



Mains Practice Question

Q. What are the challenges involved in developing the inland water transport in India and its advantages? What steps need to be taken to tap its potential? (250 words)

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Approach:

- Introduce by giving potential of Inland water transport.
- Enumerate its challenges and advantages
- Suggest some steps needed to be taken to tap its potential.

Introduction

- India has a large network of water bodies in the form of rivers, canals, backwaters, and creeks. The total navigable length is 14,500 km, out of which about 5,200 km of the river and 4,000 km of canals can be used by mechanized crafts.
- In water-based transport generally, fuel costs are low and environmental pollution is lower than in transport by road, rail, or air. The waterway is naturally available, which has to be 'trained', maintained, and upgraded.

Body

Challenges:

- Water Flow: Due to Industrial, Agriculture and habitation the water flows have been decreased over the years this also may have decreased due to impact of dams on the rivers.
- Inadequate water channel Depth: Large vessels cannot traverse without adequate waters in the rivers. This along with the seasonal dependency of rivers makes operation of many ports difficult
- Excessive Siltation:-Deforestation and erosion activity of the river leads to problem of siltation making navigation difficult.
- Poor Skills and low technology adaptation:-Lack of automation in processes and low multi operation skills affect efficient utilisation of ports
- It is a slower mode as compared to Rail and Road by its very nature. So improper navigational aids further hurt its competitiveness with other modes.

Advantage:

- Water transport is not only environment-friendly but also cheaper than other modes of transport. Currently, logistics cost in India is one of the highest among major countries –as per the reports it is 18% in India versus 8-10% in China and 10-12% in European Union.
- The acquisition of land for national and State highways is difficult and the cost of construction of roads, flyovers and bridges is high. So, water transport is good alternative.
- It will help in the generation of millions of job opportunities.
- It will boost the maritime trade of the states and augment their economies.
- There is a huge potential for domestic cargo transportation as well as for cruise, tourism and passenger traffic.

Steps taken to tap the potential:

- Jal Marg Vikas Project (JMVP) and Sagarmala are measures taken by Government to support inland water transportation
- The Indian Government should focus more and put some special efforts and funds on the development of commercially significant IWT.
- It requires the maintenance of a specified water depth and width depending upon the size of vessels expected to use that waterway. This necessitates the release of adequate discharges.
- There is a strong need to provide effective rail, road and coastal connections from the waterways for multi-modal logistics. The terminals should be located close to industrial hubs or consumption centers and should provide connectivity to both rail and Road.
- Preservation of existing canals, lakes etc. is an essential ingredient of environmental protection. Inland waterway should not pollute the water way itself.

Conclusion

- National waterways provide a cost-effective, logistically efficient and environment-friendly mode of transport, whose development as a supplementary mode would enable diversion of traffic from over-congested roads and railways. Hence, the waterways project deserves better regulation and development across the country.

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