

DIRTY INDIA!

Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, a billionaire entrepreneur and founder of Biotech companies in India, has spoken candidly about India’s flaws – the filth everywhere and public’s lack of civic sense. This harsh truth if our reality and must to taken with a pinch of salt. Shah is no ordinary person; Her contribution to Indian economy and particularly bio research is immense. At the same time, she is well traveled and has a clear idea of how Indian scene is irksome. In a latest podcast, Majumder-Shaw said it’s shameful to see streets littered and garbage dumps everywhere in the cities and most importantly; most Indians often display a lack of civic sense. People often break the queue, spit in public places and throw plastic waste in rivers and on the roads. This gives a very bad reputation to our country despite India being one of the best and the most diverse destination for the tourists. While we must feel proud of our rich heritage, diversity of cultures and topography, we need a serious introspection of the poor hygiene in public places and irksome habits of many Indians of littering and spiting in public places. Yes someone would suggest that Prime Minister Narendra Modi launch yet another campaign and spend millions on making India clean. That is not the answer and besides, the phase two of Swacchya Bharat Abhiyan is supposed to deal with solid waste management too. However, the larger question is about the civic sense of general public. This can be tackled in schools provided the curriculum is not always exam-centric and focus is on overall development of youth. Secondly the gram panchayats and civic bodies can launch campaigns for waste management with public cooperation. Waste segregation and management must be taught to common people through workshops at the Resident Welfare Association levels. The waste to energy businesses must be encouraged and even subsidized initially. Even imposing fine against littering and spitting in public places must be enforced strictly.

CJP: Resilience, resistance and India’s youth

Anil Anand

Cockroach Janata Party (CJP), an incidental and accidental creation, came into being thanks to the Chief Justice of India’s remark-whether casual, off-the-cuff or serious. Named after one of the most primitive living winged insects, with origins dating back 320 million years and comprising over 4,600 species worldwide, the cockroach has found a new meaning in the current Indian context. The long existence of this underrated insect is attributed to its resilience and instinct to survive under the most difficult circumstances.

Barely two months into existence in its new manifestation as CJP, with restive but resilient youth becoming its fulcrum, it has no leader, cadre, ideology, constitution or manifesto. It is neither a recognised, registered nor an unregistered political party, but merely a phenomenon that has shaken the powerful government and captured the imagination of society, particularly the youth, who until recently had been solidly supporting Prime Minister Narendra Modi but are now seeking his accountability. At the centre of this phenomenal success are Gen Z’s drive and educationist-environmentalist Sonam Wangchuk’s steely resolve, which took the short-lived agitation to a new high. That does not take away the credit from the enormous youth force of the country and their parents, who came out of their comfort zones to protest. As a field reporter in Delhi, having covered many major rallies, protests and public meetings over the last four decades, one has never witnessed such a spectacle before. A nondescript organisation, emerging from nowhere and giving a clarion call to join the protest against the government’s failure to check paper leaks and its refusal to remove Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan for presiding over this mess, led to an unbelievable response.

The entirely voluntary nature of the protest, in every respect, has been its strongest point. The crowds came voluntarily, spending their own money, unlike the traditional practice of mobilising people through cash payments or by arranging their travel. Once at the venue, and faced with police action that left hundreds



of young protesters injured, society swung into action. Food, water and medical aid became readily available. Even more encouraging was that this voluntary effort transcended religion, caste, creed, colour and political affiliations. Alleged intrusions by ruling party supporters, though very few in number and reportedly backed by the police, were the sordid side of this otherwise remarkable story. SocialIssues & Advocacy

From the unassailable position that the Narendra Modi dispensation had created for itself over the past decade, the CJP-mobilised youth protest posed the first serious challenge to it. Ostensibly, the high hopes that the youth, along with other sections of society, had pinned on the Prime Minister have been belied, particularly with the education system going haywire. On top of that, the BJP’s heavy religion-based agenda, culminating in the alleged donation theft in Ayodhya’s Ram Temple, managed by a trust packed with nominees of the ruling dispensation, led to pent-up anger erupting at the CJP congregation. Notwithstanding the fact that student outfits owing allegiance to Left groups were also at the centre of the action, with half a dozen of their young activists joining Sonam Wangchuk in an indefinite fast, the movement has so far remained aloof from political colouring or related controversies. This is simply because the youth’s agenda is brief, focused, meaningful and to the point.

