Reimagining Urban Governance

What is the issue?

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- Migration from rural areas is leading to overcrowding of urban areas.
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- Hence, a fresh look at urban governance is necessary.
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What do the trends say?

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- Cities are economically vibrant spaces around the world and draw a large number of rural migrants looking for better prospects.
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- This is a sustained trend, particularly in developing countries now, as production, jobs and markets get concentrated.
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- 'UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs' released its 2018 'World Urbanization Prospects', which forecasted future trends.
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- India, China and Nigeria are expected to lead other countries and account for 35% of the projected growth in urban population by mid-century.
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- It estimates 52.8% of Indians will live in cities by 205o, (presently 34%) and that Delhi would become the world's most populous city by 2018.
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- This forecast frames the challenge before developing countries in general and India in particular.
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What is the state of cities in India?

- Urbanisation in India is a complex process, as it is defined not by a constant migration of rural residents but by the flow of mostly male workers.
- Big cities expand geographically and engulf neighbouring towns, which is also another significant way in which populations are becoming urbanised.
- Even with only about a third of Indian population living in cities, civic anarchy is rampant in the country.
- Housing deficits have led to the proliferation of slums, and lack of enforcement of building norms has left the metros heavily congested.
- Also, poor investment in public transport has fuelled unsustainable levels of private vehicle use.

What are the challenges?

- **Policy Challenges -** There is a strong policy emphasis on improving facilities in rural areas, which is to stymie the migration to urban centres.
- But there is a natural economic magnetism to cities, which is proving too strong to resist, thereby mandating suitable village oriented economic policies.
- Also, designing cities in such a way to ensure that their high levels of productivity and efficiency are not compromised is a big policy challenge.
- Elected Mayors lack the stature and authority to introduce urgently needed reforms despite the 74th Amendment that gave them significant autonomy.
- **Pollution -** World Health Organisation (WHO) has noted that 14 Indian cities are among the top 20 worldwide with the worst air quality profiles.
- Most cities are also unable to collect and dispose of municipal waste scientifically, and simply dump them in the suburbs.

- Such a dismal scenario can only get worse with higher population concentrations, unless city governments come into their own.
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- **Integrationist Approach -** While the Centre's goal of homes for all by 2022 is laudable, it is unlikely to be realised without a push from the States.
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- Schemes driven by innovation and low-cost approaches and augmenting rental housing should be a priority within the plan.
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- Integrating green spaces, open commons and wetlands will make cities cleaner and aesthetically richer.
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Source: The Hindu

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