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MEKONG EYE

NEWS DIGEST #323**August 16, 2021****Cambodian dam project ignored economic, social, cultural rights, report says - RFA**

A China-financed hydropower project in Cambodia's northeast has uprooted thousands of local indigenous and ethnic minority people since its completion in 2018, and the developer and the Cambodian government ignored their ethical responsibilities to facilitate its completion, Human Rights Watch **said in a report** released last week. "The Lower Sesan 2 dam washed away the livelihoods of Indigenous and ethnic minority communities who previously lived communally and mostly self-sufficiently from fishing, forest-gathering, and agriculture," said John Sifton, HRW's Asia advocacy director in a statement. **(See also: China's Belt and Road dam in Cambodia ruined livelihoods: report - Nikkei Asia; Chinese-backed Cambodia dam devastated livelihoods of villagers, rights group says - SCMP; US cooks up new 'human rights' report to vilify BRI project in Cambodia - Global Times; Government disputes HRW report - Phnom Penh Post)**

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How Mekong River is turning into a new flashpoint in Indo-Pacific - DW

Experts view the South China Sea as the most probable area of conflict in Asia. Their attention now has also turned to the Mekong River, where the economic and environmental stakes are arguably much higher.



First ever report on maritime environment, national islands completed - Vietnam+

Its six chapters give an insight into the pressure of socio-economic development to the country's seas and islands, impacts of maritime environmental pollution, as well as State management of seas and islands, and chances and challenges in protection work.



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MEKONG DEVELOPMENT

Asean and Mekong as anti-China blocks (Editorial) - Khmer Times

Asean and Mekong platforms have gradually become platforms for China bashing with the ongoing over securitization of these regional and sub-regional frameworks. As the US begins to advance the so-called comprehensive Indo-Pacific strategy with Asean at the centre and to reinvigorate the Mekong-US Partnership as well as the Friends of the Mekong, the ongoing trend of over-securitisation is even deepening.

China denies Mekong River water levels fell due to flow restrictions from Jinghong hydropower dam - SCMP

China's Ministry of Water Resources has refuted **accusations** that Mekong River water levels in downstream Southeast Asian countries decreased because of the restriction of water flows from its Jinghong hydropower dam, saying "There is no so-called interception problem in the operation of [Chinese] hydropower stations, and it does not consume water. Instead, it scientifically regulates the run-off."

MRC Secretariat CEO urges deeper engagement during Friends of the Mekong ministerial meeting -Mekong River Commission

"I call for a deeper and stronger engagement from all our Friends," Dr Hatda, MRC Secretariat Chief Executive Officer, said. The MRC Secretariat became the newest member of the multinational Friends of the Mekong after being invited to join the group in March this year.

US, Mekong states deepen cooperation under Mekong-US partnership (opinion) - Phnom Penh Post

The US is a long-standing partner of Mekong countries in promoting peace and prosperity in the region. Our enduring partnership was on full display last week when the US and Cambodia co-chaired the second Mekong-US Partnership (MUSP) ministerial meeting – an important regional mechanism for addressing shared challenges and strengthening cooperation.

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Network

A large collaborative project of in-depth genomic surveillance of malaria has identified and tracked drug resistant malaria parasites in the Greater Mekong Subregion, helping inform public health decisions in Southeast Asia.

CAMBODIA

Cambodia's indigenous peoples request land registration reforms - Phnom Penh Post

The deforestation of community-held land and the slow registration process for indigenous people's collectively-held lands remain challenges for indigenous communities who rely on natural resources for their livelihoods, according to a joint statement of the Cambodia Indigenous Peoples Organisation. **(See also: [Indigenous people express concern about land rights - Khmer Times](#); [Indigenous people in Cambodia play vital role in organic rice production development - Khmer Times](#))**

Climate risk country profile for Cambodia - ADB

Climate change and human influences, such as upstream dam construction and deforestation, over the Mekong River's hydrological regime threaten to reduce the productivity of the Tonle Sap Lake and Cambodia's fisheries – a significant threat to the livelihoods and nourishment of many poor, rural communities.

Gov't says NGO campaign illegal - Khmer Times

The campaign by a group of non-governmental organisations demanding the release of environmental and human rights activists is illegal and more of a political agenda than a defense of freedoms, says the Ministry of Justice.

Drought hits rice yields in K Cham, Oddar Meanchey - Phnom Penh Post

Om Vibol, director of the provincial Department of Water Resources and Meteorology, told The Post that cultivation in these four districts depends on rainfall, and water from the Mekong and Tonle Sap rivers. Drought often occurs when crops are planted at the beginning of the rainy season when there is not enough water.

