Environmentally Prudent Development

What is the issue?

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- While preserving the natural environment is vital for enhancing quality of life for city dwellers, infrastructural needs are also equally important.
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- As there is an inherent conflict between the two objectives, a prudent balance needs to be struck for creating better living conditions.
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What is the significance of urbanisation?

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- City clusters are economic growth engines and globally, they've played a significant role in the economic growth of nations.
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- In India, the urban population (nearly 32%) contributes over 60% to the GDP and is projected to contribute around 75% in the next few years.
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- More than 12% of global city dwellers lived in the 28 megacities in 2014, of which Tokyo, Delhi and Shanghai were among the biggest.
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- According to UN estimates, Delhi is projected to become the most populous city in the world by 2028.
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What is driving urbanisation?

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- Agriculture and allied services contribute merely 15% of GDP but these domains nonetheless continue to engage over 60% of India's population.
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- The dearth of economic opportunities has led to large scale rural distress and made outward migration for seeking better opportunities inevitable.
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- On the contrary, the GDP contribution of megacities and metropolitan regions is disproportionately high, triggering a constant stream of migration.
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- Investing in our urban infrastructure will lead to enhanced economic activity, employment generation and betterment of life.
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- This is a much-desired socioeconomic outcome in a young nation like India, which has a demographic advantage to absorb the opportunities.
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What is straining the urbanisation euphoria?

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- To sustain cities as growth engines that provide employment, we must focus on making our cities economically viable and environmentally sustainable.
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- But creating large-scale urban infrastructure to support the burgeoning population and economic growth implicitly takes a toll on the environment.
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- Notably, high economic growth and prosperity of China came at a huge environmental cost, which the country is trying to address now.
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- In Indian cities, there is lack of basic infrastructure, and pollution is also on the rise, which is deteriorating the quality of life for residents.
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- Significantly, Delhi counts among the most polluted cities in the world and many other Indian cities also fall in the list.
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What is the way ahead?

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- We have to work hard to ensure that our urban infrastructure causes least harm to the environment and has a net positive impact on our quality of life.
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- **Impact Assessment -** Various infrastructure projects that are taken up must be subjected to a stern “Environment Impact Assessment” before

approval.
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- Even environmentally positive projects like a “well designed metro line” might attract the ire of nature lovers due to their immediate implications.
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- In such scenarios, campaigns to aid the masses compare the “long-term environmental benefits and the immediate ecological impact” are needed.
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- People need to recognize that pollution caused by daily hour-long traffic jams will do more harm than felling 1,000 trees to build a metro line.
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- **Eco Prudence -** Project planning and implementation should be advanced in a way that ensures the least harm to nature.
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- Also, proportional compensatory afforestation should become a part of project design at a location as close as possible to the project site.
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- Thus, a balance between developmental needs and environmental consciousness is needed to enhance the overall quality of life for all people.
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Source: The Hindu

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