Strategically, CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke and his core team invited all political parties to join them, but without their party flags or agendas. Many frontline political representatives came to express solidarity, but none dared impose their own agenda, probably because they were cautioned by the overwhelming presence of the protesting youth.

Sustaining the impact of this mobilisation until the final goal is achieved is certainly a serious challenge for the protesting youth. Given the nature of the current ruling dispensation and its ability to use statecraft in all its manifestations, maintaining the momentum will be crucial in countering such tendencies.

The biggest takeaway from this month-old Gen Z movement is that it has rewritten the concept of the “new normal” prevalent since 2014, with the fear factor at its core. At a time when no one dared question the government, the protesting Gen Z broke this barrier by raising slogans and posing questions directly to the Prime Minister.

However, another major achievement of CJP’s revolutionary initiative is that the Jantar Mantar movement has also shaken the Opposition, particularly the Congress, into more meaningful action. The pressure built by Opposition parties in both Houses of Parliament and, finally-hopefully not for the last time-Rahul Gandhi’s sit-in outside the Prime Minister’s official residence, accompanied by Opposition MPs, has further strengthened the protesting

youth’s demand for justice. With society and the Opposition parties fully backing them, the movement has gained a kind of multi-pronged safety net. More importantly, the leadership should remain in the hands of CJP’s core team and the youth on the ground. Everyone else, including Sonam Wangchuk, Rahul Gandhi and the Opposition parties, should be seen only as lending strength to the youth movement.

Rahul Gandhi has already been raising the issue of paper leaks and the corresponding decline of the education system through party-organised programmes, which have evoked a positive response. However, taking to the streets to protest outside the Prime Minister’s residence in high-security Lutyens’ Delhi has given a new meaning to his youth-centric agenda. The youth, under the aegis of CJP, have perhaps unknowingly registered some unique achievements. First, they have successfully challenged the systemic contempt for collective empowerment or unity that has prevailed in recent years. When young people rise collectively and awaken society, it captures the imagination of everyone, including their adversaries. This can be seen and felt in the current phase of the CJP protests. Another significant aspect of the movement is that it has overcome societal, ideological, religious, regional and class divisions that one has witnessed in most such programmes held in Delhi from time to time. Above all, it has forged a cross-class and, more importantly, an urban-rural alliance. The mobilisation of crowds for such protest rallies has traditionally come from rural areas, with negligible participation from urban populations. That dynamic has changed drastically, as people from all regions and backgrounds have united to highlight the concerns of the youth. ExecutiveBranch

The CJP-driven youth protests are having a profound, multi-layered impact on the Indian psyche by transforming systemic and economic despair into a unified generational identity. What began as an online meme responding to a controversial remark from the judiciary has evolved into a historic street mobilisation that is altering how young Indians view their relationship with power.

MANIPUR’S FRAGILE PEACE NEEDS MORE THAN

Sabir Nishat

Peace in Manipur remains painfully fragile. More than three years after ethnic violence erupted between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities in May 2023, the state continues to oscillate between cautious optimism and renewed bloodshed. Although the intensity of violence has diminished in recent months, recurring incidents of killings, militant attacks, and deepening ethnic mistrust reveal that the underlying conflict remains unresolved. Manipur today stands at a decisive moment where the choice is no longer simply between peace and violence, but between genuine reconciliation and the institutionalisation of permanent division. InternationalRelations

