Rising the Height of Sardar Sarovar’s Dam

Why in news?

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The Narmada Control Authority recently decided to raise the height of the Sardar Sarovar dam to its full height, by ordering the closure of 30 gates.

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What will be the impact?

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- The dam will generate hydro-energy, extend irrigation and bring drinking water to drought-affected, arid areas of Rajasthan and Gujarat.
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- Once the dam is at its full height, it will submerge one town and at least 176 villages.
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- This might displace close to 20,000 families and deprive them of flood productive agricultural land, and destroy hundreds of acres of biodiverse forest.
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- Ecologists, hydrologists and engineers have also produced detailed documentation that brings into doubt the claims of water provisioning, economic growth and safety made by the project.
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What are the challenges?

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- **Siltation -** It is one of the biggest challenges faced by dams worldwide, and constitutes one of the biggest challenges to the long-term success of this dam.
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- Apart from directly reducing water storage capacity, siltation also decreases

water capacity due to increased evaporation loss.
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- As a result, the capacity to generate hydropower is affected.
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- A dam choked with silt creates a river prone to risky situations of potential flooding in the backwaters.
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- **Erosion -** The steep slopes of the Narmada valley are prone to erosion.
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- They have been protected so far because of the dense forests that line the sides of the valley.
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- If these trees are cleared, soil from the denuded slopes will flow unchecked into the river, turning the water muddy.
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- **Biodiversity -** The Narmada valley is one of the most fertile ecosystems in India, brimming with biodiversity, and with abundant fish, birds and trees.
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- Blocking normal water flow, leading to downstream habitat change and impacting biodiversity.
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- The Narmada estuary, where the river meets the sea, has become increasingly saline because of the decrease in fresh water flow after the dams came up.
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- Fish catch of some species has now declined by as much as 75%.
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- **Rehabilitation -** Compensation to the displaced has often come in the form of land unsuitable for farming or living, located either on riverbeds at the risk of flooding, or in rocky areas which cannot be ploughed.
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- Resettlement sites lack basic facilities like wells, drinking water pipelines, or grazing land for cattle, let alone schools or road facilities.
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- This leaves the once self-reliant people of the valley with no option but to work as daily wage labour and crowd into urban slums.
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What should be done?

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There has to be a clear, transparent public accounting of livelihoods lost and jobs created, of profits accrued at the expense of great misery and injustice.

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Quick Facts

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Sardar Sarovar dam

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- The Sardar Sarovar Dam is a **gravity dam** on the **Narmada river** near Navagam, Gujarat in India.
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- It is the largest dam and part of the Narmada Valley Project.
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Narmada Control Authority

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- The Narmada Control Authority (NCA) has been setup under the final orders and decision of the **Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal (NWDT)** as a machinery for implementation of its directions and decision.
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- The authority started functioning from December, 1980.
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- The authority is a body corporate with representatives of the four States of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and representatives of Govt. of India.
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- Secretary (Water Resources), Govt. of India is the **ex-officio Chairman** of the Authority.
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Source: The Hindu

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