

2. Violation of Ganga Flow Norms

Prelims Level: Places in News

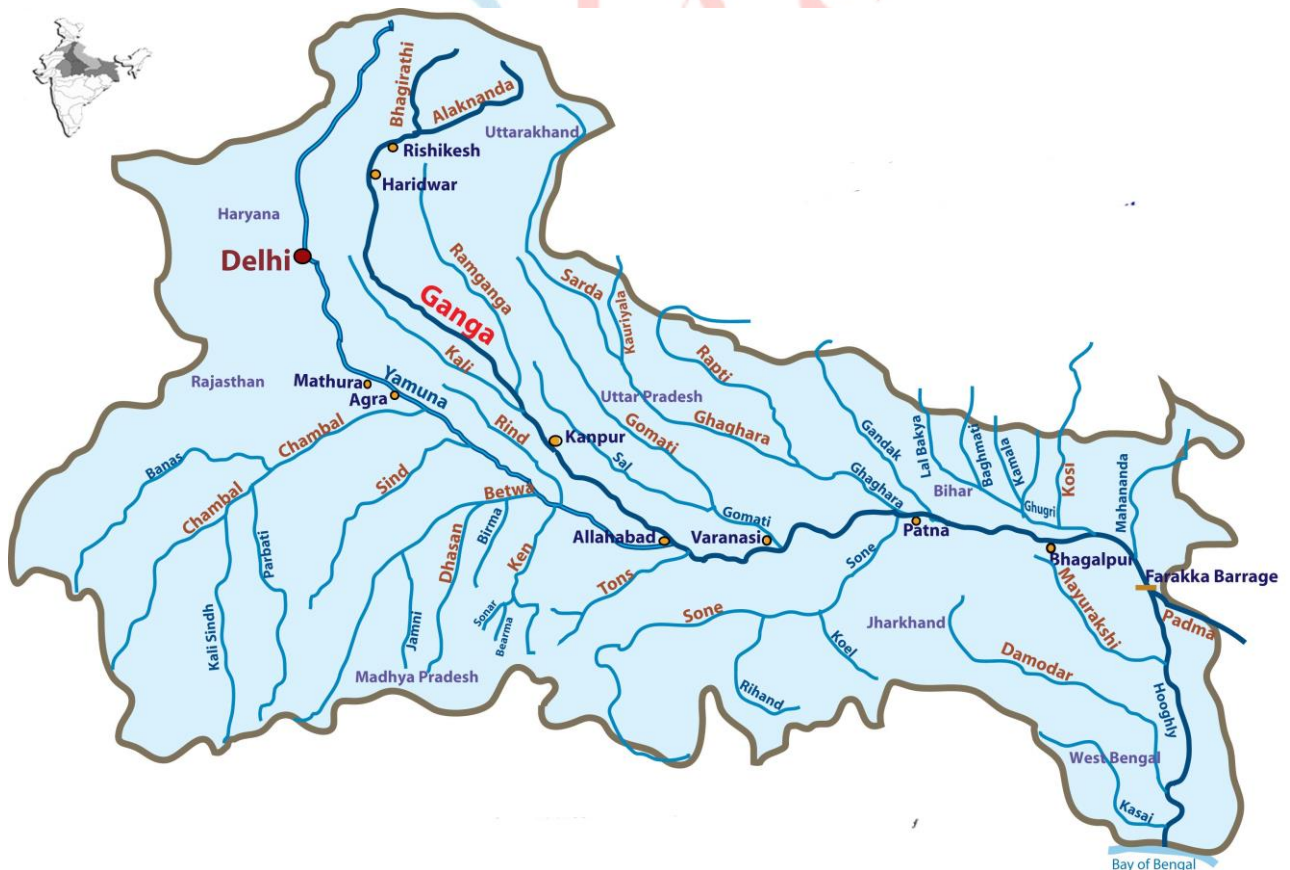
Mains Level: GS-III Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.

Why in News?

- A recent report by **Central Water Commission (CWC)** says that few hydro power projects on the upper reaches of the river Ganga's tributaries are violating **Ganga Ecological Flow (e-flow) Norms**.

About Ganga River System:

- The Ganga is the most important river of India both from the point of view of its basin and cultural significance.
- It **rises from the Gangotri glacier near Gaumukh (3,900 m) in the Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand**. Here, it is known as the **Bhagirathi**.
- The important tributaries of Ganga are the **Ramganga, the Gomati, the Ghaghara, the Gandak, the Kosi and the Mahanada**.
- The river finally discharges itself into the **Bay of Bengal near the Sagar Island**.



What is Ecological – Flow Norms?

- The Central Government under the **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986** has notified the minimum environmental flows for the River Ganga that has to be maintained at various locations on the river.
- This is to ensure that the river has **at least the minimum required environmental flow of water** even after the river flow gets diverted by projects and structures for purposes like irrigation, hydropower, domestic and industrial use etc.
- This is an important step taken towards maintaining the uninterrupted or **Aviral Dhara** (continuous flow) of the river.
- Environmental flows are the **Acceptable Flow Regimes that are required to maintain a river in the Desired Environmental State** or predetermined state.
- The Central Water Commission is the designated authority and will be responsible for supervision, monitoring, regulation of flows and reporting of necessary information to the appropriate authority as and when required and also take emergent decisions about the water storage norms in case of any emergency.

Which are the Non-Compliant Ones?

- The non-compliant ones are: **Vishnuprayag Hydroelectric project** – Alaknanda, **Srinagar Hydroelectric project** – Alaknanda, **Maneri Bhali Phase 2** – Bhagirathi and **Pashulok** - Ganga Mainstream.
- Violating the e-flow norms can mean closure of the project or a hefty fine.

Tussle between Power Companies and E-flow Norms:

- The Centre's e-flow notification came into effect in October 2018 and gave companies three years to modify their design plans, if required, to ensure that a minimum amount of water flowed during all seasons.
- Power producers generally hoard water to create reserves to increase power production.
- In September 2019, the government advanced this deadline, from October 2021 to December 2019.
- This was after the CWC undertook field visits to hydropower sites and reported that most of the power projects could begin implementing the norms right away and didn't need three years.

About Central Water Commission:

- CWC is a premier technical organization of India in the field of water resources and is presently functioning as an **attached office of the Ministry of Jal Shakti**.
- It was formed in 1974-1975 via a notification.
- The Commission is entrusted with the general responsibilities of initiating, coordinating and furthering in consultation of the State Governments concerned, schemes for control, conservation and utilization of water resources throughout the country, for the purpose of flood control, irrigation, navigation, drinking water supply and Water Power Development.

