

Varanasi multi modal Terminal and Inland Waterways Transport

Why in news?

The Rs. 170-crore multi-modal terminal at Varanasi was inaugurated recently.

Why this development is significant?

- This is the first of the three multi-modal terminals being constructed on the National Waterways NW-1.
- It is a part of the Jal Marg Vikas(JMV) Project of The Inland Waterways Authority of India.
- It is aided by World Bank.
- Two other multi modal Terminals are also being constructed in Sahibganj and Haldia respectively.
- The opening of the Varanasi 'port' marks a major advance in the ambitious JMV project.
- Riverine trade along the Ganga may act as a boost for the economies of the eastern region, where road transportation is inefficient.
- A multi-modal approach will address chronic logistics issues, inviting investment into regions considered uncongenial for business.

What is Jal Marg Vikas Project (JMV)?

- Jal Marg Vikas is a project that aims to develop the stretch of River Ganga between Varanasi to Haldia for navigation of large vessels upto 1500-2000 tonnes weight.
- The project plans to maintain a draught of 2-3 metres in this stretch of the river and sets up other systems required for safe navigation.
- The objective is to promote inland waterways as a cheaper and more environment friendly means of transport, especially for cargo movement.
- Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) is the project Implementing Agency
- The objective of the JMV project is to facilitate the movement of 1,500-2,000 tonne vessels along the Allahabad-Haldia stretch.

Is the inland waterway transport underutilized in India?

- The potential of inland waterways to emerge as a viable alternative to road transport is immense.

- In India, only 3.5 % of trade is only done through inland waterways route.
- However the inland waterways play a major role in many countries.
- For instance: 47 % in China, 40 % in Europe, 44 % in Japan and Korea and 35 % in Bangladesh is through Inland Waterway Transport (IWT).

Why IWT should be promoted?

- IWT's **fuel efficiency** is unparalleled, particularly in comparison with road transport.
- The costs to be incurred in dredging in particular should be viewed in the context of the larger savings and economic gains.
- It will also serve to keep major waterways in serviceable condition, since a minimum flow and depth would be required to keep large vessels afloat and moving.
- There are 14,500 km of navigable waterways in India.
- Out of these, about 5,700 km is navigable by mechanized vessels.
- Apart from the Ganga, the Brahmaputra, West Coast Canal (in Kerala) Mandovi, Zuari and Sunderbans are operational waterways.
- The annual profits of the 12 major ports, estimated at Rs. 7,000 crore.
- It will be channelized to develop an extensive inland waterways system.
- The major ports will develop special purpose vehicles to this end.

Source: The Hindu