Mumbai Stampede - Urban Planning

What is the issue?

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- The recent stampede tragedy in Mumbai has drawn attention to the flaws in urban planning.
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- India's urban development and planning requires a course correction to prevent such incidents in future.
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What is the case with Mumbai?

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- The area around the railway station where stampede occurred was home to several of the city’s mills a few decades ago.
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- Naturally, workers settled around the mills, in chawls and colonies.
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- As the textile and manufacturing industry declined, services and commercial activity and so the construction for offices and residences increased.
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- However, these went on without any adaptive response from the public authorities to address the transportation challenges.
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- Consequently, it led to the pressure on the existing transport infrastructure.
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- The footfalls in surrounding railway stations increased manifold irrespective of the inadequate carrying capacity of bridges and stairways.
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What are the drawbacks in urban planning?

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- A major drawback is the absence of coordination among the many public organisations.
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- As a result, various civic and infrastructure-related functions remain dissociated.
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- Also, planning authorities prepare land use plans for a 20-year horizon.
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- On the other hand, transformation is happening in the land use pattern in relation to the ongoing changes in economic activity at a faster pace.
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- Resultantly, the planning process is not adaptive and flexible enough to respond to the changing land use and economic forces.
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- Further, overlapping of functions and the jurisdictional confusion among metropolitan bodies undermine responsibility and accountability.
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What are the possible solutions?

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- The urban planning authorities have to be more responsive to the dynamics of the cities.
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- Coordination and cooperation among all public authorities must become a regular feature of the governance set-up.
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- The ultimate requirement thus is a **single coordinating agency**.
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- The Metropolitan Planning Committees (**MPCs**) as provided in 74th Constitutional Amendment Act is one such entity.
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- However, the functioning of MPCs has been disappointing because of lack of autonomy, executive power, finances and functionaries.
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- Another alternative is the metropolitan councils that are appointed democratically and entrusted with specific powers.
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- Some of its features could be -
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1. having a clear functional mandate.
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2. having adequate autonomous power for planning and decision making.
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3. defined comprehensive jurisdiction for the entire metropolitan region over certain functions such as transport.
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4. taking up other functions that require provisioning at a regional level.
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5. having representatives from other public organisations and domain experts from outside the public sphere.
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- In all, accountable public authorities who respond to the dynamics of cities can bring out the much needed reformed urban planning.
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Source: The Hindu

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