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Update by the Shan Human Rights Foundation

October 19, 2020

Indiscriminate shelling, torture, looting by Burma Army during large-scale offensive against RCSS/SSA in southern Kyaukme

Since September 30, 2020, the Burma Army has been carrying out a large-scale ground and air offensive against the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) in southern Kyaukme township, committing flagrant abuses against civilians, including indiscriminate shelling, torture, looting and destruction of property.

Over 1,000 Burma Army troops, from Kyaukme-based Military Operations Command #1 and mobile combat divisions ID 101 and ID 99, backed by helicopter gunships, have been sweeping through villages south of Kyaukme town, firing indiscriminately, and causing over 4,500 villagers to flee from their homes.

Burma Army abuses documented in detail by SHRF include: indiscriminate shelling in Khang Khai village, seriously injuring a 45-year-old villager; looting and destruction of property in Khang Khai and Nam Mark Hin villages; arbitrary arrest of two villagers in Nam Mark Hin village; torture and disappearance of a 19-year-old villager from Na Phung village.

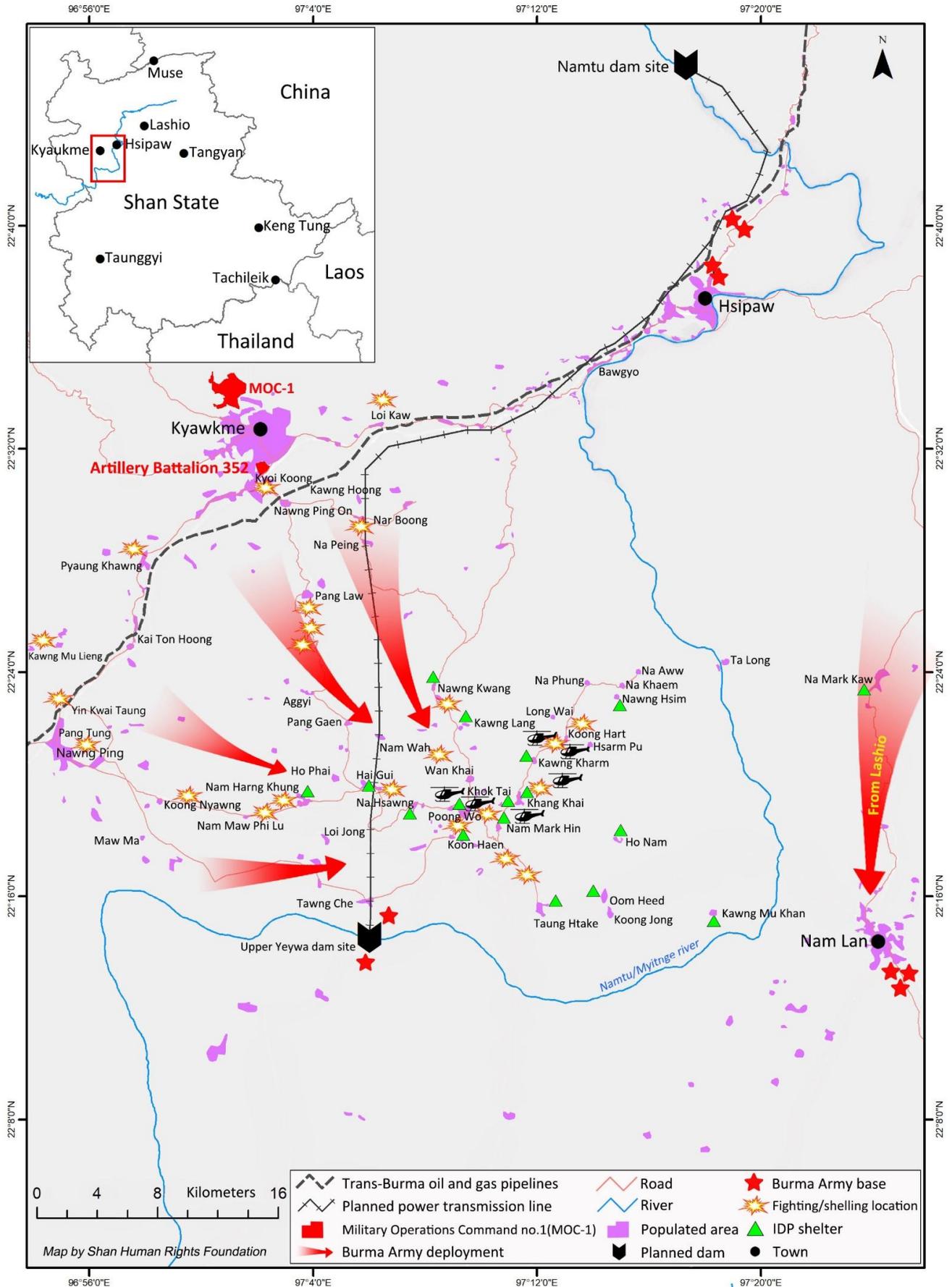
The Burma Army is continuing to build up troops in the area, and forbidding villagers from returning home. The IDPs, crowded together in village temples, are facing food shortages, and fear exposure to Covid-19.

