

Coal and the City | Deccan Herald

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Harini Nagendra,

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Less than a month from now, on October 31, the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference – COP26 -- will take place in Glasgow. This is a critical international meeting, bringing world leaders together to control the climate crisis. Cities play an increasingly important role in this conversation. Cities like Bengaluru consume two-thirds of the world's energy, and a large proportion comes from coal-fired power plants. Many of these coal plants are located within 500 km of a major Indian city. Coal plants contribute to global warming and to local pollution. The toxic smog from these plants moves over long distances, impacting not just the people who live next to the plants, but also the dense populations living in far-flung cities.

A new report from C40 cities, a global coalition of mayors from many of the world's leading cities, describes the impact that coal plants have on cities like Bengaluru. In 2021, the coal plants located within 500 km of Bengaluru have a total capacity of 35,901 MW, generating 173 megatons of CO₂ every year. By 2030, this will increase by nearly 30% as new coal plants are commissioned, increasing the total capacity of energy to 46,281 MW, and producing 215 megatons of CO₂ each year. The report suggests that air pollution due to coal plants already leads to about 230 premature deaths annually in Bengaluru – this will increase to about 420 by 2030, and 500 by 2050, unless they are quickly phased out and replaced with renewable energy. Coal pollution also leads to chronic asthma and other respiratory diseases amongst children and adults that increase sick days and lead to hospitalisation, severely impacting the earning capacity of households, and increasing the vulnerability of the poor, in particular, who depend on daily wages to run their homes.

The Energy Transitions Commission, an international think-tank with an India office based in TERI Delhi, points to the challenges confronting India as we seek to phase out coal. To support economic growth, India seeks to produce five times as much electricity by 2050. When coal already accounts for 60% of India's total electricity supply, how can we find our way out of the fossil fuel trap?

Their reports suggest that subsidies will be important to phase out old coal-fired power plants. But a transition to renewable energy could be very profitable, generating enough money to provide these subsidies. In Bengaluru alone, as many as 1,24,000 new jobs can

be created in the renewable energy sector if we adopt this path. But this requires significant support from government and industry -- and the will to make it happen.

Thus, there is clear economic logic in shutting down coal plants. The technology is available – already, cities around the world, including Houston, Sydney and Yokohama, run on 100% renewable energy. Yet, cities like Bengaluru seem to be trapped in inertia, not just depending on coal, but commissioning new coal plants to supply the growing city with more electricity.

We need to think out of the box, drawing on examples from other cities. The transition to renewable energy can be done innovatively. Quezon City has placed solar rooftop systems on its public schools, Curitiba has taken over an old landfill and converted it into a solar and biomass plant, and cities like Los Angeles have begun to build solar canopies on top of large parking lots, to combat urban heat island effects and generate solar power. Can we generate the will to make this transition happen, and at speed?

Time is running out – for Bengaluru, and for the world.

(Nagendra, the Azim Premji University Prof, prides herself on barking up all trees, right and wrong.)

NEXT STORY



S Natarajan,

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Diabetic retinopathy is a disease that attacks people having diabetes. It usually happens when blood sugar levels are high, leading to blood vessel damage in the retina and vision loss or damage.

Diabetic retinopathy can occur in type 1 & 2 diabetes patients. Despite controlling diabetes, the risk of blindness remains high. Hence, a retina check-up is a must.

The early symptoms include floaters, blurriness, inability to perceive colour, poor night vision and dark or empty spots in the centre of vision.

There are four stages of Diabetic Retinopathy:

Mild Nonproliferative Retinopathy

This is the first stage where the small blood vessels in the retina develop tiny bulges that protrude from walls, sometimes leaking fluid and blood into the retina. At the initial stage, one is likely to have no vision loss. The chances of entering the third stage are high