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Dubai floods wake-up call for world

An intense storm caused travel havoc across the United Arab Emirates (UAE) recently. The UAE experienced its heaviest rains in the 75 years for which it has kept weather records, according to meteorological authorities.

In Dubai, operations at the airport, a global travel hub, were severely disrupted, while vehicles were submerged in poorly drained slip roads and tunnels, highlighting the vulnerability of the region's financial centre to extreme weather.

Flood waters cascaded through malls last week, while in the most violent periods of the storm, furniture was hurled from balconies while the sky turned green. The rising waters flooded villas in the city's desert outskirts, where residents were canoeing and jet-skiing along submerged roads.

Scientists have predicted that climate change will make the lower Gulf region hotter, more humid and more prone to flooding. The oil-rich UAE is seeking to reduce its dependence on exports of fossil fuels, the biggest contributor to global warming.

While the disaster struck many miles away, it certainly shows the way global warming has impacted each one of us, transgressing land boundaries, across the world. Who will know it better than we Indians, bearing the brunt of extreme climate events since the last 20 years.

Dubai receives about 3.7 inches of rain in a year, but within a day it received 5.7 inches, making it 1.5 years of rain in 24 hours. It reminded of the July 26, 2005 Mumbai deluge, caused by the eighth heaviest-ever recorded 24-hour rainfall figure of 944 mm (37.17 inches) in one day.

The highest 24-hour period in India was 1,168 mm (46.0 inches) in Aminidivi in the Union Territory of Lakshadweep on May 6. The previous record high rainfall in a 24-hour period for Mumbai was 575 mm (22.6 inches) in 1974.

Climatic changes have resulted in variations in the ecosystem, reducing the net productivity, resulting in encroachment of agricultural and construction lands, deprivation of natural habitats, alterations in migration times and routes, mixing of species, extinction, loss in biodiversity and impacts on livelihood.

Temperatures have increased on average by 0.2 °C in 20 years due to the growth of industries and the rise in population, and are predicted to increase by 0.8 °C in the upcoming time keeping in constant the activities of humans.

The effects of global warming can already be felt. The predicted increase in precipitation by 10-12% and rise in sea levels by nearly 50 cm has the potential to submerge several coastal cities in India like Mumbai, Chennai, Goa, Kochi, Daman, etc, putting nearly 35-50 million Indians at risk of death due to chronic flooding, shows a National Maritime Foundation report.

Statistics have shown that nearly 2-3 million people are forced to relocate from coastal regions to interiors in India every year and the numbers are increasing rapidly. Also, multiple floods, storms, and cyclones with high frequency have been recorded in the last few decades compared to the past.

Despite all this, we still are not ready to mend our destructive ways. Urbanisation and industrial development are increasing rapidly. These are accompanied by problems of population explosion, encroachment of agricultural, and construction lands, increased waste generation, effluent release, and escalated concentrations of several greenhouse gases and pollutants in the atmosphere.

This has led to wide-scale adverse impacts. Best example of all this destruction is Goa, which has been facing a lot of issues related to increased exploitation of resources, air, land and water pollution, etc.

Excessive exploitation of the State's resources at the cost of Goa's pristine environment and its population is posing a threat not only to the clean and green environment, but also to wildlife. Building roads or creating settlement zones in eco-sensitive areas is causing human-animal conflict, with the displaced animals entering human settlements and endangering domesticated animals and destroying agricultural produce.

The killing of tigers in Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary is the biggest example of this man-animal conflict.

Goa's long coastline has been facing the threat of erosion. This includes some of the top beaches in the state like Anjuna, Keri-Tiracol, Morjim in North Goa and Agonda, Betalbatim, and Majorda in South Goa. Human factors like illegal sand mining and natural factors like flooding are the main reasons.

But instead of becoming the guardians of our environment, the political leadership has become the main perpetrator of its destruction, which is a shame. This is the situation around the world, where the political leadership is colluding with big corporate conglomerates and destroying the environment for their greed.

Looking at this situation, it is unlikely that we would be able to reverse this trend, which means more suffering is in store for the common people as the frequency and intensity of extreme climate events will increase.