The offensive is in violation of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), to which RCSS/SSA is a signatory, as well as the Burma Army's recently extended unilateral ceasefire, declared to deal with the Covid-19 crisis. It is the second offensive launched by the Burma Army against the RCSS/SSA in southern Kyaukme this year. An earlier unprovoked offensive in June, involving extrajudicial killing and torture, led to a mass protest on July 10 by over 15,000 Kyaukme villagers.

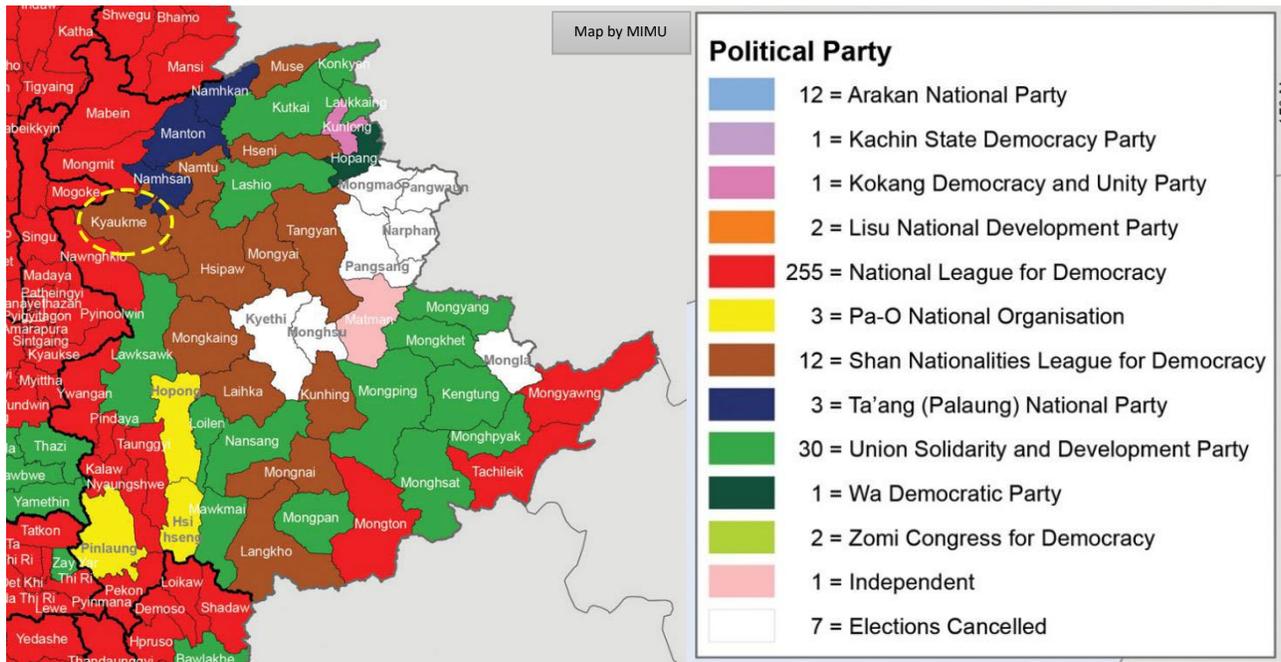
The Burma Army alleges that fighting broke out because RCSS/SSA is operating outside boundaries agreed upon under the NCA, but the RCSS/SSA has pointed out that no such boundaries have been agreed upon.

