



KAMARAJ IAS ACADEMY
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River Basin Governance Reform in India

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The Government of India has extended the River Basin Management (RBM) Scheme for the 16th Finance Commission period (2026–27 to 2030–31), reflecting a renewed focus on integrated and sustainable water resource management.

Concept and Approach:

The RBM Scheme is a Central Sector initiative under the Ministry of Jal Shakti that promotes a basin-level approach to water management. Instead of treating water resources separately, it considers the entire river system—including rivers, tributaries, lakes, and groundwater—as a single interconnected ecosystem.

Core Objectives:

The scheme aims to ensure:

- Integrated planning and sustainable utilisation of water resources
- Conservation of both surface and groundwater
- Reduction of fragmented and project-based water management approaches
- Balance between economic development and ecological sustainability

Institutional Architecture:

The implementation framework includes key organisations:

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Brahmaputra Board – Focuses on flood control, erosion management, and basin planning in Northeast India

Central Water Commission – Conducts surveys and prepares Detailed Project Reports (DPRs)

National Water Development Agency – Responsible for river interlinking and national water planning

Geographical Focus Areas

The scheme prioritizes strategically important and water-rich regions, especially:

Brahmaputra, Barak, Teesta, and Indus basins

North-East India

Jamm& Kashmir and Ladakh

These regions are critical for water security, ecological balance, and national security.

Key Functional Components:

Flood and erosion control measures (e.g., protection of vulnerable regions like Majuli Island)

Expansion of irrigation and hydropower capacity

Preparation of DPRs for water resource projects

Use of modern technologies such as GIS, LiDAR, and drone surveys

Community-based water management practices in hilly regions

Significance for India

The RBM Scheme is crucial for:

Ensuring long-term water security

Addressing floods, droughts, and inter-state water disputes

Supporting agriculture, industry, and energy sectors

Strengthening climate change resilience and disaster management

Conceptual Understanding: River Basin

A river basin refers to the area drained by a river and its tributaries and is considered the basic hydrological unit for water resource planning in India. India has 20 river basin groups (12 major and 8 composite), covering about 81% of the country's geographical area.