

India upgrades 736 dams under DRIP scheme

NEW DELHI, May 17 (PTI)

INDIA is implementing one of the world's largest dam-rehabilitation programmes under the Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Programme (DRIP), with rehabilitation proposals worth Rs 5,053 crore for 191 dams already approved and major physical-rehabilitation work completed at 43 dams till March 31, 2025, according to the Jal Shakti Ministry.

The Ministry said the second and third phases of the DRIP, operationalised in October 2021, together cover 736 dams across 19 States and three central agencies -- the Central Water Commission (CWC), the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB) and the Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC).

Major dams planned for safety improvement under the sec-

ond and third phases of the project include the Bhakra Dam (Himachal Pradesh), the Ranjit Sagar Dam (Punjab), NTR Sagar (Telangana), the Nagarjuna Sagar Dam (Telangana), the Gandhi Sagar Dam (Madhya Pradesh), the Kadana Dam (Gujarat), the Jirga Dam (Uttar Pradesh), the Imphal Barrage (Manipur), the Myntdu Leshka Dam (Meghalaya) and the Silabati Barrage (West Bengal), among others.

The total project outlay for DRIP-II and III is Rs 10,211 crore -- Rs 5,107 crore for Phase-II and Rs 5,104 crore for Phase-III.

Of this, Rs 7,000 crore are being provided as external loan assistance, while Rs 3,211 crore are being borne by the participating states and central agencies.

The Phase-II scheme is co-financed by the World Bank and



the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

"Phase II and III together will last for 10 years, each phase continuing for six years with two years overlap," the Ministry said.

It added that DRIP-II and III are structured around four

major components -- rehabilitation of dams and associated structures, institutional strengthening, revenue-generation measures to support sustainable operation and maintenance, and project management for effective implementation.

India currently manages one of the largest dam portfolios globally and ranks third in the world with 6,628 specified dams, of which 6,545 are operational and 83 are under construction.

The gross water-storage capacity of these dams is about 330 billion cubic metres and they are critical for ensuring national food, energy and water security.

The Ministry said more than 26 per cent of these dams, or 1,681 structures, are over 50 years old, including 291 that are more than 100 years old, while another 42 per cent fall in the 25-50 years age bracket.

"Ageing infrastructure, sedimentation, changing hydrological patterns and increasing climate variability have highlighted the need for systematic rehabilitation and safety management," it said.

When Govts ask citizens to consume less

WHEN Governments ask citizens to tighten their belts, democracies often react with skepticism. Questions are raised, motives are debated, and political narratives quickly take shape. Yet history suggests something important: in moments of global uncertainty, national resilience has often begun not in Parliaments or ministries, but in millions of ordinary households. From wartime rationing to food shortages, oil shocks, and economic crises, leaders across the world have repeatedly turned to their people—not merely for support, but for participation.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent appeal to citizens on May 11, 2026, urging Indians to adopt a seven-point framework to reduce fuel consumption and prepare for possible energy disruptions, has sparked a predictable public debate. Critics have questioned whether such appeals place too much responsibility on ordinary citizens. Others see it as a practical attempt to prepare the country for possible turbulence in global energy markets.

Before viewing such appeals

purely through a partisan lens, it may be useful to ask a larger question: Is this the first time an Indian Prime Minister has asked citizens to change daily habits during a national or global crisis?

History gives a clear answer—NO.

India's first major example came under Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri in 1965. India was facing a severe food shortage while simultaneously dealing with military pressures during the Indo-Pak conflict. Rather than hide the gravity of the situation behind official statements, PM Shastri directly appealed to the nation. He urged citizens to skip one meal a week, reduce food wastage, and support domestic agricultural production. Families across the country voluntarily observed weekly fasts, and many establishments even kept kitchens closed on designated evenings. It became one of independent India's most remarkable examples of public cooperation during hardship. It was during this period that Shastri gave the enduring slogan, "Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan."

Less than a decade later, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi faced the global oil shock of 1973–74.

Following the Arab oil embargo, petroleum prices surged worldwide, affecting energy-dependent economies, including India. Her Government urged citizens to conserve fuel, reduce unnecessary travel, save electricity, and practice economic restraint. The message was clear: energy security was not merely a Government concern; it required

BY COL MOHINDER PAL SINGH

public participation.

