

Reviving Inland waterways

Why in news?

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India revives its inland waterways for freight movement with a shipment of 16 containers owned by PepsiCo reaching the new multi-modal terminal at Varanasi.

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What is the background?

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• The push to revive the country's waterways as viable commercial freight corridors is one among the big-ticket infrastructure initiatives of the government.

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- Rivers and canals were traditionally used in pre-modern India to transport humans and materials, and to carry out trading activity.
- Inland waterways started to decline with the advent of widespread road and rail networks.

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• Long, slow voyages began to be considered incompatible with the faster pace of doing business.

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- Also, presence of <u>silt deposits</u> led to channels becoming increasingly <u>shallow</u> and the commerce dried up in the traditional docks and ports.
- Hence to realise the maximum potential of this sector, the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) was established in 1986.
- Five waterways were identified by IWAI, but the investment in them remained inadequate.
- Between 1986 and 2014, India spent only Rs 1,456 crore on its inland waterways.

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• In comparison, China invested Rs 1,09,000 crore from 2005-10, and Germany

pumped in Rs 77,000 crore in its waterways in 2016 alone.

• However, India increased its investments to Rs 1,605 crore in this sector from 2014-18.

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• The National Waterways Act, 2016 merged existing Acts to make a law to notify 106 National Waterways, including the existing five.

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What is the potential?

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• India has 14,500 km of navigable waterways in rivers, canals, backwaters, creeks, etc.

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 \bullet About 55 million tonnes of cargo moves on waterways, but the activity is largely restricted to –

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1. The Ganga-Bhagirathi-Hooghly system

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2. The Brahmaputra

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3. The Barak river

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4. The rivers in Goa

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5. The backwaters of Kerala

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6. Inland waterways in Mumbai

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7. The delta regions of the Godavari and Krishna.

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• Overall, waterways account for just <u>about 3%</u> of all freight movement in India, and the mode remains <u>grossly underutilised</u>.

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• However, the same amount of energy can move several times more cargo (by weight) by water than it can move via rail or by road.

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What are the constraints?

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• There are multiple constraints in transporting men and materials perennially on inland waterway corridors.

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• <u>Periodic dredging</u> is required to clear the silt that comes with the monsoon, so that adequate depth is maintained.

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• Both fixed and floating terminals are needed at multiple points along the waterways.

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• Many rivers are becoming progressively drier and many of those that retain adequate volumes are spanned by <u>low bridges</u> that would hinder passage of larger vessels.

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What are the measures taken?

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• The <u>Jalmarg Vikas Project</u> receives financial assistance from the World Bank to upgrade navigability on National Waterway 1 from Varanasi to Haldia, a distance of 1,380 km.

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• The project seeks to develop a fairway of 3-metre depth in phases, at an estimated cost of Rs 5,369 crore.

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- The project is intended to be completed by 2023.
- There are plans to develop three multimodal terminals along National Waterway 1.

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- Apart from the one in Varanasi, being built for Rs 169.59 crore, there is one planned in Sahibganj in Jharkhand, and the third in Haldia.
- It also involves building a Farakka navigation lock for Rs 359 crore, to be completed by June 2019.

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• The government has also tapped the <u>National Clean Energy Fund</u> and the <u>Central Road Fund</u> for the initiative, and has borrowed from the market by issuing government bonds.

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• Along with that, two barges carrying 1,233 tonnes of fly ash were recently flagged off on river Ganga (National Waterway-1) from Kahalgaon power plant in Bihar.

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• The barges will travel 2,085 km across multiple waterways to reach Pandu Inland Port in Assam.

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- \bullet This could make our waterways establish themselves as possible for cargo transportation and make compete with other sectors. $\$
- The journey also marks one of the longest hauls in waterways sector movement in India.

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• The government called it a critical integrated movement through three waterways such as NW1 on the Ganga, the Indo-Bangladesh Protocol (IBP) route, and NW2 on the Brahmaputra.

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• Also since August 2016, pilot movements have been carried out on various stretches of NW1.

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• More than 15 voyages have been completed, including integrated movements through multiple waterways.

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- \bullet The present journey is part of an effort by the government to resurrect the Ganga as a significant transportation artery. $\mbox{\sc h}$
- The terminal has been designed mainly for construction material, food grains, cement, and fertilisers.
- Thus the PepsiCo cargo shows that a commercial shipment can use Inland waterways as a viable, working route for transportation.

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Source: The Indian Express

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