A culture clouded by smog and darkness



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Heavy pollution on Dec. 13, 2017, surrounds New Delhi Railway Station in India, creating smog causing low visbility in the city.

The first thing I noticed when I came out of Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi, India, was the blanket of dark smoke. It took me a minute to realize that it was early morning because the darkness of the smoke appeared to engulf the entire sky, blocking the sun.

All I could smell was burning rubber. I asked my cousin if India is always like this and he responded, "No, it's just particularly bad right now."

Despite this, the smoke did not dissipate the entirety of my two weeks there.

As of Nov. 26, the air quality index in New Delhi is 263, which is in the "very unhealthy" category, making it the second most polluted city in the world, according to IQAir, an information platform that reports on air quality.

Back in 2021, New Delhi was the fifth most polluted place in the world according to IQAir.

The air quality index measures ground-level ozone, particle pollution, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide, according to the National Weather Service.

What is extremely scary about the pollution in India is how it is part of everyday life. All of my family went about their days, coughing and losing their voices every time they stepped outside.

They would order things online to minimize going outside, especially since the smog increases the amount of heat in the atmosphere.

It can be easy to blame the pollution and smog towards India's population as the country is the second most populated area with 1.4 billion people, according to Worldometer.

More people means there are more cars that emit carbon dioxide, more industrialization that employs the population and more landfills. All of these can, and do contribute to the air quality, but the real culprit for the climate crisis in India are Western countries, including the United States.

As of 2021, the U.S. is responsible for 5.01 billion tons of CO_2, whereas India contributes 2.71 billion tons, according to Our World in Data.

When we hear stories about climate change, we are quick to lend our support to countries in need by setting up funds and donating money. But rarely do we ever address its roots. Western countries contribute the most to the crisis but pay for it the least.

Countries like the U.S. have better infrastructure and money to address the climate crisis when it happens domestically.

However, India doesn't have that luxury. My grandfather had to turn on the water heater, wait 30 minutes and then go shower. Sometimes, the water wouldn't even heat up. While I stayed there, most of my showers were in frigid cold water.

There are also seldom straight roads. The terrain is rocky, filled with cows and litter. There is little to no regulation of trash or the various animals that roam the same roads as cars and people.

In a place where consistent warm water is a luxury and clean streets are rare, addressing climate change on a large scale is not a concern.

The Indian government is simply looking toward ensuring every village and neighborhood in the country has electricity.

This is why Western countries need to stop sitting on their ass, making false promises while the world continues to burn. They are so far removed from the issue that they don't even realize the luxuries they have, which is exemplified at this year's COP 27 in Egypt.

COP 27 or the conference of parties is a meeting of the 197 countries that agreed to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1992, according to an Oct. 13 New York Times article.

Many "developing" countries at the 2022 COP 27 asked for a fund set up by wealthier nations to help them combat climate change in their countries, according to a Nov. 20 NPR article.

Wealthier countries such as the U.S. agreed to setting up a fund since they are the ones contributing the most to emissions but there was no timeline according to the same NPR article.

Given that the U.S. still owes billions of dollars to climate change efforts, there is very little chance any "developing" countries will actually get the money they deserve.

At every conference, we see world leaders attempt to douse large fires with sprinkles of water when what we really need is a commitment to prevent the climate from ever getting to a disaster.

In 2009, wealthier nations promised $100 billion a year by 2020, but the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development reported developing countries only received $83.3 billion, according to the same NPR article.

Western countries watch India's pollution increase, Pakistan's massive flooding and tiny island nations completely disappear without doing anything.

They watch California burn every single year to the point where universities shut down, but it still isn't enough for them to maintain their commitment to the planet.

Western nations can not continue operating with wool over their eyes, not when my family in India has to live in unbreathable air.

What is especially unfortunate is we'll all start forgetting the beauty of these countries because they will be taken over by climate disasters.

I love seeing the rocky mountains of India's Dharamshala, the cows roaming the streets and the smell of chai filling my grandparents' home.

It is an absolute shame that this beauty is hidden away from the world by a dense layer of dark smoke that the U.S. and other Western countries have left.

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Calm down Vin Diesel, sideshows aren't cool



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GRAPHIC BY CAROLYN BROWN

Sideshows need to hit the brakes and come to an end – we are not in a "Fast and Furious" movie, nor can you drive like Brian O'Conner.

Sideshows are events held on streets, freeways and other public locations. Cars are the most common vehicle used during the events, however motorcycles and dirt bikes are also welcome.

The most common stunts are donuts and car bouncing up and down, taking over streets by causing chaos. When a car does donuts, the driver spins in tight circles that leave circular marks on the street.

Car bouncing is pretty self-explanatory and has been inherited from the lowriding culture that happened in the '80s.

Car meets are safer than sideshows. People who participate in such events simply take their car and park in an area they can showcase it.

No donuts, no blocking traffic and no harm is done as spectators walk around and look at modded cars.

On the other hand, a major point of a sideshow is to make it obvious that it occurred. One way of doing this is by leaving marks on the streets. People who take part in them go to public intersections, including freeways, and stopping traffic to perform donuts.

Sideshows bring nothing but destruction. Backing up traffic and forcing others to maneuver around the scene is a danger that should be treated as a crime.

Those who participate in sideshows need to stop thinking they're in "Tokyo Drift" because injuries or death can happen. Stabbings and shootings have occurred, police officers injured and just overall chaotic incidents that need to be avoided.

On Nov. 13, a sideshow took place on Monterey Highway and Branham Lane, where the San Jose Police Department impounded 19 vehicles and issued 720 citations.

Of the vehicles abandoned on the scene, two were reported stolen. A resident additionally said they were car-jacked at gunpoint.

It wasn't always about doing dangerous stunts and cars spinning rapidly in circles. Sideshows used to be about expressing yourself through your car, according to an Aug. 18, 2015 KQED article.

Originating from the streets of East Oakland, sideshows brought communities together to showcase aesthetically pleasing, high performance cars.

Now, sideshows revolve around doing donuts and other stunts, nothing like what it was back in the '80s.

Why have sideshows turned from casually looking at cars to now an entire event that causes destruction and harm?

As time progressed, people wanted to stand out as being the best.

There's always someone who has to one-up another person, so maybe that's what caused a shift in sideshows.

It seems as if people started car tricks to draw attention. As more and more people took notice, it became a norm to block off streets to point the spotlight on the cars.

Whatever the reasoning may be, sideshows are dangerous activities that can harm not only the spectators, but also the authorities instructed to break it up.

With no positive outcome, sideshows need to be put in reverse and drift back to when spectators would just appreciate cars.

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