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Editorial

FICUS TREES: In spite of our great technological achievements, some of dubious value, such as the new “glass houses” which line our roads, it is the Banyans and the Peepuls which will remain the lasting glory of Bangalore. In our Newsletter of June 1998, it was reported that our Project for initiating special measures for protecting these trees “has made some progress”. Alas no progress followed and we are still attempting to ensure that the Order passed by Department of Forests, Ecology & Environment on 6.1.1997 (10 years ago) will come into effect some day.

TREE MEET ON 6-1-07: In June last year our Trustees were in a despondent mood particularly because of the senseless tree cutting which was in progress for widening roads, making underpasses and over bridges and for every form of “development” where trees were supposed to be an obstruction. We thought that the time had come to organize a Public Meeting to “re-emphasise the VISUAL and ECOLOGICAL importance ” of the trees of our city. We had agreed that the meeting should be carefully prepared so that apart from just high-lighting the well known facts about trees playing their invaluable role in providing shade and beauty, reducing temperatures, abating noise, we could also present fresh data about the extent to which trees absorbed carbon dioxide and other pollutants caused by the rampant growth of vehicular traffic in the city. We had announced that this would be “a meeting with a difference” – the difference being caused by 6 months of careful planning which preceded the event. The success of the Meeting (whose aftermath we report here) was very largely due to the presence of Mr. Pradip Krishen, who specially came over from Delhi to encourage us and the exceptional hospitality and facilities provided by Raman Research Institute.

Mr. Vijay Thiruvady who played a major role in organizing the Meet reports on the developments which are now underway.

Tree meet on 6th January 2007

BET had the privilege of hosting a Tree Meet at Raman Research Institute (RRI) on the 6th of January 2007. BET had a hall full of invitees aggregating about 120 persons from academicians, NGOs, Government of Karnataka - Forest Department, Department of Horticulture, "friends of Trees" through to an assortment of keenly interested citizens apart from BET Trustees and family members.

Justice Saldanha (Retd.) inaugurated the Tree Meet while Capt. Prabhala requested Mr. Pradip Krishen author of "Trees of Delhi" to give an audio-visual Presentation on the relevance of Trees & Urban Planning. Prior to Mr. Krishen's presentation he planted a sapling of a *Saraca thaipengsis* in the presence of Ms. Dominique Radhakrishnan in the premises of RRI. Dominique assisted BET considerably with all preparations for the Tree Meet.

Mr. Krishen gave an audio-visual Presentation on the Avenue Trees of Lutyens' Delhi, the selection of tree species and the unanticipated mistake made in tree selection. Due to a paucity of time Mr. Krishen could not complete his Presentation. However, prior to and after the Presentations all those present had an opportunity to meet Mr. Krishen.

Samir Whitaker's presentation on Trees & Pollution Abatement was based on research carried out by him / Secon on the Role of Trees in mitigating air pollution and the Heat Island effect by comparing two sets of Sites comprising Nrupathunga Road and Hudson Memorial Circle and Sarjapur Road after Agara and at Bellandur Gate. Mean ambient temperatures were found to vary considerably between Bellandur Gate (at 54.7°C) and Sarjapur Road where the mean temp. was 45.5°C. A similar variation was observed at the other site. Samir's presentation brought into sharp focus the value of trees in reduction of particulate matter, temperatures, surface run offs and effluence.

Mahesh Srinivas and Vijay Thiruvady gave a Photo Presentation on Heritage & Exotic Trees of Bangalore. There was an urgency about bringing to the notice of the Public and the Authorities the dwindling Heritage Trees in the city. 300 yr old Banyan trees, which would be national treasures anywhere, have practically all been cut off on Hosur and Sarjapur roads leaving behind a mere handful of trees which were discussed at the Presentation. In addition, Bangalore known for its

tree wealth in Lalbagh and its exotic avenue trees were also covered bringing back memories of Bangalore – the Garden City.

Mr. Prasad, Sr. Horticulturist – West End Hotel, talked on Tree Transplantation and Translocation of Trees, based on his experience in Goa and the West End of transplantation of over 500 trees. All the factors which go into the transplantation of trees, the tree species which are easily transplanted, the species difficult to transplant and the techniques and methods of transplantation were covered. Also discussed was the prerequisites/requirements of equipment, tools and manoeuvring space for successful transplantation. Mr. Prasad & BET believe that tree transplantation is an effective method of saving a number of trees being cut down in Bangalore.

Since the Tree Meet a number of enquiries for the translocating of trees and tree transplantation have been received by Prasad and BET which are being followed up.

After the Presentations, the house was thrown open for discussions with Capt. Prabhala being the moderator. From the questions asked and the intensity of the participation it became obvious that the participants needed a forum to express their frustrations with regard to keeping Bangalore City green and to introduce an effective interaction with the various Institutions involved to prevent the loss of green cover in Bangalore. BET shall be maintaining contact with the participants to build on the views expressed at the end of the Tree Meet.

BET believes that the Tree Meet achieved the objectives for which it was held and that various Government bodies' opinions to take effective steps on protecting the trees of Bangalore has been favourably influenced.

Mr. Pradip Krishen's book "Trees of Delhi" and Mr. Neginhal's "Golden Trees, Greenspaces & Urban Forestry" were available for purchasing at the Tree Meet. In addition, there were some six panels of Mahesh's photographs on Trees and the denizens of trees on exhibit together with 5 sets of 10 postcards each of Mahesh's photographs for sale.

