herbs. Research on the Thai side of the Salween found at least 77 varieties of herbs and 39 edible plants in the Salween forest.<sup>33</sup>

Since the forests along the Salween and Pawn are close to water sources, thick and full of wild fruits, and sparsely populated with people, they have been reliable grazing and dwelling grounds for wild animals. The undisturbed stretches of forests also serve as corridors for the animals to move from one area to another.

### **Birds**

Common birds include peacock, pheasant, jungle chicken, Indian pied hornbill, bullhorn bird, kite, eagle, owl, emerald dove, woodpecker, parrot, king crow, and green jay. Birds found near the rivers include the common moorhen, dabchick, snipe, little egret, sarus cranes, and vultures. Birds found in the vicinity of the towns and villages include the red-wattled lapwing, greater coucal, koel, crow, sparrow, golden weaver bird, swift, purple sunbird, red-whiskered bulbul, quail, pitas, common India nightjar and partridge.

### **Mammals and Reptiles**

Bigger mammals found in the Salween area include wild pigs, barking deer, samburs, wild buffalos, wild cows, bears, and bison. Tigers and mountain goats that live in the higher mountains also come down to the river at night time for water. Smaller wild animals include various kinds of monkeys, rats, squirrels, black giant squirrels, fox, rabbit, porcupine, mole, hog badger, and leopard cats. Natural salt licks and wild fruit trees near the river bank and upstream near small streams are gathering areas for animals; bigger mammals come there to hunt the smaller ones. Thick forests that have many caves are commonly home to various flying mammals such as bats. Invertebrates and reptiles such as various kinds of snakes, monitor lizards, ground lizards, pangolin and water animals such as otters and various kinds of fish are also found along and in the Salween. Different kinds of turtles that live in the river come to the river bank and lay eggs.

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<sup>32</sup> KDRG Interview No. 15, 2005.

<sup>33</sup> *Thai Baan Research at the Salween: Villagers' Research by the Thai-Karen Communities*, 2005, [www.searin.org](http://www.searin.org).



# PART II

## THE LAWPITA HYDROPOWER PROJECT





# THE LAWPITA HYDROPOWER PROJECT

*“The post-war Japanese government decided to compensate Burma for the atrocities inflicted during the conflict. They built a dam at a place called Moby, about ten miles southeast of Phekon. This dam feeds water to the hydro-electric plant connected with the very Lawpita waterfall that occupied my childhood imagination... Phekon was granted the status of a township – and got no electricity.”<sup>34</sup>*

The Balu Chaung<sup>35</sup> River flows out from Inle Lake in Burma’s Shan State; it is a tributary of the Prawn River, itself a tributary of the Salween, one of the great rivers of Asia. Before the hydropower project, the Balu Chaung made a sometimes rapid and sometimes gradual descent into the deeply cut valley of the Prawn River some 670 meters below. This drop created the Lawpita Falls, a series of spectacular cascades in three groups of waterfalls.

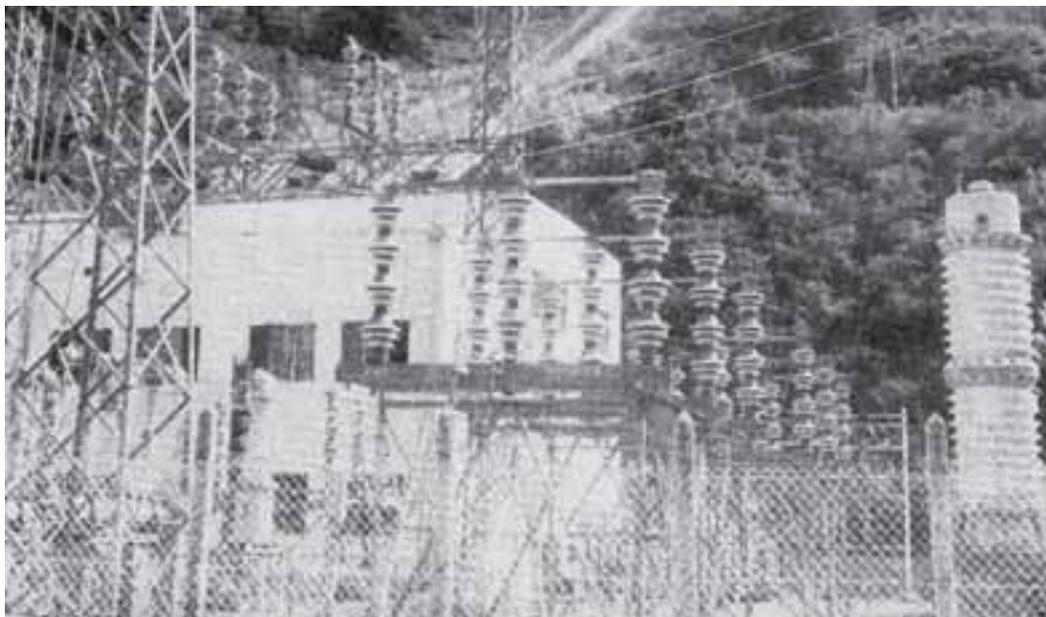
The waterfalls and rapids are spread out over a total of 19 kilometers with some sections dropping long distances off oddly carved and encrusted limestone formations. The wider area around the falls features caves, sinkholes and high limestone escarpments. The natural beauty of the falls has been largely lost as a result of the construction of the dams and diversion of the bulk of the water flow.

The idea to harness the Balu Chaung River and the natural drop of the falls for the production of hydropower was initiated in 1950 in accord with a bilateral war reparation agreement between Japan and Burma. Lawpita was the first large-scale hydropower project in the country, and the plants remain an important source of electricity for central Burma. The components of the project and the timeline of their construction are briefly described on the following pages.

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<sup>34</sup> *From the Land of Green Ghosts*, Pascal Khoo Thwe, 2002.

<sup>35</sup> *Chaung* means “large stream” or “small river” in Burmese. The Balu River, therefore, is referred to as the “Balu Chaung” in Burmese. The name has been appropriated in English and it is now widely known as the “Balu Chaung River”.



## PROJECT COMPONENTS

### *Moby Dam and Reservoir*

The Moby dam was built on the Balu Chaung River in order to divert water to the hydropower plants. The dam (11 meters in height according to some who worked on its construction) is on the border of Karenni and Shan states, with almost the entire reservoir lying within Shan State. The reservoir stretches from Inle Lake for about 60 kilometers, with an average width of 3-5 kilometers, covering a total area of approximately 207 square kilometers, or almost 25% bigger than Inle Lake itself (see map on page 22).<sup>36</sup>

### *Lawpita (Balu Chaung) Hydropower Plant No. 2 (from now on called Plant No.2)*

Water is diverted from the reservoir to the plants in order to generate power. Despite its name, Plant No. 2 was the first power station to become operational. It was built in two stages and together has six generators that operate on a rotational basis to produce 168 MW of power. It is located on the highest of the cascades of Lawpita Falls, some 40 kilometers east of the dam. Both plants are known locally as “Lawpita Plants No. 1 and No. 2” while internationally they are known as “Balu Chaung I and II.”

### *Dawtacha Dam*

This smaller dam was built in order to store water closer to the plants for better flow control.

### *Lawpita or Balu Chaung Hydropower Plant No. 1 (from now on called Plant No. 1)*

Plant No. 1 is located close to Plant No. 2, but receives water from Dawtacha dam and has an installed capacity of 28 MW.

### *Transmission Lines*

A 402 kilometer-long high voltage transmission line carries power to Rangoon, while another 400 kilometer-long line runs to Mandalay.

<sup>36</sup> *Historical Record and Kayah State*, U Khin Maung, Information Officer for Kayah State, 1971, p. 53.

## TIMELINE

- 1954 The Japanese government approves the budget for the project as part of a war reparations package. Feasibility and design studies begin.
- 1960 The *first phase* of construction is completed on Plant No. 2.
- 1962 Construction of Moby Dam begins but is halted because of the coup in Rangoon (see history section). Villages are given the order to move but most do not comply.
- 1966 Construction of Moby dam begins again. 2,000 workers are brought in from Central Burma, denying local residents employment opportunities.
- 1970 Construction of Moby dam is completed.
- 1970-72 8,000 households in Pekhoh Township of Shan State are forced to move as the reservoir fills up.
- 1974 The *second phase* of construction is completed on Plant No. 2. It has a total electricity generating capacity of 168 MW.
- 1986 Construction begins on Plant No. 1.
- 1988-92 A second smaller dam (Datawcha) is built. It is completed in 1992.
- 1992 Plant No. 1 is completed; it has the installed capacity of 28 MW.
- Today Plans for Plant No. 3 have not been realized due to security concerns, technical problems and a lack of funding.



## FALSE PROMISES: NO BENEFITS

Newspaper articles written at the time of construction boasted of the benefits to come from the project. Promises of irrigation, electricity, and development were also made to local authorities and in campaign speeches. For example, farmers from Loikaw remember that during his campaign for election in 1974, BSPP's Kayah State party unit chairman, U Hla Soe, said: "*For the advancement of your lowly living standard up to average level, the Lawpita hydropower plant will supply your towns and villages with the electricity.*"<sup>37</sup>

An article written in 1969 in a government newspaper commented on the benefits to come from Moby dam:

*"Modern residential buildings will change a virgin land to a place of new style of living where the native folks will become owners of land and houses. This is the fruit of the socialist economy bringing development to the Union, assuring unity to policy."*<sup>38</sup>

In another government-owned newspaper, an article explained:

*"The new government of Ne Win (the BSPP) has laid down the policies regarding equal benefits between the Union of Burma and its states, and is concerned with the equal implementation of development...When the Lawpita project is expanded, the aim is not only to utilize the power stations but also to give water to over 25,000 acres of fallow lands for agriculture...This project will also create work for the people of Moby and Kayah State."*<sup>39</sup>

These visions and promises have not come true. Far from bringing development to the Kayah people, the utilization of water for the power plants caused water shortages and robbed local farmers of control over a vital resource. Release of dam water has also caused crops to be flooded. Promises of electricity supplies for towns and villages has also never materialized as transmission lines carry the electricity straight to central Burma, leaving Karenni villagers in the dark.

### **Water Use: Before and After**

The source of the Balu Chaung is Inle Lake in Shan State's Pekon Township. The river passes through a 260 square kilometer stretch of dense forested watershed, clear creeks, and rich soil to Loikaw. Local Shan and Karenni villagers living along the river practiced subsistence agriculture and relied on fishing in the creeks and streams to supplement their diets.

Previously, local residents relied on the many tributary streams for watering their cultivation plots. Irrigation water wheels were also used along the Balu Chaung itself downriver. A local resident described the water use prior to the construction of the Moby dam this way: "*The situation was favorable to draw water throughout the year from handmade small reservoirs across the creeks into the farms alongside.*"<sup>40</sup>

One local resident who was a mechanic at Plant No. 2 for 8 years in the 1980s described the

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<sup>37</sup> KDRG Interview No. 8, 2005.

<sup>38</sup> BERG, *op.cit.* 3, p. 64.

<sup>39</sup> "Let's Say Openly," an article written by Thein Pe Myint in the *Bo Tahtaw* newspaper on June 21, 1969, extracted from the book *Historical Record and Kayah State*, U Khin Maung, 1971, p. 62.

