

# CHINA CLEARS NEW DAMS ON BRAHMAPUTRA

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - China

China's media reported in November that State-owned hydropower company POWERCHINA had signed "a strategic cooperation agreement" with the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) government to "implement hydropower exploitation in the downstream of the Yarlung Zangbo River".

In 2015 China operationalised its first hydropower project at Zangmu in Tibet, while three other dams at Dagu, Jiexu and Jiacha are being developed, all on the upper and middle reaches of the river. While POWERCHINA is not the first hydropower company to push for dams downstream and previous plans did not pass technical feasibility studies because of concerns over the environmental impact, the inclusion of the projects in the draft FYP suggests a high-level sanction has been given.

Yan Zhiyong, POWERCHINA's chairman, told a conference of the China Society for Hydropower Engineering last year "there is no parallel in history" to the plans and the downstream reaches of the river offered "a historic opportunity for the Chinese hydropower industry". Mr. Yan did not mention the location of the planned project but spoke about the particular potential offered at the "Great Bend" of the Brahmaputra and at the Yarlung Zangbo Grand Canyon in Medog county, where the river falls over a 2,000 metre-drop and turns sharply to flow across the border into Arunachal Pradesh.

India has expressed concerns to China over the four planned dams on the upper and middle reaches, though Indian officials have said the dams are not likely to greatly impact the quantity of the Brahmaputra's flows in India because they are only storing water for power generation, and the Brahmaputra is not entirely dependent on upstream flows with an estimated 35% of its basin in India. Dams on the lower reaches and at the Great Bend would, however, raise fresh concerns because of the location across the border from Arunachal Pradesh and the potential impact downstream.

Mr. Yan said the 50-km section at the Great Bend alone offered the potential of 70 million kWh "which equals more than three Three Gorges power stations" and "will play a significant role in realising China's goal of reaching a carbon emissions peak before 2030 and carbon neutrality in 2060", a target mentioned by Premier Li Keqiang on Friday at the opening of the NPC and also highlighted in the draft outline.

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