

China Commences Mega-Dam Construction on Brahmaputra River in Tibet, Raising Regional Concerns



China has officially commenced construction of a massive hydropower project on the Brahmaputra River, also known as the Yarlung Tsangpo in Tibet, a move poised to significantly alter regional water dynamics. The groundbreaking ceremony, attended by Chinese Premier Li Qiang, took place on Saturday, July 19, 2025, in Nyingchi City. This ambitious undertaking, estimated to cost around \$167 billion, is designed to be the largest hydropower project globally, surpassing even the Three Gorges Dam in generating capacity.

The project, which involves the construction of five hydroelectric plants, aims to make a significant contribution to China's carbon neutrality targets and promote economic development in the Tibet region. According to China's official

Xinhua news agency, the electricity generated will primarily be transmitted to other regions for consumption while also meeting local power needs within Tibet.

However, the initiation of this mega-dam has immediately triggered considerable apprehension in downstream nations, particularly India and Bangladesh, which heavily rely on the Brahmaputra's waters for agriculture and livelihoods. Critics express concerns over potential alterations to the river's flow, which could lead to reduced water availability during lean seasons or exacerbate flooding during monsoons. India's Ministry of External Affairs previously urged

China to "ensure that activities in upstream areas do not harm the interests of the downstream states of the Brahmaputra."

Pema Khandu, Chief Minister of India's Arunachal Pradesh state, bordering Tibet, has vocalized strong concerns, describing the project as a "ticking water bomb" that threatens an "existential threat" to local tribes and livelihoods. He highlighted China's non-participation in international water-sharing treaties as a compounding factor. While Beijing has asserted that the dam will not cause a "negative impact" downstream, the scale of the project, located in a seismically active and ecologically sensitive region, continues to fuel anxieties. The potential for the dam to impact sediment flow, crucial for the Brahmaputra delta, has also been flagged by environmental experts.

As construction proceeds on this monumental project, the focus will remain on the long-term implications for transboundary water management and regional stability. The absence of a formal water-sharing agreement among the riparian states underscores the diplomatic challenges ahead as nations navigate the complex interplay of development, energy needs, and environmental stewardship in this critical region.