<sup>40</sup> KDRG Interview No. 5, December 2004.

contrast of traditional water use with that after the dam was built:

*“I grew up in the area and my family were mostly farmers. Before the power plant and Moby Dam were built, we didn’t have many water shortages further upstream. When water levels were higher, farmers did not have to draw water from the main river. Instead, they could use the run-off from the forests as well as smaller streams flowing into the Balu Chaung. It was only when water levels were lower, then the farmers would use the old water wheel system to scoop out water to irrigate their crops.*

*“We couldn’t believe the drastic changes that occurred when the forests were cleared, the dam was built, and the power plants began operating. Access to water became harder, especially in the drier seasons. Sometimes there was not enough food.”<sup>41</sup>*

The authorities made it clear that power generation was more important than farmers’ needs. After the construction of Plant No. 2, farmers were not permitted to draw sufficient amounts of water from the Balu Chaung with traditional water scooping wheels, particularly when water levels were low. The abolishment of this feasible, low-tech system that had been used for generations impacted the production rate of crops, and traditional subsistence farming patterns were shattered. The SPDC, together with power station engineers, determined the supply of river water without consulting local farmers and residents:



*Traditional “water scooping” wheel Photo: Historical Record and Kayah State*

*“1986/87 was quite a bad year for the power plant as water levels were low. Upstream of the plant, water restrictions were put in place - especially on local farmers using water for irrigation. These decisions were made by engineers from different sections of the plant, according to how much water they needed for efficient electricity generation. The mechanical and irrigation engineers would submit their proposed [water] management solutions to the authorities. The order would then come from the BSPP to implement the necessary changes, for example, to forbid farmers or villagers from using water upstream of the plant. Electricity for Rangoon and Mandalay came first, the local villagers and farmers came second.”<sup>42</sup>*

These decisions resulted in many problems:

*“The impact on affected farmers and villagers was immediate. Farmers could not draw water from the river for their crops, and the villagers could not use water for everyday living. Some would try to pump water at night for a couple of hours, to draw water for their crops and for their families to use. The engineers realized what was happening when they carried out water level checks at the plant. They started*

<sup>41</sup> Images Asia Interview No. 16, 2001.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

*to patrol the riverbanks night and day. Workers would sometimes see people taking the water. Some didn't want to cause the locals any trouble, so they simply warned them to be careful, not to take too much [water] and not to do it again. But other workers were not so sympathetic to the farmers and villagers, and would demand some money to keep quiet - otherwise they would tell the authorities who would severely punish those taking water.*"<sup>43</sup>

1997-98 was a period of severe drought in most regions in Burma, causing devastating damage to the farms below the dam and drinking water shortages. One farmer explained:

*"When there was a drought in 1998, water was prioritized for the hydropower plant, so I could not irrigate my field from the canal that came from the Balu Chaung. I did not have any source of water other than rain. That was not enough. On the west side of the Loikaw-Taungyi road, wind-powered water wheels scooped water into canals to irrigate farms on both sides of the Balu Chaung. However, after 1998, this was banned. Local authorities blocked an irrigation canal because the water had to be directed to the hydropower plant. Because we could no longer take water from the river, our crops failed."*<sup>44</sup>

Traditional upland farms could also not be tended because the conflict between the SPDC and the KNPP persisted:

*"The traditional method of shifting cultivation was not an option for me either as it was necessary to go into the hills and the soldiers did not allow this. Any time they met farmers in the hills, the soldiers harassed them, not believing that they were there to farm, and accused them of trying to make contact with the Karenni Army, or of trying to supply [the Karenni soldiers] with food. Because I could not do shifting cultivation, I sold many of my belongings to buy good land near Vi Seh Ku about eight or nine years ago. But then the irrigation canal was blocked in 1998, so in the end, I lost both my belongings and my farmland."*<sup>45</sup>

### DAWTACHA DAM

To conserve water in the dry season and regulate water flow, construction on another dam (the Dawtacha) began in 1988. Water was diverted to the Dawtacha reservoir for use at the power plants. The farms below the reservoir were deprived of water and those above it were flooded. Six hundred acres of farmland around Dawtacha village were flooded, and 2,000 acres of farms in Wan Kon, Law Lya Li, Loi Phi, Mai Kann, Ta Ta Blu, Ma Htaw Khu, and other small villages above the reservoir turned to fallow land due to the lack of water, and currently have been turned into a vast landmine field.

Restrictions on water use are not the only problems affecting local farmers near the power plants and dam. Local people point out the rise in destructive floods and droughts since the construction of the dam. Unnatural and unseasonal flooding occurs when the dam water is released in the rainy season, destroying already planted crops. One man related the fate of his uncle who had fields below the reservoir:

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Mekong Watch Interview No. 23, 2001.

<sup>45</sup> Mekong Watch Interview No. 23, 2001.

*“My uncle lives near me in Hpya Pyu, on a 70-acre farm alongside the Balu Chaung. Earlier this year (2001), and for the previous three or four years, his land has been flooded during the rainy season. This happened after he planted the area with rice, so the crop was ruined. The irony is that there have been prolonged periods of drought for the last few years, especially in the dry season, which normally receives at least a few showers a year. Flooding of my uncle’s farm is an expected annual event - the flooding helps irrigate the newly planted rice crops. These recent floods are not natural though. According to my uncle, they correspond with the Burmese authorities’ opening the gates of Moby Dam further upstream on the Balu Chaung. Combined with natural flooding [during the rainy season], the excessive river flow bursts the banks of the Balu Chaung, flooding nearby farms downstream. [The authorities] have never consulted with my uncle about this, nor given any notice of when they will open the gates... it is ruining his crops and threatening his livelihood.”<sup>46</sup>*

### **The Electricity: Where Does It Go?**

Contrary to the promises, most of Karenni State still receives no electricity. The majority of power produced is carried by high voltage transmission lines to Rangoon and Mandalay. There are seven villages in Mahtawkhu tract and thirteen in Lawpita tract, both close to the hydropower plants. These villages lie within the security zone of the plants, but no one has bothered to provide them with electricity. One resident living in Mahtawkhu village stated:



*A power pylon overlooks Moby reservoir Photo: KDRG*

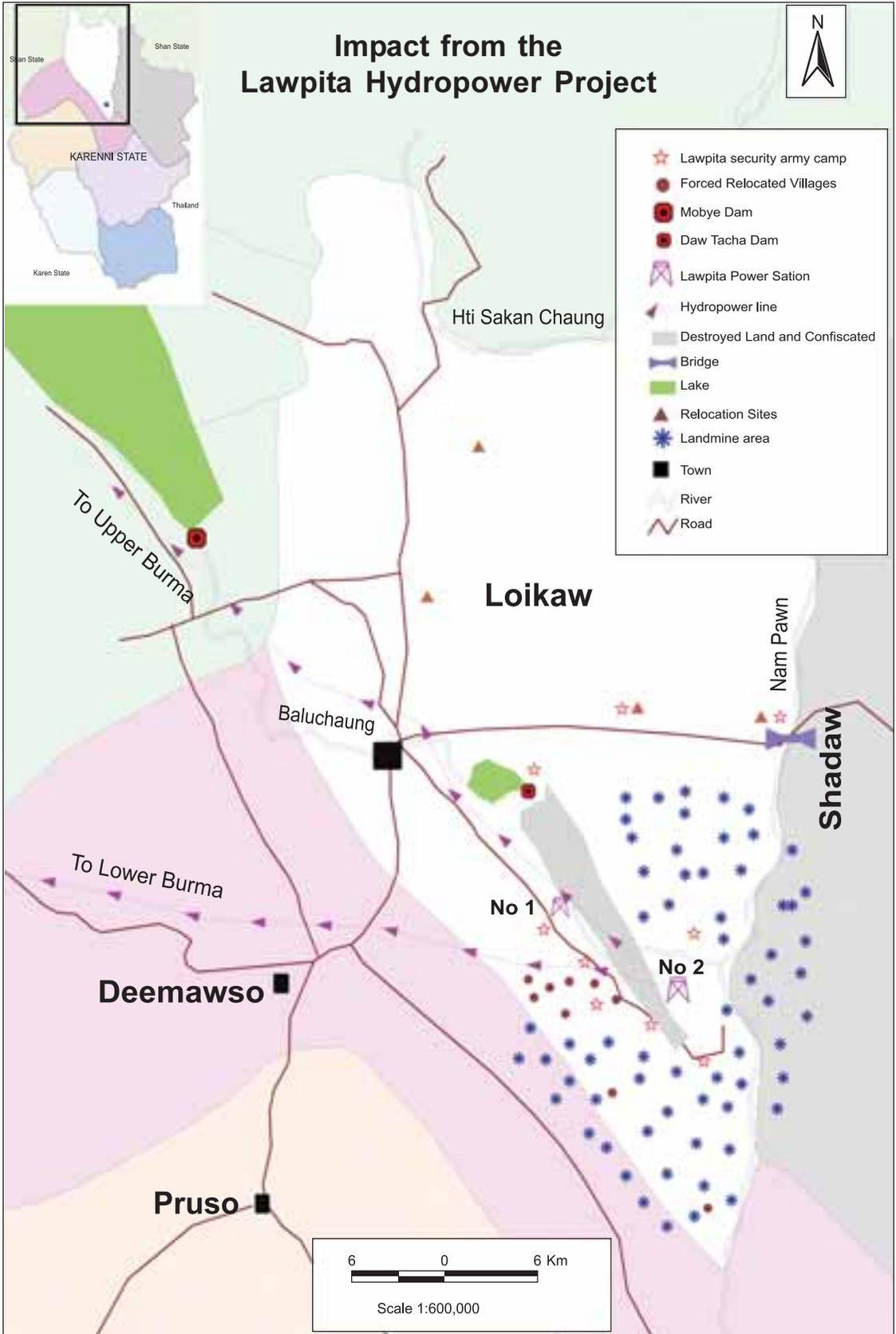
*“My village lies not one mile from the No. 1 Power Station and is situated under the high voltage cable line, but we have no access to electrical power. Only the soldiers and staff of the station are supplied. They make us do everything without payment; incessantly calling us up for loh-ab-pay<sup>47</sup> or the so-called ‘labor contribution’ even after we had our farms confiscated to be used as the station site. We haven’t been compensated until today. Still, all the villages in Mahtawkhu have no access to the electricity.”<sup>48</sup>*

Only three towns, Loikaw, Demawso, and Pruso, are scantily supplied with power and rural areas have no access. The power that is supplied in the towns is but in name; only military bases, departmental offices, officers’ flats, and businessmen’s houses receive full supply. Ordinary people are supplied with only a low voltage line. One resident who managed to draw a power line into his house in Demawso said:

<sup>46</sup> Images Asia Interview No. 25, 2001.

<sup>47</sup> “Loh-ab-pay” is a traditional term for labor contributed to the community to earn religious merit, but is now used by the SPDC and Burma Army to call villagers for forced labor.

<sup>48</sup> KDRG Interview No. 1, 2005.



*“It is only in namesake that I can use electricity. You can come and take a look. From 6 pm to 10 or 11 pm, the light of the bulb is only slightly brighter than a tomato. Only after midnight it returns to a normal state. Rice cookers do not work; ironing and turning on videos or cassettes is impossible due to the low voltage. As for well-to-do people, they can buy generators so there is no problem for them.”<sup>49</sup>*

In addition to unequal access, there is further inequity in electricity pricing schemes. SPDC officials are charged 1.5 kyat<sup>50</sup> per unit of power while common people are charged the standard rate of 25 kyat per unit.<sup>51</sup> As the cost is out of reach for most, few people can actually afford it.

#### FORCED DISPLACEMENTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE LAWPITA HYDROPOWER PROJECT

In addition to the broken promises, the construction of both dams (Moby and Dawtacha) to service two power plants forced many civilians in Shan and Karenni states to abandon their farm lands, foraging areas, and villages. The displacements associated with the project that have taken place over the last 45 years are outlined below.

The village of Lawpita itself had two sections, one of Kayah residents and another of Shan residents with a total population of about 2,000. Lawpita was within two kilometers of the power plants. Other villages in the village tract were on average about six kilometers from the power plants. Villagers mainly depended on rotational and lowland farming, domestic animal husbandry, hunting, and fishing for their livelihood before construction of the plants.

#### **Forced displacement and loss of land associated with the construction of Moby Dam and Plant No. 2**

Many households in the Lawpita area were evicted to make way for project infrastructure including workers' barracks, staff housing, and equipment storage areas. Approximately two thousand workers – primarily laborers from central Burma but including Burmese, Japanese, Swedish, and UN engineers – were recruited, brought into the area, and provided with housing. After the dam's completion, the authorities distributed local Karenni farmlands to the migrants who in turn permanently settled in the area. The former owners received no compensation and it was later learned that the authorities had promised the laborers from central Burma ownership of farmlands in Karenni State.<sup>52</sup>

Some local residents were unsure of their situation until water filling in the reservoir gradually approached their villages and kept their possessions until the water level was at their doorstep. According to local sources, the filling of the dam's reservoir in 1972 caused the displacement of over 8,000 families in Pehkon Township in Shan State. No compensation was offered for the loss of land or livelihood. For homes, the fixed sum of 327 kyat was offered. Most people reportedly refused the payment in anger; the phrase “only enough to pay for the stairs” was commonly heard.<sup>53</sup>

An Anti-Dam Construction Committee made up of local leaders formed in 1963 in Pehkon Township. They wrote several complaint letters and met some officials, but were met with threats of arrest. Finally the group had no recourse and formed the Kayan New Land Party (KNLP) as an armed resistance in 1964.

<sup>49</sup> KDRG Interview No. 2, 2005.

<sup>50</sup> The kyat is the unit of Burmese currency. Due to volatile inflation, we have tried to provide relative terms in this report instead of quoting exchange rates that may quickly be out of date.

<sup>51</sup> Karenni Evergreen field research sourced from electric power users in Loikaw town, 2001.

<sup>52</sup> Excerpt from Maung, *op. cit.* 36.

<sup>53</sup> Images Asia Interview No. 18, 2001.