On October 10, the Burma Army True News Information Team defended the operation by saying its troops were providing "security" along the Mandalay-Lashio highway. This highlights a likely main reason for the offensive: to secure new infrastructure development in Kyaukme, including expansion of the China Myanmar Economic Corridor, and construction of new power transmission lines between planned dams along the Namtu/Myitnge river. Surveying for the 230 kV power lines, stretching 75 kms from the Upper Yeywa dam site to the Namtu dam site in Hsipaw, has recently started.

Burma Army offensive against RCSS/SSA in Kyaukme, Sept 30-Oct 10, 2020



Locals also suspect that the Burma Army has deliberately sparked fighting to disrupt voting in the November 8 general election in Kyaukme, where the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) won all seats in the 2015 election (in the Upper and Lower Houses, as well as the State Parliament). On October 16, 2020, the Union Election Commission announced that voting would be cancelled in 12 village tracts in Kyaukme, including four tracts in southern Kyaukme: Nawng Hsim, Pang Law, Hai Gui and Kher Nim.



2015 Lower House election results

SHRF strongly condemns this unprovoked offensive, and demands that the Burma Army immediately withdraw troops from villages in southern Kyaukme, so that villagers can return home. We call urgently for international pressure to bring an end to Burma Army offensives and human rights violations throughout the country, so that inclusive negotiations towards a new federal constitution can begin.

We also reiterate our demands to foreign companies to pull out from the Upper Yeywa hydropower dam project, to avoid complicity in atrocities by Burma Army troops securing the site.

Details of human rights violations by the Burma Army

Indiscriminate shelling causing civilian injury; looting and destruction of property in Khang Khai village

On October 3, 2020, about 50 Burma Army troops entered Khang Khai village, where most villagers had taken shelter in the village temple, due to the fighting around the area. The troops stationed themselves around the village, and some camped in the temple.