But it is still not too late to get our act together. For this. The policy makers and corporates have to shed their greed, the people have to put pressure on the elected representatives and also change their own habits.

comment



SOTER D'SOUSA

Amidst the current repressive and intimidating political climate, it needs nothing more than cowardice to criticise the opposition parties; whereas, it takes tremendous courage to question and speak truth to the regime in power



sible civil society sit back and ask, "...but where is the credible opposition which we can vote for?"

Autocracy which has enveloped India's governance has been desperately attempting to offload its corruption and abuse of power onto the political opponents through aggressive propaganda at public cost. A toxic ideological group, which worked to weaken democracy and internationally defame the country while in opposition for over 6 decades after independence, seeks to label its dirty motives on its opponents and critics when in power. The rhetoric of a dark leadership fits a 'desi' proverb "ulta chor kotwal ko daante" (the

As the world watches the evolving Indian politics, there is hardly any doubt that this Lok Sabha Election 2024 is not about a level playing field for the opposition parties. Federal agencies targeting prominent opposition parties and leaders by freezing bank accounts, initiating inquiries and jailing them after election dates have been announced is unprecedented in the history of democratic India. Let us not fool ourselves into believing that this 'tamasha' to entertain the galleries will cleanse the nation from a cultural DNA of corruption and reduce crimes. Assurances to the courts about not initiating coercive action against a political party during the LS polls are no consolation. The EC appointing special observers to oversee the poll process and ensuring an equal playing field does not necessarily make an election free and fair. With the Sword of Damocles hanging over the heads of opposition leaders on financial matters, frozen bank accounts and a controversial EC, it is but normal that the focus of the opposition parties during the elections will be diverted and their spending power blunted. In such a hostile political climate, how can any respon-

thief accusing the policeman), or in other instances it is 'the pot calling the kettle black'. How can any responsible citizen defend such a government which shamelessly dodges accountability and transparency and villainizes the opposition and critics?

A political regime with a mindset that an emphasis on civil rights had kept the country 'weak' and interprets a people's mandate as a license to impose destructive programs and projects on the people is far more dangerous than the 1974 emergency. The last one decade has shown that the regime in power is a sore loser and will resort to any unethical tactics to overturn electoral mandates, as witnessed in the Chandigarh mayoral elections, or in the engineering of defections to snatch power through the backdoor. After being beaten in its game by some stinging Apex court judgements, a government on the back foot is now manufacturing and marketing suspicions about a 'vested interest group' employing pressure tactics to influence judicial outcomes. This agenda gets exposed when the government, which otherwise remains silent on Manipur and several horrific incidents of violence, finds its voice to support some letters from prominent personalities. Are we seeing frustrated egos now attempting to settle scores after failing to defend and cover up the electoral bonds scam in court? Were the pseudo patriots blind to notice the repeated humiliating swipes from a then Union Law Minister against the higher judiciary in the recent past?

The double (speak) engine governance has not only given a shield of legitimacy to corruption, but has also turned a blind eye to lawlessness branded as nationalism. The information which has spilled into public domain on the electoral bonds has exposed the 'na khaunga, na khane dunga' bluff of the anti-corruption crusade designed to malign the earlier regime. Let's not forget that the allegations on black money and scams to malign the previous government turned nothing more than the fable of 'the boy crying wolf'. Amidst the hysteria over corruption whipped up by these anti-democracy forces in 2011, the repeated warnings of many intellectuals about a

game plan to overturn the Constitution and destroy democracy went unheeded and dismissed by citizens as Congress propaganda.

After weaponising religion, culture and food to politically exploit public emotions and blind reason, the game now seems to have turned towards exploiting women's rights for regime survival. The defenders of Bilkis Bano's rapists in Gujarat bestowing the title of 'Shakti Swaroopa' to the victim of sexual harassment in Sandeshkali, Bengal, is a mockery of woman empowerment. The nation saw how the government played hide and seek to shield the accused involved in the sexual harassment of female wrestlers. So, is the gender card employed for the South Goa LS polls genuinely about empowering women, or meant to facilitate the 'ease of doing business' for the mining and real estate lobby in the plunder Goa?

A very interesting essay titled 'How Autocrats Weaponise Women's Rights' by Elin Bjarnegård and Pär Zetterberg, both associate professors in political science at the Uppsala University in Sweden, introduce the concept of 'autocratic gender washing' to shed light on why authoritarian states adopt gender-equality reforms. According to them, "Autocratic gender washing occurs when autocrats take credit for advances in gender equality in order to turn attention away from persistent non-democratic practices, such as violations of electoral integrity and human rights."