The Tree Meet was followed by lunch at RRI when all the participants got an opportunity to meet each other.

V.R. Thiruvady

STATE PUBLIC BUS TRANSPORT POLICY PAPER

1. Government to use every means to encourage use of public bus transport services, particularly in cities.
2. Movement of public bus transport vehicles to be given top priority. Traffic authorities to ensure this.
3. Government to discourage use of all personalized forms of transport, particularly cars to
 - ♦ provide room for more (public transport) buses,
 - ♦ reduce fuel consumption, and consequently pollution,
 - ♦ de-clutter the roads,
 - ♦ get people into the healthy habit of walking, atleast upto the bus-stands by
 - ♦ increasing road tax; introducing congestion tax
 - ♦ introducing 'pedestrians only' zones in city centers. (Contractors may be facilitated to operate slow-moving, mini-buses for people to shuttle between the parking lot and the shopping areas).
 - ♦ restricting plying of private vehicles on the main city arteries during peak hours, as may be required.
4. Public bus transport sector to be opened out totally, for open competition between various players, on a level playing field, subject to concessions noted below.
5. Classifications such as stage carriages, contract carriages, maxi cabs, etc to be withdrawn, and annual license fees charged on the basis of the vehicle floor area.
6. Service providers to be totally free to adopt their own fare tables. There are to be no restrictions on fares, whatsoever.
7. Service providers to be free to choose the routes they wish to operate on, as also the schedules. RTO to be empowered to impose restrictions only in the case of overcrowding of routes/roads.
8. All bus stands to be taken over and run (or better still - leased out to professional contractors) by local bodies, like BMP, City Corporations, Municipalities, etc, making the facilities available to all service providers against user charges.
9. Public bus transport vehicles to be maintained in exacting road-worthy condition. No public bus transport vehicle to be more than 10 years old.
10. Policing of public bus transport vehicles to be made very strict, with heavy penalties being levied in cases of offences like over-speeding, rash & negligent driving, drunken driving, over-loading, etc.
11. Auto-rickshaws to be gradually phased out, particularly from trunk and arterial routes (meant for movement of high speed vehicles), and replaced by four-wheeler taxis.
12. An efficient bus transport system (with government and private players operating in open competition) to form the backbone of the public transport system. In large cities, these to be supplemented by METRO rail as the situation warrants.

Notes:

1. KSRTC (and its subsidiaries) and BMTC may be incorporated into companies, with employees holding substantial stake.
2. KSRTC (and its subsidiaries) and BMTC may be allowed 100% concession on annual license fee for their vehicles for a period of 3 years (from the date of the policy coming into effect), and 50% concession for the next two years, and 25% concession thereafter.
3. Buses run by co-operative societies may be allowed 25% concession on annual license fees.

Likely scenario resulting at the end of 3 to 6 months of implementation of policy:

1. Corporates like TVS, Ashok Leyland, etc, alongside the present contract-carriage operators like BlueLine, VRL, Sharma Transports, KPN, etc, apart from co-operatives like those formed by ex-servicemen, likely to come on the scene with hundreds of buses, catering to all kinds and classes of demand.
2. The resulting competition will automatically drive the different service providers to come up with innovative schemes of attracting more and more people to switch over to the use of the buses rather than relying on their individual vehicles.
3. At the lower end, you will have the 'Janata' services, stopping at all bus stops enroute, and charging the barest minimum (which in all possibility will be much lower than BMTC's present charges).
4. At the upper end, you will have the A/C deluxe services (possibly with broad, reclining seats, newspapers & magazines for reading, etc) catering to corporate executives, and operating from say Whitefield to Residency road, with just some 5 stops in-between. These buses may also cater to students of say Bishop Cottons School, possibly with a 25% concession being offered to them.
5. In between, you will have a wide spectrum of services, with each service provider making known his USP through the local media.
6. Even within a Jayanagar or an Indiranagar, you will have mini-buses operating in given circuits, catering to the local shopping and other needs of the residents.
7. The usage of two-wheelers and cars will reduce drastically, atleast for commuting, leading to
 - ♦ de-cluttering of city roads, thereby providing room for speedy movement of buses,

- ♦ reduction of air pollution with lower per capita consumption of fuel,
 - ♦ spread of population from city centres to out-lying areas due to ready availability of cheap and efficient means of transport,
 - ♦ promotion of the healthy practice of walking atleast to & from the bus stops,
 - ♦ an appreciable drop in the monthly family transport budget.
8. In the rural areas also, the demand for good public transport will lead to entrepreneurs / co-operatives coming forward to meet it, and healthy competition will ensure efficient and cheap services.

In this connection, a reference is made to the report on 'Bus Transport Systems' displayed on the website of the Union Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas (www.petroleum.nic.in/ch_15.pdf), salient excerpts from which are listed below, for a ready reference:

1. Promoting public bus transport should be viewed as a priority in any strategy to improve urban road traffic and in controlling air pollution from automobiles. The country can ill afford the luxury of unchecked growth of private vehicle population. The costs to the country's economy in terms of higher fuel consumption and to the society in terms of health are significant enough to warrant urgent action.
2. Clearly, there is a strong case for promoting private enterprise in meeting transport needs in urban areas.
3. An aspect of public policy that impacts on provision and expansion of public transport either by state owned utilities or by private entrepreneurs, relates to the unviable fare structures imposed by the authority.
4. With improved efficiency, the fare structure can continue to remain low while still providing for overall viability of the operations.

As will be noticed, the 'policy' enunciated above takes into account all these factors.

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