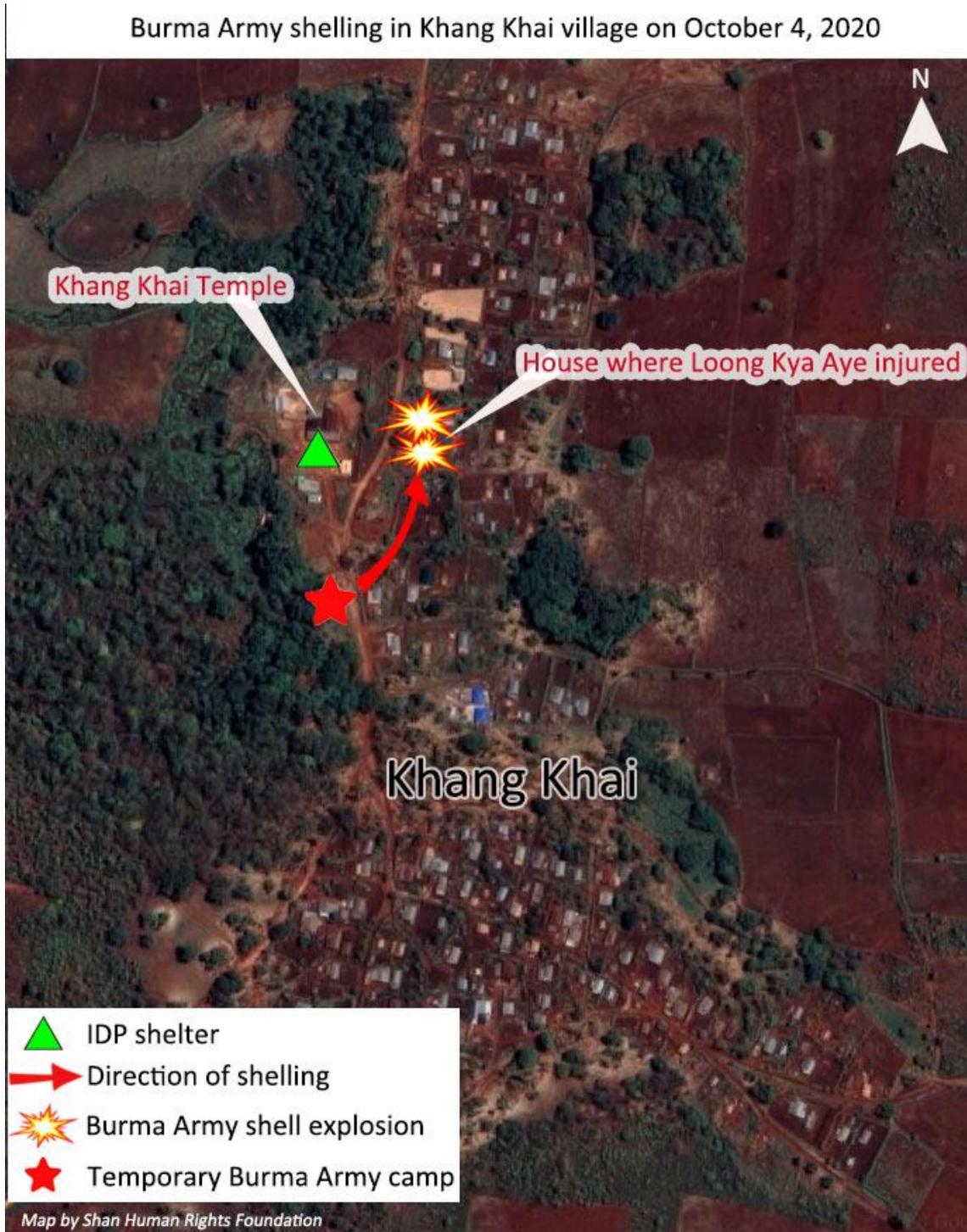
A local teacher called Nang Kham Noom and her husband



Loong Kya Aye, injured by Burma Army shelling

had decided to stay in their house, with a hired worker, Loong Kya Aye, age 45, (son of Loong Maung Herng and Ba Sue) as they wanted to guard their possessions.

On October 4, at 6 pm, Burma Army troops stationed on a hillock south of the temple, fired shells directly into the village. Two shells landed on Nang Kham Noom's house, damaging the building, and injuring Loong Kya Aye, who was hit by shrapnel in the left ear, hand, waist and leg. Another shell landed in the same compound, damaging a tractor.



Nang Kham Noom did not dare leave the house. She phoned to the abbot at the Khang Khai temple, begging him to come and help. He said the Burma Army did not allow him to leave the temple, but he would talk to them. After a while, three elderly villagers came with four Burma Army soldiers to carry Loong Kya Aye to the temple, where his wounds were washed. He was taken by truck to Kyaukme hospital at 9 pm for emergency treatment.

The Burma Army soldiers removed the tail sections of the two mortar shells which had hit the house, and told villagers that they were not Burma Army shells, but belonged to RCSS/SSA. However, the fragments were clearly identifiable as 60 mm shells, commonly used by the Burma Army.

The Burma Army troops did not allow Nang Kham Noom back into her house after the shelling. Villagers in the temple saw the troops looting food and possessions from her house, and then breaking down the entire building. The troops also ransacked other houses, destroying food supplies.