Amidst the current repressive and intimidating political climate, it needs nothing more than cowardice to criticise the opposition parties; whereas, it takes tremendous courage to question and speak truth to the regime in power. It's fashionable for some with no grass-root political experience to tom-tom the need for honest and capable political candidates, but do these words actually play out in action on ground? Can a society which has lost honesty and basic civility on the streets tolerate honest leaders in government? Whether religion and education have trained citizens to first think wisely for them to vote wisely will be tested in this election.

(The writer was a Counsellor at a Drug Prevention and De-addiction Centre in Goa)

Will Democracy be Buried or Redeemed in the Polls 2024?

people's edit

VOTER-ID VERSUS NRC-CAA

SUJIT DE

I was a student of class VII when my father was posted to another place. I had mixed feelings about going to a new place. There was the excitement that I would get a chance to explore a new place, a new environment along with the sadness of leaving an area that had become a part of myself.

My father took me to a nearby school in our new locality and got me admitted there. But I was bullied on the first day in my new school. It was my first encounter with ragging as well as with the game of othering.

Initially, some students behaved as though I were an enemy from outer space. Was it just fun or a ritual to welcome a fresher? If it was so, then where was its origin? The paranoia for anyone outside one's herd might be its origin.

Be that as it may, fortunately for me, the school administration and teachers did not treat me in a different way; rather they accepted me as their own. This helped the hostile environment change into a friendly and cordial one within a few days. What would have happened, had my class teacher after calling my roll number asked me to enrol my name again as a student in my school!

In that case, instead of the change that the situation underwent from hostile to friendly, it would have become unbearable. Then, I would have faced more ragging with renewed vigour in the hands of some heartless students. Plus, it would cause tremendous harassment for me and my parents.

But should any teacher ask such a question to a student when his roll number had already been recorded in the attendance register? It was the school authorities who had recorded the name of the student in the attendance register. Therefore, asking such a question actually means the authorities do not have faith in themselves.

The same question arises regarding the non-acceptance of a voter-ID as a sufficient document for citizenship. Given the Members of the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha are directly elected by voters, it is akin to putting a big question mark behind all of them. Should a government ask some voters to prove whether they are citizens of a country or not after being elected by the votes including the votes of those voters?

How could a government challenge the way it had been elected while completing its term of five years? Moreover, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA) has gone against the secular character of the Constitution by removing one particular religion from the selection process.

Two back to back incidents that happened last month brought back my memory of the first day in my new school. Sujit Dutta (my namesake) and Esan Singh were found dead at Ichamati in Meghalaya's East Khasi Hills district on March 27 hours after an organisation took out a protest against the CAA. It appears that the CAA has increased the divide between tribal and non-tribal people of Meghalaya.

Debashish Sengupta (37), a resident of Kolkata, was found hanging from the ceiling fan on March 20. His father, Tapan Sengupta said, "Since the notification of the CAA, my son has been suffering from tremendous mental trauma and agony and was also in acute fear psychosis for not having all the required documents as shown in the social media and as prescribed in the said notification."

The Centre should pay heed to the apprehension someone has expressed in a newspaper after Debashish Sengupta took his own life. "The moment I formally apply for Indian citizenship, it will be an acknowledgment that I am not an Indian citizen. That is a huge risk."

Anything that can increase the divide between different communities and create fear psychosis in the minds of the voters of our country should be avoided. It could spell disaster in our country which has achieved unity by accepting its rich diversity.

Trial run of the Smart City

Global warming and related effects have been increasing the severity of the weather patterns. The number of humid days in a year have increased in the past few years. The memory does the work of cross-checking and verifying the past data of weather with the current state. There is no need of any dataset to study and prove that global warming is really affecting our lives. James Lovelock had coined a term Gaia, meaning that the earth is like an organism, with let's say, consciousness, and is now taking revenge to get rid of the wrongdoings of humans on the environment.

Goa cannot be spared, just because there is a Double Engine Sarkar. Nature does not differentiate. Let the government stick the same dialogue now "This is just a trailer, movie is ahead" to this situation. If we collectively put the blame on the authorities for not executing the Smart City work in a systematic manner, they would counter this by asserting that the trial run of rain happened when work is still in progress.

