

INDUSTRY, MATERIALS AND UTILITIES JANUARY 8, 2020 / 2:45 PM / UPDATED 2 YEARS AGO

Don Sahong hydropower dam in Laos connects to Cambodian grid

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PHNOM PENH, Jan 8 (Reuters) - The Don Sahong hydropower dam in Laos has begun operations and this week connected its power grid to Cambodia, a Cambodian official said on Wednesday as the country steps up electricity imports after continued power outages last year.

Don Sahong, which was designed for an installed capacity of 260 megawatts (MW), is the second dam to begin operations on the Lower Mekong River within six months, after years of opposition from environmental activists.

The 1,285-megawatt Xayaburi Dam in Laos began supplying energy to Thailand in October.

Victor Jona, director general of energy at the Ministry of Mines and Energy, told Reuters that the link was connected on Tuesday.

“Don Sahong has a capacity of 195 megawatts, and the (state-run utility)

He added that total capacity would only be reached in the annual rainy season starting around April, and output would likely be less during the current dry season.

The Lower Mekong River experienced record drought last year, and many parts along it have seen lower than usual water levels in the dry season.

Cambodia's purchase price from the Don Sahong dam, which lies about 2 km north of the border in Laos, is \$07.295 per kilowatt, Jona said. The deal will last for 30 years, he added.

“We are buying this electricity to supply our demand that increases from one year to another by between 18% and 20%,” he said.

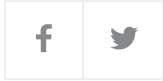
Cambodia last year had the worst power outages in years as a surge in demand was fuelled by a construction boom accompanying Chinese investment.

Officials have said the electricity shortage was also due to low level water at hydropower dams across the country.

Cambodia uses hydropower for about 48% of its domestic electricity production, according to Electricite du Cambodge.

With demand growing fast, Cambodia imported about 25% of its electricity supply last year, with the bulk of it transmitted from Vietnam and Thailand, according to the state utility statistics. (Writing by Kay Johnson; Editing by Jan Harvey)

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