



BRI Watch is a regular update produced by FIDH to document the impact of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects and other China-backed investments on human rights and the environment across Asia.

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CHINA TOUTS “HIGH STANDARD” BRI AS ABUSES CONTINUE

Amid ongoing human rights violations and negative environmental impacts linked to the implementation of BRI projects, China’s President Xi Jinping sought to convince the international community of plans for a participatory and environmentally friendly BRI. On 20 April, at the Boao Forum for Asia, [Xi stated](#) that the BRI will follow the principles of “extensive consultation” and champion the philosophy of “green and clean cooperation.”

BATANG TORU HYDROPOWER

PROJECT (INDONESIA)

The US\$1.5 billion Batang Toru hydropower plant in North Sumatra Province is developed by China’s state-owned Sinohydro and Indonesia’s PT North Sumatra Hydro Energy (NSHE), a special consortium company. At 510-megawatts, Batang Toru is set to be one of Indonesia’s largest hydropower plants. The project, which is funded by the Bank of China, began construction in 2015 and is set to become operational by 2025.

PORT CITY COLOMBO (SRI LANKA)

The Port City Colombo is a US\$1.4 billion infrastructure project being developed on 664 acres of reclaimed land, by China Harbor Engineering Company (CHEC) Port City Colombo (Private) Limited, a private subsidiary of state-owned China Harbor Engineering Company Limited. The project commenced in 2014 and is scheduled to be completed by 2040. The Port City will comprise of a financial district, a marina, casinos, shopping malls, and a residential area. All reclaimed land is owned by the government of Sri Lanka, and 43% of the project’s marketable land has been leased to CHEC for 99 years.

ENVIRONMENT

In **Indonesia**, it is feared that the construction of a network of roads near the site of the Batang Toru hydropower plant in North Sumatra Province could be linked to a landslide that killed more than 10 people on 29 April. Following the disaster, [preliminary findings](#) of an evaluation conducted by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry indicated that road construction near the Batang Toru Hydropower plant had not followed proper technical procedures. The hydropower plant is constructed within the Batang Toru ecosystem, which is the habitat of the endangered Tapanuli orangutans.

TRANSPARENCY

In **Sri Lanka**, lack of transparency and adequate public consultation marred the adoption of a critical law governing the Chinese-built Port City Colombo. In April, in the middle of the New Year holiday season and at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing restrictions, [draft legislation was hastily introduced in Parliament](#) without adequate consultation with all relevant stakeholders. The draft law, which set up the Port City Economic Commission, was challenged by civil society actors, lawyers, and other groups in the Supreme Court over the unconstitutionality of numerous provisions, including some that exempted the Port City Economic Commission and port city companies from certain regulatory regimes and parliamentary oversight. Following the legal challenge, the Supreme Court directed Parliament to make numerous changes to the text, after which the amended legislation was adopted on 20 May.



In **Myanmar**, the military junta that seized power in the 1 February coup d'état took over the supervision of BRI investments in the country. In March, the [junta restructured three key committees](#) tasked with the implementation of BRI infrastructure projects. The junta ousted all civilian members of the China Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) Joint Committee, replacing them with its own appointees. In addition, the junta restructured the Central Committee and the Working Group Committee for the implementation of the Myanmar-China Cross-Border Economic Cooperation Zones (CBECZ).

In **Pakistan**, concerns remain over the lack of transparency surrounding the implementation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects amid growing interference from Beijing. In February, it was reported that following a proposal by the chairman of the National People's Congress of China, the heads of China's and Pakistan's respective legislative bodies directed their secretaries to [form a joint parliamentary oversight committee](#) to address delays in the implementation of CPEC projects. The formation of the committee was made in haste, with a representative from Gwadar, the port city that is central to CPEC, declaring that even he was not consulted prior to this decision.

LABOR RIGHTS

In April, more reports emerged of Chinese overseas workers being subjected to widespread human rights abuses by Chinese companies that implement BRI projects. A report published by the non-profit organization China Labor Watch [revealed labor rights violations affecting Chinese overseas workers](#). The report covered over 100 workers in eight BRI countries, including three in Asia: **Pakistan**, **Indonesia**, and **Singapore**. The report revealed that between August 2020 and April 2021, workers were subjected to violations including: poor living and working conditions; restrictions on freedom of movement; unpaid wages; withholding of passports; intimidation and threats; lack of medical treatment for workers infected with COVID-19; and restricted freedom of speech.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

In Bangladesh, a protest against labor rights violations linked to a China-backed investment project was met by police with lethal force. On 17 April, [police opened fire on Bangladeshi workers](#) who were protesting at the construction site of the Chinese-backed Banshkhali coal-fired power plant in Chittagong District. Seven workers were killed in the crackdown. The workers were protesting to demand unpaid wages, a pay raise, and reduced working hours during the holy month of Ramadan.

CHINA MYANMAR ECONOMIC CORRIDOR

(MYANMAR)

The China Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) agreement was signed by Beijing and Myanmar's National League for Democracy (NLD)-backed government in 2018. CMEC aims to develop a 1,700-kilometer network that will connect China's Yunnan Province with some of Myanmar's major economic hubs – Mandalay, Yangon, and the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Rakhine State.

CHINA-PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR

(PAKISTAN)

The US\$46 billion infrastructure development projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) are based on the signing of 51 agreements and Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) between China and Pakistan in 2015. CPEC consists of several infrastructure projects including numerous transportation networks, energy projects, and special economic zones. Transportation networks built under the CPEC will link the Gwadar Port project [see Issue 0] and Karachi with northern Pakistan and China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (XUAR), and beyond, by overland routes.

BANSHKHALI COAL-FIRED POWER PLANT

(BANGLADESH)

The 1,320 megawatt coal-fired power plant in Banshkhali, Chittagong District, is a project developed by a joint venture between Bangladeshi private industrial conglomerate S. Alam Group, China's state-owned Electric Power Construction Corporation (SEPCO III), and China's private company HTG Group Development. Construction of the power plant commenced in 2016 and operations are expected to begin by December 2022.