USAID-funded Keo Seima conservation project completed - Khmer Times

Key project achievements focus on collaborative conservation efforts to improve biodiversity conservation and ecosystem health, sustainable and equitable economic opportunities, community livelihoods, and natural capital reinvestment, and to strengthen inclusive landscape governance in KSW in the Eastern Plains, Cambodia.

Major M'kiri tourism plan given the nod - Phnom Penh Post

Investment will target the natural eco-tourism areas and corridors of the five wildlife sanctuaries; the Bou Sra-Dak Dam Cultural and Ecotourism Corridor; the provincial capital Sen Monorom town; and the area in O'Raing district connected with the development of a widely-anticipated regional-level airport.

LAOS

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Laos section of a pan-Asia rail route linking Kunming in China to Singapore is expected to boost trade and tourism. Critics say, however, that Laos could struggle to repay Chinese debt; that only a fraction of the population will benefit; and that overtourism could threaten Luang Prabang's world heritage status.

Laos-China Railway scheduled to open December 2nd - Laotian Times

Authorities are now resolving a number of final issues, including compensating individuals who have been affected by the Laos-China railway project and dealing with areas where the railway crosses highways. (See also: [Trains to arrive next month for trial run of Laos-China railway - Vientiane Times](#))

Laos govt reveals debt payment plan; determined to pay off US\$14bil owing over the next five years - Star Online

The government will strive to boost revenue from new sources and explore untapped potential sources of revenue, especially in the mining and energy sector.

Laos, Vietnam ink 14 agreements to strengthen ties - Star Online

These include a memorandum of understanding on hydropower development on the Ma River in Huaphan province, agreement to buy electricity from the Nam Ou and Nam Ngum 4 dams, and other electricity purchasing and mining agreements.

MYANMAR

China to fund Myanmar projects in agreement with junta - Reuters

China will transfer over US\$6 million to Myanmar's government to fund 21 development projects within the Mekong-Lancang Cooperation framework. The grant signals cooperation resuming under the junta that overthrew an elected government on Feb. 1. (See also: [Myanmar receives funds from China for projects under LMC Special Fund - Xinhua](#))

Myanmar port project highlighted in China's BRI human rights abuses - Maritime Executive

As China seeks to increase its influence over Myanmar including its ports and key infrastructure projects, a new report highlights China's Belt and Road Initiative projects impact in developing countries while citing the extensive lists of alleged human rights abuses lined to Chinese business operations. The report comes days after Myanmar's military junta decided to expedite China's funded Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone and the deep-Sea Port project.

THAILAND

Climate Risk Country Profile, Thailand - ADB

Floods are by far the greatest natural hazard facing Thailand in terms of economic and human impacts. Thailand is cited as one of the ten most flood-affected countries in the world. Drought and cyclone impacts also represent major hazards. All may intensify in future climate scenarios.

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Economic Corridor. A total of 38 water supply-related projects worth 52.8 billion baht were devised in a bid to feed the corridor. Of them, nine projects are complete.

Thailand flexes financial muscle to grapple with climate crisis - UN News

"Social responsibility and sustainable profit" can go hand in hand according to the chief of Thailand's government pension fund. The UN, and some of the biggest players in the Thai economy, are working together to support efforts by the country's finance and banking institutions to speed up the South East Asian country's transition to a net zero carbon economy.

PTT is going on a green spending spree - Bangkok Post

PTT Plc, whose sales account for about 10 percent of the nation's economic output, is suddenly spending billions of dollars on electric-vehicle and renewable-energy companies. It is joining the ranks of major global oil companies including Royal Dutch Shell Plc, Total SA and Eni SpA that are ramping up investment in clean energy as investor pressure mounts to ditch traditional fossil-fuel businesses.

Thailand's state enterprises invest over 100 billion baht in energy infrastructure projects - Pattaya Mail

The projects include the new liquefied natural gas receiving terminal in Rayong province, the fifth natural gas pipeline project, and a nationwide electricity transmission expansion project.

Exhibition celebrates Thailand's diversity - Bangkok Post

"Leaving No One Behind: Indigenous Peoples And The Call For A New Social Contract" is the theme of "**You Me We Us**", an online exhibition that explores diversity through stories of various ethnic groups within the Kingdom.

