

Ethiopia inaugurates Africa's biggest dam

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● Some 45 percent of Ethiopia's 130 million people lack electricity

AFP | Guba, Ethiopia

Ethiopia inaugurated the continent's largest hydroelectric project on Tuesday, with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed calling it a "great achievement for all black people" despite years of diplomatic rancour over the dam with downstream neighbour Egypt.

For Ethiopia, the Grand Renaissance Dam (GERD), straddling a tributary of the River Nile, is a national project of historic scale and a rare unifying symbol in a country torn apart by ongoing internal conflicts.

The latest figures from its Italian construction firm Webuild said the dam reached 170 metres (550 feet) high and stretched nearly two kilometres (1.2 miles) across the Blue Nile near the Sudanese border.

The \$4-billion megastructure is designed to hold 74 billion cubic metres of water and generate 5,150 megawatts of electricity -- more than double Ethiopia's current capacity, it said.

That makes it the largest dam by power capacity in Africa, though still outside the top 10 globally.

"GERD will be remembered as a great achievement not only for Ethiopia, but for all black people," Abiy said at the opening ceremony, attended by regional leaders including Kenyan Pres-



An aerial view Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile River in Guba, northwest Ethiopia.



Prime Minister of Ethiopia Abiy Ahmed delivers his remarks during the official inauguration ceremony

ident William Ruto and Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud.

"I invite all black people to visit the dam. It demonstrates that we, as black people, can achieve anything we plan," said Abiy, who has made the project a cornerstone of his rule.

But neighbouring Egypt, dependent on the Nile for 97 percent of its water, has long decried the project, with President

Abdel Fattah al-Sisi calling it an "existential threat" and vowing to take all measures under international law to defend its water security.

"For downstream countries, Ethiopia has accomplished GERD as a shining example for black people. It will not affect your development at all," Abiy said at the ceremony.

'No longer a dream'

The festivities began the night before with a dazzling display of lanterns, lasers and drones writing slogans like "geopolitical rise" and "a leap into the future".

Analysts argue the GERD, under construction since 2011, could transform Ethiopia's economy, boosting industrial production, enabling a shift towards electric vehicles and supplying power-hungry neighbours through regional interconnectors that stretch as far as Tanzania.

Some 45 percent of Ethiopia's 130 million people lack electricity, according to World Bank data, and frequent blackouts in Addis Ababa force businesses and households to rely on generators.

"It is no longer a dream but a fact," Pietro Salini, CEO of Webuild, who built the dam, told AFP from the inauguration.

He said they faced many challenges in training workers, mobilising finance and coping with the brutal civil war of 2020-2022 between the government and rebels from the Tigray region.



An interesting fact about the Three Gorges Dam in China -- the world's biggest dam -- is that its reservoir actually slowed down the Earth's rotation slightly when it filled up.

Because the dam holds about 39.3 billion cubic metres of water, the mass redistribution increased the Earth's moment of inertia, lengthening the planet's day by about 0.06 microseconds.

But now, "this country that was dark in the evening when I first arrived here... is selling energy to neighbouring countries," said Salini.

He denied there was any reason for neighbouring countries like Egypt and Sudan to be concerned.

"The hydroelectric project releases water to produce energy. They are not irrigation schemes that consume water. There's no change in the flow," said Salini.

Attempts to mediate between Ethiopia and its neighbours by the United States, World Bank, Russia, the UAE and the African Union have all faltered over the past decade.

"For the Egyptian leadership, GERD is not just about water, it is about national security. A major drop in water supply threatens Egypt's internal stability. The stakes are economic, political and deeply social," said Mohamed Mohey el-Deen, formerly part of Egypt's team assessing GERD's impact.

Cambodia opens \$2bn Chinese-built airport



Cambodia

A \$2 billion Chinese-built airport in Cambodia opened its runways to the first planes on Tuesday, bringing hopes for a tourism revival but beset by accusations of land evictions.

Officials hope the facility -- which replaces Phnom Penh's old airport as the capital's main aviation transport hub -- will boost Cambodia's struggling tourism industry.

Built by a major state-owned Chinese construction firm, the Techo International Airport is a 2,600-hectare (10 square mile) behemoth jointly funded by the Cambodian government and the privately-owned Overseas Cambodian Investment Corporation (OCIC).

A water cannon display greeted the first jet -- an Air Cambodia plane travelling from China -- to land at the airport on Tuesday, and traditional Khmer dancers welcomed its 160 passengers as they disembarked.

North Korea's Kim oversees ICBM engine test: state media

Seoul, South Korea

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un oversaw a test of a solid-fuel engine used for long range nuclear missiles, state media reported on Tuesday, marking another key step in a weapons programme Western powers have failed to stop.

State media said it was the ninth and final test of the engine, indicating that a full test-fire of a new intercontinental ballistic missile could be conducted in coming months.

Kim oversaw the "important test" the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported Tuesday, with images showing the leader looking at the flame from the engine test with binoculars.



Hundreds of pro-Palestinian demonstrators rally outside London arms show

AFP | London, United Kingdom

Pro-Palestinian protesters gathered Tuesday outside a major arms fair in London as it opened without the presence of Israeli government officials because of tension between Britain and Israel over the Gaza conflict.

Police watched as around 300 protesters waved Palestinian flags and held up placards including one reading "UK: Stop arming Israel. Stop the Gaza Genocide."

Three protesters were arrested for assaults on police officers, London's Metropolitan Police said. The British government



Demonstrators wave Palestinian flags as they protest outside the entrance to the Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI) fair at the ExCeL centre, in east London

excluded the officials from the four-day event, but 51 Israeli

defence companies were set to attend, including major arms

manufacturer Elbit.

Rafael and Israel Aero-

space Industries, both government-owned, were also scheduled to have stands, making Israel the fifth-largest national contingent at the fair at the Excel London exhibition centre. The Israeli companies "should be investigated for crimes against humanity, not invited to profit from the unspeakable devastation they have caused in Gaza", Campaign Against Arms Trade spokesperson Emily Apple said in a statement.

Neither company was immediately available for comment when contacted by AFP.