

# Burning up in Bengaluru

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It's so hot these days. As an unusual heat wave surges across large parts of India, Bengaluru's once-secure spot as a city with 'salubrious' weather seems very shaky indeed. Part of the reason is climate change, of course. With the Antarctic ice shelf disintegrating, and Himalayan glaciers losing ground each year, the effects of global warming are making themselves felt on cities like Bengaluru. But climate change is 'everything change'. The felling of lakhs of trees, filling in of lakes and wetlands, and the merciless creeping in of concrete and plastic into all parts of our lives – these are also contributors to the heat wave. Those of us who can afford it turn to coolers and air conditioners, but that only makes the problem worse – we cool the air within, and heat the air outside, making it far worse for others around.

We know the problems. We also know the solutions. Plant more trees, restore water bodies and wetlands, and protect biodiversity. But without political, economic and social will, individual and community action can only go so far. In times of crisis, we lack the systematic vision that is required to make a city like Bengaluru, which attracts over 10,000 new residents each day, liveable.

Bengaluru is, of course, far from the only city facing such a crisis. Despairing of sufficient political will to make changes at the national level, a number of cities in different continents have decided to take the lead in combating climate change, forming groups to exchange ideas, network, and learn from each other's experiences. The C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, a network of 97 of the world's largest and richest cities that collectively contribute one-fourth of the world's economy, is one of the best known.

Initiated in 2005, the network gained prominence during the pandemic, when a number of cities decided to find more sustainable pathways to economic recovery. Paris created thousands of miles of pop-up bicycle lanes, Bogotá announced a traffic-free zone in the heart of the city, and Milan, an increasingly concretised city struck with heat waves like Bengaluru, devised a mass tree planting strategy. The cities help each other plan resilient recovery strategies to address job creation along with climate protection and mitigation.

Six Indian cities have signed on to the C40 Cities network, beginning with Delhi, which joined the network in 2007. Bengaluru became a member in 2015. But mere membership is not sufficient, obviously. A number of Indian cities have developed climate action plans of their own in the past decade. One of the best-known ones in

Ahmedabad focuses on heat wave mitigation. The city sets up water stalls in different areas, opens gardens in the afternoon for people to take shelter, bans outdoor construction work in the afternoon, provides cool roofing in huts, and sets up green nets to shade bus stops.

All of these are critical to reduce deaths due to heat-stroke. But they are, in the end, only band-aids. If the temperature continues to rise, as it will over the next few years, how much can we address with a combination of green nets, cool roofs and water stalls?

Mumbai's new Climate Action Plan offers a new approach. Focusing on six areas – waste management, flood control, biodiversity, clean air, green buildings and electric transport – the plan aims to make Mumbai more liveable and economically viable, building on a foundation of ecological restoration. Built with local communities in mind, the plan focuses on the poorest in the city, protecting them from flood risk and heat waves, and ensuring they have access to green spaces and biodiversity.

In dark times such as these, we look for slivers of hope. Bengaluru is in the early stages of developing its own C40 climate action plan. Meanwhile, the Environment Support Group, one of the city's best-known NGOs, developed a participatory climate action plan for the city. Several other groups are working on similar lines. But in the end, political will is the key to determining whether Mumbai's plans remain on paper or take off in reality, and whether Bengaluru's plans get off the ground. Can we dare to hope?

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R K Misra,

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Hitherto the exclusive domain of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)'s entry into the Gujarat election arena gives notice of a season of heightened aggression as the new challenger and the old one brace to beard the lion in its own den.