

PASSAGE 4

1. This year marks a great milestone in the human saga, similar in magnitude to the agricultural era and industrial revolution. For the first time in history, a majority of human beings will be living in vast urban areas, according to the United Nations-many in mega cities and suburban extension with populations of 10 million people more. We have become Home Urbans.
2. Millions of people huddled together and stacked on top of each other in gigantic urban centres is a new phenomenon. Recall that 200 years ago, the average person on earth might have met 200 to 300 people in a lifetime. Today, a resident of New York City can live and work amongst 2,20,000 people within a 10 minute radius of his home or office in midtown Manhattan. Only one city in all of history-ancient Rome-boasted a population of more than a million inhabitants before the 19th century. London became the first modern city with a population of over one million people in 1820. Today, 414 cities boast populations of a million or more people and there's no end in sight to the urbanisation process because our species is growing at an alarming rate. Around 3,76,000 people are born every day on earth. The human population is expected to increase to nine billion by 2042, most living in dense urban areas.
3. No one is really sure whether this profound turning point on human living arrangements ought to be celebrated, lamented, or merely acknowledged for the record. That's because our burgeoning population and urban way of life has been purchased at the expense of the demise of the earth's vast ecosystems and habitats. Cultural historian Elias Canetti once remarked that each of us is a king in a field of corpses. If we were to stop for a moment and reflect on the number of creatures and earth's resources and materials we have expropriated and consumed in our lifetime.
4. Large populations living in mega cities consume massive amount of the earth's energy. To put this in perspective, the Sears Tower alone, one of the tallest skyscrapers in the world, uses more electricity in a single day than a town of 35000 inhabitants. Even more amazing, our species now consume nearly 40 per cent of the net primary production on earth-net amount of solar energy converted to plant organic matter through photosynthesis-even though we only make up one half of 1 per cent of the animal biomass of the planet.

wild. Rising population, growing consumption of food, water and building materials, expanding road and transport, and urban sprawl continue to encroach on the remaining wild, pushing it to extinction. Our scientists tell us that within the lifetime of today's children, the wild will disappear from the face of the earth after millions of years of existence, The Trans-Amazon Highway is hastening the obliteration of the last great wild habitat. Other remaining wild regions from Borneo to the Congo Basin are fast diminishing with each passing day. It's no wonder that according to Harvard Biologist EQ Wilson, we are experiencing the greatest wave of mass extinction of animal species in 65 million years. By 2100, two-thirds of the earth's remaining species are likely to become extinct.

6. Where does this leave us? Try to imagine 1,000 cities of nearly one million or more inhabitants in 35 years from now. It boggles the mind and is unsustainable for the earth. Perhaps the commemoration of the urbanisation of the human race in 2007 might be an opportunity to rethink the way we live on this planet. Certainly there is much to applaud about urban life : its rich cultural diversity and social inter course and dense commercial activity come readily to mind. But the question is one of magnitude and scale. We need to ponder how best to lower our population and develop sustainable urban environments that use energy and resources more efficiently, are less polluting, as well as better designed.
7. In short, in the great era of urbanisation we have increasingly shut off the human race from the rest of the natural world in the belief that we could conquer, colonise and utilise the rich largesse of the planet to ensure our complete autonomy and without dire consequences to us and future generations. In the next phase of human history, we will need to find a way to reintegrate ourselves back into the rest of the living earth if we are to preserve our own species and conserve the planet for our fellow creatures.

A. Questions

- (a) What is the significance of the present year in human history? 2
- (b) How is life different today from the life in Past? 2
- (c) Why should we lament at the growth of population and not celebrate the progress? 2
- (d) How is the urbanization harmful for the natural resources? 2
- (e) What is the warning given by our scientists for future? 1

B. Find out the words which mean just the opposite of the following: (1×3) = 3

- (i) small (para 1)
- (ii) shrinking (para 5)

Will you scan? (para 6)