

### Water power

It was a “very important hydro-political act”, said geographer and author Habib Ayeub, a Nile expert who has taught at universities in Cairo and Paris. The dam was inaugurated on January 15, 1971, three months after Nasser’s death, by his successor Anwar al-Sadat. For the first time, “an Egyptian president decided to manage the Nile within Egypt”, to develop agriculture and the economy in the country, Ayeub added. For Egypt, an otherwise desert nation where 97 percent of the population lives along the green and fertile Nile banks, the dam revolutionised its relationship with the land. “The dam offered a reprieve to Egyptians by giving them enough water... and protecting them from the hazards of floods, which could be absolutely catastrophic,” said Ayeub.

It also brought electricity to much of the country, a move Nasser said was key to developing

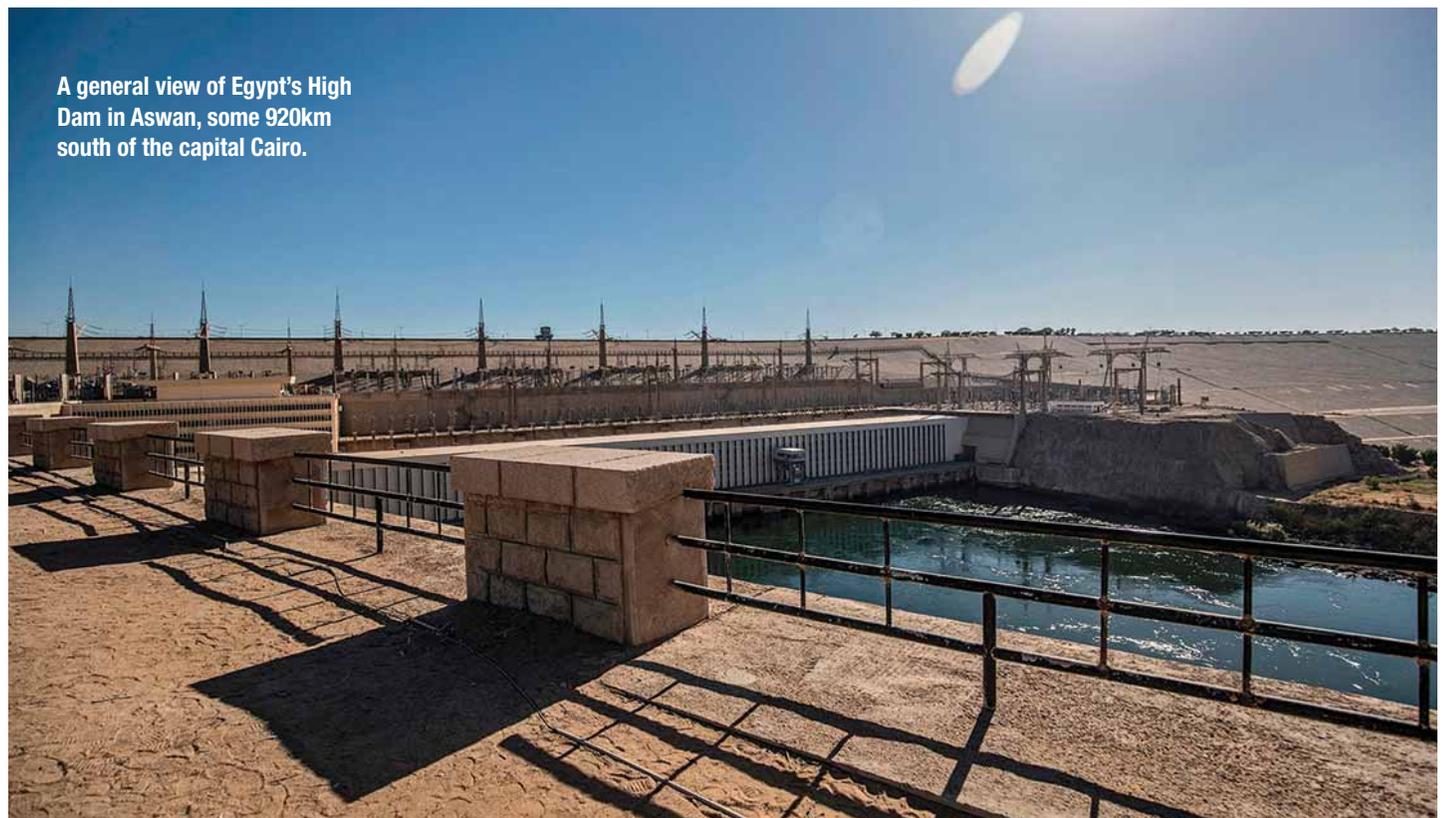
the nation. Abdel Hakim Hassanein, who overlooks the river from his home close to the dam, some 700 kilometres south of Cairo, praised its construction. “We didn’t have electricity before, we used oil lamps,” the 68-year-old said, adding that work at the dam remains a key source of local jobs. Ethiopia, the second most populous nation in Africa, today uses similar arguments, saying its 145-metre (475-foot) GERD Blue Nile

barrier-set to be Africa’s largest hydro-electric dam-is vital to provide power for its 110 million people. But Egypt, with the Arab world’s largest population, sees the GERD as an existential threat.

### ‘Belly of the desert’

In the 1960s, many Egyptians also saw the Aswan dam as a threat to their lives-in a different

A general view of Egypt’s High Dam in Aswan, some 920km south of the capital Cairo.



A general view of Nasser Lake, the reservoir of Egypt’s Aswan High Dam, around 920 kilometers south of Cairo.