

Contestation over the Himalayan water: China's Damming of Yarlung Tsangpo and its Implications

The Chinese National's Peoples Congress approved the development of the South West hydropower project in its 14th Five-year plan drafted during the fifth plenum of the 19th Central Committee. By accelerating the construction of a dam on the lower reaches of the Yarlung Tsangpo river, raised severe concerns for the lower riparian states, including India and Bangladesh. The river originates from Tibet as the Yarlung Tsangpo enters India as the Brahmaputra and finally reaches Bangladesh as Jamuna. The Tibetan Plateau, also known as the [Third Pole](#), is the storage of the largest freshwater outside the Arctic's, serving China's populated water scared North and a strategic position for China. China holds a significant privilege as an upper riparian state and how it uses its water resources. The Recent clashes on the Sino Indian border put a hold on the diplomatic relations between countries, furthering the delay in solving the river water mechanism between countries, including Bangladesh.

Non Traditional security issues have come into prominence in the present era with changing nature of threats and security. Military power no longer remains the only rationale for determining safety with the rise of globalization and changing global realities. In his book "People, States and Fear", Barry Buzan emphasized the need to expand the focus from traditional security concepts to non-traditional issues like the environment, terrorist attacks that transect national borders. Non-traditional security requires cooperation both at the international and regional levels because it affects governmental institutions and civilians. The concerns of overbuilding of dams shift the focus from land-related dispute to over sharing of water. Water security has become a mainstream issue, and India, the middle riparian state, faces a threat from China and does not simultaneously upset Bangladesh. Bangladesh faces the highest risk of water scarcity if poorly managed by the upper riparian state. India is connected to its NorthEast through a 22km chicken's neck, and the region faces natural calamities which includes flood every year. Bangladesh also faces the problem of flood and soil erosion that increases tension overusing limited resources, and China's ambitious plans to construct hydroelectric power projects might bring immeasurable damage to the region. India also fears China's aim of converting the river water for serving its domestic purposes. Brahma Chellany, a geostrategist, calls China's move of constructing dams as water hegemony after Li Ling, a former PLA officer in the 2005 book "Tibet Water will save China", suggested that China should divert the Yarlung/ Brahmaputra river to the Yellow river to use it for its internal purpose. The water concerns have long-lasting environmental impacts that can cause severe detrimental effects on the Tibetan Plateau, India, and Bangladesh.

China is not a party to the United Nations Watercourse Convention but instead deals with issues in a bilateral process. China also did not participate in the World Commission of dams that provides countries with guidelines while constructing dams. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) between India and China on hydrological information in Yarlung Tsangpo/ Brahmaputra was signed in 2002 and was renewed in 2008. Another MOU was signed between China and Bangladesh on hydrological information in the year 2008. In the year 2002, China agreed to provide India with data on the Brahmaputra river. During Hu Jintao's visit in 2006, an agreement was reached to set up an expert level group to discuss information related to hydrological data. In recent years, China has withheld providing information. Chinese concerns include the Indian territory of Arunachal Pradesh which China claims to be a part of Southern Tibet. Contrary to India China relations, Beijing and Dhaka have shared a good relationship in recent years. In a summit in 2010, both China and Bangladesh have cooperated in information sharing, flood control, disaster management.

China is the largest populated country globally, with China occupying a favourable geographical position as many of the international rivers originate from the Tibetan plateau. The Yarlung/ Brahmaputra river originates Jemayangzong glacier and is situated in a complex topography making it the world's third-largest river in terms of its discharge. The annual mean temperature has increased in the region. The dams could produce three times more than the Three Gorges Dam, which led to the relocation of around 1.4 million people in China. The US Congress recently passed the [Tibetan Policy and Support act](#) that introduces provisions for protecting the water resources and environment in the Tibetan plateau. Chinese sees this as an interference in the internal matters of China. China's program of open up the West and developing the West economically lies in building hydropower dams. As of 2014, the data released by China's Ministry of Water Resources, the government has spent \$4.87 billion on water resources in the Tibetan region. The populated North has only 13.8% of the freshwater, and the Tibetan region serves water scarcity. Xi Jinping idea of building a well off society by 2035 includes an environmental water governance model that fits the population. But studies have shown the Tibetan Plateau is experiencing alarming environmental signs China's five-year plan 2011- 2015 focused on hydropower projects by approving dams on the Tibetan river. Chinese media have always portrayed that building dams on the river aim to improve its western parts and meet the local needs. The construction of the Zangmu Dam is said to have played an essential role in Tibet's power supply. However, it does not serve the environment-friendly approach as espoused by President Xi Jinping in his idea of well off society. [Global Times](#), in its report, mentioned Yan Zhiyong, Chairman of the Power Construction Corp of China, calling the hydropower project meaningful for the environment, natural security, living standard, energy and international cooperation.

The use of river water has become a point of contestation among the countries in recent years. Both India and China are suspicious of each other's intentions on the river. Bangladesh and India have concerns over sharing of river water. India being a democratic country, requires the approval of different shareholders, including state governments, on river-related issues. None of the countries signs the United Nations Water Course Convention that delays cooperation among countries, requiring immediate solution. However, [Information disclosure](#) is one way for countries to cooperate over water management among conflicting countries, reinforcing trust among the countries. China should resume sharing information on the Brahmaputra river. The Indian government needs to cooperate with Bangladesh and solve its bilateral water-related issues. The Three countries are also a part of the Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar(BCIM) initiative which can pave the way for cooperation among the states. Beijing also needs to reassure New Delhi about its non-threatening aims and impacts of building dams on the river and resume water flow information, especially during monsoon. Bangladesh being the lower riparian state, vouches for a multilateral framework in river management. The three countries should conduct scientific studies and continue dialogue on the management and navigation of water resources. Meaningful cooperation among the countries should be reached that will only strive on consensus among the states regardless of big or small states and transparency.