



## Mullaperiyar Dam Issue

**For Prelims:** Mullaperiyar Dam, Supreme Court, NDSA, Periyar River, Western Ghats.

**For Mains:** Mullaperiyar Dam Issue and dam safety act, Water Resources.

### Why in News?

Recently, the [Supreme Court](#) ordered the reconstitution of the **Mullaperiyar dam's supervisory committee**.

- The committee will include **one technical expert each from Tamil Nadu and Kerala**, the two States involved in the dispute concerning safety of the dam.

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### What was the Supreme Court Ruling?

- The court has **empowered the panel with functions and powers** on par with that of the [National Dam Safety Authority \(NDSA\)](#).
  - NDSA is a body envisaged under the **Dam Safety Act, 2021**.
- For any act of failure, “appropriate action” will be taken against the persons concerned not only for having violated the directions of the court but also under the Act
  - The act **talks of one year imprisonment or fine or both for refusal** to comply with directions of bodies formed under the law.
- As per the Supreme Court latest order, the **two States are expected to nominate, within two weeks**, one representative each to the supervisory committee, in addition to one nominee each.

### What do we Know about the Mullaperiyar Dam?

- The Mullaperiyar, a **126-year-old dam**, is located on the **confluence of the Mullayar and Periyar rivers** in Kerala’s Idukki district.
- The dam stands at the height of 53.66 metres and 365.85 metres in length.
- The **dam** is owned, operated and maintained by Tamil Nadu.
  - **Tamil Nadu maintained it for several purposes**, including irrigation, drinking water supply and hydro-power generation.

### What are the Key Highlights about Periyar River?

- The Periyar River is the **longest river in the state of Kerala** with a length of 244 km.
- It is also known as '**Lifeline of Kerala**' as it is one of the few perennial rivers in the state.
- Periyar River originates from **Sivagiri hills of [Western Ghats](#)**, in Tamil Nadu and flows through the Periyar National Park.
- The **main tributaries** of Periyar are Muthirapuzha, **Mullayar**, Cheruthoni, Perinjankutti.

## What is the Dispute?

- In late 1979, after the eruption of the controversy over the structural stability of the dam, it was **decided at a tripartite meeting** chaired by K. C. Thomas, the then Chairman of the [Central Water Commission](#) that **the water level be lowered to 136 feet** against the full reservoir level of 152 feet so that Tamil Nadu could take up strengthening measures.
- In 2006 and 2014 the **Supreme Court held that the water level be raised to 142 feet**, up to which Tamil Nadu stored water even last year (2021).
- The court's judgment of 2014 also **provided for the formation of the supervisory committee** and the completion of the remaining work by Tamil Nadu.
  - But, **there has been no end to litigation over the dam** with Kerala witnessing [landslides](#) in recent years.
- Though **there had been no reports of landslides in the vicinity of the dam site**, the events in other parts of the **State led to a renewed campaign against the dam**.
- The Kerala government **proposed that the existing dam be decommissioned** and a fresh one be built
  - These **options are not completely acceptable to Tamil Nadu** which wants to complete the remaining strengthening work and restore the level to 152 feet.

## Why is the Dam Safety Act?

- **About:**
  - The Dam Safety Act, 2021 came into **force in December 2021**.
  - The act is **aimed at addressing the long-felt need for addressing issues** concerning the safety of major dams all over the country.
  - It **provides for surveillance, inspection, operation, and maintenance of certain dams** for prevention of disasters related to dam failure, apart from institutional mechanisms to ensure their safe functioning.
  - The Act covers those dams having a height of over 15m and between 10m and 15m with certain stipulations.
- **Create two National Institutions:**
  - **National Committee on Dam Safety (NCDS):** It seeks to **evolve dam safety policies** and recommend necessary regulations, and the
  - **National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA):** It seeks to **implement policies and address unresolved issues** between the two States. The NDSA will be the regulatory body.
- **Create two State Level Institutions:**
  - The legislation also envisages the formation of **State Dam Safety Organisations and State Committees on Dam Safety**.
    - **Dam owners will be held responsible** for the construction, operation, maintenance, and supervision of dams.

## How does the Dam Safety Act Affect Mullaperiyar?

- Since the act provides that the **NDSA will perform the role of the State Dam Safety Organisation for a dam located in one State and used by another**, the Mullaperiyar dam, strictly speaking, comes under the purview of the NDSA.
- Besides, the Supreme Court, which has been hearing petition after petition after its judgment in 2014, **mooted the idea of extending the powers of its supervisory committee** to take over charge of the safety and maintenance of the structure.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

**Q. Which one of the following pairs is not correctly matched? (2010)**

Dam/Lake	River
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- (a) Govind Sagar : Satluj
- (b) Kolleru Lake : Krishna
- (c) Ukai Reservoir: Tapi
- (d) Wular Lake : Jhelum

**Ans: (b)**

- Govind Sagar is a man-made reservoir situated in Bilaspur District, Himachal Pradesh on the River Satluj. It is formed by the Bhakra Dam.
- Kolleru Lake is one of the largest freshwater lakes in India located in Andhra Pradesh. It is located **between Krishna and Godavari deltas**. It was declared as a wildlife sanctuary in November 1999 under Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, and designated a wetland of international importance in November 2002 under the Ramsar Convention.
- The Ukai Dam, also known as Vallabh Sagar, is constructed across the Tapi River in Gujarat. It is the second largest reservoir in Gujarat after the Sardar Sarovar.
- Wular Lake is the largest freshwater lake in India and lies in the Kashmir Valley. It is also one of the largest fresh water lakes in Asia. The lake basin was formed as a result of tectonic activity and is fed by the Jhelum River. Wular lake is also one of the 46 Indian wetlands designated as a Ramsar site.

**Q. Consider the following statements: (2009)**

1. There are no east flowing rivers in Kerala.
2. There are no west flowing rivers in Madhya Pradesh.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Ans: (d)**

- **Pambar, Bhavani and Kabani are three east flowing rivers** of Kerala. Pambar and Bhavani flow into Tamil Nadu. Kabani enters Karnataka. All three of them empty themselves into Kaveri.
- Two main rivers of the **Madhya Pradesh flowing west are Narmada and Tapti or Tapi**. The Narmada is the westward flowing river of Peninsular India. It rises from the western flank of the Amarkantak plateau in the State of Madhya Pradesh.

**Source: TH**