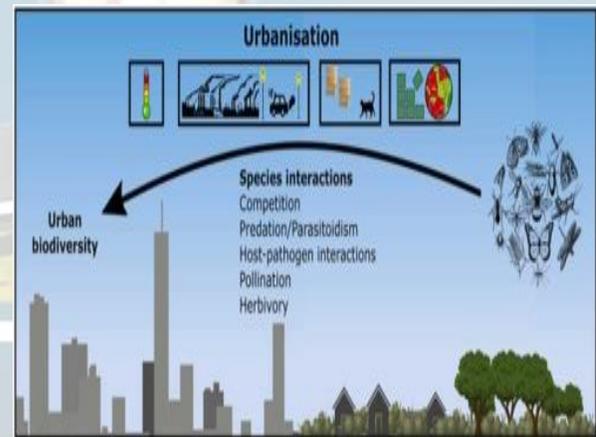
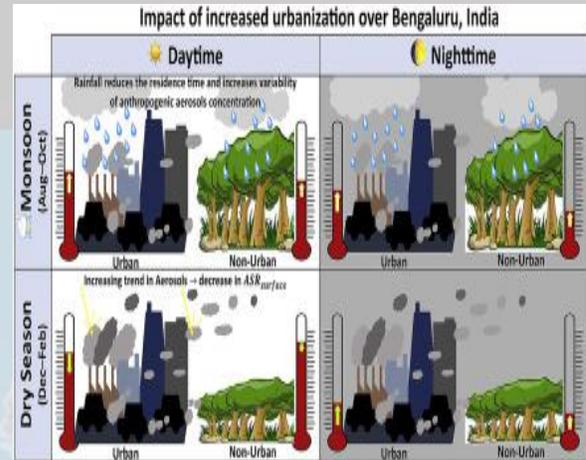
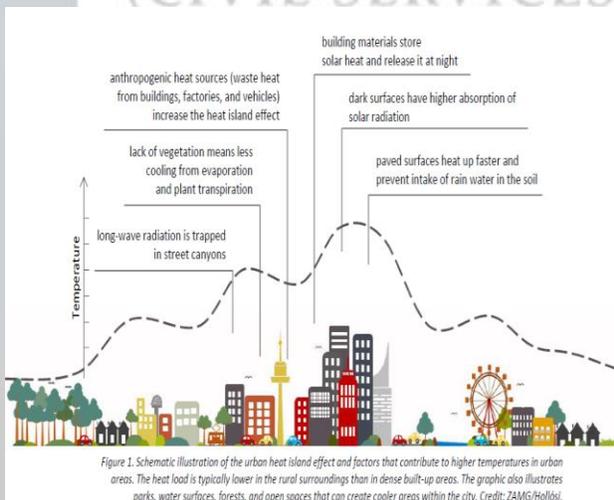
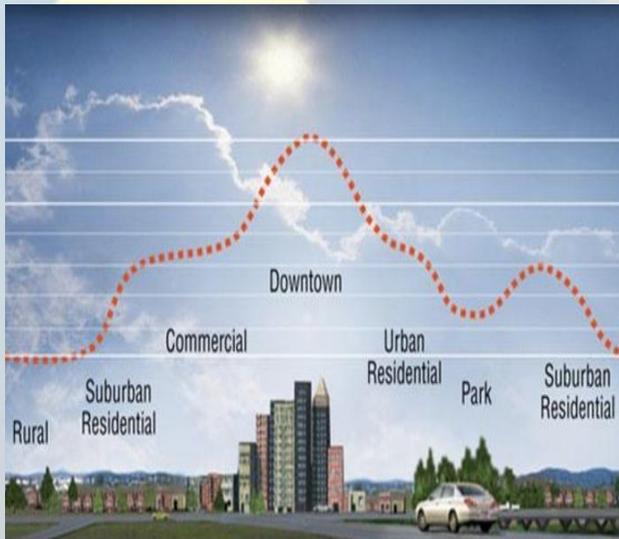
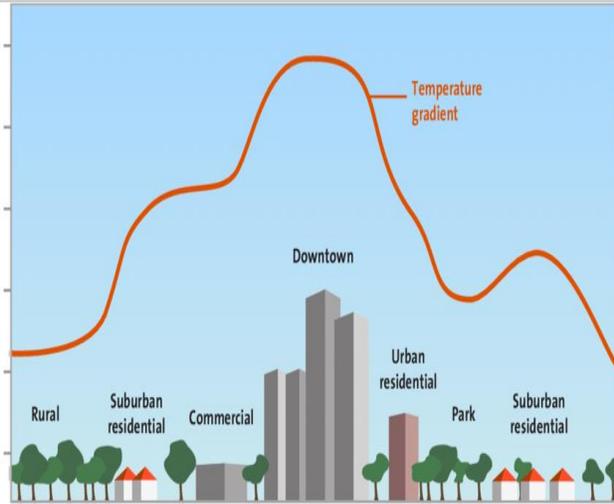