TABLE: SUMMARY OF RELOCATED AND RESTRICTED VILLAGES, HOUSEHOLDS, AND POPULATION

<b>Village Name</b>	<b>HH</b>	<b>Pop</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Reason</b>	<b>Tract/Township</b>
<i>Impact from Power Plants No. 1 and 2</i>					
<b>Lawpita (Kayah village)*</b>	40	250	1973	Plant No. 2 construction	Lawpita / Loikaw
<b>Lawpita (Shan or central village)*</b>	30	180	1973	Plant No. 2 construction	"
<b>Htee Tho Ku*</b>	36	220	1990	RZ Plant No. 2	"
<b>Bya Ka Net*</b>	18	95	1990	RZ Plant No. 2	"
<b>Daw So Shay*</b>	30	155	1990	RZ Plant No. 2	"
<b>Daw Khu Li (Kanni)*</b>	20	115	1990	RZ Plant No. 2	"
<b>Daw We Maw*</b>	30	160	1990	RZ Plant No. 2	"
Zaya Pyu	30	150	1990	RZ Plant No. 1	"
Daw Seh	27	103	1990	RZ Plant No. 1	"
Lay Ein Suu	7	40	1990	RZ Plant No. 1	"
Hso La Sei	28	150		RZ Plant No. 2	"
Daw Ka Htoo	60	356	1990	RZ Plant No. 2	"
<b>Htee Ta Nga*</b>	18	95	Restricted 1990 Relocated 1996	RZ Plant No. 2	Htee Ta Nga / Loikaw
<b>Ta Po*</b>	16	70	Restricted 1990 Relocated 1996	RZ Plant No. 2	Daw Pu / Demawso
<b>Bu Lya*</b>	47	247	Restricted 1990 Relocated 1996	RZ Plant No. 2	"
Mataw Khu (upper)	70	300	1986	RZ Plant No. 1	Mataw Khu / Loikaw
Mataw Khu (lower)	20	98	1986	RZ Plant No. 1	"
Thataplu	40	180	1986	RZ Plant No. 1	"
Wan Kome (Dawkluku)	30	152	1986	RZ Plant No. 1	"
Daw Lya Lei	35	180	1986	RZ Plant No. 1	"
Loiphei	20	106	1986	RZ Plant No. 1	"
Daw Tama	30	145	1986	RZ Plant No. 1	"
Daw Ta Cha (Pa-O)	60	285	1986 (have electric supply)	RZ Plant No. 1	Chee Kei / Loikaw
Daw Ta Cha (Kayah)	65	312	1986 (have electric supply)	RZ Plant No. 1	"
<b>Daw Tayoke*</b>	37	187	Restricted 1990 Relocated 1996	RZ Plant No. 1	Palaung / Loikaw
Palaung	48	227	Restricted 1990	RZ Plant No. 1	"
<i>Impact from Moby Dam</i>					
114 villages (approx. 60 completely flooded)	1,740	Estimated 8,000	1969-1972	Relocated to make way for the reservoir	Pekhon Township, Shan State

*Summary:* 4,558 affected by the power plants and 8,000 people affected by Moby dam, resulting in a total of 12,558 people displaced by the project.

\* These villages were relocated; the others were restricted in movement. RZ stands for "restricted zone".

### **Displacement following the stationing of IB 72 for power plant security**

Infantry Battalion (IB) 72, made up of about 500 Burma Army troops, was stationed at Lawpita in 1974 for the security of Plant No.2 and the power pylons. Approximately 400 residents from Lawpita village tract were initially evicted to make way for the battalion's base. The evicted villagers were not told where to move to; they resettled in nearby villages on their own. The population of the plant's staff and laborers gradually swelled as time passed. They expanded their cultivation areas, shrinking those of local residents and forcing them to move to further locations. One displaced person gave an account of his experience:

*"An order was released in 1970 for the eviction of two villages to make way for the base of IB 72 in 1970, but it wasn't until 1973 that they started to move us. The resettlement area was not prescribed; the only statement made was that people could move anywhere they wished. Approximately 400 people from 80 households had to move. Every three households were provided with a truck for relocation. Some households received 100 kyat while some got 200 kyat as compensation (200 kyat was worth about one cow at the time). Many had to move without any payment for the loss of belongings, livestock, and farms. No assistance was given to us by the authorities for building new houses and tending new farmland when we reached Bya Ka Net relocation site. It was overcrowded so we moved to another location where our relatives lived."<sup>54</sup>*

### **Displacement due to the construction of Plant No. 1**

Karenni farms were confiscated without compensation during the 1980s to make way for Plant No.1. Local farmers put up petitions to the authorities but to no avail:

*"I did not know about the plans for the power station. One day, the head of the village called a meeting and said that soon a power station [Plant No. 1] would be built, so land would be confiscated. Some villagers were upset. They had already planted their crops. Village representatives went to the BSPP office in Lawpita to complain, but their complaints were ignored. People with many acres of land, some teachers, and also banana farm owners, went with the headman to the BSPP office and explained that they had already planted their crops. We did not want our land to be taken away. The authorities said that the plan was already determined, and they would not accept any complaints. Within a month, two meetings were called in my village to try to lodge complaints. Others did similarly, but in the end, these meetings didn't make any difference. Machinery was brought in and our land was taken away."<sup>56</sup>*

### **Forced relocation related to the declaration of restricted zone**

Local civilians and the armed opposition groups recognized and resented that local resources were not to be equally provided to local people. Hence, armed opposition groups sporadically attacked the high voltage cable pylons and frequent skirmishes broke out between KNPP and SLORC forces around the power plants. KNPP forces regularly attacked the power plants' security forces during the 1980s, and launched more attacks in 1990. The SPDC subsequently evicted villages around the plants, labeled the area a *restricted zone*, and planted numerous landmines.

KNPP forces attacked security battalion IB 72 with heavy weapons in May 1990. Soon after, five

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<sup>54</sup> KDRG Interview No. 3, 2005. This displaced person lived first in Lawpita (Kayah) village. He was moved to Bya Ka Net when IB 72 was stationed at Lawpita. He was later moved again to Htee Tho Ku, then to a relocation camp near Loikaw. In 1996 he moved to the refugee camp on the Thai border.

<sup>56</sup> Mekong Watch Interview No. 10, 2002.

villages<sup>57</sup> were given seven days to move without any assistance. Upon hearing about the eviction, nearby relatives came and requested the SPDC to help out, but again to no avail:

*“In 1990, our family was forced to move again by the Burma Army. This time we had to move further away to Loikaw and were given only seven days. The soldiers were more brutal in their approach, using much more force than in the 1974 relocation. Again there was no assistance, and villagers lost most of their livestock and other items that they could not carry. There was no compensation for the loss of land or homes, and we later found out that the Burma Army simply kept all that was left behind. In fact, Burmese soldiers started to arrive in the area after just three days of giving notice. They were quite violent, knocking over things like women’s mortars and pestles and generally threatening us to move quicker. Many villagers had no opportunity to gather food for their families, which was distressing given our uncertain future. There was a lot of anger and crying and fear among the people, but we could do nothing but comply with such an intimidating army presence.”<sup>58</sup>*

## HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES ASSOCIATED WITH THE MILITARY EXPANSION AROUND THE LAWPITA HYDROPOWER PROJECT

In 1961, after the first stage of Plant No. 2 was completed, the Burmese government stationed IB 54 in Loikaw, extending its force to 700-1,000 troops. Military camps were stationed in the towns of Loikaw, Demawso, Pruso, Pasaung and such financially viable areas as the Mawchi tin and tungsten mine and the Lawpita power plants. At the time, the Karenni resistance forces virtually dominated the rural regions, causing the Burmese government much apprehension for the security of the towns and the power plant. Military expansion to counter this apprehension in turn led to increased human rights abuses by Burma Army troops.

### Forced Labor and Porterage

In 1998, the International Labor Organization’s (ILO) Commission of Inquiry found widespread and systematic use of forced labor in Burma.<sup>59</sup> In 1999 the SPDC released Order 1/99, ordering its battalions to punish anyone imposing labor “contribution” or porterage. However, battalion commanders, ignoring the order, still extensively practice forced labor and porterage. Such practices are until today rife in Karenni State where Burma Army troops are stationed. The troops force civilians to build military barracks, dig trenches, make fences for military camps, fetch poles and bamboo needed for various buildings, fetch water and other culinary provisions, clear areas around the camps, patrol roads, run errands, and work plantations, all without payment. Villagers are made to do all manner of forced labor at their own expense. Heavy fines are exacted for noncompliance. A former SPDC soldier who personally took charge of organizing labor related his experience:

*“Forced labor was taken for granted by IB 72. The major would demand 20 persons from each surrounding village. Sometimes the villagers were grouped up and called away and not told where they were going or for how long. The villagers were made to pay money when they did not wish to go. Those who didn’t pay money and refused were beaten or shot. I have seen more than one person killed for this reason.”<sup>60</sup>*

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<sup>57</sup> The villages of Htee Tho Ku, Dawso Shay, Bya Ka Ne, Daw Khu Li, and Daw We Maw, comprising 745 villagers from 134 households.

<sup>58</sup> KDRG Interview No. 4, 2005.

<sup>59</sup> *Report on Labor Practices in Burma*, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 1998, p. 40.

<sup>60</sup> Images Asia Interview No. 13, 2001.

In addition to “labor contribution” for military camps, SPDC soldiers forced civilians to serve as porters; they had to carry military provisions and ammunition boxes and act as mine sweepers at battle fronts, according to those with personal experience. One veteran porter related: “We mostly had to carry rice provisions, ammunition, and military implements.”<sup>61</sup>

Given the stationing of several military forces in Karenni, some people take portering for the military for granted as their way of life: “When I was in Daw Pe and Tee Po Kalo villages, Burma Army soldiers frequently called me up for portering, I think there were hundreds of times.”<sup>62</sup>

Many porters died due to torture, landmines, and diseases related to malnutrition and poor health. “I once saw one porter who could no more carry his load beaten to death by an SPDC soldier.”<sup>63</sup>

Due to the lack of time to spend on their own farms, civilians had to abandon their farms, facing various drastic impacts on their livelihood.

After the ILO investigated some situations in Burma in 2000, the SPDC, in the attempt to cover up its misconduct, used a euphemism to describe forced laborers and porters. They were called “voluntary workers” or “patriotic workers”. Nevertheless, these laborers were given neither food nor payment for their work, and upon refusal, made to pay fines or face prison terms.

*“The SPDC soldiers did not consider the workers to be porters anymore. Instead, they often tried to tell the villagers that they were “volunteers” or “patriots” doing “patriotic duties for the country and the people.” However, we were made to do as much hard labor as ever, or otherwise fined.”<sup>64</sup>*



#### Seal of IB 530

To: xxx (village headman):

On April 9, 2000, we want 100 people for labor from your village tract, which includes (xxx, xxx, xxx, and xxx) villages. They need to bring along with them hoes, choppers, and knives. They also should bring a rice-pack (food) along with them. I want to assure you that 100 people must come to us exactly on this date. Otherwise, what happens if they don't come will be your responsibility. You yourself have to come also with those 100 people.

Sergeant XX

<sup>61</sup> Images Asia Interview No. 20, 2001.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> BERG, *op.cit.* 3, p. 69.

## PERSPECTIVE OF A BURMA ARMY SOLDIER BASED AT LAWPITA

XXX arrived at the refugee camps on the Burmese-Thai border in 1996. He was part of IB 72, providing security for the power plants from 1991-1996.

*“One of 72<sup>nd</sup> Division’s duties was to guard the periphery of the hydropower plant. They had to monitor and protect the fence surrounding the plant. There were many mines placed in this area. If a villager were to trigger a mine, which happened from time to time, the soldiers would refuse to help the villager. On one particular occasion, I witnessed a villager actually having to pay for the mine that had been destroyed.*

*Over the five years that I was working in this area, I saw and heard of many villagers, livestock and even Burma Army soldiers being injured or killed by these landmines. Many people were killed or injured after completion of Balu Chaung I. Villagers were used to help clear the area for the new power plant. Some were paid 40 kyat per day, but most were used as forced labor. The tasks included clearing landmines.*

*Forced labor was common-place in the area where I worked. Villagers were forced to build new fences, new roads and dig holes, etc. A notice from the Burma Army was given to local villages to finish certain tasks. When the task was completed, the notice was changed and a new task would commence. Villagers often had to work for two weeks at a time. They were not provided with food, water or given any money for their hard labor. They were allowed a short break each day to rest. These activities were continuing up until the time I left in 1996.*

*I could see the harm that the mines and forced labor were inflicting on the people. Not just physical harm, but the impact of the Burma Army acquiring Karenni land that would otherwise have been used by villagers for farming, gathering food or building houses on. Life for the local villagers became harder, and subsistence became a daily chore. However, I could do nothing about it, even as a Burma Army soldier, as the repercussions would have been severe had I interfered with the implementation of government policy.*

*Part of this policy was to relocate villagers away from the area. Around 1992, Bya Ka Neb village was completely removed of people. They were forced to relocate to just outside Loikaw. They were given just seven days to vacate. They were offered no assistance, no transport and no compensation for their loss of land or belongings. I felt very sad for the people that had to move, but again I had to obey and enforce Burma Army decisions.*

*Another directive of the Burmese military government was to encourage their soldiers to inter-marry with the local villagers. The encouragement took the form of payments of 3,000 kyat per marriage for higher-ranking soldiers.*

*In the five years that I worked for the Burma Army, I witnessed the forced relocation of almost all of the remaining Karenni villages in the areas surrounding the power stations. I heard from fellow Burma Army soldiers of many killings, rape and torture of Karenni villagers during the same period.”<sup>55</sup>*

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<sup>55</sup> Images Asia Interview No. 10, 2001.

