



THOUGHT FOR THE DAY: If we command our wealth, we shall be rich and free; if our wealth commands us, we are poor indeed.

— EDMUND BURKE



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Reservations are no panacea

It is unlikely that the question of caste reservations will be resolved anytime soon. What looks like the makings of a veritable Mandal 2.0 will have to cast its full spell on the national polity, and then force an uneasy solution before receding into the background.

Meanwhile, the ongoing agitation for reservations to the Marathas too does not lend itself to any easy fix. Various parties in power at different times in the recent past have sought to resolve the issue, including by conceding the demand for Maratha reservations, but the higher courts have stuck by the decision to defend the 50% barrier.

Not entirely unlinked to the caste reservations is the question of jobs under the sons of the soil provision. The Haryana government in 2020 had reserved 75% jobs in the private sector for local residents. Though initially jobs offering Rs 50,000 monthly salary were proposed to be covered, but subsequently the salary cap was lowered to Rs 30,000.

Doubtless, the benefit of reservations has gone to the most dominant sections among the beneficiary class, causing heartburn to those left behind in the reserved category. However, over the years hitherto agrarian castes in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Haryana, etc too have joined the reservation bandwagon due to the inability of farming to support expanded families.

Will COP28 be able to deliver climate justice?

Climate Concerns

Shailendra Yashwant



As the world governments begin another round of negotiations at the 28th Conference of Parties (COP 28) for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Dubai, UAE, between November 30 and December 12, 2023, it is important to acknowledge that life on Earth has entered uncharted territory and is possibly experiencing the warmest temperature on the planet in the past 100,000 years.

Global daily mean temperatures that have never exceeded 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels before 2000 did so repeatedly this year, and finally breached the 2°C threshold last week, twice — first on November 17 and then again on November 18, 2023. The breach was temporary, but the rapid pace of change has shocked scientists and caught governments unprepared even as extreme weather events, from heatwaves to floods, droughts and forest fires, wreak havoc around the globe.

The extreme changes to the climate that the world is experiencing today are a result of the historical cumulative global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of the rich and developed countries, who have repeatedly reneged on their promises and pledges made at COPs to curtail their fossil

fuel emissions, to deliver climate finance, to help developing countries cope with climate impacts and transition to low carbon economies.

Meanwhile, greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise and have increased by 1.2% from 2021 to 2022, setting a new record of 57.4 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (GtCO2e). A recent UNEP report notes that governments are currently planning to produce more than double the amount of fossil fuels in 2030 than would be possible in a pathway consistent with limiting warming to well below 2°C.

And it's not just governments that are to blame. The Great Carbon Divide, a new Oxfam report, has found that the richest 1% of humanity is responsible for more carbon emissions than the poorest 66%. This elite group, made up of 77 million people including billionaires, millionaires and those paid more than US\$140,000 (Rs.11,665,454) a year, accounted for 16% of all CO2 emissions in 2019 — enough to cause more than a million excess deaths due to heat.

There has been increasing scepticism about the ability of the UN-led climate jamborees to deliver on its agenda, which has snowballed into a massive controversy



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this year as COP28 is headed by Sultan Al Jaber, CEO of a fossil fuel company. After all, from the Kyoto Protocol to the Paris Agreement, there is a long history of concerted efforts by rich countries, and corporations, especially the fossil fuel-producing nations and oil and gas companies, to delay and derail any actions on emission reduction.

villain, opposer of equity, blocker of negotiations and a laggard in climate action is the USA, which accounts for 4% of the current world population, but has contributed 17% of global warming from 1850 to 2021. India, by contrast, accounts for 18% of the world population, has contributed only 5% of warming and is yet miles and gigawatts ahead of the USA in its climate commitments.

The truth is that the ferocity of climate events in 2023 cannot be ignored, the clamour for climate justice by frontline communities cannot be disregarded, and the lack of climate action by a few rich countries cannot be overlooked.

COP 28 has to go beyond ensuring the delivery of its procedural remit, i.e. Global Stocktake of where countries are at with their Paris Agreement commitments, adopting a framework for the Global Goal on Adaptation, defining a New Collective Quantified Goal and operationalising the Loss and Damage Fund.

However, the success of COP28 under Sultan Al Jaber will not be measured by its procedural outcomes, but on whether he can deliver on two key issues — drastic reduction in emission reduction by phasing out fossil fuels as demanded by 80 countries at COP27 and more importantly ensuring the delivery of adequate and timely climate finance, the great enabler of climate action.

