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Update by the Shan Human Rights Foundation

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Hundreds of villagers forced to build new Burma Army tactical command base east of Lashio near Salween River

Since October 2019, Burma Army troops have forced hundreds of residents of eleven villages in Mong Gaed tract, Lashio township, northeast Shan State, to provide wood and bamboo, and build a new Tactical Operations Command base, for which villagers' fields and woodlands have also been confiscated.

One person from each of the approximately 500 households in the tract has been forced to spend up to six days a month cutting wood and bamboo, carrying it to the base, and building spiked fences around the base.

In December, they were also forced to spend four days clearing land and building new barracks for the pro-government Man Pang militia, near the new Burma Army base.

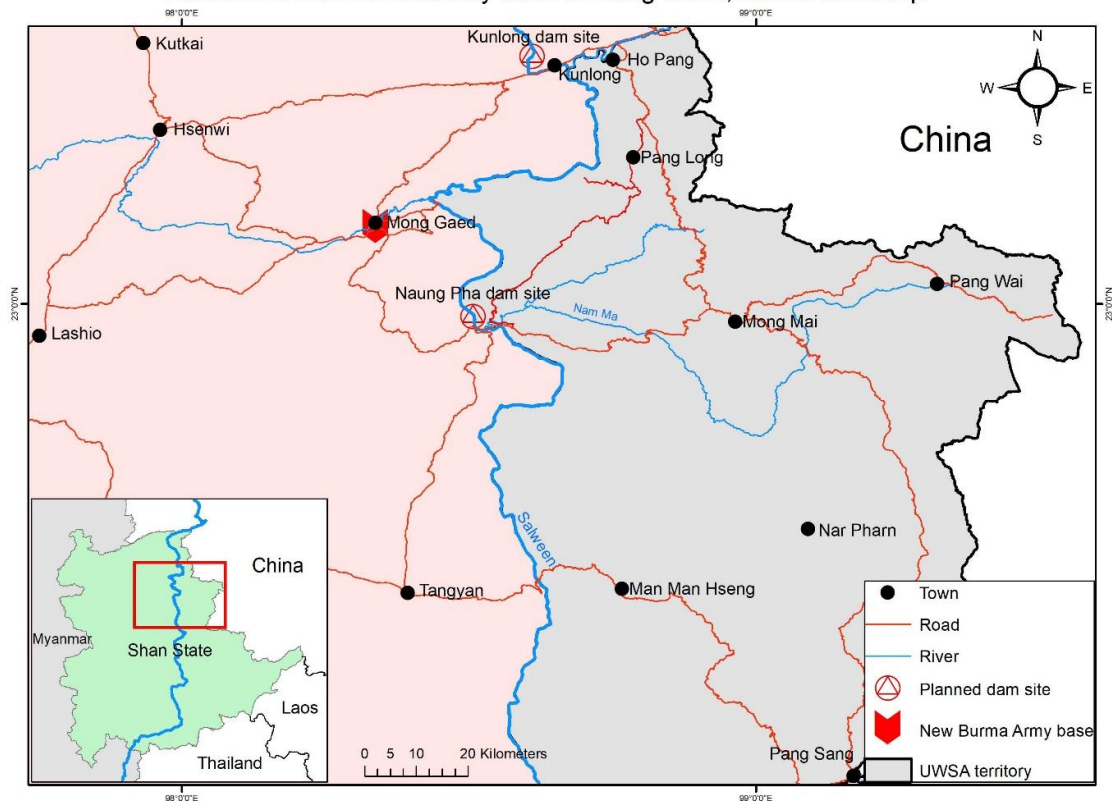
The new base lies in the mountains about 60 kilometers east of Lashio town, near the Salween River, and houses 300-400 troops under Military Operations Command 10, rotating between Light Infantry Battalions (LIB) 362, 365 and 366, and sometimes Infantry Divisions (ID) 11 and 88 .

The new base appears intended to strengthen defences against the Brotherhood Alliance -- which passed through this area to carry out attacks around Lashio in August 2019 -- and protect two main trading routes to the China border: the Muse-Lashio-Mandalay road, and the Hsenwi-Kunlong-Chinshwehaw road.

By helping secure the mountainous western bank of the Upper Salween, the base will also enable the construction of the Kunlong and Naung Pha dams on the Salween, which are planned to export power to China and strongly resisted by local communities.

The Burma Army's ongoing large-scale use of forced labor renders meaningless the Burmese government's alleged zero-tolerance of this abuse, for which it has recently set up a National Complaints Mechanism.

Location of new Burma Army base in Mong Gaed, Lashio township



Details of forced labor

On October 2019, the Burma Army began building a new Tactical Operations Command base south of Mong Gaed, about 300 meters west of an smaller existing camp. The new Burma Army base was formerly occupied by the Man Pang pro-government militia, who relocated to a new base about 500 meters to the west.