Property ransacked in Khang Khai

According to one villager: “At night, they entered the village again searching and eating up all the food. They emptied out (remaining) rice and poured out cooking oil. They put our mattresses outside in the middle of the village. They searched and ransacked all the houses in the village.”

After pictures and news of Loong Kya Aye’s injuries were spread on social media, the Burma Army True News Information Team released a statement on October 6, blaming the RCSS/SSA for the shelling.

The statement read: “In the evening of October 4, close to Khang Khai village, a Tatmadaw column securing the area fought with a group of RCSS/SSA, who were operating outside their designated area. In the fighting, about 3,000 meters east of Khang Khai village, the RCSS/SSA fired shells which landed and exploded in Khang Khai village, injuring U Kya Aye, who was staying in the house of Daw Kham Noom.”

Two villagers arrested and tied up; looting and destruction of property in Nam Mark Hin village

On October 4, Burma Army troops shot dead a buffalo in Nam Mark Hin village. When villagers saw this, they tried to round up their buffalo and take them to their houses for protection. Two male villagers, Loong Khen and Loong Yong, were in the process of rounding up their buffalo, when some Burma Army soldiers staying in the village pointed their guns at them, and ordered them to come to a house where their commander was staying in the west of the village.

One of the arrested villagers described what happened: “We told them that we were villagers from this village, and just civilians. We begged them not to do anything to us. But they tied our hands behind our back, and tied us to a house pole under a house.”

Luckily, the two villagers managed to untie themselves that night and escape under cover of darkness to a nearby village.

The same villager said: “The Burmese soldiers also shot dead two pigs and searched all the houses in the village. They took all the money they found. They also opened children’s school bags, and seeing English lesson books, they asked us: ‘Who came and taught you English?’ We told them that our abbot at Poong Wo temple taught our children. Then they said, ‘If so, the abbot of Poong Wo is an insurgent abbot, right?’ Burmese soldiers have dug holes around houses in our village. They are staying in our house compounds and under our houses, and shooting from there.”

Another woman who fled from Nam Mark Hin said: “We worry about our livestock. Our village is becoming a Burmese troop base. When they started fighting, they stayed at the edge of our mother’s house fence, then moved to her cow-stall, and shot from there. Then they moved to under our house and shot from there. They shoot from every house they stay in. That’s why we were afraid and fled. We couldn’t call anyone to accompany us. We just rushed to flee.”

There are about 35 households in Nam Mark Hin. All the inhabitants fled on October 4, except for seven villagers (five men and two women), who were forbidden by the Burma Army troops from leaving the village. They were forced to stay in one of the houses, guarded by Burma Army troops, until October 11, when 2 SNLD MPs, Sai Tun Win and Lung Sai Ku, and members of the Nam Khong welfare group arrived at Nam Mark Hin, and negotiated with the local Burma Army commander for their release. They



Bunker dug by Burma Army in Nam Mark Hin

then brought them to Taung Htake temple, to shelter with other IDPs.

Since October 11, Nam Mark Hin has remained deserted. The Burma Army has looted and destroyed property in all the houses, slashing rice sacks, dismantling bamboo floors, and throwing bedding outside to be spoiled in the rain. Villagers tried to return to Nam Mark Hin on October 12, but were blocked by the Burma Army patrolling in the area.



Bedding strewn outside by Burma Army in Nam Mark Hin

Villager disappears after being tortured on suspicion of being Shan soldier

On October 9, at about 4:30 pm, Sai Maung Oo, a 19-year-old farmer from Na Phung village, left his house to tend his farmland. On the way, he encountered Burma Army soldiers north of his village. The soldiers interrogated him, and searched his bag and pockets. They checked his mobile phone, and, finding a picture of him wearing camouflaged clothes, accused him of being a Shan soldier. He replied that he was not a soldier, and had just put on the clothes to take the photo.

