

Delegate calls for Tiger Leaping Gorge rethink

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Beijing. March 6. INTERFAX-CHINA - A delegate at the China People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) has said that the construction of a reservoir at the Tiger Leaping Gorge (Hutiaoxia), a renowned tourist site on the Jinsha River in Yunnan Province, will lead to substantial losses.

Ren Yuling, who also serves as an advisor to the State Council, told journalists at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing that China "must learn the lessons" from the mistakes made during the construction of other hydropower stations, and "cannot use 'forceful' methods to construct the Tiger Leaping Gorge Reservoir. If it does not proceed through public tribunals, it will probably lead to significant losses."

According to the China Youth Daily, Ren has submitted a proposal to the latest session of the CPPCC to call for a public hearing on the fate of the Tiger Leaping Gorge, which the authorities are planning to flood in order to create a hydropower station some time before 2009.

The vice-head of the National Development and Reform Commission, Zhang Guobao, has vowed that China would press on with hydropower development in Yunnan despite the opposition. The government hopes to integrate the scenic but remote areas of the province, including Xishuangbanna on the Burmese border, the Nu River on the frontier with Tibet, as well as the Tiger Leaping Gorge, through the construction of roads and rail links and the development of local resources, including its rivers.

The Jinsha River, the western branch of the Yangtze, is at the center of Yunnan's hydropower plans, with the construction of the Xiluodu station, set to be the country's second biggest after the Three Gorges, already underway.

However, despite a provision in the 2004 Environmental Impact Assessment Law, which compels hydropower developers to consult local people before construction is launched, experts are concerned that the interests of poor rural communities subsisting on the banks of China's rivers are systematically ignored. Ren's proposal calls for the 2004 law to be respected in full.

Ren noted that similar methods were used on the Min River in Sichuan Province, where the "forced" construction of a hydropower station and the subsequent damage to the ancient Dujiangyan irrigation facility created direct losses to the state amounting to billions of RMB, according to China Youth Daily.

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