Raghav Gadgil, St Cruz

Iran-Israel conflict impacts crude oil prices

As the Israeli-Hamas war continues to rattle the West Asian region leaving a trail of death and destruction, the Iran-Israel shadow war has very much come out into the open. Tel Aviv had been targeting Tehran's assets for over a decade, particularly in Syria,

taking advantage of the chaos engendered by that country's civil war. Tensions have escalated between Iran and Israel, raising a huge concern among several countries including India. Being an ally of Israel as well Iran, India needs to prevail upon both sides to exercise restraint. The war could impact the global economy which is already in the midst of two wars - Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas.

The Gaza war, in large part due to the denial of Palestinian rights and statehood, is the crux of the biggest security problem in the Middle East. It is a problem that will not be fixed by Israel and Iran engaging in a dangerous stand-off in which there is no true winner

Gregory Fernandes, Mumbai

Linemen should work in safe environment

In yet another tragic death involving a worker of the electricity department, a lineman was electrocuted while he had climbed up a pole to undertake repair work at Valshi, Bicholim on Friday morning.

It is reported that five linemen have met tragic deaths due to electrocution in the year 2023. The year 2018 and 2019 saw one case each while in 2022 three line helpers were electrocuted. To protect against electric shock, linemen have to mandatorily

wear protective gear. This includes rubber gloves, insulated boots and protective clothing made from flame-resistant materials. Linemen also wear hard hats to protect their heads and safety glasses or face shields to protect their eyes. Besides electrocution, linemen also face danger of falling while working from significant height. However it is observed that in Goa, linemen work even on high-tension wires without adequate protection. It is of paramount importance to switch off the source of the electricity power to the locality where the work is being carried out.

It is also a good idea to put up a sign on the main switch-board so that nobody turns the switch on even by accident. It is observed that linemen climb an electricity pole using a ladder made of aluminium or a steel ladder. Aluminium is yet another metal known for its high conductivity of electricity. A bamboo, wooden or fibreglass ladder needs to be used instead.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Safety of linemen should be supreme

The recent electrocution of a linemen at Bicholim yet again throws a question mark on the safety conditions being provided by the Govt to the linemen.

Linemen working on 11KV, 33 KV lines are very much prone to

electrocution. The government's claim that the govt will ban reverse current inverters is nothing less than foolish talk. For a domestic household there is no chance of current flowing in a reverse direction and for commercial structures there must be guidelines which need to be followed.

Were guidelines in place and being followed by the user using inverter which gave a reverse current ? Was the deceased using safety gadgets ? All these questions must be answered by the powers that be. It is sheer negligence of the department for which it must be answerable. Linemen time and again risk their lives working with bare hands on high tension lines and there are glaring examples of this. Is the government so bankrupt that no safety gadgets can be provided to the linemen and cannot all safety precautions be taken when linemen have to work on high current spots ?

Aaron Fonseca, Assagao

Recognising the value of earth

Our earth is the only planet we know that harbours life. Recognising the unique value of our "blue planet", it's crucial that we adopt practices to preserve and nurture it. Protecting our planet not only involves planting more trees to combat the effects of pollution and global warm-

ing prevention but also involves adopting sustainable living habits. Eco-friendly practices, such as recycling, reducing waste, and using renewable energy sources, play an instrumental role. According to World Economic Forum by the year 2050, our oceans are expected to contain more plastic than fish. This means that we'll be eating more of plastic.

Plastic, a fossil fuel product, does not biodegrade. Instead, it breaks down into tiny pieces that the fish eat, and then we eat the fish. Another common destination for plastic is the landfill. Since it contains toxic chemicals, landfills then contaminate groundwater.

I suggest, we really need to try working on ending plastic pollution every day. It's not hard, and it saves everyone's money. Just like our trash cans, our garages and our homes, the earth has limited space to store junk. We all need a clean environment so we can live healthy lives and leave future generations a healthy Earth.

Jubel D'Cruz, Mumbai

Is Goa really safe for Goans?

What is happening to our beautiful Goa. Murders, crimes, robberies, damaged roads, increasing pollution and the most important issue, but at present is there no proper water supply.

We have a life snuffed out everyday due to road accidents. *Beti bachao, beti padhao* is just a slogan as our women and girls are hardly safe. This is the one question which comes to my mind: Is really Goa safe for Goans?

Anita Fernandes, Verna