Burmese soldiers said they did not believe him, and started kicking his face and body. They took him back to his house, which they searched and ransacked. They also looted food from the house. They then took Sai Maung Oo with them to Nawng Hsim village, where they stayed for one night. Local villagers

and monks went to the soldiers to try and persuade them to release Sai Maung Oo, saying he was just an ordinary villager and not a soldier. The Burma Army troops replied they would not harm him and had just taken him to guide them.

On October 10 at 7 am, the Burma Army soldiers took him back to Na Phung village, and searched his house again. Then they took him with them to Hsarm Pu village for one night. No one has seen him since.

On October 14, the Burma Army troops informed the Na Phung village headman that Sai Maung Oo had run away from them. Locals fear he may have been killed.

Sai Maung Oo is the son of Loong Pancitta and Pa Hla Sey of Na Phung village.

Burma Army offensive to secure new power transmission lines?

Planned power transmission lines linking the Upper Yeywa dam-site to the planned Namtu dam in Hsipaw run across southern Kyaukme township, precisely where the current Burma Army offensive is taking place.

An impact assessment for these 230 kiloVolt lines has recently begun by Resource and Environment Myanmar Company Ltd (REM), commissioned by Natural Current Energy Hydropwer Co. Ltd. (NCEH), the project holder of the Namtu dam.

The 210 megawatt Namtu dam project is being planned on the Namtu/Myitnge river, about 25 kilometers north of Hsipaw town. Impact assessments are still being conducted for the Namtu dam, but since 2017, NCEH has been clearing protected forest, building roads to the dam site, and constructing rows of concrete workers' housing. Namtu MP Nang Kham Aye has raised questions in the Naypyidaw parliament about this issue, but no action has been taken against NCEH.

Local communities are strongly opposed to the Namtu dam. The dam's reservoir will stretch over 15 kilometers upstream, and will submerge the Shan village of Li Lu, with 47 households and 212 people. The villagers do not want to move. Thousands of Hsipaw villagers living downstream of the planned Namtu dam fear reduced water flow, unpredictable river fluctuations, and blocking of fertile sediment.

For further detail on the Namtu dam, see <https://shanhumanrights.org/eng/index.php/387-unauthorized-construction-at-namtu-hsipaw-dam-site-highlights-urgent-need-for-dam-moratorium-in-burma>

IDPs sheltering at local temples as of October 13, 2020

No.	Villages of origin	Sheltering	Population
1	Wan Khang Khai	Hai Gui Temple	125
2	N/A	Poong Wo Temple	718
3	Wan Nam Mark Hin, Wan Khang Khai	Loi Tei (Taung Htake) Temple	646
4	Wan Khang Khai	Khang Khai Temple	74

5	Wan Na Khaem, Wan Na Aww, Wan Nawng Hsim, Wan Na Phung	Nawng Hsim Temple	452
6	Wan Nam Mark Hin, Wan Koon Haen, Wan Peing Ton, Wan Harng Nawng, Wan Taw Ler, Wan Koong Nyaung	Koon Hean Temple	397
7	Wan Na Hsawng	Na Hsawng Temple	170
8	Wan Ho Nam	Ho Nam Temple	386
9	Wan Ho Nam	Kawng Kharm Temple	400
10	N/A	Kawng Lang Temple	286
11	N/A	Nawng Kwang Temple	95
12	N/A	Kawng Mu Khan Temple	250
13	N/A	Oom Heed Temple	430
14	Talong	Na Mark Kaw	100
Total			4,529



IDPs sheltering at Khang Khai temple

Timeline of Burma Army offensive against RCSS/SSA in southern Kyaukme township (Sept 30-Oct 10, 2020)

Burma Army battalions deployed:

<i>Elite infantry divisions</i>		
1	ID 99	
2	ID 101	

All battalions under Kyaukme-based Military Operations Command #1:		
1	IB 234	(Hsipaw)
2	IB 243	(Nam Lan)
3	LIB 17	(Nawngkhio)
4	LIB 501	(Kyaukme)
5	LIB 502	(Kyaukme)
6	LIB 503	(Hsipaw)
7	LIB 504	(Nawngkhio)
8	LIB 505	(Nam Lan)
9	LIB 506	(Nam Lan)
10	Artillery Battalion 352	(Kyaukme)

