

## Three Gorges Corp. defends reservoir plan amid drought debate

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YICHANG, Hubei, Oct. 25 (Xinhua) -- China Three Gorges Corporation defended the ongoing plan to raise water level in reservoir to 175 meters during dry season, saying its water storage will help prepare for possible worse drought in coming months.

"Compared with last year, we have much less discord between the water storage and water supplies this year," Yuan Jie, chief of the control center of the China Three Gorges Corporation, told Xinhua.

Beginning Sunday morning, the Three Gorges project had increased its water flow to downstream to over 9,000 cubic meters per second, about 38 percent more than originally planned, to relieve the drought situation downstream.

The runoff from upstream of the Three Gorges Dam dropped to around 10,700 cubic meters Sunday morning.

Yuan said though the ongoing water storage plan did have an effect on the Yangtze River's middle and lower reaches areas but their effort will help improve water supplies in those areas during the most dry January-February season next year.

Continuous severe drought were reported in Hunan, Jiangxi provinces along the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River and southern China's Guangdong Province over the past month, leaving more than 1.5 million people short of drinking water and thousands of hectares of cropland thirsty.

Demands for the Three Gorges Dam to discharge more reservoir water were on the increase, forcing the project to slow down its water-raising pace to 175 meters, a target that was rescheduled to early November from the end of October.

The water level of the Three Gorges reservoir stood at 170.47 meters at around 11:00 a.m. Sunday.

Zheng Shouren, Chief Engineer of the Yangtze River Water Resources Committee, said those blaming the drought in Hunan and Jiangxi solely on the Three Gorges project got a partial picture.

"The drought in Hunan and Jiangxi was mainly caused by the lack of rainfall in the regions amid continuous high temperature since September," said Zheng, who is also an academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering.

As a seasonal adjusting reservoir, the Three Gorges reservoir must store water in autumn and winter to make up water supplies to the Yangtze River's downstream areas in January-February, a period when water flow from the upper reaches will drop to its lowest level, he said.

To solve the drought worries next year, Zheng suggested, it will be better for the Three Gorges project to begin water storage earlier.

The Three Gorges project began raising its reservoir water level for the first time to 175 meters since Sept. 15 this year, half a month ahead of last year's water storage experiment.

If the Three Gorges reservoir failed to raise its water level to 175 meters this year, Zheng said, the drought situation in the Yangtze River's middle and lower reaches areas might turn worse because the project can't guarantee a minimum discharging flow between 5,000 and 6,000 cubic meters per second due to a smaller reserve.

"We have placed too much attention to the flood control in the Yangtze River in the past," Zheng said, "but it seems that our study on drought relief amid increasing water demands is not enough."

Plenty of farm land and China's most important industrial area are built beside the Yangtze with millions of people living in many large cities like Wuhan, Nanjing and Shanghai in downstream of the Three Gorges dam.

The dam discharges its reservoir water during the dry season between December and March every year, increasing the flow rate of the river downstream and providing more fresh water for agricultural and industrial usage.

The water level upstream of the reservoir will drop from 175 meters to 145 meters to leave room of about 22.1 billion cubic meters for the flooding season.

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