

PETROLEUM IN THAILAND 2002

1. VILLAGERS VOW TO FIGHT THAI-MALAYSIAN PIPELINE

BANGKOK - A long-overdue Thai-Malaysian gas pipeline project is set to be hit by fresh environmental protests despite an attempt by the Thai government to soothe opposition by rerouting it. Environmentalists and residents of fishing communities in the southern town of Chana, on the route of the 366-km (230-mile) pipeline, told Reuters last week they would block any attempt to construct the line.

"Villagers are on round-the-clock security alert and we will not allow any outsiders to get within a two kilometre radius from our villages," said protest leader Suriya Sakkariya.

"This project not only affects our community, but it hurts the entire country and we will continue to fight on."

After a previous route was greeted with protests, the government of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra announced last Friday the onshore part of the pipeline would be moved five km (3.13 miles) in order to avoid environmental objections.

The Petroleum Authority of Thailand (PTT) and Malaysia's Petronas are joint operators of the proposed gas pipeline project, worth 30 billion baht (\$698.8 million).

The pipeline will be laid from the Thai-Malaysian Joint Development Area (JDA) natural gas project in the Gulf of Thailand to the southern Thai province of Songkhla, and then on to Kedah state in northern Malaysia.

Construction of the pipeline and a gas separation plant was due to begin early in 2001 but has been awaiting environmental approval and has been delayed by fierce opposition from environmentalists and villagers in Songkhla.

Prommin Lertsuridej, a personal secretary to Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, told reporters last week opposition had subsided significantly after the government changed the route.

"The government has told the PTT to work closely with villagers in the area to hear their opinions in order to avoid opposition to the scheme," Prommin said. But villagers were unconvinced.

"We know the government is sending a PR team to persuade villagers in the area to agree with the project, but we will not allow them to build the pipeline here," said

Kittipop Suthisawang, a leader of another anti-pipeline group in Chana. Kittipop said the town is a major breeder of Javanese turtledoves.

He said environmental experts warn the scheme could threaten the breeding cycle of 200,000 doves, jeopardizing a business worth a billion baht a year to the village. Years of delays have prompted Malaysia to threaten to go it alone with the project.

Source: RESISTANCE OILWATCH NETWORK BULLETIN Number 30 – July 2002

2. THAI-MALAYSIAN GAS PIPELINE: THREE-DAY RALLY MARKS RENEWED DEMAND FOR DUMPING OF PROJECT

Opponents of the Thai-Malaysian gas pipeline perform a protest dance on a beach in Songkhla yesterday, the first day of their three-day rally [against the project](http://www.bangkokpost.com/News/03Sep2002_news06.html). [Locals joined by Pak Moon dam protesters](http://www.bangkokpost.com/News/03Sep2002_news06.html) http://www.bangkokpost.com/News/03Sep2002_news06.html Kultida Samabuddhi Songkhla Around 2,000 villagers affected by state projects yesterday launched a three-day demonstration at Lan Hoy Siab beach in Songkhla's Chana district to demand the Thai-Malaysia gas pipeline project be scrapped. "The government is destroying the livelihood of Chana villagers just as they have done to Pak Moon villagers," said Sompong Wiangchan, 50, an opponent of Pak Moon dam in Ubon Ratchathani province in the Northeast. Mrs Sompong said the rally supported a five-year struggle against the pipeline project by Chana people. She conceded, however, that it might not change Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's mind about the project, because Mr Thaksin had shown he had no regard for the public's opinion. Mr Thaksin on May 10 approved the 41-billion-baht gas pipeline and gas separation plant, a joint venture between PTT Plc and Malaysia's Petronas, on a condition that the pipeline be moved 5km from its original site. The PM's approval came after the project's environmental impact assessment study had been rejected eight times. Mrs Sompong warned opponents to avoid violence in their struggle.

"The experience of Pak Moon dam villagers shows that violence is ineffective", she said. Prakob Lamsoh, 60, a Chana resident who lives near the proposed pipeline route, said villagers no longer trusted Mr Thaksin, whom they thought was biased in favour of the developers. Opponents are worried about industrial pollution. They also said Thailand was at a disadvantage under the joint-venture contract with Malaysia. Chana villagers said Mr Thaksin, on a visit to the site early this year, promised he would not go ahead with the project if it caused trouble to local people. Mr Prakob said opponents declined to meet Mr Thaksin during his visit to Songkhla last Friday because there was no point. A villager, who declined to be named, said some people supported the pipeline project, but preferred to keep a low profile for fear of being shunned by their neighbours. "Many villagers believe the project would create jobs", he said. The joint venture will exploit gas reserves in the so-called Joint Development Area (JDA) which lies in the Gulf of Thailand

where Thailand and Malaysia meet. National oil companies from both countries have set up the Trans Thai-Malaysia Company to build a pipeline to bring the gas ashore in southern Thailand. The pipeline was originally due to go into operation this year.

Source: RESISTANCE OILWATCH NETWORK BULLETIN Number 33 – Octobre 2002

3. THAI-MALAYSIAN GAS PIPELINE: PIPELINE PROTESTERS FLY THE RED FLAG

The flags marking the proposed site of the Thai-Malaysian gas pipeline in Songkhla were green during Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's January visit. Yesterday the flags were still there, only this time they were red. Local residents said this was a message to the premier signalling: "We will fight the pipeline with all our means." About 1,000 of the project's opponents yesterday kicked off a three-day gathering in Songkhla's Chana district. Travelling by bus, van and truck, they came from across the country, carrying supplies. Many of them face problems of unpopular government projects in their hometowns. The atmosphere was friendly at Larn Hoi Siab Beach, where the gathering is being held and where the proposed pipeline will come ashore. Young villagers guarded the area and there was no police. No alcohol was allowed, leader Banchong Nasae said.

Famous singer Surachai Chanthimathorn, or Ngaa Caravan, showed his support for the gathering by throwing a concert on the beach after a forum organised by Songkhla academics. The project's opponents also organized Southern-style fund raising activities called Liang Namchar (donate money and have tea). The opposition groups have scheduled a series of activities for the event, including a protest at the city hall and the Malaysian Consulate. Meanwhile in Bangkok, academics, senators and the National Human Rights Commission agreed to work together to pressure the government to stop the project to prevent the possibility of violence. The National Human Rights Commission will today organise a special meeting to seek a ruling from the Constitution Court on whether the government's decision to proceed with the pipeline project violated the Constitution. "We will submit it through the Parliament Inspector channel," commissioner Wasan Panich said. Industry Minister Suriya Juengrungrangkit again this week insisted the government would not change its policy regarding the project.

Source: RESISTANCE OILWATCH NETWORK BULLETIN Number 33 – Octobre 2002