In 1991, Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao inherited an economy on the brink of collapse. Foreign exchange reserves had fallen to critically low levels. As India entered a difficult but transformative phase of economic reform, the Government appealed for economic discipline, support for structural reforms, and reduced dependence on imports. Public patience during that period played an important role in enabling long-term economic recovery.

In May 1998, after the Pokhran nuclear tests, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee faced international sanctions and economic uncertainty. He urged citizens and

industry to demonstrate self-reliance, confidence in domestic capabilities, and resilience in the face of external pressure.

Even during periods of global inflation and rising energy prices between 2008 and 2012, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh repeatedly emphasised energy discipline and public acceptance of difficult fuel pricing decisions.

This pattern is not unique to India.

During the Second World War, Prime Minister Winston Churchill urged British citizens from 1940 onward to accept rationing, reduced consumption, and industrial discipline. Food, fuel, transport, and clothing were tightly regulated, and citizens were encouraged to "make do and mend." Personal inconvenience was accepted as part of national survival.

Similarly, in the US, President Jimmy Carter, during the energy crisis of 1977–79, urged Americans to reduce fuel consumption, lower household energy usage, and adopt conservation as a civic responsibility. His message was controversial at the time, but history has viewed it as an early recognition of energy vulnerability.

Seen in this broader context,

Prime Minister Modi's recent appeal appears less like a political exception and more like a familiar governance tool during uncertain times. India imports a large share of its crude oil requirements, making it vulnerable to disruptions caused by wars, supply chain instability, or turbulence in global shipping routes. In such circumstances, encouraging responsible consumption is neither unusual nor unprecedented.

That said, public appeals alone cannot solve structural energy challenges.

For such efforts to be meaningful, behavioural change must be supported by visible policy action. Expanding reliable public transport, accelerating electric mobility, incentivizing energy-efficient practices, investing in renewable energy, and improving transparency on national energy trends can make citizen participation far more effective.

History shows that nations overcome crises not through symbolism alone, but through a combination of credible leadership, informed citizens, and practical policy execution. Public cooperation matters—but it works best when matched by institutional preparedness.

Lanka's move to lease airport near Hambantota port sparks Indian interest

NEW DELHI, May 17 (PTI)

INDIA is closely monitoring Sri Lanka's decision to offer foreign investors control of an airport near the China-controlled Hambantota port, as it could present a rare opening for Indian firms seeking strategic footholds in the Indian Ocean, people familiar with the matter said on Sunday.

The Sri Lankan Government has already called for expressions of interest from domestic and international investors by

In 2017, China gained control of the strategic Hambantota port through a 99-year lease that had raised concerns in New Delhi in view of the location of the mega transit hub.

June 9 to take control of the Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport (MRIA) in Hambantota under a 30-year build-operate-transfer (BOT) model.

In 2017, China gained control of the strategic Hambantota port through a 99-year lease that had raised concerns in New Delhi in

view of the location of the mega transit hub.

New Delhi is watching the new opportunity with keen interest as both neighbouring countries have sought to forge greater trade and strategic relations following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the island nation last April.

The Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport, located about 250 km from the capital Colombo, has endured a troubled first decade, the people said.

Launched in 2013 with grand ambitions, the project cost USD 209 million, funded primarily by China's Export-Import Bank. However, despite having a swanky terminal building and a 3,500-metre runway, it failed to draw the passenger traffic and airline commitments required for commercial survival.

For years, the facility lan-

guished underutilised and mocked globally as the "world's emptiest airport".

Now, the Sri Lankan Government has issued a fresh Expression of Interest (Eoi), inviting strategic investors -- domestic and international -- to take over, operate and transform MRJA into a modern aviation hub.

The Eoi presents two independent investment tracks. The first is aerodrome operations -- a management contract for civil airport operations, requiring a

minimum of five years' relevant aviation experience or operation of at least one international airport handling over one million passengers annually, the people cited above said.

The second is landside operations, offered on a BOT model with a 30-year lease and extension provisions.

It will provide for the development of 238 hectares of land, comparable in scale to the Chinese-developed Colombo Port City but without any of the political risks, they said.