## Land confiscation to make way for infrastructure and subsequent military farms

The sites for constructing the sifting pond, conveying canals, concrete conduit pipes, the power cable towers and lines, access roads and the power stations were all confiscated without payment from relevant owners. The construction of the spillways I and II for Plant No. 2 also caused many farmers to lose their farms. In addition, thousands of acres of farms and lands were confiscated and demolished due to the construction of military bases, military



*A “model” farm on land confiscated by the Burma Army Photo: KDRG*

plantations, railways and roads, and the demarcation of security areas. In particular, approximately 900 acres of farms in several villages<sup>65</sup> were confiscated for the construction of Plant No.1 in 1982.

Authorities offered no compensation whatsoever for confiscated lands, instead forcing owners to plant and harvest seasonal crops such as paddy, corn, soy bean, sunflower and such for the communal fund of the military, without any payment. If the villagers’ livestock entered these farms, owners were made to pay for the damage. As a result of constant calling up for forced labor, villagers had no time to tend for their livelihood, thereby having no other option but to abandon their villages and flee to refugee camps in Thailand. One woman who arrived at the refugee camp plainly related:

*“We constantly had to go and work for their military farms, and there was no time to tend to our own hill farms. Poor crops resulted and we had to buy rice. Eventually it was too hard so we had to come to this place.”<sup>66</sup>*

### Extortion, Looting, and Thievery

Since the time of General Ne Win’s government till today, various ways and means have been devised to extort money from civilians. Even government departmental staff’s salaries and wages have been deducted for various reasons. According to a report of the Karenni Information Department and KDRG research data, the types of extortion imposed on civilians after 1988 include porter fees, gate fees, military fund contributions, sport fees, road and bridges fees, fire sentry fees, labor contribution fees, and levies on farms, farm water, and crops.

Burma Army troops’ extortion, looting, and thievery are rife in remote areas and at the frontlines. Villagers near the Lawpita power plants provided these details of several incidents:

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<sup>65</sup> Ma Htaw Khu upper village, Ma Htaw Khu lower village, So La Se, Daw ta Khya, Ta Ta Plu, Mai Kan, Wan Kun, Daw Lya Li, Daw Ka Htu, and Lawdalay.

<sup>66</sup> Images Asia Interview No. 116, 2001.

- In May 1993, 21 armed soldiers from IB 72, alleging insurgent presence in Ma Htaw Khu upper village, launched a house to house search and rummaged the room of one Say Reh, looting 120 pieces of his silver coins.
- In 1993, U Ko Reh of Ma Taw Khu village, upon spotting two privates from LIB 530 stealing his garden fruits, questioned them and had his sons send them back to their barracks. As a result, the two culprits, along with their superiors came back to the village the next morning. They called out U Ko Reh and his sons and beat them with bamboo poles, 5 shots each in front of the villagers, and then departed.
- In 1994, LIB 530 officials arbitrarily demanded 500 kyat for the battalion fund and another 100 kyat for portering fees from each household of 10 villages in the Ma Htaw Khu village tract within Plant No. 1 area. Ma Htaw Khu village tract is within Loikaw Township and the township administration office regularly demanded portering fees of 50-250 kyat 3-4 times per month per household. In addition, other mobile groups levy extra “emergency fees”.

In good rainy seasons, the authorities have released dam water and ordered farmers to cultivate twice a year, levying a proportionate paddy quota or tax. Authorities paid a meager cash amount far below the prevailing price in return for the paddy. Farmers had to buy paddy at the prevailing price from elsewhere and turn in the paddy quota when their crop outcome failed. Normally farms are cultivated once a year, but as they were ordered to plant twice a year, crop outcome declined due to poor soil value.



Date: 4. 9. 2000

To: xxx (village headman)

“We want you to come to the office at 8:00 a.m. tomorrow. We want to discuss with you about those returnees from Mai Shu (Murng Su) mining area and the donation receipts. We want the 9 returnees from Mai Shu to donate 1,000 kyat to us to be brought along with you. We want to use it for village security and village festival. You must stop other work and come to the office as soon as possible.”

Signed by:  
Region Security Officer

## Sexual violence by Burma Army troops

Harassment and rapes committed by Burma Army troops, particularly in ethnic minority areas, have been documented in several reports.<sup>67</sup> With the expansion of SPDC troops into Karenni areas, sexual violence against women has also increased.

Due to security concerns and the sensitivity of the subject, it is difficult to get an accurate picture of sexual violence in Karenni State. The Karenni National Women's Organization (KNWO) began documenting cases in 2004 and has so far collected information about 29 confirmed rape cases that happened between 1996 and 2003. Some of the women were murdered after they were raped. All the complaints brought to the relevant military officials or township administrative offices were ignored, and no treatment was provided for the victims. Not a single case of a Burmese soldier tried or sentenced to jail terms for rape cases has been witnessed or recorded in Karenni State. Offenders have only been transferred to distant regiments as punishment.

### RAPE CASES COMMITTED BY BURMA ARMY TROOPS PROVIDING "SECURITY" FOR THE LAWPITA POWER PLANTS

*On October 22, 2001, XX, from YY village in Loikaw Township, who was 7 months pregnant, was raped and killed by 6 soldiers from LIB 530 near the village. The relatives and villagers found her corpse after two days, in an earthen oven that was used to burn limestone.<sup>68</sup>*

*On October 28, 2001, former XX village tract chairman's 15 year-old daughter was raped by 3 SPDC soldiers from an IB 72 column. Upon learning of the case, the column commander said that the culprits had run away and threatened the person concerned to keep quiet about the case, and if the matter was brought to the officials, the complainer would be arrested and action taken against him. The column commander then changed his operation area so as to evade the case. The 3 rapists were still seen at the military station by the villagers after some time.<sup>69</sup>*

One mother of Htee Ta Nga village, within the power plant security zone, described her experience:

*"When we lived in Htee Ta Nga, I witnessed an occasion when SLORC soldiers came to the village and ordered all the men to stay in one house. This left the women alone and vulnerable in their respective homes. We were very much afraid. Some of the women were raped in their own homes. They tried to rape my daughter-in-law. We could do nothing while the soldiers were plundering the village. It is very rough; there is no life security for us women in the rural areas."<sup>70</sup>*

One ex-SPDC soldier explained that the incidents described above correspond to his own experience:

*"On one occasion in 1989, near Ye Ni Pauk, I witnessed a 'one-star' lieutenant from the LIB 102 trying to grab a young girl to rape her. Her brother, who was nearby, came to help. The lieutenant, upon seeing the brother approach, shot and killed him, and without remorse carried on raping the girl."<sup>71</sup>*

<sup>67</sup> *License to Rape: The Burmese Military Regime's Use of Sexual Violence in the Ongoing War in Shan State*, Shan Women's Action Network, 2002, *Shattering Silences*, Karen Women's Organization, 2004, and *Catwalk to the Barracks*, Woman and Child Rights Project (Southern Burma) in collaboration with Human Rights Foundation of Monland, 2005.

<sup>68</sup> Karenni Forces Frontline News, 2001.

<sup>69</sup> Voice of Karenni and Karenni Evergreen News Issue, November, 2001.

<sup>70</sup> Images Asia Interview No. 26, 2001.

<sup>71</sup> Images Asia Interview No. 20, 2001.

The SPDC awarded extra privileges to its soldiers for marrying an ethnic woman, with the implication that ethnic women are at the disposal of its soldiers in implementing a “Burmanization” policy. As to this, an ex-SPDC soldier reported:

*“Higher ranking Burmese soldiers were granted special privileges when they married Karenni girls even without the girl’s consent. Rape cases were not uncommon. Women being raped were made to leave the village, or even killed by SPDC soldiers.”*<sup>72</sup>

Another incident that is deeply engraved in the memory of the Kayans happened near Pekhon town in the 1964 operation against the KNLP. Oo Mary, the beautiful daughter of a local chief, was taken by Burma Army soldiers to be a porter. She was paraded past the local people and taken to the most well-known church where she was raped.<sup>73</sup>

### **Conscription and Child Rights Abuses**

Being aware that the policy of the BSPP before 1988 to eliminate the insurgencies with Burma Army forces alone was impractical without the collaboration of local residents, the military set up people’s militias. There were over 1,500 people in militias in the townships of Loikaw, Moby, Pekhon, Demawso, and Pruso established in 1973. Many children were drafted into this scheme, as well as into the local Burma Army.

During the 8-8-88 uprising, however, the military retrieved all arms from the militias, and expanded regular forces. Those recruiting locals to the military would make grand promises to poor families with young sons in Loikaw and Demawso townships, telling them that office jobs and opportunities for further studies at colleges, universities, and military academies would be provided for the children. In this way they drafted many poor, ill-informed children into the army.

### **Persecution and Arbitrary Execution**

Any area branded a *black area* where the Karenni resistance forces regularly maneuver, and anywhere within suspicion is a free fire zone. Burma Army soldiers arbitrarily shoot civilians on sight, labeling them insurgents’ guides, or sometimes simply taking their frustrations out on innocent civilians.

Some other areas are subject to restricted movement. An order to seize or shoot anyone without a travel permit was described by a Karenni farmer who fled to Thailand:

*“We generally could not move freely, we could not go beyond one or two furlongs (less than two kilometers) without permission. To go, one had to get the commander’s permission. Permission was given sometimes and sometimes not. When permission was not granted, no reason was given as to why. Villagers dared not go out without permission; otherwise they could be arrested or killed. I saw soldiers brutally torture and shoot two persons going out without permission in front of the villagers. In 1991 or 1992, one villager who went out was arrested and taken into the jungle. Villagers waited for his return, but he never came back. We went to look for him and saw that he had been shot dead.”*<sup>74</sup>

Other arbitrary killings are not uncommon:

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<sup>72</sup> Images Asia Interview No. 13, 2001.

<sup>73</sup> Images Asia Interview No. 18, 2001.

<sup>74</sup> Mekong Watch Interview No. 3, 2001.

*"In 1995 or 1996, the village head and secretary were also killed by SLORC troops. One night, SLORC soldiers arrived and arrested all the villagers. All were released except the village head and secretary. They were taken to the jungle, killed and buried. I was one of the villagers that uncovered the corpses, so I saw that they had been murdered."*<sup>75</sup>

One ex-SPDC soldier described persecution methods this way:

*"They used all means of torturing during the interrogation; one of them is that they often use a burning stick to get information about the KNPP's movements."*<sup>76</sup>

## **Injuries and Deaths from Landmines Due to Securing the Power Plants and Pylons**

*"The rebels attacked the pylons ... Government soldiers responded by planting landmines around the pylons rather as though they were planting bulbs. Animals got blown up – We lost several working bulls and buffaloes. Some children were killed. Then the army ordered us to build fences around the minefields. We did so. The rebels defused the mines and blew up the pylons again. The army replanted the mines..."*<sup>77</sup>



By 1990, approximately 18,000 landmines had been planted exclusively for the security of the power plants.<sup>78</sup> Landmines have also been planted at the base of each high voltage transmission pylon so that armed groups could not destroy them. Villagers nearby the pylons were ordered to make fencing around the base of the posts. They were, and are, also forced to see to the security of the mines, and clean areas around the planted mines.

Many civilians have lost their limbs and lives due to the explosion of landmines planted around the power plants. As of 2001, 30 civilians have died, over 50 villagers have been injured, and over 200 livestock were injured or killed in the Lawpita region.<sup>79</sup> Total numbers of landmine victims in Karenni State are yet unknown. Landmines planted in Karenni State could well number 100,000. The Lawpita security project in 1990 forcefully relocated villagers to Nwa Laboe. One former resident of the relocation site, who arrived at a refugee camp in 1996, stated:

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Images Asia Interview No. 13, 2001.

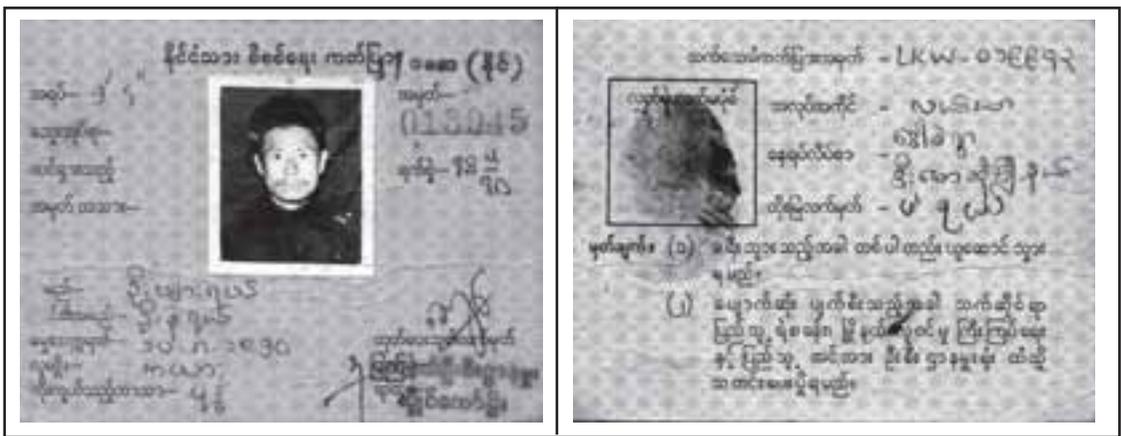
<sup>77</sup> *From the Land of Green Ghosts*, Pascal Khoo Thwe, 2002, p. 68.