Urbanisation and cities



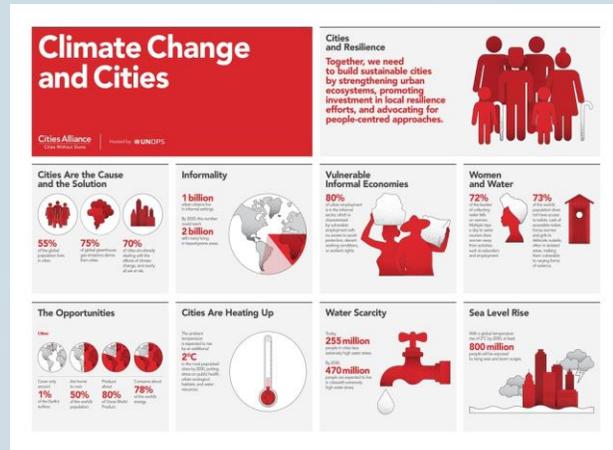
It is extremely critical to acknowledge the fact that the degree of urban expansion in the Chennai city has been one of the fastest in the country.

- And, it is important to recognise that the urban expansion process is irreversible and can be disastrous if not regulated.
- When the city limit was expanded from 174 sq.km to 426 sq.km, and the CMA to 1,189 sq.km, there was very little thought devoted to protecting

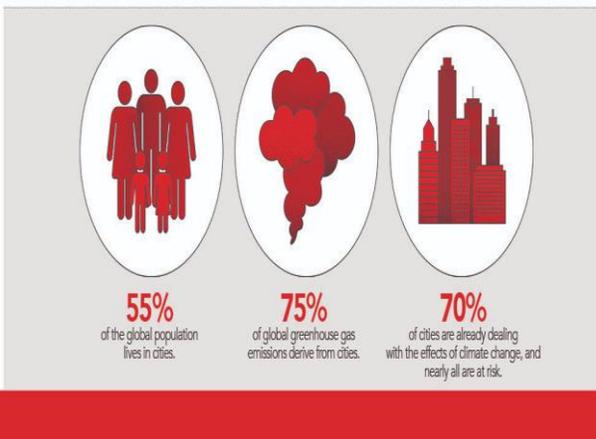
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the ecological hotspots in the expanded areas.

- In the process, Chennai has lost many water bodies (lakes and ponds) and much of the Pallikaranai marsh land and coastal wetlands.



Cities Are the Cause and the Solution



Sea Level Rise

With a global temperature rise of 2°C by 2050, at least

800 million

people will be exposed to rising seas and storm surges.



Water Scarcity

Today,

255 million

people in cities face extremely high water stress.



By 2030,

470 million

people are expected to live in cities with extremely high water stress.

