

## SECURING INDIA'S DAMS

Relevant for: Geography | Topic: Distribution of key natural resources - Water Resources incl. Rivers & related issues in world & India

Dams have been at the centre of Indian life for several decades and a part of the faith since eons. When the celestial Ganga came crashing onto earth, its ferocity would have broken the planet into smithereens had it not been Lord Shiva who dammed its flow in his locks and saved the planet.

In today's time, the world has been a witness to a dam's power. When the Three Gorges Dam over the Yangtze became functional, it slowed the earth's rotation by 0.06 microseconds. It is this power of dams that both impresses us and intimidates us.

Dams, while being the vault of India's progress and prosperity, also threaten human life and property. The historic decision by the present government of granting approval to Phase 2 and 3 of DRIP (Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Programme) at a project cost of Rs 10,211 crore is a step in the direction of water security, resilience against hazards and emergency action planning of the dam infrastructure around the country.

In terms of the number of dams in the world, India ranks third after China and the US, with nearly 5,745 projects. While 973 dams, or 18 per cent of the total number, are 50 to 100 years old, 2,992, or 56 per cent, are aged between 25 and 50. The age of these dams is what makes a robust dam safety policy an absolute necessity, as any kind of mishap has the potential to leave a trail of destruction in its wake. It was the cataclysmic event of the 1979 Machchhu Dam disaster in Gujarat's Morbi district, resulting in the untimely death of scores of people, that served as a wakeup call for dam safety and security in the country.

The committee formed to investigate the disaster recommended clear guidelines for dam safety protocols along with an implementing body to oversee the same. Thus, DRIP was born and since then it has guarded the nation from impending disasters. Among the towering achievements of DRIP are the rehabilitation of 207 structures in six years, numerous dam break analysis, the preparation of emergency action plans, training of professionals and strengthening of institutions.

Currently, 18 states are serviced by DRIP's flagship project DHARMA (Dam Health and Rehabilitation Monitoring) capturing nearly 85 per cent of data of 5,000 plus dams across the country. While DRIP Phase 1 was doing truly stellar work according to its mandate of providing dam safety since 2012, a third-party evaluation recommended the initiation of new phases. The decision taken by the government on October 29 is in the direction of implementing the recommendation.

DRIP will be implemented over a period of 10 years in two phases — each of six years with two years overlapping from April 2021 to March 2031. The upcoming phases will bolster its operational mandate of dam safety like structural integrity, surveillance and maintenance, instrumentation and monitoring etc. In spirit, DRIP is the actualisation of the principles and guidelines laid down by the Dam Safety Bill, 2019, which has already been passed by the Lok Sabha and is soon to be presented in the Rajya Sabha.

The new phase of DRIP has a vibrant mix of federalism and "atmanirbharta" weaved into it. Being a state subject, the management of water has always been a contentious subject. The ownership and management of water has been vested in states. However, the exceptional work

done by DRIP has been able to erase any discomfort that the states might feel with relation to dam management and maintenance.

Of the total [budget](#) for the second and third phases of DRIP, Rs 7,000 crore will come from external assistance — the World Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank — while the balance Rs 3,211 crore will be borne by the concerned implementing agencies. The idea of revenue generation component of Rs 408 crore in the budget came from Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) during briefing sessions in order to make dams self-sustaining or “atmanirbhar”.

With emphasis on weekend tourism, water sports, fisheries, solar power and other allied activities, a perfect balance between structural resilience and economic resilience of dams has been envisioned through the project. Dam disasters are seen as matters of national shame — they not only lead to human tragedy but also devastate the ecology. Thus, it is important that India becomes a leader in dam safety, which DRIP Phase1 and 2 will certainly be achieving in the coming days.

There are many aspects of national security that common people are unaware of. One of them is the safety and maintenance of dams. These are silent warriors who labour to keep the country safe, store our precious commodity and add power to our fight against water scarcity. The expansion of DRIP is a reward for their fight, a token of appreciation from the government for keeping its people safe and ensuring that they sleep in peace, knowing that our waters are safeguarded and our tomorrow has been secured.

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