The recent killing of two children after an explosive projectile struck a house in Bishnupur district starkly demonstrated how quickly tensions can resurface. The incident triggered widespread protests, clashes with security forces, curfews, and internet restrictions, reviving memories of the devastating violence that has scarred the state since 2023. An equally disturbing development followed with the abduction and murder of six Naga civil-

ians in Kangpokpi district. Their deaths have widened the scope of the crisis beyond the original Meitei-Kuki confrontation. The Nagas, who had largely remained outside the direct conflict, now find themselves increasingly drawn into an already volatile situation. The subsequent arrests may advance the criminal investigation, but they cannot erase the larger political implication-that Manipur now faces overlapping ethnic tensions involving three major communities, each carrying distinct historical grievances, territorial concerns, and political aspirations. The roots of the conflict stretch back decades. Competing claims over land, identity, political representation, and administrative control have long shaped relations among Manipur’s communities. The Meitei demand for Scheduled Tribe status, the Kuki-Zo demand for a separate administrative arrangement, and the long-standing Naga political aspirations have created overlapping anxieties that successive governments failed to address effectively. The violence of 2023 merely exposed these unresolved contradictions with unprecedented brutality. Its human cost has been immense. Around 260 people have lost their lives,

while more than 60,000 were displaced from their homes. Entire neighbourhoods that once reflected Manipur’s diversity have become ethnically segregated, with heavily guarded buffer zones separating communities that previously lived side by side. Every passing month of separation makes reconciliation more difficult, allowing mistrust to harden into permanence.

Equally damaging has been the erosion of confidence in public institutions. The previous administration faced sustained criticism over allegations of partisan governance and its handling of the violence. Whatever the eventual verdict on individual allegations, public perception itself weakened faith in the state’s neutrality. President’s Rule temporarily filled the political vacuum before the new government, led by Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh, assumed office in February 2026. The new administration has attempted to signal a departure from the past. Its emphasis on dialogue and equal engagement with all communities, including the Chief Minister’s symbolic visit to Kuki-majority Churachandpur, represents an important political gesture. In a state where communication between communities had virtually collapsed, even

symbolic outreach carries significance. Politics Thousands of firearms looted from police armouries during the initial phase of the conflict continue to circulate despite sustained recovery efforts. There are, however, encouraging signs. The surrender of dozens of cadres belonging to the banned Kangleipak Communist Party (People’s War Group), along with the surrender of arms and ammunition, suggests that sustained security pressure, combined with rehabilitation, can persuade militants to return to the democratic mainstream. Such developments provide hope, but they cannot be mistaken for a comprehensive solution.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to lasting peace is the enormous justice deficit. The Supreme Court’s recent concern over the slow pace of investigations into nearly 3,000 cases arising from the 2023 violence highlights the scale of the challenge. Investigations have progressed in only a small fraction of these cases, leaving victims waiting years for accountability. Justice delayed in such circumstances does not merely prolong suffering; it reinforces perceptions that the state is either unwilling or unable to protect its citizens impartially.

Queues to QR codes: India’s daily commute is becoming a digital experience

Shreya Gupta | Shubhangi Gupta

For decades, urban commuting meant standing in line, buying paper tickets and carrying cash. Today, tickets are moving to smartphones, payments to QR codes and airport access by facial recognition. What is changing is not just transport digitisation but the integration of mobility into everyday digital behaviour. This reflects a wider behavioural shift. Government data shows digital payment transactions rose from 4,371 crore in 2020-21 to over 18,000 crore by January 2025-more than fourfold in under five years. As smartphones become central to payments and services, the commuters increasingly begin experiencing a hassle-free and convenient travel experience.

Railways offer one of the earliest examples of this shift. While online reservations became common much earlier, daily commuting remained tied to counters and printed tickets until Indian Railways introduced paperless mobile ticketing through the UTS app in 2015. The app later expanded to include UPI payments and multilingual support. Mobile-based UTS booking has also become in-

creasingly popular, particularly in Mumbai’s suburban network. Between April and November 2023, Central Railway reported that 14.76 crore passengers used UTS, including 14.44 crore on Mumbai Division, generating over `161 crore-showing growing commuter comfort with carrying tickets on smartphones. Alongside this, Indian Railways now operates more than 4,661 Automatic Ticket Vending Machines (ATVMs) and 5 Coin-cum-Card Operated Ticket Vending Machines (CoTVMs) to support digital purchase of unreserved, platform and season tickets and reduce counter congestion. Digital adoption is also visible in reserved travel: e-ticketing accounted for approximately 87.5% of all reserved tickets booked in 2024-25. More recently, the RailOne app has integrated services including ticket booking, live train tracking, PNR status, food ordering and complaints onto a single platform while enabling digital payment through R-Wallet, cards, net banking and UPI.