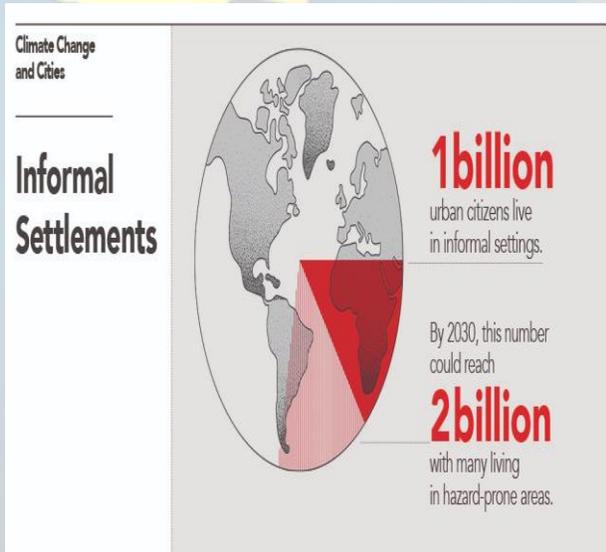
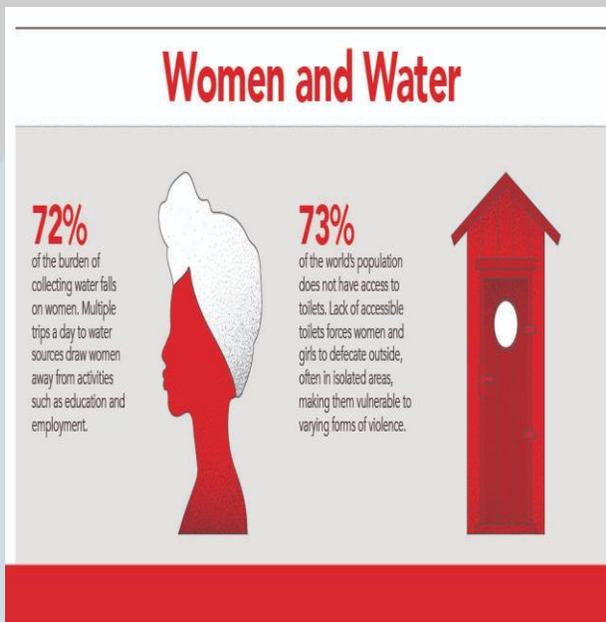
Vulnerable Informal Economies

80%

of urban employment is in the informal sector, which is characterised by vulnerable employment with no access to social protection, decent working conditions, or worker's rights.



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The Hindu

India and Oman

- The **Sultan of Oman, Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**, is visiting India from December 16 on a state visit.

- This is his **first visit to India after taking over in January 2020** following the passing of Sultan Qaboos. **Oman is the closest neighbour to India** in the Arabian Gulf region.
- With key **Omani ports abutting the coastline along the Arabian Sea as well as the Gulf of Oman** leading into the Persian Gulf and towards the Gulf of Aden, Oman's location is of utmost strategic importance to India.
- Along with **Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)**, Oman completes the trio of key strategic partners of India in the Gulf region.
- **The ruling family of Oman has always had a strong connection with India.**
- **Sultan Qaboos was always favourably disposed towards India and invited Indian companies and professionals to undertake projects apart from sourcing supplies from India.**
- **At the people to people level too, India and Oman enjoy close ties.**
- There is a large **Indian community of almost seven lakh people** which has contributed to the constantly evolving vibrant relations.
- During the Cold War era, and even thereafter, when the **Arab world was largely ambivalent towards India** and was often soft and supportive of

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Pakistan, it was Oman which kept its doors open to India.

- In a conflict prone region, Oman has always been an island of peace.
- It has pursued a foreign policy which is based on the twin strands of moderation and mediation, including a policy of deliberate neutrality in dealing with regional issues and conflicts.
- It has carefully balanced its close relations with the western powers and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, with a pragmatic approach to neighbouring Iran, maintaining that the Straits of Hormuz will not be closed.
- Even during the Persian Gulf crisis in 2019, when the United States and Iran were on the brink of a military conflict, it was Oman which played a key role in diffusing tension
- During the GCC Qatar diplomatic standoff, Oman refused to join Saudi Arabia and other countries in breaking diplomatic ties with Qatar in June 2017.
- Much before the Abraham Accords were signed between Israel, the UAE and Bahrain in September 2020, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had made a surprise visit to Oman in October 2018, once again

confirming the importance of Oman in the region.

