



Brahmaputra (NW2) gets connected with Ganga (NW1)

For Prelims: Inland Waterways, Indo-Bangladesh (Sonamura-Daudkandi), Indo-Myanmar protocol (Kaladan).

For Mains: Inland Waterways Network advantages and challenges, Initiatives taken for Inland Waterways

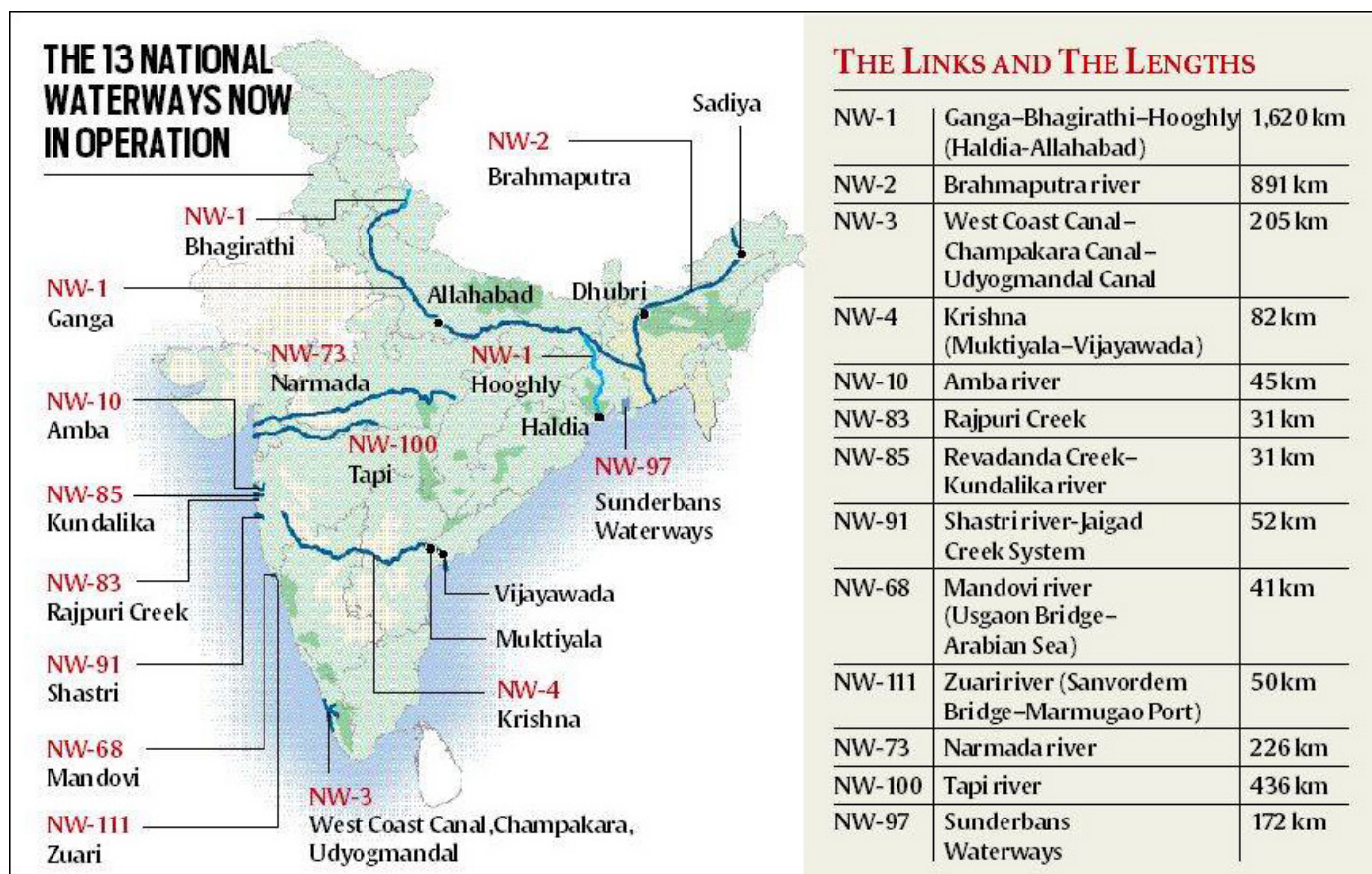
Why in News?

Recently, the **Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways** received the **maiden voyage of food-grains from Patna to Pandu port** via Bangladesh in Guwahati (Assam).

- **Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI)** is **planning to run a fixed schedule** sailing between **NW1 and NW2** heralding a new age of inland water transport for Assam & the Northeast India.
- The [Inland Vessels Bill, 2021](#), was also approved to **regulate safety, security and registration of inland vessels**.

What is the Significance of this Achievement?

