



The Burmese government must learn from the dam disaster in Laos

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Burma Rivers Network is greatly saddened by the dam collapse in Laos and calls urgently on the Burmese government to check the stability of existing large dams and stop construction of any new ones to prevent a similar disaster in Burma.

On July 23, heavy rainfall caused the collapse of the Xepian-Xe Nam Noy dam in Attapeu province, southeast Laos, which was under construction. It is estimated that 300 people are missing, and over 6,000 people have lost their homes.

The dam, a joint Thai, South Korean and Laotian venture, was started in 2013 and due for completion next year. 90% of the 410 megawatts of power to be produced by the one billion dollar dam were to be exported to Thailand.

There are 26 large hydropower dams in Burma, and a further fifty large dams are being planned, mainly for export of power to neighbouring countries. Local communities have long opposed these dams, due to the high social and environmental costs, and the fact they are mostly located in war zones. They are also greatly fearful of dam breakage, due to earthquakes or flash floods – which have become increasingly common due to widespread deforestation and climate change.

Now the dam breakage in Laos has realized their worst fears.

“The dam disaster in Laos must serve as a wake-up call for the Burmese government,” said BRN coordinator Mi Ah Chai. “They must immediately ensure stability of all existing dams and suspend construction of any new ones.”

BRN has been calling for a moratorium on all large dams in Burma until there is an end to the conflict and devolution of power under a federal democracy.

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