

## Odds getting even on pollution

Written by Administrator

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By Sidharth Mishra



Come the New Year and the residents of the national capital would be faced with the onerous task of choosing between private transport and public transport. Choosing would be the wrong word to use. The Delhi government's policy will not leave people with much of a choice. Given the distances in Delhi, wherever preferable, the residents including your reporter prefer using public transport. In the past one year that your reporter has been associated with the media school at the Indra Prastha (IP) University, not once did I take my vehicle to the far off campus. The Delhi Metro provides a comfortable journey from the other end of the city to the Campus in a mere 70 minutes, providing enough time to read newspapers or books. I do not know very many faculty members of the university who use their own vehicle. Most of them commute by the Metro.

Thanks to the Metro, many off-campus colleges of Delhi University too have now emerged prominently on the higher education map of the city. Children from the capital suburbs also have easy access to various colleges, thanks to the Metro network. Having talked of the brighter side, I must also mention that Metro services are overstretched and the wear and tear can be seen in the general make-up of the facility.

The construction of the Delhi Metro was a long-term solution to the problem of vehicular pollution rather than the knee-jerk reaction shown by the present Delhi Government.

The advertisement issued in the newspapers on Tuesday morning inviting applications from the private operators to augment the DTC routes is like allowing the hugely infamous Bluelines through the backdoor.

It was with much effort of the erstwhile Shiela Dikshit government and after several court orders that the dangerous Blueline buses, which killed road users with impunity, were phased out and discipline returned to the bus lanes. In the name of fighting pollution, the transport department of Delhi government, whether inadvertently or by design, is going to push the residents into a much graver crisis than whatever they would be facing from pollution.

In fact, I wonder if there is a pollution-related crisis in the city. With due regards to its founder

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Anil Aggarwal and its present top honcho Sunita Narain, the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) has this tendency to go hyper with little information they gather. The sad part is that in their ignorance the government of the day too has been overtaken by NGO activism.

The numerous pollution related reports that I read in the newspapers every day, make little sense to me. I am very sure the reporters, who file these reports, too understand little of what is being written. I have been a resident of the city since 1985 and the city was used to choke 24x7 around the turn of the century. Soon, there was a flurry of measures like banning the diesel buses in the national capital.

It was followed by the introduction of the CNG fleets of buses. Soon, the auto rickshaws and taxis too were asked to go on the gas. For the initial period, this move had created quite a crisis as there were not sufficient numbers of CNG pumping stations in the city and the auto and taxi drivers spent long hours in the queue to refill the fuel tanks. Slowly the infrastructure for dispensing CNG was created and many private vehicle owners too went for the installation of CNG kits in their vehicles bringing down pollution levels.

In the late 1990s, I still recall scooter and bike riders wearing a wind-sheeter even in the summer months to ward off the fuel soot from their clean shirts. On reaching home those days after a day's work one could feel a layer of dirt on one's neck, the only uncovered part of the body. Today I don't think such a "physical feel" of pollution exists in the city.

The only smoke-billowing vehicles left in the city are the trucks that ply through the metropolis without many checks on them. I wonder in the scheme of the court propelled government order if there is anything to curb pollution from the real polluters. The idea of having even-odd number vehicles plying on the even-odd dates is very medieval and reflects a lack of political vision on the part of the government to handle the situation.

The very thought of the unregulated private buses returning to the city roads in the name of augmenting DTC services is already giving me nightmares. I am very sure that the court orders did not demand that in the name of fighting pollution the city commuters should be thrown from the frying pan to the fire. Without a long-term vision and plan to augment city's public transport service, the Delhi government with such knee jerk policy initiatives can only invite a bigger crisis.

The city needs to fight pollution, but it would be best fought without much attention being paid to the television and the radio. It should not become a tool for the aggrandisement of the political agenda of various parties. Delhi needs to fight pollution, but it would be best fought by creating such facilities for the residents that they give up polluting options on their own volition.

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