



Mains Practice Question

Q. At a time when the idea of developing smart cities dominates the policy discourse, India faces challenges due to unplanned urbanisation. Comment. (250 words)

22 Apr, 2019 GS Paper 3 Economy

Approach

- Discuss trend of urbanization in India
- Elaborate on the various areas like homelessness, sanitation, and urban governance vis-a-vis unplanned urbanization
- Suggest a way forward with respect to importance of green field projects, how smart cities can solve this etc.
- Conclude with improvement in existing infrastructure.

Introduction

- Between 2014 and 2050, India is projected to add 404 million people to its urban population. India recorded the highest annual growth in the urban population at 1.1 per cent between 2010 and 2015 among major global economies.
- At a time when the idea of developing smart cities dominates the policy discourse, India faces challenges due to uncontrolled urbanisation.

Body

- Indian cities are emerging as poverty centres. Two Indian metros, Delhi and Mumbai, were among the ten largest urban agglomerations in the world in 2014, while another, Kolkata, is set to be among the world's top 15 by 2030, according to the UN.
- There were 0.9 million homeless people in urban India as per the Census data of 2011, in addition to a slum population of roughly 65 million (or 17% of urban India).
- The urban centres are woefully short on infrastructure and amenities like water supply, electricity etc. As of today, piped water, which is available to only about half of the urban population, is never distributed for more than a few hours per day. Only about 18% of slum areas have precarious access to piped water.
- Vehicular population India is very high. As, India's road network grew at an annual rate of 4% since 1951, the number of vehicles plying on our roads has increased at a rate of nearly 11%. This inevitably leads to choking of roads and increasing pollution.
- With 74th amendment, constitutional status has been vested upon urban local bodies (ULBs) and specific civic responsibilities allocated to them. Schedule XII of the constitution provides a list of subjects under the purview of ULBs.
- The list includes urban planning, regulation of land use, construction of buildings, roads and bridges, water supply, sanitation and solid waste management, environment, and the provision of urban public amenities and conveniences.
- However, the state of our civic bodies remains sordid. With near zero financial autonomy, they are reliant on state governments. In fact, any empowerment of the ULBs remains a function of states' agency.

Way forward

- Well-planned and fully serviced new areas or 'green-fields' around cities in India need to be developed to accommodate the rapidly expanding population thus decreasing burden on main cities.
- Smart cities which are resilient, inclusive and sustainable should be developed.
- Though development of smart cities is necessary, but emphasis should be laid on improving the already existing infrastructure so that urbanization doesn't become a curse.

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