Dam safety – DRIP project

Why in news?

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The government recently approved revised cost estimate of DRIP project and extended the time period for its conclusion.

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What does the project propose?

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- The objective of the scheme is to
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1. improve safety and operational performance of selected dams
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2. to strengthen the dam safety institutional setup of participating States / Implementing Agencies.
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- It is a state sector scheme with 80% of the total project is provided by the World Bank as loan/credit and remaining 20% is borne by the States / Central Government.
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- It provides for repair and rehabilitation of about 198 dams across the seven states of India, namely Jharkhand (DVC), Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, and Uttarakhand.
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What is the status of our dams?

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- Over 75% of the country’s dams are over 25 years old.
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- Majority of them exceeding their rated lifespan of 50 to 60 years and over 200 large dams are over 100 years of age.
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- Since most of the old dams are made of mud, clay or other locally available materials, they are far more vulnerable to collapsing compared to the new generation concrete dams.
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- There have already been as many as 36 dam failures, nine of which have taken place after 2001.
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- The country has as many as 5,254 large dams, besides many more medium and small barrages, and the present DRIP scheme is grossly inadequate for the task.
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- Hence an additional allocation was made and the project has been extended till 2020.
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- About 700 more dams might be taken up for fortifying during the proposed phase-II of the DRIP project.
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What are the larger concerns?

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- The devastation potential of dam failures is far higher in India than other countries owing to the denser habitation of the floodplains.
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- The menace has increased with the increased frequency of weather events associated with climate change.
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- The multi-state ownership and inter-state disputes over the upkeep and benefit-sharing of dams are also contributing to this hazard.
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- The Mullaperiyar dam, located in Kerala but owned by Tamil Nadu, is a typical case in point.
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- While Kerala, which faces the direct threat of destruction due to its breakdown, is worried about its poor physical condition and wants it to be replaced with a new structure, Tamil Nadu is unwilling to do so.

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- Even during the recent Kerala floods that threatened its survival, the Supreme Court had to intervene to get some water released.
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- TN has also recently opposed the Dam safety bill 2018 on the view it attempts to encroach on the state's powers and rights.
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What should be done?

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- Any fresh funding of the DRIP must be accompanied by the establishment of permanent institutions to carry out routine chores in all the dams of the country.
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- Such a provision has indeed been made in the Dam Safety Bill, 2018, which was also cleared by the Cabinet.
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- It provides for regular inspection, emergency action plans, adequate funding for repair and maintenance, instrumentation and safety manuals for all dams.
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- It also explicitly puts the onus of dam safety on dam owners and goes a step further to lay down the penal action for lapses on this count.
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- Thus, the Centre needs to arrive at a consensus quickly with the states to enact and enforce the law without any further delay.
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Source: Business Standard

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