Sept 29, 2020	
Burma Army announced extension of unilateral ceasefire from end of September to end of October 2020	
Sept 30, 2020	
7 am	About 100 Burma Army soldiers from Kyaukme were deployed to Na Peing village tract (about 8 kms southeast of Kyaukme town) along two different routes: one group came via Kawng Hoong village, and another came via Nawng Ping On. They began one-sidedly firing guns into the jungle around the area.
12:15 pm	The Burma Army troops fired weapons, including 60 mm shells, at the RCSS/SSA near Na Poong village, Na Peing tract.
Oct 1, 2020	
8:30	
8:30 am	Burma Army troops forced a villager called Sai Nadiya from Pang Law to transport them in his small truck from Pang Law to Nam Phart village.
1 pm	Fighting broke out with RCSS/SSA at Pang Law village (10 kms south of Kyaukme town)
Oct 2, 2020	
9 am	Burma Army started shooting one-sidedly at Loi Lem, west of Wan Khai, about 25 kms south of Kyaukme town. About 70 soldiers from ID 101 indiscriminately shot into nearby Nam Wah village, causing Nam Wah villagers to flee and seek refuge in Hai Gui temple.

Oct 3, 2020	
4 am onward	About 300 Burma Army troops from ID 101, LIB 115 and IB 136 gathered in Poong Wo village, and at 6 am started fighting with RCSS/SSA east of Poong Wo village, about 30 kms south of Kyaukme town. It was reported that 4 Burma Army soldiers were killed, and many wounded. The BA troops then hid in villagers' corn farms near Poong Wo. The Burma Army troops stationed at Poong Wo came and fetched the wounded soldiers back to their temporary base in Poong Wo. More Burma Army troops reinforcements arrived from Maw Ma (in the west) to Poong Wo. IDPs fled to Kharng Kai village.
Oct 4, 2020	
8:30 am	Fighting between Khang Khai and Nam Mark Hin villages.
11 am – 3 pm	Fighting east of Poong Wo. Burma Army soldiers searched through all houses in Khang Khai and Nam Mark Hin. Two male villagers in Nam Mark Hin were tied up and interrogated before escaping that night. Seven Nam Mark Hin villagers (5 men and 2 women) who had stayed to tend their animals, were forced to stay in the village with the Burma Army troops until Oct 11, when two SNLD MPs, Sai Tun Win and Lung Sai Ku, and members of the Nam Khong welfare group visited the village and escorted them out.
12 pm	A Burma Army helicopter flew over the fighting area.
3:30 pm	Fighting east of Poong Wo. Many Burma Army soldiers were wounded, and forced villagers to give them five trucks to carry their troops back to their base. The Burma Army troops asked for blood donations from villagers (blood group A and B).
6 pm	Burma Army soldiers stationed themselves around Khang Khai village, in corn farms, in the village temple. Some troops on a hillock south of Khang Khai temple shot and shelled into the village. Two shells landed on the house of Nang Kham Noom (a local teacher), injuring 45-year-old Lung Kya Aye, a hired worker. Another shell landed in Nang Kham Noom's compound, damaging her tractor. Two small trucks of Burma Army troop reinforcements arrived in Poong Wo from Maw Ma village tract in the west.
9 pm	The Burma Army one-sidedly shelled near Mark Lang village, Pyaung Khawng tract.
Oct 5, 2020	
6–7 pm	Burma Army troops opened fire on RCSS/SSA around Loi Khaw village, about 7 kms east of Kyaukme town.
Oct 6, 2020	
Burma Army reinforcements were brought in from neighbouring townships of Hsipaw and Nawng Khio.	
10 am	Burma Army troops attacked RCSS/SSA around Kawng Mu Lieng village, Pang Daeng village tract.
11 am	Fighting broke out in the area of Nawng Ping village and Yin Kwai Taung. More IDPs fled to Poong Wo.
2–5 pm	Burma Army attacked the RCSS/SSA at Khang Khai, Nam Mark Hin, and Koon Haen villages.
10 pm	Indiscriminate shooting by Burma Army all evening east of Poong Wo; bullets landed east of Poong Wo temple.
11 pm – 2 am	Burma Army troops from LIB 136, LIB 501 and ID 101 attacked RCSS/SSA at the shrine near Nam Mark Hin village.
Oct 7, 2020	
5:10 am	The Burma Army launched an attack against the RCSS/SSA at Nam Mark Hin village.