VIETNAM

ADDA is helping rural farmers to become self-sustainable in a changing world - ScandAsia

The region that the ADDA project is stationed in is one of the poorest regions in all of Vietnam. The rural farmers are of an ethnic minority, who speak another language than the official one of Vietnam. In some ways this has entailed, that the areas are being under prioritized by the state, because their problems are not important in the agenda of the major cities in the lowland. This for instance is seen in the lacking infrastructure of the region.

Pandemic challenges wind power projects in Mekong Delta - Saigon News

Several wind power projects currently under development in the Mekong River Delta area are rushing to complete and start operating on a commercial basis before the November deadline, which would allow them to enjoy the preferential policies.

Vietnam could, and should, replicate its solar success in electric mobility (opinion) - Vietnam Express

Vietnam may be accelerating solar development and recently scrapped plans for 9.5 GW of coal-fired power in its 2026-30 Power Development Plan, but this promising effort to decarbonize on the supply side has somehow not been adequately replicated on the demand side.

Kien Giang develops marine aquaculture towards sustainable development - Vietnam+

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enhancing agricultural economic growth in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Vietnam values relations with ESCAP: Foreign Minister - Vietnam Express

He stressed that Vietnam welcomes ESCAP's 77th session approving of a resolution on the "Regional cooperation to build back better from crises in Asia and the Pacific". The resolution highlights multilateralism and cooperation inside and outside the region in a bid to promote post-pandemic recovery, prioritising the improvement of the medical and social welfare systems, climate change response, digital transformation and digital economic development.

Philippines and Vietnam coal-fired plants to retire in ADB-led plan - Kiddei Asia

The ADB is partnering with Prudential and HSBC on a unique pilot project. The plan includes a shortlist of existing coal-fired power plants across Asia that are to be purchased and retired well before the end of their life cycles and to replace them with clean energy.

Impact of catastrophic Agent Orange disaster still lingers - Vietnam+

Sixty years have passed since the US army dropped tens of millions of extremely toxic chemicals on various areas across the south of Vietnam, but their devastating impact still lingers, destroying the environment and claiming the lives of many generations of Agent Orange victims.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Droughts shrink hydropower, pose risk to global push to clean energy - Reuters

Severe droughts are drying up rivers and reservoirs vital for the production of zero-emissions hydropower in several countries around the globe, in some cases leading governments to rely more heavily on fossil fuels. And diversions can worsen droughts elsewhere, according to experts. China's giant reservoirs on the upper reaches of the Mekong River in Yunnan have already been blamed for reducing downstream flows – affecting water access in Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar.

Human rights claims undermine China's investment abroad, report finds - Reuters

The Business & Human Rights Resource Centre logged 679 charges of human rights abuse against Chinese companies operating abroad between 2013 and 2020. Among the key findings were: problems associated with lost livelihoods linked to a rail project in Laos; the vast majority of the renewable energy complaints were related to hydropower projects, and Myanmar saw the most allegations of any country with 97. **(See also: Alleged abuses linked to China's 'Belt and Road' projects - Al Jazeera)**

Planned new hydroelectric dams threaten mighty rivers worldwide - Sustainability Times

A case in point is the Mekong river in Southeast Asia, which has turned into a shadow of its former mighty self as a result of numerous hydroelectric dams constructed in recent years throughout much of its length from China to Cambodia. No country along its course has been left unaffected.

New satellite data reveals increasing proportion of population exposed to floods worldwide - AP

Among the findings, nearly 90 percent of flood events occurred in South and Southeast Asia, with

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Interview: How will plans to protect 30 percent of Earth work for Southeast Asia? - China Dialogue

Campaign for Nature's Dr Zakri Abdul Hamid says Southeast Asian countries still prioritize socio-economic development over the environment but will eventually sign up to 30x30 targets: a plan to get world leaders to commit to protect at least 30 percent of the land and sea by 2030.

What environmentalism must be concerned about: The forgotten issues of climate change - Eurasia Review

With water levels along the Mekong River in Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam, the lowest in 100 years, local eco-systems are under stress with erosion, silting, algae, and dried up river beds, destroying local industries such as fishing.

Building a regional approach to energy security for BIMSTEC - Observer Research Foundation

As the gap in electricity supply and demand increases in the countries of BIMSTEC, trans-border cooperation can help diversify energy sources, reduce the average cost of supply, and meet peak demands.

The Mekong Eye's weekly News Digest curates news, commentary and resources on development, its environmental and social impacts, and the context affecting the Mekong region. We reach nearly 5,000 key development professionals, government officials, business leaders and journalists. Submit stories, press releases, resources or feedback to: editor@mekongeye.com.

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