Metro systems had introduced electronic ticketing years ago through smart cards and tokens, but the current shift is moving ticket access onto smartphones. Delhi Metro now offers

QR-ticket booking across multiple digital platforms including the Delhi Sarthi (Momentum 2.0) app, WhatsApp, Paytm, PhonePe, Amazon Pay and the One Delhi app. After introducing QR-based paper tickets in 2023, DMRC recorded more than 74 lakh QR-ticket sales in the first month, contributing to a nearly 32% decline in token usage. A similar shift is visible in Bengaluru: QR-ticket usage rose in 2023-24 from 0.09% to 11.63% on Line-1 and from 0.06% to 10.02% on Line-2, increasing further in 2024-25 to 23.23% and 20.34% respectively, while smart card usage declined.

Bus systems are also becoming more digital through app-based ticketing, QR payments and real-time information. Delhi’s experience showed how quickly commuters adapt when systems become easier to use.

Before COVID-19, over 36% of bus tickets were issued through passes and mobility cards, indicating some digital familiarity. However, a 2020 QR-ticketing pilot expanded access beyond existing users. The first trial recorded over 1,000 app downloads within two days, and after interface improvements, the second phase expanded to more than 15 DTC and

cluster routes, generating over 51,000 digital tickets in 14 days.

Surveys by WRI India found over 90% of users intended to continue, and the programme later expanded to around 650 buses, issuing more than 2 lakh digital tickets within three months. Bengaluru shows how this can scale: UPI ticket payments rose from Rs 6.2 crore in January 2024 (7.6% of revenue) to Rs 43.7 crore in September 2025 (nearly 49%). According to the 2024 IAMAI-Grant Thornton Connected Commutes survey covering more than 1,400 respondents, 47% of Mumbai bus commuters used travel apps to buy tickets. The shift is also changing commuter expectations: 27% of respondents prioritised real-time seat availability, 21% valued live bus tracking, and 26% identified ease of use as the most important feature. EventTicket Sales

The change is not limited to payments. Increasingly, commuters expect transport apps to tell them when the next bus will arrive, whether seats are available and which route is fastest. According to BEST, its live bus-tracking application has crossed 60 lakh downloads. The authority also reported rapid early adoption af-

ter launch, with more than 3 lakh users joining within the first few months and 12,000-15,000 new users being added daily.

According to the 2025 BusTrack report by redBus, growing smartphone and UPI adoption in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities is increasing the use of online bus booking platforms and shifting travel decisions closer to departure time. Nearly 43% of bus users booked tickets on the same day of travel, suggesting that digital access is making intercity bus journeys more immediate and flexible rather than dependent on advance bookings.

Airports are moving in the same direction. DigiYatra, which uses facial recognition for airport entry and verification, was launched at just three airports in December 2022 but expanded to 13 airports within little over a year. The number of registered DigiYatra users increased from 38 lakh on 1 January 2024 to 45.8 lakh by 10 February 2024 - a rise of over 20% in just six weeks. The largest gains were recorded at high-volume airports such as Delhi and Bengaluru, where DigiYatra journeys increased by around 24% and 27% respectively within this short period. What makes this important is not that airports be-

came digital-online check-ins already existed. The bigger change is that identity verification, ticket access and movement are beginning to merge into a single digital journey.

Several forces are driving this shift. First, India’s digital infrastructure has expanded dramatically, with more than 900 million internet subscribers creating the foundation for app-driven mobility.

Second, digital systems provide significant operational advantages to transport agencies.

Digital ticketing reduces dependence on paper-based systems and manual cash handling, helping lower revenue leakages and improve fare collection transparency. At the same time, app-based systems generate real-time commuter data that can help agencies understand ridership patterns, optimize routes and improve service planning. Third, commuters themselves are driving this transition. Research by IAMAI on digital bus mobility platforms found that features such as digital ticketing, live tracking and route discovery significantly improve commuter convenience by reducing waiting times and streamlining boarding processes. Travel& Transportation