UN MEETING: India flags concerns over targeting of ships in Strait

UNITED NATIONS, May 17 (PTI)

TARGETING commercial shipping, endangering civilian crew and impeding freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz is “unacceptable”, India’s Permanent Representative to the UN Parvathaneni Harish has said.

Harish’s remarks at a special meeting of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNECOSOC) on safeguarding energy and supply flows came days after an India-flagged commercial vessel came under attack off the coast of Oman.

Omani authorities rescued all 14 crew members of the vessel sailing from Somalia, but it was not immediately known who carried out the strike. In a post on X on Sunday, Harish said that at the UNECOSOC meeting, he shared India’s approach to the recent energy and fertiliser crisis caused by the West Asia conflict. “A combination of short-term and structural measures alongside international cooperation are essential to respond to the crisis,” he said.

“Reiterated that targeting of commercial shipping, endangering civilian crew and impeding freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, are unacceptable. International law in this regard must be fully respected,” he added. The attack on the India-flagged vessel on May 13 took place amid the fragile situation in the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway close to the coast of Oman through which roughly one-fifth of the world’s energy supplies pass.

It has been severely disrupted by the conflict in West Asia that started on February 28, with the US and Israel launching joint attacks on Iran, triggering retaliatory strikes.

Ebola outbreak in Congo, Uganda A GLOBAL HEALTH EMERGENCY: WHO

ABUJA (Nigeria), May 17 (AP)

WORLD Health Organisation (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus declared the Ebola disease outbreak in Congo and neighboring Uganda a public health emergency of international concern on Sunday after more than 300 suspected cases and 88 deaths.

In a post on X, WHO said the outbreak does not meet the criteria of a pandemic emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic, and advised against the closure of international borders.

WHO said a laboratory-confirmed case has also been reported in Congo's capital of Kinshasa, which is about 1,000 kilometres (620 miles) from the outbreak's epicentre in the eastern province of Ituri, suggesting a possible wider spread.

It said the patient had visited Ituri and that other suspected cases have also been reported in North Kivu province, which is

one of Congo's most populous provinces and borders Ituri. Ebola is highly contagious and can be contracted via bodily fluids such as vomit, blood or semen. The disease it causes is

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rare, but severe and often fatal.

Health authorities say the current outbreak, first confirmed on Friday, is caused by the Bundibugyo virus, a rare variant of the Ebola disease that has no approved therapeutics or vaccines. Although more than 20 Ebola outbreaks have taken place in Congo and Uganda, this is only

the third time the Bundibugyo virus has been detected.

Congo accounts for all except two of the cases, both of which were reported in Uganda, the WHO said. The Bundibugyo virus was first detected in Uganda's Bundibugyo district during a 2007-2008 outbreak that infected 149 people and killed 37 people. The second time was in 2012 in an outbreak in Isiro, Congo, where 57 cases and 29 deaths were reported.

WHO's emergency declaration is meant to spur donor agencies and countries into action. However, the global response to previous declarations has been mixed. In 2024, when the WHO declared mpox outbreaks in Congo and elsewhere in Africa a global emergency, experts at the time said it did little to get supplies like diagnostic tests, medicines and vaccines to affected countries quickly.

Africa CDC Director-General Dr Jean Kaseya said on Saturday

Drone hits Barakah N-power plant in UAE

■ An electrical generator was set ablaze on its perimeter

DUBAI, May 17 (AP)

A **DRONE** strike targeted the United Arab Emirates' Barakah nuclear power plant on Sunday, setting an electrical generator ablaze on its perimeter and again straining the shaky ceasefire in the Iran war.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, which caused no radiological release nor injuries, authorities in the UAE's capital, Abu Dhabi,



said. However, suspicion immediately fell on Iran, which has been increasingly threatening the UAE over recent days as the country hosted Israeli Iron Dome missile defences and troops during the war.

The attack comes as Iran still has a chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz, a vital waterway where

a fifth of the world's oil and natural gas passes through before the war, disrupting global energy supplies.

Meanwhile, America continues to block Iranian ports in response as negotiations to solidify the ceasefire have failed to advance.

US President Donald Trump has suggested hostilities could resume, and Iranian state television has repeatedly aired segments with anchors holding Kalashnikov-style rifles in an effort to prepare the public for war. Meanwhile, fire exchanges between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon have been rising in

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