- The start of cargo movement through ships through [Indo Bangladesh Protocol Route \(IBRP\)](#) marks the **beginning of a new age of economic prosperity** for the whole region of Northeast.
- This will **pave the way for growth & development** of inland water transport.
- This will also **provide the business community a viable, economic & ecological alternative** and will also play a pivotal role in **energising India's northeast as the engine of growth**.
- The sustained effort to **rejuvenate the historical trade routes** via Bangladesh got a fillip under [PM Gati Shakti](#).
 - It has been envisioned that **Northeast will slowly turn & convert into a connectivity hub**.
 - The integrated development plan, under PM Gati Shakti, has been envisioned in order to **amp up swift movement of cargo over Brahmaputra**.



What are Inland Waterways?

About:

- India has about **14,500 km of navigable waterways** which consist of rivers, canals, backwaters, creeks, etc.
- As per the **National Waterways Act 2016**, 111 waterways have been declared as National Waterways (NWs).
 - NW-1:** Ganga-Bhagirathi-Hooghly River System (Prayagraj-Haldia) with length 1620 km is the **longest National Waterway in India**.
 - The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI)** is implementing the [Jal Marg Vikas Project \(JMVP\)](#) for capacity augmentation of navigation on the Haldia-Varanasi stretch of Ganga (part of NW-1) with the technical and financial assistance of the [World Bank](#).

Related Steps taken:

- The waterways have also been proposed to be linked to the [eastern and western Dedicated Freight Corridors \(DFCs\)](#), as well as the [Sagarmala Project](#), which aims to promote port-led direct and indirect development.
- Further, the provisions of the [Indo-Bangladesh \(Sonamura-Daudkandi\)](#) and [Indo-Myanmar protocol \(Kaladan\)](#) permitting transshipment of goods through Bangladesh and Myanmar waters - which, in many cases, are a continuum of India's inland waterways - enabling quicker shipments and deeper market penetration in India's North East.

What is the Scope of Inland Waterways in India?

- About **55 million tonnes of cargo is being moved annually by IWT** (Inland Water Transport), a fuel-efficient and environment-friendly mode.
 - However, freight transportation by waterways is highly underutilized in the country as compared to developed countries.
- Its operations are **currently restricted to a few stretches** in the **Ganga-Bhagirathi-Hooghly rivers, the Brahmaputra, the Barak river** (northeastern India), the rivers in Goa, the backwaters in Kerala, inland waters in Mumbai and the deltaic regions of the Godavari - Krishna

rivers.

- Besides these **organized operations by mechanized vessels**, country boats of various capacities also operate in various rivers and canals and substantial quantum of cargo and passengers are transported in this unorganized sector as well.
- In India, **IWT has the potential to supplement the overburdened railways and congested roadways**. In addition to cargo movement, the IWT sector also provides a convenient function in related activities such as carriage of vehicles {on Roll-on-Roll-off (Ro-Ro) mode of cross ferry} and tourism.

What are the Advantages of an Inland Waterways Network?

- **Cheaper Mode of Transportation:**
 - Waterways are a cheaper mode of transportation vis-à-vis the available alternatives, significantly reducing the point-to-point cost of goods transportation.
 - It also reduces time, cost of transportation of goods and cargos, as well as congestion and accidents on highways.
 - The network requires **no green field investment**, but only capex (capital expenditure) for improvement/upgradation.
- **Seamless Interconnectivity:**
 - They are expected to also **“help create seamless interconnectivity connecting hinterlands** along navigable river coasts and coastal routes” and “are likely to play a crucial role in connecting the north-eastern states to the mainland.”

What are the Implementation Challenges?

- **No Navigability throughout the Year:**
 - Some rivers are seasonal and do not offer navigability through the year. Around 20 out of the 111 identified national waterways have reportedly been found unviable.
- **Intensive Capital and Maintenance Dredging:**
 - All the **identified waterways require intensive capital and maintenance dredging**, which could be resisted by the local community on environmental grounds, including displacement fears, thereby posing implementation challenges.
- **Other Uses of water:**
 - Water also **has important competing uses**, viz. need for living as well as for irrigation, power generation etc. It would **not be possible for the local government/others to overlook** these needs.
- **Exclusive Jurisdiction of the Central Government:**
 - The exclusive jurisdiction of the Central Government is **only in regard to shipping and navigation on inland waterways** declared to be ‘national waterways’ by an act of Parliament.
 - **Utilisation/sailing of vessels**, in other waterways, is **within the ambit of the concurrent list** or is in the jurisdiction of the respective state governments.

Way Forward

- Water being a scarce resource with competing needs, the use of water for transport may be difficult to **justify**. However, considering the various advantages and taking into account the commercial viability, the numerous opportunities for employment and economic development, the **National Waterways can be effectively used as the way forward**.
- An effective waterways network **would necessitate drawing up a well-coordinated strategy** on lines of **complementarity between the national network** and other waterways, not declared as such, as well as between waterways and roadways/railways.
 - The strategy **should closely look into the various undercurrents**, including competing uses/needs, possible local resistance and also work closely and in coordination with local governments for quick and successful implementation of this important national project.

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