

Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia agree study of contentious Nile dam

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File picture from March 2015 of Ethiopia's Grand Renaissance Dam. The project has stirred fears in parched Egypt that it could crimp flows in the Nile downstream

Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia have agreed to set up a scientific committee

to study a dam Ethiopia is building on a tributary of the Nile, an Ethiopian minister said Thursday.

The announcement broke a long impasse in a dispute over Egyptian fears that the \$4-billion (3.2-billion-euro) Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, being built on the Blue Nile, will affect the river's downstream flows.

The three countries' foreign and irrigation ministers, as well as heads of intelligence, met in Addis Ababa on Tuesday to discuss the scheme.

The meeting concluded on Wednesday at 3:00 am on a "high note", said Sileshi Bekele, minister of energy, irrigation and electricity.

"We managed to actually find a number of win-win approaches," he told reporters in Addis Ababa.

Previous rounds of talks had ended acrimoniously.

The project will feed a reservoir for a hydroelectric scheme producing 6,000 megawatts of power, equal to six nuclear-powered plants.

The foundation stone for the project was laid in 2011, and two of the 16 turbines are scheduled to start producing power this year, the Ethiopian authorities said earlier this year.

Cairo is primarily concerned at the speed at which the dam's reservoir would be filled.

The Blue and the White Nile converge in Sudan's capital Khartoum and from there run north through Egypt to the Mediterranean.

On Wednesday Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi hailed a "breakthrough" in the talks, saying he had received assurances "that

Egypt's share will not be affected".

"We just want to transform these statements to procedures ... so that we are talking about specific commitments we must all implement and operate with," Sisi said.

Ethiopia's new prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, said on May 3 in Khartoum, after a meeting with Omar Al Bashir, the Sudanese president, that Ethiopia had no intention of harming Sudan or Egypt with its dam.

The new [scientific committee](#), made up of independent experts from the universities of the three countries, will focus on the operation of the dam and the filling of the reservoir.

It will complete its work in three months.

Meanwhile a French consultancy firm commissioned to study the dam's potential environmental impact will respond to queries from the three countries on June 18 or 19, Sileshi said.

He added that the three teams would meet on a rotational basis every six months to address regional issues such as trade and infrastructure as well as the dam.

The aim is "to bring these countries much closer together through development endeavours," he said.

The next round of high-level talks is set for July 3 in Cairo.

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