



Merging Cantonments with the State Municipalities

For Prelims: Merging Cantonments with the State Municipalities, [State Municipalities](#), [British East India Company](#), [Urban Self Governance](#), The Cantonments Act, 1924.

For Mains: Merging Cantonments with the State Municipalities, Panchayati Raj Institutions, and Urban Local Bodies.

[Source: IE](#)

Why in News?

Recently, the Centre has issued a notification to denotify civil areas of **10 cantonments (out of 58) in the country**. These areas will be merged with the Concerned [State Municipalities \(Local Bodies\)](#).

- The government plans to exclude certain areas of the said cantonments and merge such areas with the state's local bodies.

What are Cantonments?

- Cantonments are areas primarily designated for **housing military personnel and supporting infrastructure**.
 - Originating from the French word "**canton**," meaning "**corner**" or "**district**," cantonments historically referred to **temporary military encampments**.
 - However, over time, they have evolved into **semi-permanent settlements that provide accommodation**, offices, schools, and other facilities for military personnel and their families.
- In India, the history of cantonments dates back to the [British East India Company period](#). The first cantonment was established in **1765 at Barrackpore, near Calcutta, following the Battle of Plassey in 1757**.
 - These areas were initially created to station military troops but have expanded to include civilian populations that provide support and logistic services to the military.
- **The Cantonments Act of 1924** in India formalised the governance and administration of cantonments, providing a legal framework for their management, development, and regulation.

What is the Mechanism for Cantonment Administrations in India?

- **Cantonments and their structure:**
 - Cantonments are classified into four categories — **class I to class IV** — depending on the size of the area and population.
 - While a **class I cantonment has eight elected civilians** and eight government/military members on the board, a **class IV cantonment has two elected civilians** and two government/military members.
 - This board is responsible for various aspects of the cantonment's administration.
 - The station commander of the cantonment is the ex-officio president of the board,

and an officer of the Defence Estates Organisation is the chief executive and the member-secretary.

- The board has equal representation of elected and nominated/ex-officio members to balance the official representation.

▪ **Administrative Control:**

- An inter-services organisation of the Ministry of Defence **directly controls cantonment administration.**
- In terms of **Entry 3 of the Union List (Schedule VII) of the Constitution** of India, [Urban Self Governance of the Cantonments](#) and the Housing Accommodation therein is the **subject matter of the Union of India.**
- There are approximately 62 Cantonments in the country that have been notified under the Cantonments Act, 1924 (succeeded by the Cantonments Act, 2006).

▪ **Administrative structure and regulation of the Urban Governance by the Municipalities:**

- **At the Central level:** The subject of 'urban local government' is dealt with by the following three ministries:
 - Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.
 - Ministry of Defence in the **case of cantonment boards**
 - Ministry of Home Affairs in **the case of Union Territories.**
- **At State Level:**
 - Urban governance is part of the state list under the Constitution. Thus, the administrative framework and regulation of ULBs varies across states.
 - The **Constitution (74th Amendment) Act, 1992** provided for the establishment of [Urban Local Bodies \(ULBs\)](#) (including municipal corporations) as institutions of local self-government.
 - It also empowered state governments to devolve certain functions, authority, and power to collect revenue from these bodies and made periodic elections for them compulsory.

What is the Need for Merging Cantonments with the Municipalities?

▪ **Different Restrictions:**

- Civilians living in cantonment areas **have long complained of issues** regarding different restrictions and said cantonment **boards have failed to resolve them.**
- For example, **access to home loans, and free movement within the premises.**

▪ **Local Governance and Civic Amenities:**

- The integration of civilian areas into municipal governance can lead to **improved civic amenities** and infrastructural development.
- Residents may have a more significant say in local governance matters, resulting in better urban planning and public services.

What are the Issues in Merging Cantonments with the Municipalities?

▪ **Legal and Administrative Challenges:**

- The transition from a cantonment town to a **merged municipality may bring about various legal and administrative challenges** like integrating infrastructure systems such as **roads, water supply, sewage, and electricity** between the cantonment and civilian areas.

▪ **Resistance from Existing Constituencies:**

- City councillors and political representatives **may resist allocating funds from their constituencies** to support the newly merged areas.
- This resistance could further exacerbate inequalities within the city and impede efforts to improve services and infrastructure in the merged areas.

▪ **Infrastructure Strain:**

- The sudden inclusion of cantonment areas into ULBs may strain existing infrastructure such as water supply, sewage systems, transportation networks, and healthcare facilities.
- ULBs may struggle to upgrade and expand infrastructure to meet the needs of the merged areas, leading to service **disruptions and deteriorating living conditions.**

▪ **Environmental Concerns:**

- Uncontrolled construction and commercialisation in merged areas, especially in ecologically

sensitive regions like hill stations, could have **detrimental effects on the environment and local ecosystems.**

- Poorly regulated development may lead to issues such as deforestation, soil erosion, and increased vulnerability to natural disasters like landslides and floods.

▪ **Security Considerations:**

- The proximity of civilian areas to military installations raises security concerns, particularly regarding **unauthorised construction and encroachment near defence facilities.**
- ULBs must adhere to security guidelines and regulations set by the military to ensure the safety and security of military personnel and assets.

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India's Urbanization

KEY CHALLENGES

Urbanization is creating new employment opportunities, but not everyone benefits

Risks from disasters and economic shocks are a major issue in Myanmar's cities especially for the urban poor

Inequality in cities is evident and can create social tension given the density

Several vulnerable groups in urban areas such as ethnic minorities, migrants, the urban poor, women, and the disabled are marginalized



The needs for sustainable infrastructure and spatial planning in urban areas are massive

Conditions in informal settlements are especially poor, these areas are in greatest need for water, sanitation, solid waste management and transport services



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Implementation will be reliant on a strong commitment from the government to a bold reform agenda



Invest in sustainable urban infrastructure and urban upgrading

Build resilience to mitigate the impact of shocks on people's livelihoods and health

Facilitate access to legal documentation for migrants and specific subgroups, and targeted social programs for those particularly vulnerable to exclusion

Invest in capacity building and new financing for urban development



Conclusion

- The decision to merge cantonments with the ULB's is in keeping with the needs of the times and, as such, is well-considered.
- Given the presence of inimical countries around India, the military needs to completely devote **itself to the major task of defending the borders and should not be weighed down** by functions unrelated to soldiers and war.
- Since the responsibility of overseeing civilian areas will rest with the ULBs once all 62 cantonments are disbanded, the defence budget can redirect the funds it would have spent on these areas to **core military requirements and social infrastructure** wherever needed.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQ)

Q. Local self-government can be best explained as an exercise in (2017)

- (a) Federalism
- (b) Democratic decentralisation
- (c) Administrative delegation
- (d) Direct democracy

Ans: (b)

Q. The fundamental object of Panchayati Raj system is to ensure which among the following? (2015)

1. People's participation in development
2. Political accountability
3. Democratic decentralization
4. Financial mobilization

Select the correct answer using the code given below

- (a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (b) 2 and 4 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ans: (c)