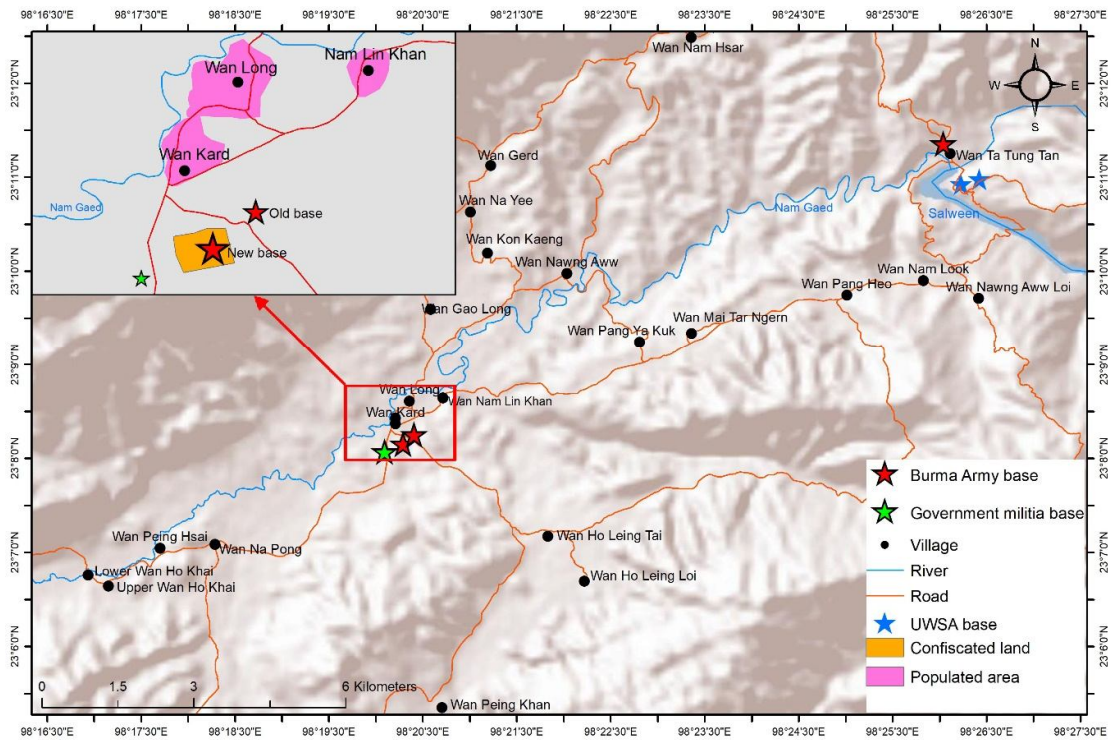
In the first week of October, troops from Burma Army LIB 366 ordered the Mong Gaed tract headman to organize all eleven villages in the tract to provide wooden logs to reinforce bunkers around the new base. Each village had to provide 25 logs (minimum 5 inches in diameter, and at least 7 feet long). The headman of each village had to organize one member of each household to go and cut down the logs, and then carry them to the base, either on foot, or in vehicles.

About 500 people were forced to work, including 80 villagers from Wan Na Pong; 75 from Wan Kard; 78 from Wan Long; 80 from Wan Nawng Aww; 15 from Wan Peing Khan; 35 from Wan Ho Leing; 35 from Wan Nam Lin Khan; 28 from Wan Na Yee; 30 from Wan Peing Hsai; 30 from Wan Ho Khai; 10 from Wan Koon Kieng.



New Burma Army base in Mong Gaed

Villages used for forced labour by Burma Army in Mong Gaed



On November 4, each village was ordered to provide wood or bamboo poles (2.5 meters long) to build fences around the new base. Large villages (of over 50 households) had to provide 25 poles, and smaller villages (of under 50 households) 15 poles. Again, one member of each household in each village had to go and cut down bamboo and wood, and bring it to the headman's house. When they had collected the required amount, the villagers had to carry the wood to the base, either on foot or by truck. Then they were forced to work erecting spiked fences around the new base: one inner fence and one outer fence. Each village was allocated a specific length of fencing which they had to complete. For most villages, it took three days of work to finish the fencing. They had to go to work at 8 am in the morning and finish at about 4 pm. They were not provided with any food or water.



Villagers forced to fence Burma Army base

Starting from November 9, armed Burma Army troops were posted on the main road north and south of the new base. One group of soldiers was posted at the entrance to Mong Gaed, near the market, and one group was posted about 500 meters along the road leading south from the village. The soldiers stopped all vehicles passing along the road, each day from 6 am to 4 pm. They questioned the drivers, and searched their vehicles. This has continued until the present.

On November 29, all villages were again ordered to provide the same amounts of wood and bamboo as on November 4, and again about 500 villagers had to spend three days continuing to build fences around the new base.

On December 10, the Burma Army troops informed the tract headman that all fields and woodland around the base would be confiscated. Villagers were ordered to go and harvest all their crops, after which they were forbidden from accessing the area. Villagers had formerly grown peanuts, corn and vegetables in this area, and used the woodlands to collect firewood and other forest products. Villagers did not dare resist the order.

On December 14, all villages were again ordered to provide wood and bamboo, and to build fences for the base. Again it took about 500 villagers three days to carry out the work.

On December 22, the Man Pang government militia ordered villagers to clear land for and build their new camp west of the Burma Army's new base. Each village had to provide the same amounts of wood and bamboo poles as demanded by the Burma Army, then one person per household had to take the poles to the Man Pang camp. They were ordered to clear the land for two days, and then they had to build barracks using the wood and bamboo they had provided. They were not given any food or water by the militia.

On December 23, there was fighting between the Burma Army and the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army in the hills west of Mong Gaed. At 1 pm, on December 27, a mortar shell was fired from the new Burma Army base, causing fear among the villagers, who heard it exploding north of the village.

On February 6, this year, each village was again ordered to provide 15 to 25 wooden poles for the new Burma Army base. They were just ordered to carry them to the base, but not to do any building.

On February 9, each village was again ordered to provide 15 to 25 wooden poles, and deliver them to the new Burma Army base.

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