<sup>78</sup> KNPP military data, 1995.

<sup>79</sup> Research Survey Excerpt, Karenni Evergreen, 2001.

“Nwa Laboe is near two battalions and overcrowded since it is a relocation site. The residents find much difficulty fending for survival. The government provides no assistance. One day my nephew went back to our former village to fetch some jackfruits. As he did not turn up after three days, his younger brother went to find him, but he did not return either. After four days I told the headman about the matter and calling along two friends, we went to look for them. We found both of them dead from a landmine planted under the jackfruit tree, with their broken legs all rotten. We could do nothing and just left them and returned. That was in May 1993.”<sup>80</sup>

SPDC authorities have never paid compensation to dead or injured civilian victims of their landmines and no medical treatment is provided. Injured villagers have been fined the cost of exploded mines. Livestock that step on landmines are taken away for army food supply and the owner of the dead animal also made to pay the cost of the exploded mine. During 2002-2003, one mine cost 15,000 kyat (15,000 kyat is worth about 11 liters (3 gallons) of diesel oil).



Identity card of a man who was killed by a landmine while collecting vegetables in the forest. Photo: KEG

### ECOLOGICAL DAMAGE AND LOSS OF LIVELIHOODS

In addition to forced displacement and human rights abuses caused by military expansion, the Lawpita hydropower project also inflicted ecological damage and impacted Karenni fisheries. Combined with restricted movements and ruined agricultural fields, these changes have made it impossible for Karenni to fend for their livelihoods.

### Damaged Forests and Flooding due to the Lawpita Hydropower Project

In the late 1960s, the authorities declared that anyone could freely clear all the trees big and small in the potential flood basin without any levy, but as the forest was practically impenetrable, the State Timber Board (STB) was called in for the clearing.<sup>81</sup>

Before the dam, the Balu Chaung basin stretched over 260 square kilometers and was densely covered with evergreen and monsoon forests at higher slopes. No commercial logging was done either by the government or local residents; trees were cut only for house building and other domestic uses. Since the project started, the forests in the Moby basin and those at higher regions have been

<sup>80</sup> Images Asia and Karenni Evergreen Interview No. 44, 2001.

<sup>81</sup> Maung, *op. cit.*36.

comprehensively extracted, both by the civilians and government agencies, resulting in drastic deforestation. Deforestation and shifting hillside farms have caused soil erosion to fill up the reservoir, reducing water capacity. The creeks flowing down the Balu Chaung eventually dried up. The SPDC launched the Inle Lake and Moby dam conservation project in 2000. Local civilians were directed to plant 15,000,000 trees from 2000 to 2005.<sup>82</sup> Still, the reservoir's capacity has visibly declined over the past 40 years.

Villagers from the Lawpita area also complain that the migrant workers from central Burma, who settled near Lawpita after the plant construction, began producing charcoal on a commercial scale in the area, further adding to deforestation.

*“The landscape has been changed, forests have vanished, and rivers have dried up - including many smaller streams that fed into the Balu Chuang River from the forests that used to grow near by. These streams, the river and the environment were a part of the local villagers’ lives... the regime has drastically changed our environment as well as our cultural and social heritage.”<sup>83</sup>*

#### IMPACT ON FISHING DUE TO MOBYE DAM

The residents below Moby dam used to catch fish by such means as blocking the waterway and swilling out the water, using meshed bamboo traps and bamboo nets. The residents above the dam such as the Inthas, Shans, Kayahs, and Kayans were well equipped with motorized fishing boats and various fishing nets, making reasonably good earnings by fishing. Before the dam, plenty of fish such as banded snakehead fish, short-headed snakehead fish, eel, carp, featherback fish and different kinds of catfish were commonly found in the river.

Beginning about five years after the construction of the dam, the fish populations and fishing jobs started to decline. A villager from Kwa Long (upstream of the dam and five kilometers from Pekhoh) explained that before the dam all fifty households in his whole village had fishermen. One person could get up to 40 viss (64 kilograms) of fish per day fishing, but now in the whole village there are only two fishermen and they can only get 4-5 viss (6.5-8 kg) of fish in a day. Villagers also complain about the bad smell in the reservoir and that some fish are diseased.

Hamilton carp and Loach cannot be found anymore. Migratory fish that used to come up the river to spawn are also no longer seen. Other fish like featherback and spiny eels are very rare. All eels are also difficult to find. A very small fish that eats waste (*nga chii saa* in Burmese) is coming in and increasing in population. Weeds are also growing so the water is not clear like it used to be. The plants clog up fishermen's nets.

Residents below Moby dam<sup>84</sup> used to rely on fisheries in the Balu Chaung's tributary streams for their livelihood. They are ethnic Inthas who have a unique way of fishing. They collect old branches and leaves and drop them into the lake or pond as a sanctuary. In due time, villagers would round up the fish using bamboo sticks meshed with nets. The catch was saved for kitchen use and some brought for sale in the Loikaw market. Today, however, some side streams have dried up; fish populations in the tributaries are lower and these practices have all vanished.

<sup>82</sup> Pekhoh Township Peace and Development Council Order, February 2000.

<sup>83</sup> Images Asia Interview No. 4, September 2004.

<sup>84</sup> In villages such as Naung Khaw, Phaung Daw, Phaya Phyu, and Phaya Ni.

In addition to the impact on fish populations, increased military presence has also impacted villagers' ability to fish. In the past, they would freely go fishing along the rivers. Currently, however, SPDC soldiers have stationed a camp at the Pawn Bridge, imposing various threats and restrictions. Local residents that rely on fishing for subsistence are in great anxiety as to how to come up with their kitchen needs. One fisherman from the area related his experience:

*"I happened to run into some SPDC soldiers and was made to work for them thrice as I was on my way to catch some fish at the time of their upstream migrating to spawn. The first instance was when the river level rose, and when I reached Htee Tho Ko, the area which offers the most catch. I ran into IB 72 soldiers and was made to act as their jungle guide. The next time was during the 8th month (August) when the migration was most plentiful. I went fishing and got a considerable catch, including one turtle weighing about 8-9 viss (13-14 kg). There the soldiers from IB 72 came up and made away with some of my fish and the turtle without any payment and they called me up to lead the way for their military operation. Three of my friends were also with me then. As for the last time, I was just about to fish and LIB 102 soldiers spotted me and made me show them the way back to Daw Nye Kbu. They took away my round fishing net too."<sup>85</sup>*

#### MILITARY RESTRICTIONS NEAR THE PROJECT MAKE FORAGING AND FARMING IMPOSSIBLE

Before the power station construction, residents could freely forage in the surrounding forests. After the power station construction, however, Burma Army soldiers made them reside in prescribed areas and restricted their movements. Some submissively complied with the orders, but after some time, the military units made them move to *new* locations on the grounds of security. Some grappled for their livelihood by cultivating small plantations, peanuts, and dry farm plots along the Lawpita-Lawdalay road. Others, deprived of farm plots, had to resort to turning to relatives in distant villages for support as their own farm plots were already covered with landmines. Many had to pay for permits from the authorities to cultivate farm plots at some distance. Eventually, for many, it became too difficult to survive and they fled to Thailand.

#### IN THE DARK

*"We're used to staying in the dark..."*

These words from a popular song about Lawpita capture the feeling of many Karenni. Even though successive Burmese regimes have promised "development" and electricity for Karenni State, the Lawpita hydropower project has not provided either. Traditional water usage has been prohibited, farmlands confiscated, and crops destroyed by unnatural floods. Limited and expensive electricity is provided only to three main towns in the state.

The projects further enabled military expansion in Karenni areas. Military battalions based in the state have increased from zero to 24 since 1961 when Plant No. 2 was completed. Two battalions stationed in the Lawpita area alone have planted at least 18,000 landmines, forcefully relocated villagers, confiscated lands without compensation, practiced forced labor, raped women, and arbitrarily killed those who resisted or were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

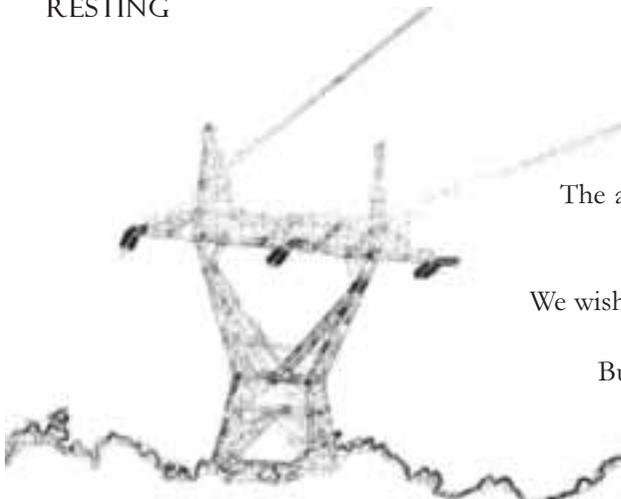
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<sup>85</sup> KDRG Interview No. 12, 2005.

Karenni people lost farmlands and livelihoods; they lost control over their own resources. The management of water continues to rest solely with engineers and authorities at the power plants who never consult local farmers. Forests were cut down and flooded in the reservoir areas; forests normally used for food foraging became too dangerous due to landmines. The changes in water levels impacted fish populations.

“Development” projects implemented by a military regime will not – can not – be beneficial for local people as their participation and any rule of law are absent under the military dictatorship. The experience in Lawpita over the last fifty years is a testament to this. Local people near the Moby dam and Lawpita power plants did not know what was coming when construction began. Only later did they realize that deforestation, loss of indispensable water resources, and destructive floods were all caused by the project. The same things must not happen on the Salween River.

PASSING BY, WITHOUT  
RESTING



Over the mountains and through the forests  
Your shoes sending out silvery rays in the sunlight  
Where do you plan to journey to?  
Son of Shanland, what a traveler

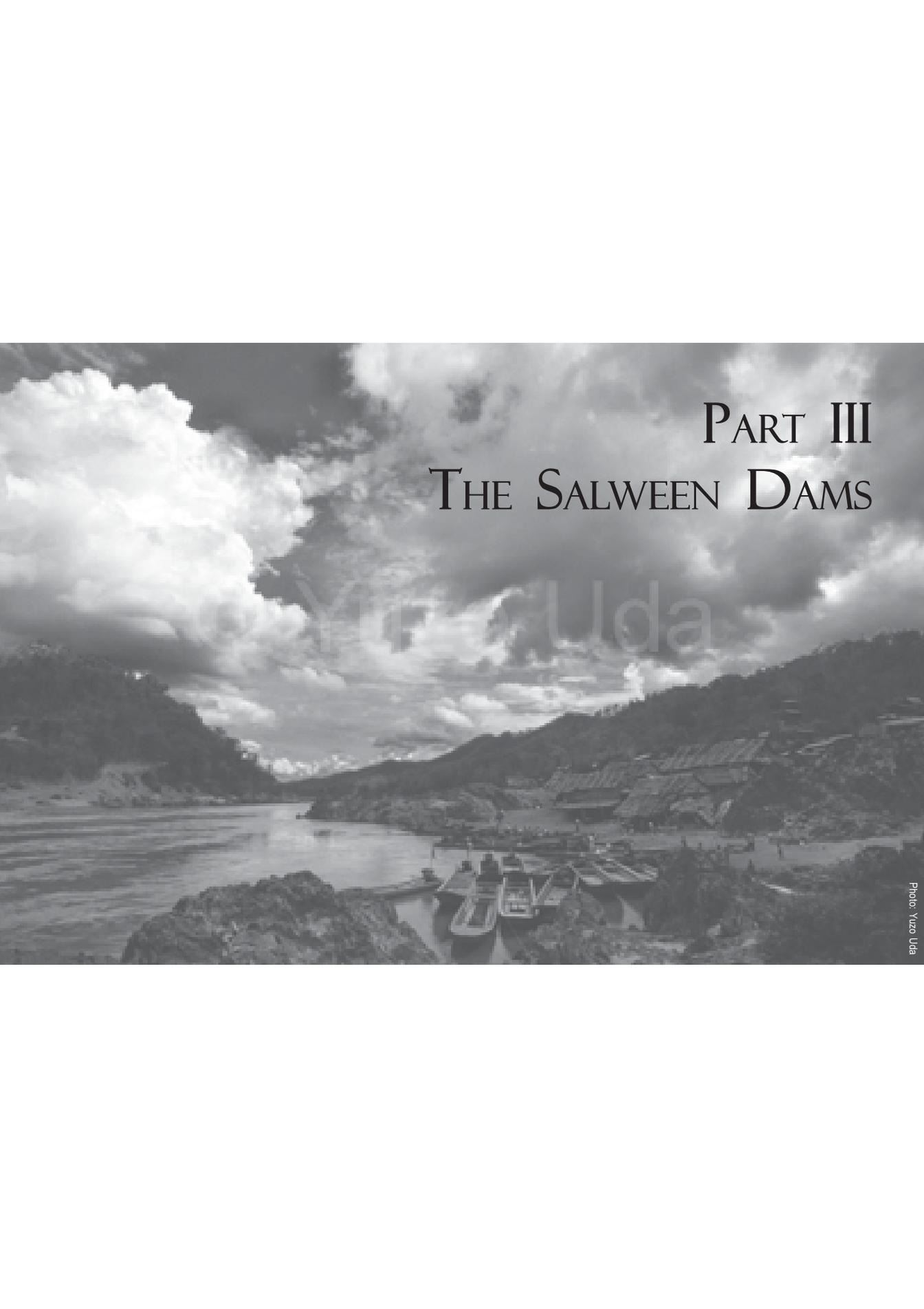
Relax at home at least for a while  
We invite you with sincere intention  
The answer a repeated shaking of your head  
As you pass by without resting

We wish to buy the goods produced in the east  
The fire that shines without burning  
But no matter if there is no chance to sell  
We're used to staying in the dark

Over the mountain, through the forests  
Your shoes sending out silvery rays in the sunlight  
Where do you plan to go for pilgrimage?  
Lawpita, Oh traveler

*This popular Burmese language song about Lawpita was composed around 1975 by Sai Kham Leik. The “shoes” refer to the pylons; the “silvery rays” to the transmission lines. The lines “pass by without resting”, or carry electricity to central Burma without “relaxing at home”, or providing any power to local areas.*



A black and white photograph of a river valley. In the foreground, several small boats are docked at a rocky shore. The river flows through the valley, leading to a dam in the distance. The sky is filled with large, dramatic clouds. The overall scene is a mix of natural beauty and human-made infrastructure.

