

Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)

Mains: GS II - Governance

Why in News?

Recently, Andhra Pradesh Assembly passes Bill to restore direct election of Mayors, Chairpersons of ULBs.

What are Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)?

- **Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)** - They are local self-government institutions that manage the civic administration, infrastructure, and public services of cities, towns, and transitional urban areas.
- **Constitutional status** - In India, they gained constitutional status under the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992, forming the third tier of government.
- **Main Types of Urban Local Bodies**
 - **Municipal Corporations (Nagar Nigam)** - Govern large metropolitan cities; headed by a Mayor with an administrative Municipal Commissioner.
 - **Municipal Councils (Municipalities / Nagar Palika)** - Govern smaller cities and towns; headed by a President or Chairperson.
 - **Nagar Panchayats (City Councils)** - Govern areas in transition from rural to urban.
 - **Specialized Bodies** - Include Cantonment Boards, Port Trusts, and industrial townships created for specific administrative or defense zones.

What are the Core Functions and Responsibilities?

- **Water and Sanitation** - Supplying clean drinking water, managing drainage, and treating sewage.
- **Waste Management** - Collecting, moving, and disposing of solid waste and garbage.
- **Urban Planning** - Managing town planning, land use, and building rules.
- **Public Health** - Controlling diseases, managing hospitals or dispensaries, and providing vaccination drives.
- **Infrastructure Care** - Building and fixing public streets, bridges, and streetlights.
- **Public Safety** - Providing fire services and removing dangerous buildings.
- **Public Spaces** - Building and keeping up parks, gardens, libraries, and museums.
- **Social Welfare** - Helping the poor, improving slums, and building night shelters.
- **Economic Support** - Setting up public markets, slaughterhouses, and parking lots.

What are the importance of ULBs?

- **Essential Service Delivery** - Provide safe drinking water, sanitation, waste management, street lighting, and drainage.
- **Grassroots Democracy** - Promote decentralization and give voice to local citizens, including seats reserved for women and marginalized groups.
- **Urban Planning** - Create master plans and control land use to stop messy, unplanned city growth.
- **Economic Growth** - Build and maintain local infrastructure that turns cities into hubs of business and job creation.
- **Disaster & Climate Response** - Act as local first responders during floods, disease outbreaks, and climate emergencies.

What are the challenges associated with ULBs?

- **Low Independent Revenue** - ULBs generate only about 32% of their required funds independently, remaining heavily dependent on state and central grants.
- **Poor Tax Realization** - Property tax collections achieve only a fraction of their actual potential due to weak enforcement and outdated mapping.
- **Loss of Taxation Powers** - The implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) absorbed local levies like octroi and entry taxes without adequate compensatory mechanisms.
- **Parastatal Interference** - State-level development authorities and single-purpose agencies frequently bypass elected municipal bodies, causing fragmented local governance.
- **Executive Power Conflicts** - Tensions persist between elected political heads (Mayors) and state-appointed bureaucrats (Municipal Commissioners).
- **Delayed Elections** - Frequent and extended postponements of local municipal elections disrupt democratic accountability in several states.
- **Staff Shortages** - High vacancy rates and lack of recruitment control leave municipal offices understaffed and overburdened.
- **Capacity Constraints** - A shortage of skilled technical and financial professionals weakens project planning, execution, and transparent accounting.

What are the measures taken by government to strengthen the ULBs?

- **Constitutional and Functional Devolution**
 - **74th Constitutional Amendment Act (1992)** - Gave ULBs formal constitutional status and mapped 18 functional responsibilities (including urban planning, public health, and sanitation) under the Twelfth Schedule.
 - **Model Laws** - Introduced guidelines like the Model Municipal Law and Model Building By-Laws to help states modernize local municipal legislation.
- **Financial and Budgetary Measures**
 - **Finance Commission Grants** - Devolution of massive fiscal support through Finance Commission recommendations (such as multi-thousand-crore allocations under the 15th Finance Commission).
 - **Municipal Bonds & Incentives** - Central budgetary incentives encouraging ULBs to issue municipal bonds to raise independent capital from markets.

- **Special Assistance Schemes:** Financial outlays via specific reform-linked special assistance packages for urban planning and capital improvements.
- **Infrastructure and Urban Missions**
 - **AMRUT & AMRUT 2.0** - Focuses on basic urban infrastructure (water supply, sewerage) and developing GIS-based master plans for cities.
 - **Smart Cities Mission** - Promotes sustainable and tech-enabled local infrastructure.
 - **SBM and PMAY** - Central support extended through Swachh Bharat Mission (sanitation) and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (housing) implemented through municipal channels.
- **Capacity Building and Governance**
 - **Training Initiatives** - Launch of platforms like the National Urban Learning Platform (NULP) and programs by the Capacity Building Commission to train municipal functionaries.
 - **Performance Indexing** - Use of tools like the Municipal Performance Index and Ease of Living Index to foster competitive governance among cities.

Andhra Pradesh's New Amendment

- The amendment modifies Section 90 of the Municipal Corporations Act, 1955 and Section 23 of the Municipalities Act, 1965.
- Under the new framework:
 - Mayors and Chairpersons will be directly elected by the people of the respective ULB.
 - They will have a five-year tenure.
 - Their elections will be held simultaneously with the ordinary elections to municipal divisions and wards.
- The Deputy Mayor and Vice-Chairperson structure has been rationalised to one Deputy Mayor and one Vice-Chairperson.
- The election of these deputy positions will continue to follow the existing model.
- Thus, the reform seeks to give the heads of urban local bodies a direct electoral mandate.

What lies ahead?

- India's rapidly urbanising cities require not merely elected representatives, but empowered, accountable and capable urban governments.

Reference

[The Hindu| ULBs](#)