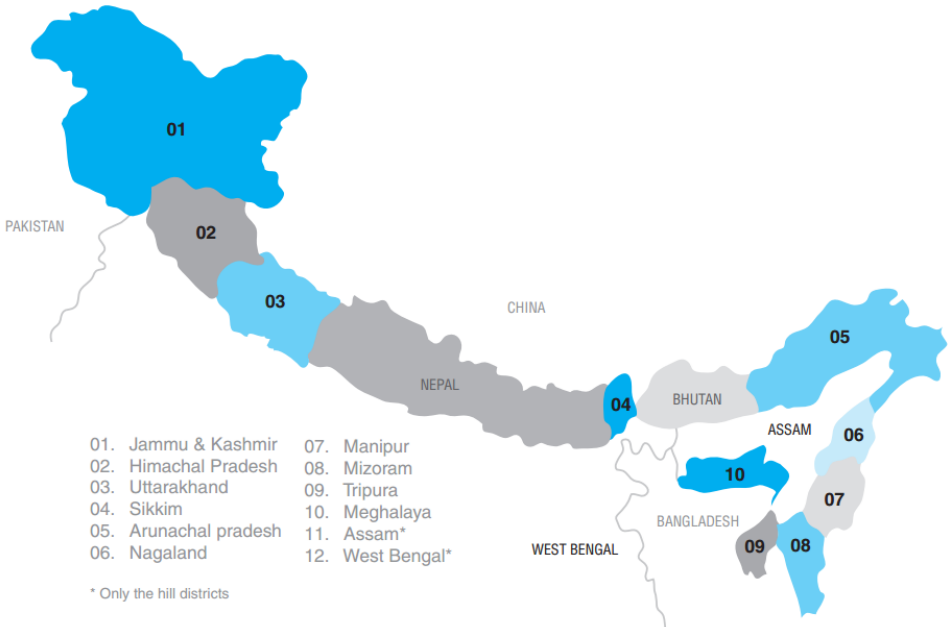
Challenges of Indian Himalayan Range Towns

Why in News?

Himalayan towns face civic issues due to unique challenges, requiring tailored development, but they often lack the necessary funds and resources.

What is Indian Himalayan Region (IHR)?

- **Location-** It spans *thirteen Indian states and union territories* of India
  - Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, West Bengal, and parts of the northeastern states.
- **Geographical divisions-** They are divided into three main geographical entities
  - **Himadri** - Greater Himalaya
  - **Himachal** - Lesser Himalaya
  - **Sivaliks** - Outer Himalaya
- **Trans-Himalayan Ranges-** The northernmost ranges include the *Karakoram Mountains, with the Zanskar and Ladakh* ranges lying to the south.
- **Major rivers-** It is home to major rivers such as the *Indus, Sutlej, Kali, Kosi, and Brahmaputra*.
- These rivers are ***glacier-fed*** and ***carve steep gorges*** through the Himalayas to flow into the Great Plains.
- **Significance**- It *provides water* to a large portion of the Indian subcontinent and *supports diverse flora and fauna*.



Note: J&K (as in picture as (1)) bifurcated into UT of J&K and UT of Ladakh in 2019.

What are the major issues in IHR Towns?

- **Civic challenges** - Himalayan towns, including state capitals like Srinagar, Guwahati, Shillong, and Shimla, face significant issues with sanitation, solid and liquid waste management, and water supply.
- **Ineffective planning**- Planning institutions often fail because they adopt models designed for plains.
- **Resource shortage-** City governments are severely understaffed, with a *75% shortage in human resources*.
- For example, in the Kashmir Valley, over 40 urban local bodies have only 15 executive officers, excluding Srinagar.
- **Environmental impact-** In Srinagar, from 2000 to 2020, there was a *75.58% increase in built-up real estate* where water bodies eroded by almost 25%.
    - Nearly *90% of liquid waste is discharged into water bodies* without treatment, further harming the environment.
- **Inappropriate infrastructure-** *Unsustainable infrastructure*, poorly designed roads, and inadequate waste management are adding to the problems.
- **Climatic variations-** Ch*anging precipitation patterns and rising temperatures* exacerbate these issues, further straining the socio-ecological fabric of the Himalayas.
- **Tourism growth-** The expansion of tourism, often *replacing eco-friendly infrastructure* with harmful constructions, has a negative impact on biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- **Development pressure-** They are stressing natural resources, leading to water scarcity, *deforestation, land degradation*, and biodiversity loss.

What are the government initiatives for IHR Towns?

- **National Mission on Himalayan Studies (NMHS) –** It focuses on *research, technological innovation, and community-based solutions*.
- They are tailored to the unique ecological and socio-economic conditions of the Himalayas.
- **Sustainable urban development Initiatives-** Programs like the *Smart Cities Mission* and *AMRUT* (Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation) aims
    - To improve urban infrastructure, including water supply, waste management, and sanitation, with adaptations for the Himalayan region's specific needs.
- **Ecotourism initiatives-** Various state governments in the IHR have promoted ecotourism to balance economic development with environmental conservation.
- **Climate Resilient Infrastructure-** The government is investing in *infrastructure projects resilient to climate change*, such as flood control, landslide mitigation, and earthquake-resistant buildings in the Himalayan region.
- **National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) –** It is to *clean and protect rivers* originating in the Himalayas.
- It includes projects of pollution control, sustainable water use, *ecosystem restoration* in towns along the Ganges and its tributaries.
- **CAMPA-** Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management & Planning Authority Funds are allocated for afforestation projects in the IHR·
- It helps to *mitigate the effects of deforestation* and land degradation, aiming to restore

ecological balance in urban and rural areas.

What lies ahead?

- *Tailoring urban planning* based on climate resilience and involving local communities in a bottom-up approach.
- A separate chapter on urban financing for the IHR towns should be included in the Finance Commission's report, *increasing intergovernmental transfers to at least 1% of GDP*.
- Emphasis should be on *eco-centric planning processes*, with public participation to ensure sustainability and resilience in urban futures.
- *Promoting ecotourism* is essential for balancing development with environmental preservation.

Reference

The Hindu| Unique Planning for Indian Himalayan Towns

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