PART III  
THE SALWEEN DAMS

Yuzo Uda



# THE SALWEEN DAMS

*“Salween became the symbol both of a great barrier and of the way to safety. The river was already reverting, in our minds, to what it had always been for our ancestors – a spirit, even a god, to be worshipped and propitiated.”<sup>86</sup>*

The military regime, with the help of its neighbors China and Thailand, is now turning its sights to the Salween River to develop more hydropower potential. Hungry for foreign income and control of the border areas, the regime is pushing ahead with agreements to build dams and sell the electricity to Thailand. The bitter lessons the Karenni have learned from the Lawpita hydropower project should be well considered before these new dams move forward. Already, similar patterns of broken promises, relocation, and abuse can be seen in the area of the proposed Salween dams.

Originating high on the Tibetan Plateau, the Salween River flows approximately 2,400 kilometers through Yunnan province of China, Shan, Karenni, and Karen states, and then empties into the Gulf of Martaban in Mon State. It is the longest free flowing river in Southeast Asia, running through areas of rich biodiversity.

Given the river’s importance to daily sustenance (see background section), it has taken on important cultural significance. Some Karenni people believe that diseases can be cured by taking a drink of the Salween’s water. During the annual *Kay Hto Bo* festival, elders bless the young by saying “*blar htoo boo hoo tyay khay*” or “may you grow as big as the Salween is long”. There are many such sayings in different villages.

The river has proven militarily strategic as well, serving as a natural barrier to regime offensives. It has been the place where Karenni people have found safety and sustenance during fighting. Therefore, any project which would allow Burma Army troops into the region would further the regime’s control over this strategic and contested area.

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<sup>86</sup> *From the Land of Green Ghosts*, Pascal Khoo Thwe, 2002, p. 195.

## THE PROJECTS

In addition to 13 dams planned by China upstream, the SPDC and the Thai government over the past few years have held several talks and signed several agreements in order to build a series of dams on the Salween. Most recently, the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the SPDC on December 9, 2005 in order to build four dams on the Salween River and one on the Tenasserim River. On the Salween, the dam sites are at Tasang, Weigyí, Hatgyí, and Dagwin.<sup>87</sup> Tasang is in Shan State while the other three are in Karen State. This most recent agreement specifically mentions the advancement of the project at Hatgyí.

Together, the dams have the capacity to produce an estimated 15-20,000 megawatts of power, or more than ten times the total capacity currently used by Burma. However, almost all of the power is intended for Thailand, which plans to increase its own capacity to 40,000 MW by 2015.<sup>88</sup> After the signing of the most recent MOU, Kraisri Kanasuta, president of EGAT, described the dam as a “win-win situation”, as “the Kingdom [Thailand] will get cheap electricity while Burma could earn much-needed income”. He said that the electricity would also be added to ASEAN’s power grid.<sup>89</sup> Mr. Kanasuta, and Viset Choopiban, the Thai Minister of Energy, who has also lauded a “win-win” situation,<sup>90</sup> seem to have no qualms about providing “much needed income” to a ruthless military regime.

Various governments (specifically Thailand and China), financial institutions (including promotion by the Asian Development Bank (ADB)<sup>91</sup>), and companies (so far EGAT and MDX Public Companies Limited of Thailand and Sino Hydro Corporation Limited of China) are all gearing up to have a stake in the projects. These actors, and any others that may participate in the project, are and will be working with a military junta and therefore complicit in any abuses or crimes it commits during the implementation of the projects.

Contrary to sections 58, 59, and 60 of the 1997 Thai Constitution, and the 1997 Official Information Act of Thailand, Thai authorities have withheld vital information on the dam plans and their expected impacts, and there has been no consultation with or participation of local stakeholders in the decision-making process. Thai civil society groups have been pushing their government to provide more information. Upstream, Chinese academics and environment groups successfully lobbied their government to reconsider its dam plans in 2003. People on the Burmese side of the river, however, have no such opportunity.

Several reports and articles have been written about the Salween from various perspectives. The Chinese have written about the dam plans upstream, the Shan about plans at Tasang, the Karen about militarization around the Weigyí and Dagwin sites, and the Thai about potential impacts on the Thai side of the river.<sup>92</sup> All of these references are important to understand the full scale of the

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<sup>87</sup> A dam at Ywathit in Karenni State has also been considered.

<sup>88</sup> [http://www.aseanenergy.org/energy\\_sector/electricity/myanmar/installed\\_capacity.htm](http://www.aseanenergy.org/energy_sector/electricity/myanmar/installed_capacity.htm)

<sup>89</sup> *Green group plans Salween dam plan*, The Nation, published on Dec 10, 2005.

<sup>90</sup> *Government to push Egat to invest in Burma dams project*, Bangkok Post website “Breaking News”, November 14, 2005.

<sup>91</sup> The most significant method of engagement, however, is done through the Greater Mekong Subregion economic cooperation program. The controversial Tasang project in Shan State is included in the ADB’s “Regional Indicative Master Plan on Power Interconnection in the Greater Mekong Subregion”. For more information see [www.adb.org](http://www.adb.org).

proposed projects. In this report, however, we will focus on the proposed Weigyi dam, as it will have the biggest impact on people in and from Karenni State. This focus, however, does not mean that the potential impacts we describe below will not be also felt should any of the proposed dams go ahead.

We would like to mention here that although there have been many articles and media attention paid to the Salween dam projects, the local residents along the Salween who will be those to suffer the impacts most, particularly Shan, Karen, and Karenni villagers and IDPs living in hiding alongside the river, have not been given information about the projects, let alone consulted as to how the projects would impact their lives.

## **Weigyi**

The proposed Weigyi dam site is located at a large whirlpool in the river in Papun district in Karen State, just across from Mae Hong Son province's Mae Sariang district in Thailand. It has a proposed height of 168 meters, a maximum height of water level (or m.a.s.l.) of 220 meters, and an estimated power capacity of between 4,540 and 5,600 MW.<sup>93</sup> Although the Weigyi dam will be built in Karen State, the vast majority of the reservoir it will create lies in Karenni State (see map). Weigyi will be at least ten times higher than Moby dam and flood many of the best lowland forests and agriculture lands in the state.

Papun District in Karen State has been the site of repeated military offensives and anti-insurgency campaigns by the regime's troops. Before 1992, there were only ten Burma Army garrisons in the district. Today there are fifty-four garrisons fortified with heavy artillery, including twelve along the Salween River bank. Out of 85 original villages in the area directly adjoining the planned dam sites of Weigyi and Dagwin, only a quarter remain. Most fled to Thailand, with fertile farmland lying fallow; however, 5,000 villagers remain hiding in the jungle, facing severe food shortages and health problems. Roads to the planned dam sites have been built using forced labor, and landmines have already been planted along the roads.<sup>94</sup>

KDRG estimates that the Weigyi dam will create a reservoir 640 square kilometers in surface area, or the size of the island of Singapore.<sup>95</sup> The proposed Tasang dam site upstream in Shan State is located at 200 meters, thereby potentially putting it under water if the Weigyi m.a.s.l is 220 meters as documented. The map on the following page is therefore calculated using the more conservative m.a.s.l. of 200 meters. At a water level height of 220 meters, the estimated flood area would increase from 640 to 860 square kilometers. In either calculation, any clearing done around the reservoir, water surges, and higher rainy season water levels are not taken into consideration. Thus the impacted area will most likely be greater than that depicted on the map.

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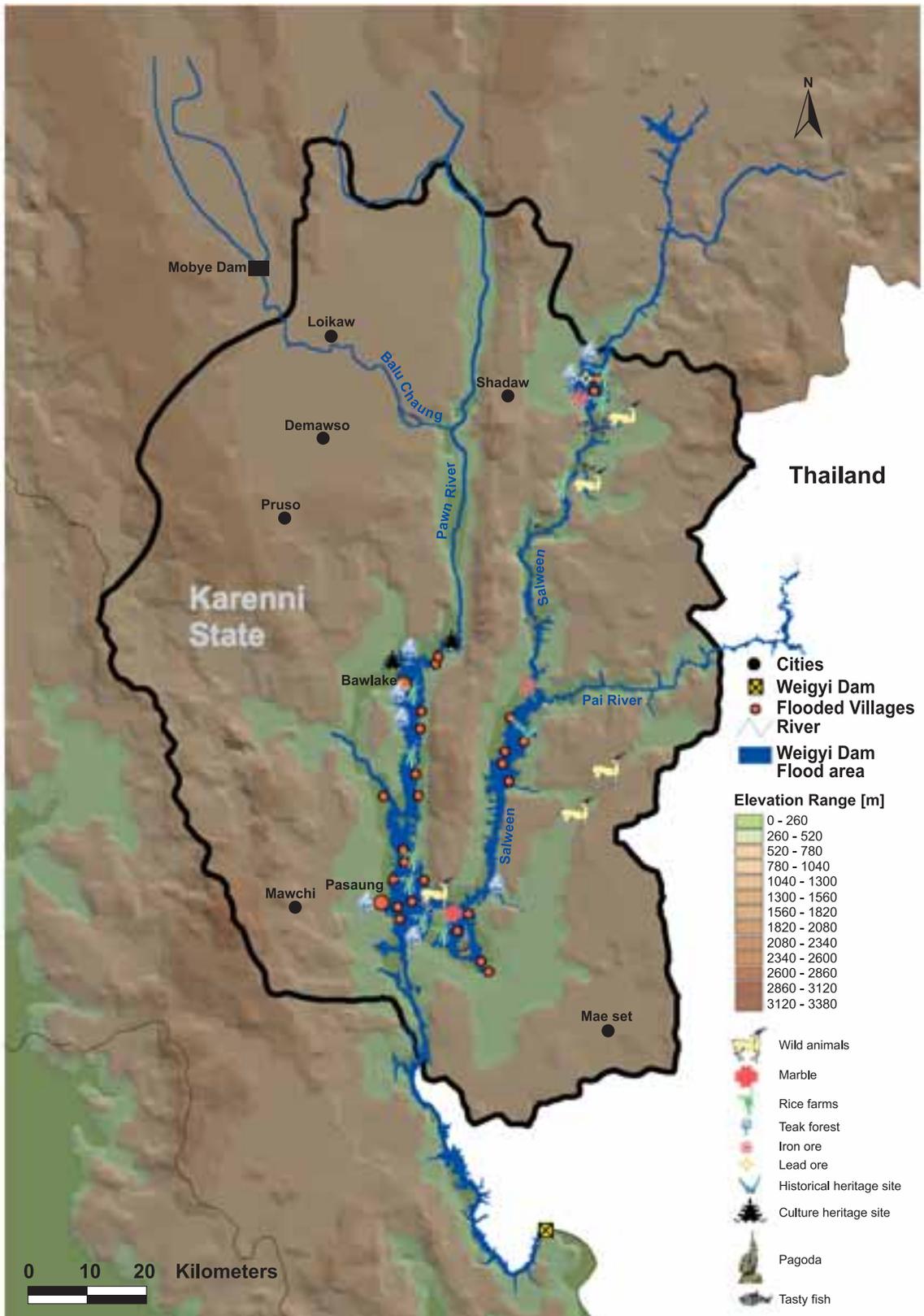
<sup>92</sup> For example, please see *Damming at Gunpoint, Burma Army Atrocities Pave the Way for Salween Dams in Karen State*, Karen Rivers Watch, 2004, *Tragedy of the Two Lands*, Southeast Asia Rivers Network, 2002, *Nujiang River Sentiment*, 2004, [www.nujiang.ngo.cn](http://www.nujiang.ngo.cn), and *The Salween Under Threat: Damming the Longest Free River in Southeast Asia*, Salween Watch, Southeast Asia Rivers Network, and Center for Social Development Studies, 2004.

