

SIANG UPPER MULTIPURPOSE PROJECT: GEOGRAPHY

NEWS: Rights groups back anti-dam protests in Arunachal Pradesh

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

Protests have erupted in Arunachal Pradesh against the proposed 11,000 MW Siang Upper Multipurpose Project over fears of displacement and ecological harm, despite its strategic role in countering China's upstream hydropower plans. The project impacts the Siang River and indigenous Adi tribes who depend on the region's fragile ecosystem.

Context: Protests in Arunachal Pradesh over Siang Upper Multipurpose Project

- Local protests have erupted in the **Upper Siang district** of Arunachal Pradesh against the proposed **11,000 MW Siang Upper Multipurpose Hydropower Project** by NHPC.
- The opposition stems from concerns over **large-scale displacement** and **environmental degradation** in the ecologically and culturally sensitive region.

Siang Upper Multipurpose Project: Key Facts

- **Project Capacity:** 11,000 MW – one of India's largest planned hydropower projects.
- **Location:** Upper Siang district, Arunachal Pradesh.
- **River Involved:** Siang River (the Indian name of the Yarlung Tsangpo or Dihang).
- **Purpose:**
 - To act as a **strategic countermeasure** to China's planned **60,000 MW hydropower project** on the Yarlung Tsangpo in Tibet.
 - To ensure **year-round natural water flow** and provide **flood control** in the event of sudden upstream releases by China.
 - To contribute to India's energy security and **clean energy goals**.

Concerns Raised by Locals and Environmentalists

- **Displacement Risk:**
 - An estimated **1 lakh people** in the Upper Siang district could be displaced.
 - These include **indigenous tribal communities**, such as the **Adi tribe**, with deep cultural and ecological ties to the land.
- **Environmental Impact:**
 - Disruption to the **Siang River ecosystem** due to construction and submergence.
 - Threat to **biodiversity, forests, and traditional livelihoods** in the region.
 - Risk of altering **downstream hydrology**, affecting Assam and Bangladesh.

About the Siang River

- Known as **Yarlung Tsangpo** in Tibet, the river enters India in Arunachal Pradesh as **Dihang or Siang**.
- After entering Assam, it merges with the **Lohit** and **Dibang** rivers to become the **Brahmaputra**.
- Key Features:
 - Forms a dramatic **horseshoe bend** around **Namcha Barwa peak**.
 - Passes through **diverse sub-basins** in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Sikkim, and West Bengal.
- **Important Tributaries:**
 - *Left/South Bank:* Dibang, Lohit, Burhi Dihang, Kopili, Dhansiri (South), Kelang, Noadehing
 - *Right/North Bank:* Subansiri, Kameng, Manas, Sankosh, Dhansiri (North), Teesta, Ronganadi



About the Adi Tribe

- The **Adi** are one of the **major tribes of Northeast India**, primarily inhabiting Arunachal Pradesh.

- **Geographic Spread:** Mostly found in **Siang belt** and **Dibang Valley**.
- **Sub-Tribes:** Includes 14 sub-tribes like Ashing, Bori, Bokar, Karko, Minyong, Pasi, Padam, Tangam, and others.
- **Society and Culture:**
 - **Patriarchal and clan-based** social structure.
 - Traditionally follow **Animism**, known as “**Donyi Polo**” – worship of the Sun and Moon.
 - Depend on **jhum (slash-and-burn) agriculture** for livelihood.
 - Known for their **deep ecological knowledge** and **forest stewardship**.
- **Language:** Speak the **Adi language**, part of the Tibeto-Burman language family, distantly related to **Chinese and Tibetan**.

Strategic and Geopolitical Importance

- China’s plans to construct the **world’s largest hydropower dam** on the Yarlung Tsangpo near the Indian border have **geopolitical and ecological implications**.
- China is **not a signatory** to international water-sharing conventions, raising concerns about **unilateral diversion** of river waters.
- The Siang Upper Project is seen as **India’s strategic hydropower response** to safeguard downstream interests and secure **water and energy resources**.

Conclusion

- The **Siang Upper Multipurpose Project** embodies the **tension between strategic infrastructure needs** and **local ecological and cultural preservation**.
- It underscores the **need for inclusive planning**, where energy security does not come at the cost of **indigenous rights and environmental sustainability**.
- The issue calls for **careful ecological assessments, community consultations**, and a **balanced approach to development in the Northeast**.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/arunachal-pradesh/rights-groups-back-anti-dam-protests-in-arunachal-pradesh/article69625118.ece>