The question on everyone's mind ahead of COP28 is can Sultan Al Jaber get the richest individuals, countries and corporations to bring an end to the twin crises of climate breakdown and inequality? The answer is most likely no, but he can certainly start by adding a few billion USD into the Loss and Damage funding facility to help the poor nations and vulnerable people cope with the unfolding climate disasters.

Shailendra Yashwant is an independent environmental photojournalist and climate communications consultant. He tweets at @shababa

India's metro network needs buses for masses

On My Mind

Abhay Vaidya



Just a fraction of the thousands of crores of rupees that India is spending on her metro rail network can do wonders for urban commuters. This is by complementing the metro rail network with a robust bus service as a part of the public transport system.

Already a small section of Pune has started commuting to office via metro rail, especially on the Vanz-Ruby Hall section connecting east and west Pune. "My son-in-law no longer drives to office but takes the metro," said a proud senior citizen with a smile, happy that his daughter's husband had been spared of the heavy automobile pollution, congestion and stress of commuting back and forth to office.

The nascent metro network in Pune has made a good start in certain sections and can succeed in a big way only if it is complemented with an efficient bus and

CNG/electric autorickshaw service providing last mile connectivity as seen in Delhi and Noida.

To-and-fro feeder buses and autos to the metro station is a given and a well-acknowledged part of a city's public transport plan. However, emerging megacities like Pune will always need a robust public bus service — like Mumbai — to cater to commuters in the suburbs and localities not connected by the metro network. Significantly, the success of a metro network also depends heavily on a good bus service because it is the buses which bring passengers to the metro stations.

The absence of a good mass transport system in Pune over the decades has forced the citizens to use personal vehicles making Pune the city with the highest number of two wheelers. An average middle class family has a minimum of one car and two two-wheelers; with the number climbing up to two cars and three two-wheelers for an upper middle class family. This can be reduced sharply with the metro network and an efficient public bus service.

Pune's public bus service, the PMPML (Pune Mahanagar Parivahan Mahamandal Limited) is a critical part of the city's public transport infrastructure but has always been neglected by the ruling politicians and the establishment. That is why, Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) on-going 'Bus Mitra' cam-

paign is noteworthy.

Most political campaigns are often about protests, marches, demonstrations, bandhs and vandalism of public property, all aimed at grabbing the media's attention. But here is a public campaign which has sought to bring all the stakeholders together with the common good of giving the people of Pune a better bus service. Notably this campaign is being driven by a band of young and energetic volunteers.

Driven by a band of young and energetic volunteers, AAP's 'Bus Mitra' campaign in Pune is noteworthy as it seeks to address a crying need of the city's commuting public

Focused on the safety of bus commuters, the campaign led by AAP's Pune vice-president Chenthil Iyer, a self-employed chartered accountant, has been driven bottoms-up, seeking to address the woes of bus commuters. After a public survey of the commuters, AAP's volunteers stationed themselves at various bus stops to assist commuters during peak hours in the evenings. This was done once a week, every Wednesday from 7 pm to 8 pm, as the volunteers urged bus drivers to bring their vehicles close to the bus stops and not halt in the middle of the road.

Blowing whistles, they assisted passengers to safely board and alight from buses and ensured that private vehicles and autos were not parked near bus stops or indulged in double parking near bus stops. There was close and friendly coordination with bus drivers and conductors, the PMPML, administration and the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Traffic, Vijay Kumar Magar, which contributed immensely to the success of the public-spirited campaign.

All the networking, planning and coordination was done by Iyer and his team over Zoom meetings and a WhatsApp group. At the Sadanand Hotel bus stop on Baner Road, AAP's Pune president Sudarshan Jagdale who was there with his two volunteers spoke of how many accidents have happened because of cars and two-wheelers coming in the wrong direction. Indeed, wrong-side driving by two-wheelers and four-wheelers is a hazardous nuisance suffered by pedestrians and bus commuters on Pune's roads. This is aggravated by the inability of bus drivers to bring

their vehicles into the bus bay at bus stops because of indiscriminate double parking and parking of private vehicles close to bus stops.

Participating in the feedback survey, women commuters called for increased and reliable frequency of buses and the need for clean and well-maintained buses. The PMPML needs to address these issues and also take steps to drastically reduce the number of bus breakdowns on a daily basis.

For decades together, government after government has neglected the PMPML as politicians have been deaf to the city's crying need for a decent public bus service. Poor maintenance and inadequate fleet strength resulting in unreliable and poor frequency have been the bane of Pune's bus service. Consequently buses are packed and overcrowded, and cannot be boarded by the elderly and senior citizens.