<sup>93</sup> According to a preliminary study done by Electric Power Development Corporation in 1991, quoted in *Water and Dam Construction*, the height of the dam will be 168 meters. Documents from the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand also confirm that the proposed dam is 168 meters with the maximum water level of 220 meters. However, the power capacity has varied in different reports and articles.

<sup>94</sup> *Damming at Gunpoint*, Karen Rivers Watch, 2004, p. 1-2.

<sup>95</sup> Based on the maximum height of water level of 200 meters (see also methodology section).

## Expected Impact from Inundation by the Proposed Weigyi Dam



## THE HUMAN IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED WEIGYI DAM

The expected flood area of the Weigyi dam will impact four of Karenni State's seven townships, completely submerging 28 villages, including the entire towns of Pasaung and Bawlake (see map). Many additional villages in the flood area have been relocated over the years of civil conflict. Still, based on KDRG and Karenni Social Welfare Development Center field surveys, the current village population that will be directly impacted by the flood is conservatively estimated at 8,300. IDPs hiding in the flood zone are estimated at 13,500. Villagers that have been relocated and/or are hiding in Demawso Township and Ywathit that rely on paddy fields in the flood zone number 3,700. Refugees and migrants that are from the flood zone but have not been able to return number approximately 8,400. KDRG estimates that the flood zone will impact a total of 30,250 people. This includes villages that will be submerged, IDPs living in the flood zone, IDPs and villagers that rely on fields in the flood areas, and refugees and migrants who will not be able to return to their homelands.

## LIVELIHOOD IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED WEIGYI DAM

*"The streams, springs, and rivers which flow down from the high mountains through valleys to the Salween River are good grazing grounds for wild animals to dwell and most areas are good for hunting. It is a fertile area for agriculture; local people make gardens along the river bank. They grow beans, tobacco, and watermelons. The crop production is very successful because of the good soil on the river bank which is brought by the water during the rainy season."<sup>96</sup>*

### Farming

The valley that the Salween cuts through eastern Karenni State provides fertile lowland farm fields for the majority of people living there. Wet rice (that is more productive than upland rice) is the primary crop, with sesame, corn, peanuts, peas, and chili also cultivated for subsistence as well as trade. As most people depend on mountain creeks during the rainy season, usually only one seasonal crop is planted. However, vegetable gardens along the fertile river bank itself are extensive in the dry season and fruit can be harvested from various types of trees throughout the year. Bawlake Township in particular has well-established stands of mango and coconut trees and plum trees spread naturally in abundance; it therefore supplies coconut and plum juice to various townships. Mae Set Township is well-known for its high yields of paddy and sesame compared to other areas.



*Paddy farming in Pasaung Township Photo: KSWDC*

<sup>96</sup> KDRG *Trading along Salween River* Interview No. 7, June 6, 2005.

TABLE: ESTIMATED HUMAN IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED WEIGYI DAM

Flooded Villages			
Village	Township	HH	Population
Kehmapyu	Pasaung	120	600
Nammahuk	Pasaung	20	96
Nammaku	Pasaung	80	385
Pasaung	Pasaung	250	1,280
Namkit	Pasaung	40	200
Papu	Pasaung	17	80
Htoo Chaung Bridge	Pasaung	20	110
Kyaukpenyo	Mae Set	25	130
Sopa	Mae Set	110	520
Hwe Papuk	Mae Set	50	245
Pamaku	Mae Set	20	115
Nampinlin	Mae Set	30	142
Wang Au	Bawlake	50	160
Chi Kweh	Bawlake	25	115
Wan Chai	Bawlake	35	217
Ye Ni Pauk	Bawlake	50	250
Mong Htang	Bawlake	35	185
Bawlake	Bawlake	400	2,430
Haw Kham	Bawlake	25	150
Saw Lon	Bawlake	25	150
Sapauk	Bawlake	15	63
Wam pala (lower)	Bawlake	13	75
Wam pala (upper)	Bawlake	15	82
Saya	Bawlake	20	120
Hota	Bawlake	20	89
Sa Laung	Shadaw	39	187
Palonge	Shadaw	15	75
Nah Kyaing	Shadaw	13	76
Subtotal Flooded Villages		<b>1,577</b>	<b>8,327</b>
Affected IDPS		<b>n/a</b>	<b>13,526</b>
Rely on fields in flood zone		<b>n/a</b>	<b>3,698</b>
Affected Refugees		<b>n/a</b>	<b>4,400</b>
Affected Migrants		<b>n/a</b>	<b>4,000</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>30,253</b>

Due to Karenni State's mountainous terrain, there are few areas that are suitable for wet paddy production and lowland agriculture in general. Many of these areas are within the flood zone. Given the Lawpita experience, it is highly unlikely that any compensation will be offered for this devastation and it is not clear where, or if, residents will be able to find new farm lands.

### **Fishing**

Residents in all four of the affected townships and those from Datawma Gyi village tract of Demawso Township depend on fishing to provide protein to their diet and some rely on it to supplement their incomes. Virtually all the residents along the Pawn River also fish as dry and wet farming cannot fully address their subsistence.

Local residents use various means to catch fish and make use of their catch in many ways. As modern fishing means are out of reach, fishing gear consists mainly of hook and line, round loaded nets, and conical nets. They seek help from mountain and river spirits by offering a few candles with some food and drinks to the relevant spirits at *nat* shrines. Many people plant their seedlings along with some pieces of fish, believing that it strengthens the plants, resulting in a more plentiful yield and fuller grains. They sell their catch to surrounding villages or to such towns as Loikaw, Demawso and Pruso, or have it dried up for kitchen use. They save the money they earn to buy clothing, pay for their children's schooling, or for emergency needs. Some barter for other goods.

The Pawn River serves as the habitat of many species of valuable fish such as catfish, long-finned eel, spiny eel, featherback, carp, Hamilton's carp, fork-tailed catfish, and snakehead. These fish come up from the Salween to nest and hatch in the Pawn. There has been almost no research done on the number of fish species and habitats in the Pawn and Salween in Karenni State due to the unstable situation there. However, a recent study by Thai-Karen villagers on the Salween and its tributaries in Mae Hong Son province in Thailand found 70 different fish species.<sup>97</sup> The study also found 18 different ecological systems, including rapids, different fish habitats, and beaches, just on the stretch of the Salween that borders Thailand and Burma alone. Local villagers along the Pawn River in Karenni State describe a similar diversity. There are hundreds of small caves and specialized habitats for fish in the Pawn near Bawlake. This area will be flooded, filling in the caves and destroying unique habitats.

Many fish swim up from the Salween into smaller rivers and streams during the rainy season in order to lay eggs and nest. These streams are also important to frogs. According to local experience, many small streams and tributaries dried up and filled up with sedimentation along the Balu Chaung River after the Moby dam was built. If the same situation occurs with the Weigyi dam, migratory fish will find no place to lay eggs during the rainy season and some species may become endangered.

### **Hunting and Harvesting in the Forests**

Karenni people rely on the forests for a large part of their livelihood. The forests provide sufficient fuel and construction materials for homes, countless varieties of wild fruits, vegetables and mushrooms, and seasonally edible products for humans and animals, biomass for fertilizing lowland farms, non-timber forest products for income generation, animals for meat, and herbal medicines for health just to name a few. Before most of the township was relocated into military sites, local residents in Shadaw traded rattan, resin, honey, wax, stick lac, and thanaka (a natural sun screen), as

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<sup>97</sup> *Thai Baan Research at the Salween: Villagers' Research by the Thai-Karen Communities*, 2005, [www.searin.org](http://www.searin.org)



### FISHERIES DESTROYED

The transformation of the Salween and Pawn from fast flowing rivers with seasonal changes to large reservoirs will have negative impacts on fish migrations and spawning, and ultimately on fish populations and species diversity:

*Drastic alteration of the river's seasonal flow regime, radical alteration of a river's chemical characteristics, destruction of natural nutrient cycles, and the obstruction of fish migrations and prevention of fishes entering their seasonal habitats required for feeding and breeding, are but a few of the severe impacts of dams on rivers and their inhabitants....Most riverine fish species...adapted to seasonal flows, rapids, and deep pools...cannot adapt to the still-water lake-like conditions of a dam's reservoir.<sup>98</sup>*

well as manufactured medicinal herbal plants for tonic uses and for curing malaria.<sup>99</sup> The forests are an integral part of villagers' lives and livelihoods, and large swathes of forests will be flooded and destroyed by the reservoir (see below).

Most Karenni men go on a week-long hunting trip just before the rice harvest in order to have meat at the time of harvest. Usually they travel by boat down the river and up side streams in groups of about five. They bring fishing nets to get fish during the day; in the evenings they hunt frogs and wild animals. Of the larger animals, wild pigs and deer are commonly hunted. The group then preserves their catch: fish is made into paste and dried; meat is also dried or cured in salt. They then store everything in bamboo and divide it equally. Frogs are kept alive in cages and sold for income, as well as any surplus meat. During the rest of the year, most people are struggling with their farms and only hunt smaller animals nearby their paddy fields.

### Trading along the rivers

There are four main rivers navigable by motorized boats in Karenni: the Salween, Pawn, Balu Chaung, and Pai. The Salween is the most principal river used for trading. The people of the three countries through which the river flows have long had trading relations using wooden boats and log rafts. Particularly the people from China's Yunnan Province, the Shans, Was, Akhas, Lahus, Karennis, Karen, Thai-Karens, and Mons have used the river for traditional trading as well as business ventures until today. The majority of trade is small-scale and provides local farmers with a market for their products, especially in the absence of good roads.

The town of Pasaung is an important crossroads and trading center for Karenni people. It is the focal point of transportation to Thailand through Mae Set, to the central plain of Toungoo, to Shan

<sup>98</sup> *Food for the people: Natural fisheries of the Mekong River*, Dave Hubbel in *Watershed, People's Forum on Ecology*, Vol. 4 No. 3, June 1999, p. 34.

<sup>99</sup> BERG, *op.cit.* 3.

State via the Loikaw by-road, to Karen State and Shan State along the Salween, and to Thailand along the Pai River. The entire town, as well as Bawlake, another important center of economic activity, will be submerged under the reservoir.



*A monastery near Bawlake that will be inundated  
Photo: Karenni News Information Committee*

Mae Sam Laep, which lies in the Mae Sariang district of Mae Hong Son province in Thailand near the forthcoming Weigyi dam project, is a key center for trading cattle and goats, and local products such as onions, beans, sesame, dry chili and other dry goods from Burma, and commodities such as cooking oil, seasoning powder, household goods, clothing, medicines, and other consumer goods from Thailand. The Weigyi dam will cut off Mae Sam Lap from Karenni State, disrupting a generations-old trade route. Another trading center called Thakawhta on the Salween at the border of Karen and Karenni State, where local people trade many homemade candles, will also be submerged.

The valley along the Salween, where most of the sesame and chili is grown for trade, will also be submerged, unraveling the current local economic structure and leaving the future of local goods in question. New trade routes between Karenni State and Thailand will inevitably emerge, but it will be the small-scale gardeners, farmers, and small traders who will suffer a loss of livelihood in the meantime.

## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED WEIGYI DAM

### **Access to Social Welfare Services and Health Impacts**

Bawlake and Pasaung are relatively big towns in primarily rural-based Karenni State. Residents from the surrounding areas rely on these towns for vital services and markets. For example, residents of Mae Set Township must go to Pasaung town for high school or to visit a hospital. Pasaung, and the only road leading to it, will be flooded, destroying the already tenuous access to medical and educational services for those in Mae Set, not to mention those in Pasaung Township itself. Schools and medical clinics will be destroyed and no new infrastructure is mentioned in any current dam plans.

The health impacts of the Salween dams will further strain services in an already abysmal public health system (the WHO ranks Burma's health system second worst in the world, only slightly outperforming Sierra Leone) and cause resulting problems to spill over into Thailand. According to Dr. Withaya Huanok of Johns Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health:

*“In many areas, changes in water flow due to the construction of dams in malaria-endemic areas resulted in subsequent changes in vector biology, such as predominance of more competent mosquito vector species. This, coupled with migration, has resulted in increases in malaria transmission and/or type, such as shifts from vivax malaria to the far deadlier falciparum malaria. Similarly, dams and resultant flooding in some cases have resulted in increases in Wuchereria bancrofti infection, a parasite causing lymphatic filariasis (elephantiasis). This also has largely been due to the creation of favorable breeding conditions for appropriate mosquito vectors.”<sup>100</sup>*

Dr. Withaya concludes that *“disease prevention should be a consideration prior to planning of any project that may cause perturbations in the environment or may fuel demographic changes. The cost of preventing infectious diseases is much lower than that of controlling them once they have been loosened upon a population, and further research into these potential problems may yield higher returns than the very projects themselves.”<sup>101</sup>*



*A Karenni mobile medical team treats a woman in Shadaw Township Photo: Karenni Mobile Medical Team*

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<sup>100</sup> *Dams, Diseases, and Displacement: The Potential Public Health Costs of the Salween Dams*, Withaya Huanok, MPH, MD, 2006.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

## Historical and Cultural Sites

Several important Karenni cultural and historical sites will be submerged, including the historical capital of Bawlake, the cave of the white elephant (known as Kyauk Mauk Khone in Burmese and Law Ka Dya Leh in Karenni) on the Pai River,<sup>102</sup> and the routes that the defeated Japanese took on their retreat at the end of World War II.

