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Syllabus: GS paper 3: Disaster management

'The devastation potential of dam failures is far higher in India than other countries owing to the denser habitation.'
Discuss the status of dams in India and the DRIP project.

Why in news?

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

What does the project propose?

- The project proposes to:-
 1. improve safety and operational performance of selected dams
 2. to strengthen the dam safety institutional setup of participating States / Implementing Agencies.
- 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.

- 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.

What is the current status of dams in India?

- Over 75% of the country's dams are over 25 years old.
- Majority of them exceeding their rated lifespan of 50 to 60 years and over 200 large dams are over 100 years of age.
- 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.
- There have already been as many as 36 dam failures, nine of which have taken place after 2001.
- 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.
- Hence an additional allocation was made and the project has been extended till 2020.
- About 700 more dams might be taken up for fortifying during the proposed phase-II of the DRIP project.

What are the primary concerns?

- The devastation potential of dam failures is far higher in India than other countries owing to the denser habitation of the floodplains.
- The menace has increased with the increased frequency of weather events associated with climate change.
- The multi-state ownership and inter-state disputes over the upkeep and benefit-sharing of dams are also contributing to this hazard.
- The Mullaperiyar dam, located in Kerala but owned by Tamil Nadu, is a typical case in

point.

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

What needs to be done?

- 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.
- Such a provision has indeed been made in the Dam Safety Bill, 2018, which was also cleared by the Cabinet.
- It provides for regular inspection, emergency action plans, adequate funding for repair and maintenance, instrumentation and safety manuals for all dams.
- 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.
- Thus, the Centre needs to arrive at a consensus quickly with the states to enact and enforce the law without any further delay.