



Institute of Chinese Studies

# WEDNESDAY SEMINAR

*Line of Riparian Control:  
China, India and the  
Brahmaputra Basin*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Speaker:

**Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman**

17 September 2025

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**Speaker:** Dr. Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman, Visiting Associate Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi.

**Chair:** Prof. Nimmi Kurian, Professor, Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi; and, Member, External Advisory Board, India China Institute, The New School, New York.

**Venue:** Zoom Webinar

- The seminar examined the complex politics of Himalayan rivers, particularly focusing on the Brahmaputra and Yarlung Tsangpo, highlighting how mainstream narratives often skew perceptions by emphasising absence of treaties, weak institutions and border tensions. Prof. Nimmi Kurian underlined that these frameworks obscure the environmental degradation and extractive pressures shaping the region.
- Dr. Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman highlighted the strategic and ecological dimensions of hydropower development. He emphasised the scale of dam-building by India and China, its socio-environmental impacts and the limitations of existing governance mechanisms, including data-sharing MoUs.
- The discussion underscored the growing importance of adopting a bioregional perspective, incorporating sediment flows, seismic risks, indigenous knowledge and community resilience, rather than viewing river systems solely through national security or infrastructural frames.
- Dr. Kurian emphasised time as a critical dimension, noting that large-scale projects often produce delayed, unevenly distributed consequences, and advocated integrating “slow violence” as a lens to understand long-term impacts on Himalayan borderlands.
- The discussion underscored India’s role as a middle riparian state, while stressing the importance of transparent, community-inclusive governance and enhanced subnational cooperation. Furthermore, the importance of learning from international river management experiences such as the Lower Mekong Basin was also highlighted.

- The seminar concluded with reflections on the persistent securitisation of river politics, cultural and bioregional considerations, and the challenges of navigating entrenched bureaucratic and elite-driven frameworks.

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