India Oman strategic partnership

- Oman is a crucial pillar of India's West Asia policy, with their multi-faceted engagement increasingly taking on a more strategic shape in recent decades.
- The India Oman strategic partnership was signed during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Oman in November 2008 and is based on twin pillars of mutual trust and shared interests.
- Oman was one of the few countries to have been invited by India to its G-20 presidency as a guest nation earlier this year.
- Defence and security engagement form a key pillar of this strategic partnership and are governed by a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed in 2005.
- Oman is the first Gulf country with which all the three wings of India's defence forces hold joint exercises. Since 2012/13, an Indian naval ship has remained on duty in the Gulf of Oman for antipiracy operations.
- Oman has allowed overflights/transit by Indian military aircraft too.

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- During the Persian Gulf crisis in June 2019, the Indian Navy launched 'Operation Sankalp' to ensure the safe passage of Indian flagged ships which most often operated off the coast of Oman.
 - The MoU on Duqm Port during Mr. Modi's visit is a historic landmark in our security cooperation, providing basing facilities, Operational Turn Round and other logistics facilities to Indian naval ships operating in the region.
 - Trade and commerce forms yet another important pillar of engagement. Bilateral trade during FY202223 reached \$12.388 billion.
 - There are over 6,000 India Oman joint ventures in Oman, with an estimated investment of over \$7.5 billion.
 - India was the second largest market for Oman's crude oil exports for the year 2022 after China.
 - In October 2022, India and Oman launched the Rupay debit card in Oman, a key footprint of India's initiative of promoting digital public infrastructure (DPI) in the world.
 - India and Oman are looking forward to increased engagement in strategic areas such as space cooperation and MoU on this was signed during Mr. Modi's visit.
 - The possibility of an agreement on joint exploration of rare earth metals, vital to modern electronic equipment, could add strength to the partnership.
 - The proposed India Middle East - Europe Connectivity Corridor (IMEEC) infrastructure project to link India to Europe across West Asia could also see Oman playing an important role.
 - There is a proposal from the South Asia Gas Enterprise (SAGE), a private consortium based in India, to lay a 1,400 km long deepsea pipeline from Oman to India for the transfer of gas.
- India's gateway to West Asia**
- Security challenges in the region have a ripple effect in India and, therefore, any instability in the region has a direct bearing on the safety and security of millions of Indians working there, India's energy security and its steadily growing trade relations.
 - Apart from being India's oldest strategic partner in the region and closest neighbours, Oman is an integral part of all important groupings in the region; the GCC, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the Arab League.

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- Its ability to manage rival ideologies and power games in the region makes it vitally important to India.
- Both countries consider themselves as ambassadors of peace and enjoy goodwill across ideologies in the world.
- Oman is, therefore, India's gateway to West Asia.

The Hindu

Inflation

- From the TOP or tomato, onion and potato triumvirate of India's most widely consumed vegetables, onion prices remained the biggest source of concern as year on year inflation ballooned to 86%, from October's 42% pace, and the sequential pace swelled to 48%.
- With reports that inclement weather and depleting groundwater are likely to cause a near 25% shortfall in onion output during the key rabi season, the outlook for prices of the nutrient dense bulb moderating in the near future appears bleak, the government's move to impose a ban on its exports notwithstanding.
- Pulses and sugar are other areas of concern, with the first witnessing more than 20% inflation and the sweetener also experiencing an

uptick in the pace of price gains to 6.55%.

- With sugar production also expected to take a hit due to lower rainfall, the number of supply related challenges policy makers face to rein in price gains is rising.
- With the RBI having opted to refrain from raising rates for now, the onus is squarely on the government to help temper inflation, or risk suffering an erosion in broader consumption and economic growth.

The Hindu