### *Saw Lon*

Five successive chiefs ruled over Bawlake from 1750 until the time of the British. During the reign of Pha Ban at Bawlake (around 1800) a gifted villager named Phaw Phaw was summoned to establish a new area east of the Pawn River. Phaw Phaw erected two royal *haws*, or palaces, at Saw Lon village, which the Shans call *Sao Lon Haw Kham*, meaning the *golden residence of the great lord*. The son of Phaw Phaw succeeded his father in 1886, allied himself with the Burmese king and turned against the British. In 1889, the British colonists overran the region and destroyed the *haws*. However, to this day the historical remnants of the old *haws*, a bronze bell weighing 752 kg that was a gift from the Burmese King Mindon, and many stupas still stand. Since the historical city is deeply symbolic of the national aspirations of the Karenni people, there is particular concern for the disappearance of this historical heritage under the flood.<sup>103</sup>



*The royal grounds in Bawlake that will be submerged*

### *Site of Historical Karenni-Thai Friendship Pact*

Saya village on the Salween is the place where the eastern king of Karenni and the king of Chiang Mai signed a historic agreement of friendship in 1809. An oath taking ceremony, following the red Karen custom, took place. The ritual consisted of killing a carabao (buffalo), taking its blood and mixing it with liquor to create the 'liquid of truth'. The horns of carabao were divided; one was given to each king. The parties then made the following vow: "So long as the water of the Salween does not go dry, the horns of the buffalo do not straighten, and the white elephant cave does not sink, Muang Deng (Karenni) and Muang Chiang Mai will maintain the values of friendship".<sup>104</sup>

<sup>102</sup> KDRG Interview No. 14, 2005.

<sup>103</sup> *Kayan Tribe History*, Pe Maung Soe, 2001, p. 233-35.

<sup>104</sup> *Independence and Self-determination of the Karenni State*, KNPP Political Bureau, 1997.

## THE YINTALAI: A TRIBE THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION

Only approximately 1,000 people from the Yintalai<sup>105</sup> tribe that once served the king Pha Ban in Bawlake now remain. Their ancestral lands are in Pasaung and Bawlake townships, therefore the flood from Weigyi would completely submerge their sacred land, cultural heritage, livelihood, homes, and forests. As a people, they will proportionately suffer most from the impact of the Salween dams.

### *Beliefs and customs*

The Yintalai are a sub-group of the Kayah; their language is slightly different, and they have no written alphabet.<sup>106</sup> Most of the Yintalai profess Buddhism and at the same time practice animism. Every Yintalai house has a Buddhist altar and spirit shrine. The spirit shrine is round and built on long poles of wood or bamboo, with a hanging roof at the edges. The Yintalai pay special tribute to the *pi thu lu mo* spirit that they call to rest on the *Kay Hto Bo* post every year during the *E-Lu* festival.

As they are devoted to many traditional spirits, the Yintalai consult chicken bones and read the results by determining the nature and position of the holes and paying offerings to relevant spirits. This consultation is done to pay respects to spirits, to predict the future, when someone is sick, and on other occasions.

The Yintalai also believe that there are spirits guarding the mountains, jungles, and big trees. These spirits are powerful, hence when cultivating farm plots, offerings and appeals are made for plentiful crops and less damages.

When a mother dies, in order to part the child from the dead mother, they put a thread the measure of the child's height into the coffin as the substitute of the living child. Another custom is to smear pot soot on the forehead or fasten thread round the legs, hands, or necks of little children onto which 50 or 25-pya coins were suspended when going out at night, believing that it protected the children from evil elements and for health and longevity's sake. The rulers of old would have their coins and possessions, such as sword, lance and flintlock, buried along with them. The legs of livestock such as buffalo, cattle, pigs and fowl were deposited in the tiny pen set up next to the head on the grave mound. The meat was cooked and made for the folks who lent hands for burial, and eaten before the burial. An important traditional feast is the glutinous rice feast or *pwe sawt doung*, which celebrates successfully warding away evil spirits from their settlements. The feast lasts three days with music and dancing.

The Yintalai firmly believe that relevant traditional customs must be strictly observed, otherwise, severe calamities will definitely result.<sup>107</sup>

### *Costumes*

Men traditionally wear woven white loose shirts with short sleeves and white loose shorts covering above the knees. They wear long hair with a topknot and a white or pink turban around the head with its edge pointing up at the right hand side. They wear ear lobe plugs or earrings made of gold or silver.

Women wear a short-sleeved woven jacket like a shirt buttoned up in the front and adorned with red lining at the edges. Their sarong is designed to have a red-brown background color, over which yellow and green lines are woven across. They wear a topknot and cover their head with a head turban adorned with silver or ivory hairpins.



### *The taboos*

During the *E-Lu* festival, they keep particularly strict traditional customs, abstaining from eating snakeheads and ground lizards of all kinds at the time. The pillow cases of pregnant women are not to be stitched closed. The men, while sowing corn seeds specially saved for brewing *tyay ya* (rice wine) must not eat fried foods, deeming that the seeds sown would not grow otherwise. This rule is observed only when sowing corn seeds.

### *Livelihood*

The Yintalai are primarily devoted to farming, breeding livestock, and hunting for their livelihood; they occasionally turn to handicrafts. They settle in regions surrounded with rocks and boulders and as the soil is infertile, only subsistence cultivation is possible. As irrigation is impossible, they rely on rain water for their farms and practice shifting cultivation. As for handicrafts, the villagers dig out big logs together to make huge boats for the whole village to use. They fend for their living by selling products from the dry farms for extra income.

<sup>105</sup> Also formerly known as the Yintalaing or Yangtalaing.

<sup>106</sup> *Myanmar Ethnic People Traditions and Culture (Kayah)*, a publication of the BSPP, 1967.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED WEIGYI DAM

There have been no full-scale studies done of the forests along the Salween in Karenni State. It is certain, though, that all the remaining forests in the flood area, including important habitats for wild animals and birds, will be permanently destroyed by inundation. As mentioned in the background section, the entire reservoir area lies within an ecoregion of outstanding biodiversity. In their *Greater Mekong Subregion Atlas of the Environment*, the Asian Development Bank and United Nations Environment Programme note that “*even greater biological variety is expected when more of the ecoregion is surveyed.*” This potential will never be fully understood or realized once the forests lie under water.

In addition to the primary effect of destroying hundreds of square kilometers of forests, many secondary effects will also impact forests that do not lie in the flood zone itself. An estimated 25,500 people currently relying on the land and forests in the flood zone will be displaced, causing encroachment into remaining forests. While lowland areas can support a larger number of people on smaller areas of land, upland areas (those that will be left for settlement after the flood) are not as productive. Therefore, in order to sustain the same populations, more land than is currently under cultivation will be sought, land most probably in previously undisturbed forests. If history is a lesson, people will also seek safety deeper and deeper into forests, thus further disturbing a previous balance in the ecosystem.

Forests will likely be cut in order to build roads for dam infrastructure and to replace old roads and trading routes that will be flooded. These roads will enable, and most probably stimulate, logging in previously unreachable areas, particularly as Karenni State is home to some of the last stands of mature teak in the world.

In particular, flat land opposite Pasaung town on the east side of the Salween is a popular gathering area for various animals. Barking deer, wild cows and wild buffalo, deer, bears, wild pigs, and many other kinds of wild animals come down from the mountains to this flat land to find water and food during the dry season. This area will be submerged.

The reservoir will also flood deposits of emerald, antimony<sup>108</sup>, lead ore and aluminum in Shadaw Township. Just below Sopa village in Mae Set Township, marble has been found. There is iron ore near Ywa Thit (mentioned in EGAT documents and promoted by the Myanmar Electric Power Enterprise as another possible dam site) in Bawlake Township.

In his book *Silenced Rivers*, Patrick McCully writes about the ecological impacts of dams:

*“The permanent inundation of forest, wetlands and wildlife is perhaps the most obvious ecological effect of a dam... Yet it is not only the amount of land lost which is important, but also its quality: river and floodplain habitats are some of the world’s most diverse ecosystems. Plants and animals which are closely adapted to valley bottom habitats can often not survive along the edge of a reservoir... As well as destroying habitat, reservoirs can also cut off migratory routes across the valley and along the river. Because it isolates populations, this ecosystem fragmentation also leads to risks of inbreeding from a smaller genetic pool.”<sup>109</sup>*

<sup>108</sup> BERG, *op.cit.* 3.

<sup>109</sup> *Silenced Rivers: The Ecology and Politics of Large Dams*, Patrick McCully, 2001, p.32.

# PART IV

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS





# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## CONCLUSION

The ruling military regime in Burma is seeking foreign income to fund its continued grip on power. Building dams on the Salween provides a double benefit: the electricity generated can be sold for much needed revenue, while securing the dam sites will enable increased military control in still-contested ethnic areas. Both of these benefits for the regime, however, spell only misery and further destruction of an already ravaged homeland for the Karenni. The reservoir that will be created by the Weigyi dam will submerge fertile farmland, bio-diverse forests and cultural sites, destroying fisheries and disrupting trade and transportation routes, not to mention permanently displacing an estimated 30,000 people.

Once again, Karenni people will not benefit from so-called development but instead will suffer in order to send electricity to faraway users, in this case in Thailand. The SPDC, and its Thai and Chinese partners in the Salween dams project, have not received the consent of local Karenni people, let alone informed them what they intend to do. From the Karenni perspective, “development” in the Salween basin will continue as it has for nearly half a century, *and only get worse*. It will proceed without consent, without benefit, without protection of rich natural resources, and without the security of basic human rights.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

*To the Thai government:*

- Immediately stop all plans to jointly develop hydropower with the Burma’s military regime, including the building of dams along the Salween River, as such projects implemented by the military regime will inevitably lead to further severe human rights abuses and bring no benefits to local people, as experienced by the Karenni for nearly 50 years with the Lawpita hydropower project.

- Stop any form of support to Burma's military regime, including investment, loans and development aid, which subsidizes and provides political legitimacy to the dictatorship, enabling it to continue oppressing the peoples of Burma.
- Allow all refugees from Burma access to protection and humanitarian aid in Thailand, and step up efforts to promote democratic reform and national reconciliation in Burma so that genuine peace can be achieved and the refugees can return home.

*To international investors, and bilateral and multilateral development agencies:*

- Do not provide any funds to the Salween dam projects, as they will not only displace and cause further human rights abuses against ethnic villagers already ravaged by half a century of civil war, but will also subsidize the military regime and enable it to continue its grip on power.

*To the SPDC:*

- To stop all plans to build dams on the Salween River, including the Weigyi Dam that will flood Karenni heritage and homelands, including the entire lands of the ethnic Yintalai and cause irreversible damage to a uniquely diverse eco-region.
- To immediately stop military operations, end all human rights abuses, including forced relocation of villages, displacement of and attacks on civilians, extrajudicial killing, sexual violence, forced labor and burning of houses and property, and withdraw all troops from Karenni State and other ethnic areas of Burma.
- To immediately begin tripartite dialogue with the National League for Democracy and the ethnic nationalities, so that genuine peace and democracy can be established in Burma.



### **Dammed by Burma's Generals** **The Karenni Experience with Hydropower Development - From Lawpita to the Salween**

The first large-scale hydropower development project in Burma harnessed the Balu Chuang River in Karenni State at Lawpita Falls. Nearly fifty years after the inception of the project, displaced villagers left without promised electricity and irrigation tell the story of what development is like under Burma's military regime. Increased militarization to secure the hydropower plants led to forced relocations, the planting of thousands of landmines, forced labor, and sexual violence, while dams flooded farmland and forests and disrupted fish habitats.

Burma's generals – together with neighboring Thai and Chinese interests – are now eager to dam the Salween, Southeast Asia's longest free flowing river. One of the proposed dams will flood nearly six percent of the entire Karenni State, including scarce lowland farm fields, biodiverse and unstudied forests, and cultural heritage sites. Twenty eight villages and towns will be completely submerged, preventing refugees from the world's longest civil war from ever returning to their homelands. An entire tribe of people – the Yintalai, who now number 1,000 – will have to flee the rising waters and forever lose their sacred lands.

As Pascal Khoo Thwe, the author of *From the Land of Green Ghosts*, says in his foreword, “*To those who have the power and those who care – read this report.... Don't kill our sacred Mother of Rivers, the Salween...*”