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## An outlining of urban transformation strategies

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Cities are home to about 50 crore people, accounting for about 36% of India's population. The urban population has been growing at a steady pace of 2% to 2.5% annually

### What are the key urban development initiatives in the new Indian Budget?

- Expansion of the **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban)** to provide 1 crore more housing units
  - Allocates ₹10 lakh crore for constructing 1 crore housing units under PMAY(U). This includes ₹2.2 lakh crore as central assistance over five years
- New **rental housing with dormitory-type** accommodation for industrial workers.
  - This would be done in PPP mode with Viability Gap Funding from Central govt.
- Continued support for core infrastructure development through **Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT)**
  - Continues AMRUT with ₹8,000 crore allocation.
  - Also, opens up Viability Gap Funding for PPP projects in core infrastructure
- Introduction of the **National Urban Digital Mission (NUDM)** for digitization of property and tax records with ₹1,150 crore allocated.
- Cities can now tap into the Capex Expenditure for infrastructure.
  - ₹11.11 lakh crore has been allocated for highways and many other sectors but cities can also make efforts to partake a share in it.
- Announces special thrust for bankable **solid waste management** projects
- Proposes development of 100 **weekly 'haats'** or street food hubs in select cities
- Allocates ₹1,300 crore for **electric bus systems** in cities
- Promotes **transit-oriented development** and economic planning

### What is Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) and how does it benefit urban areas?

- Definition: TOD is an approach to urban development that maximizes the amount of residential, business, and leisure space within walking distance of public transport.
- Key features:
  - High-density, mixed-use development near transit stations
  - Integration of residential, commercial, and recreational spaces
  - Pedestrian-friendly design
  - Reduced dependency on private vehicles
- Benefits:
  - Addressing urban sprawl and unplanned growth
  - Improving access to affordable housing near job centers
  - Reducing transportation costs for low-income groups
  - Enhancing the viability of public transport systems with Increased public transit ridership
  - Reduced traffic congestion and air pollution
  - More efficient use of land and infrastructure
  - Enhanced quality of life and community vibrancy
- Challenges
  - Land acquisition issues
  - Existing high-density development in many urban areas

- Need for significant infrastructure investments
- Coordination between multiple agencies and stakeholders

#### Examples of TOD:

- **Tokyo, Japan:** Tokyo has one of the most extensive and efficient public transportation systems in the world, with many neighborhoods designed around transit stations.
- **Copenhagen, Denmark:** Copenhagen is known for its cycling infrastructure and pedestrian-friendly streets, making it a model for TOD.
- **Vancouver, Canada:** Vancouver has implemented a successful TOD strategy, with many new developments built around transit stations and a strong focus on walkability and public space

*Can you answer the following question?*

*Evaluate the urban development initiatives proposed in the recent Indian Budget. How effectively do these measures address the challenges of rapid urbanization?*

## SC Verdict on GM Mustard

On July 23, 2023, the Supreme Court of India delivered a split verdict on the validity of the Centre's 2022 decision granting conditional approval for the environmental release of genetically modified (GM) mustard hybrid DMH-11.

- Currently, cotton is the only GM crop approved for commercial cultivation in India.

#### What is the background of the case?

- Developed at **Delhi University**, DMH-11 is a hybrid variety of mustard that has been genetically modified for **herbicidetolerance** and to increase yield.
- The case revolved around the approval granted by the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) in 2023 for the environmental release of the GM mustard hybrid DMH-11 for seed production and testing.
  - The GEAC is the apex regulatory body in India, under Union Environment Ministry, responsible for assessing the safety of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) for environmental release.
- The petitioners, environmental activist Aruna Rodrigues and the NGO 'Gene Campaign,' challenged this decision, arguing for a moratorium on the release of any genetically modified organisms (GMOs) into the environment until **comprehensive biosafety protocols** are established and **publicly available**.

#### What was the supreme court's verdict?

The two-judge bench comprising Justices BV Nagarathna and Sanjay Karol held contrasting views:

- **Justice BV Nagarathna:** Ruled against the commercial release of GM mustard, citing concerns about potential risks to biodiversity, human health, and the lack of adequate regulatory oversight.
  - She deemed the October 2022 decisions of the GEAC invalid due to the absence of a health department member and the absence of eight members from the meeting.
  - She emphasized the need for adhering to the "precautionary principle," which calls for caution when dealing with potentially harmful technologies.

- **Justice Sanjay Karol:** Upheld the GEAC's approval, stating that the fears expressed by the petitioners were not substantiated by evidence.
  - He highlighted the potential benefits of GM mustard in increasing crop yield and reducing reliance on imports.
- **Outcome:** The split verdict means that the matter will now be referred to a larger bench of the Supreme Court for a final decision.

#### What are the implications of this judgement?

- **Uncertainty for GM Crops in India:** The split verdict leaves the future of GM crops in India uncertain, as it highlights the lack of consensus on their safety and environmental impact.
- **Need for National Policy:** Both justices agreed on the need for a national policy on Genetically Modified (GM) crops. They directed the Centre to consult all stakeholders and experts within four months to formulate this policy.
- **Impact on Agriculture:** Mustard farmers could have benefitted from increased yields and reduced input costs if GM mustard is approved.
- **Public Health and Environmental Concerns:** The concerns raised by the petitioners about potential risks to biodiversity and human health remain a significant point of contention, requiring further scientific investigation and public debate.

*Can you answer the following question?*

*In light of the contrasting opinions within the Supreme Court regarding GM Mustard release, suggest measures to strengthen the regulatory and decision-making processes for GM crops in India*

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