Mumbai has always had a far superior bus service with good frequency, fleet strength and specially-marked seats for ladies, senior citizens and the disabled. It is high time that authorities paid attention to improving Pune's bus service and complementing it with the metro for the benefit of one and all.

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Flight of a simple mind

— Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

When you are listening to somebody speaking, the speaker's very first sentence triggers off some conversation within you. You are constantly agreeing or disagreeing with the speaker. Have you ever wondered whether you can listen without any thoughts or pre-conceived notions in your mind?

Students listening to a lecture are able to grasp only a part of it. Increasingly, even that attention is reducing; many young people now suffer from attention deficit. Only if there is alertness and presence of mind, you can be creative in a real sense. Alertness and creativity

Total rest happens in meditation. Mind that has come back to the source, is meditation. Mind that becomes "no mind" is meditation.

Focus means what? Being centered, looking to the highest and remaining in the space of peace is focus. No peace means no focus. As long as you hold onto some planning, your mind does not settle. Every desire or ambition is like a sand particle in the eyes! You cannot shut your eyes or keep them open with a sand particle inside, it is uncomfortable either way. Disposition is removing this particle of dust or sand from the eye so that you can open them freely!

When the flight of the mind stops, you experience total rest and complete alertness. It enriches the quality of your life.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Festival of ill effects

Diwali, the festival of lights, symbolising the victory of good over evil, brings joy and celebration to millions of people across India. However, it also has had consequences on environment and health of people. The chemicals and pollutants released by fireworks can significantly worsen air quality emitting toxic gases, example being Delhi and other major cities in India. These pollutants settle in the environment, posing risks to our health particularly related to the respiratory system. Chemicals in crackers such as cadmium and lead seriously affect health. The loud sounds from firecrackers can directly affect humans, especially the elderly, and may even trigger heart attacks. Bursting crackers releases heat, carbon dioxide, and other harmful gases, contributing to global warming. Mishandling firecrackers can lead to injuries and fire mishaps. The remnants of burnt crackers become garbage polluting the soil and water. Animals are affected by loud noises and air pollutants. We need to change the way Diwali is celebrated so that

it brings joy and happiness to all, and misery to none.

Dr O Prasada Rao, Hyderabad

Nehru in history's palimpsest

Nehru the erudite dreamer who chose to see the rose, never the thorns, manages to stay as enigmatic as being relevant to times this nation is passing through. Our history's palimpsest is being over-written by aspirations of the day. That the Nehru era was ahead of its times, had enabled us to sustain both democracy and economic progress at fair levels. The first of the famed IITs was established ahead of our first general election of independent India — in short, the right to education had gone hand in hand with the right to vote and technological and research institutes would form the bulwark of our macro-economics. If healthy political discourse was encouraged in his times, so was the vibrancy of the institutions of governance and the right to dissent. Now in attempting to leapfrog into growth we have subordinated social equity and value systems to a mirage of a Super India. In the process we have mislaid social inclusiveness. We expect that labour trade in its rights but look to no recompense

thereof. Through all this, the neo-urban elite is busy debating unfamiliar leaders as Nehru, in a history that they do not care to comprehend.

R Narayanan, Navi Mumbai

Prison reforms, an urgent need

Your editorial 'Jail reforms are overdue' (Nov 15) highlights a very valid issue. Prison reforms have become a pressing need. Assault on prisoners by jail staff, favouritism to influential prisoners, fights between prisoners, lack of space to accommodate all prisoners so that they can lead at least a basic dignified life are some of the issues. Women prisoners are the worst sufferers of the lot and recommendations of the Supreme Court panel must be implemented in letter and spirit in a time-bound manner so that all these issues can be addressed and these prisoners can be right-tracked towards a more constructive life.

Bal Govind, Noida

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INDIA 75 YEARS AGO NOVEMBER 26, 1948



END KASHMIR FIGHT, U.N. COUNCIL'S PLEA

Paris, November 25. The U.N. Security Council unanimously appealed to India and Pakistan today to stop fighting in Kashmir and to do nothing to aggravate the situation or endanger the



ARCHANGEL MICHAEL MESSAGE FOR THE DAY. A day of giving & receiving, overcoming fears and insecurities and making the right choices. Do not fall into temptation. Bank, paperwork & financial transactions will be of focus. You will spend time doing what you love. Ask for help and delegate. I am sending you signs, notice it. Tip for the day: Visualise Archangel Michael and say "Please help me to understand signs sent by you clearly, this or better than you". Lots of divine miracles your way, Sheetal Sapan Mhatre.