Challenges of Rapid Urbanization

Why in news?

World Cities Day is celebrated on 31st October every year by the United Nations General Assembly.

What is urbanization?

- **Urbanization** – Urbanization the process of people moving from rural to urban areas, and the corresponding growth in the number of people living in cities.
- **Significance** – Urbanization, along with industrialization and sectoral change, hold key to the nature of soci0-economic transformation in country.
- **Global trend** – The world's urban population has reached an estimated 57.5% of the world's total population, with projections to double by 2050.
- **Urbanization in India –** As per 2011 census, urban population in India was about 31.2% of the total population.
- By 2036, towns and cities will be home to 40% of the population, with urban areas contributing almost 70 % to GDP.
- South India is one of the most urbanized regions of the country with Tamil Nadu and Kerala reaching 50% urbanization.
- **Rapid urbanization** – When urbanization happens at a rate that puts pressure on infrastructure, healthcare, and other services.
- India experiencing rapid urbanization with an annual growth rate of 2.3%.

> *October 31 is observed every year as World Cities Day. The theme for this year's World Cities Day is 'Youth Climate Changemakers: Catalyzing Local Action for Urban Sustainability'.*

What are the concerns in rapid urbanization in India?

- **Groundwater depletion** – Due to rapid urbanization and industrial expansion ground water is depleted at a faster rate than its recharge capacity.
- **Climate change** – Rapid urbanization intensifies pollution and contributes to *urban flooding.*
  - Cities in the NCR region rank among the most polluted.
- **Urban planning issues** – Outdated spatial plans fail to address population growth has led to overcrowding.
  - 40% of urban residents in India are living in slums.
- **Urban heat islands –** Urbanization replaces natural land cover with dense built environments like buildings and pavement that absorb and retain heat, creating a heat

island effect within the city limits.

- **De-industrialization** – Leads to declining share of employment in manufacturing which deprives the jobs for growing population in cities.
    - It has led to job losses in cities like Ahmedabad, Delhi, Surat, and Mumbai.
- **Governance issues** – Despite the 74th Constitutional Amendment, most urban planning remains centralized, with minimal powers to local urban bodies.
- This limits effective local governance, as key functions outlined in the 12th Schedule remain under centralized or state control.
- **Lack of funding** – Cities receive just *0.5% of GDP in intergovernmental* transfers, limiting their capacity to address local issues.

What are the Impacts of rapid urbanization?

- **Growing inequality** – Wealthy developments contrast sharply with slum conditions.
- **Socio-economic segregation –** As city development increasingly caters to the wealthy while ignoring the needs of the broader population.
- **Poverty growth –** Many people remain below the poverty line due to the prevalence of low-paying, high living costs, and insufficient social support.
- **Water scarcity –** Over use and consumption in urban areas leads to acute water crisis in cities.
- **Lack of infrastructural development –** Cities here often suffer from housing shortages, poor access to clean water and sanitation.
- **Poor living conditions –** Without adequate infrastructure in urban areas leading to poor living conditions.
- **Informal sector jobs –** Street vending, rickshaw driving, and informal construction work, often become the primary livelihood for migrant and low-skilled workers.
- These roles typically fall outside labor regulations, leaving workers without social security.
- **Poor working conditions –** Informal workers in urban areas often face hazardous work environments, including unregulated construction sites and polluted spaces.
- **Environmental degradation –** Urbanization leads to the destruction of natural habitats, deforestation, and a reduction in green spaces to make way for housing, industry, and infrastructure.
- **Pollution crisis –** Cities face severe pollution and 10 most polluted cities in India, *eight are in the NCR region around Delhi.*

What lies ahead?

- Increase investments in eco-friendly housing, improved public transit, and infrastructure to withstand climate events.
- Enhanced community engagement and urban governance.
- Promote sustainable building materials, water conservation, and emergency preparedness to withstand climate disruptions.
- Smart city solutions can improve the quality of life by using Artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things (IoT), and data analytics to manage resources efficiently.
- Focus on upskilling the urban workforce, especially in the informal sector.

Reference

[The Hindu| Challenges of Urbanization in India]