10 am	Burma Army soldiers from Artillery Battalion 352 based in Kyaukme town shot in the direction of Kyoï Kong, on the southern edge of Kyaukme town. Burma Army troops also shot one-sidedly at Shrine Hill, Pyaung Khawng village, Pyaung Khawng tract, causing fear among local villagers.
12 pm	Burma Army attacked RCSS/SSA near Nam Mark Hin.
12:30 - 1:30 pm	Three Burma Army helicopters came to unload military supplies at a hill east of Pong Wo, Khang Khai and Nam Mark Hin. They flew from a northwest direction, unloaded the rations and flew back. The helicopters were from Lashio. At the same time 200 Burma Army troops from ID 99 headed in the direction of Tawng Che.
1 pm	Two trucks of Burma Army troop reinforcements and weapons arrived from Lashio at Nam Lan, in Hsipaw township.
2 pm	Two Burma Army helicopters gunships flew above Koong Hart village (8 km northeast of Poong Woh), Nawng Hsim village tract, searching for RCSS/SSA troops and shooting from the sky. This caused villagers from Koong Hart, Kawng Kharm, Long Wai and Koong Joang in Nawng Hsim tract to flee their homes. Shells hit the houses of Lung Parn Hsar and Lung Oattama in Koong Hart, destroying their roofs. A villager called Lung Jarm Sar, aged 45, was hit in the finger by shell shrapnel. The helicopters also sent troops and supplies and took back wounded soldiers.
4 pm	Burma Army troops one-sidedly shot and shelled into the jungle around Poong Woh temple.
5:15 pm	4 trucks of Burma Army troop reinforcements travelled from Tawng Che to Poong Wo.
Oct 8, 2020	
8 am	Fighting at Nam Maw Phi Lu, Loi Jong tract. IDPs fled to Nam Harnng Khung temple, Hai Gui tract.
11:40 am	Burma Army launched attacks near Nam Harnng Khung.
12:30 pm	Fighting between Burma Army and RCSS/SSA between Hai Gui and Na Sawng.
9 pm	The Burma Army one-sidedly shelled near Mark Lang village, Pyaung Khawng tract.
Oct 9, 2020	
12:15 pm	Fighting between Burma Army and RCSS/SSA around Loi Tei (Taung Htake).
4:30 pm	Sai Maung Oo, age 19, a villager from Na Phueng was arrested and tortured by Burma Army, and has since disappeared.
7 pm	Burma Army troops (from Artillery Battalion 352) deployed to Kyoï Koong village fired 60 mm shells indiscriminately into Kyoï Koong village. A shell landed in Kyoï Koong village, damaging houses, and U Tin Maung Win's go-down. A Kyoï Koong villager, Nang Mawn Jing, was hit by shrapnel in her head and leg. She was taken to Kyaukme hospital for treatment. Villagers said there were no Shan troops in the village when shelling happened.
Oct 10, 2020	
Early morning	Burma Army troops fired one-sidedly from a hill near Poong Wo.
12:25 pm	2 Burma Army helicopters landed at the Poong Wo football ground, and villagers saw unloading of troops and ammunition. Two other helicopters flew above, giving security, but didn't land.

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