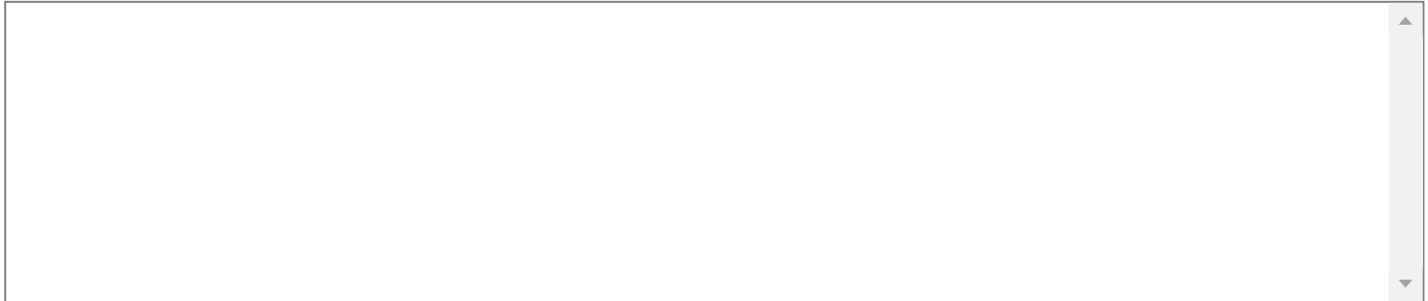




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**AJIT SALDANHA (/COLUMNIST/AJIT-SALDANHA)**

Ajit Saldanha has a finger in the pie, and another on the political pulse. And when he writes, he cooks up a storm.

(/columnist/ajit-saldanha)

# On the contrary: Cuddle up, it's a muddle

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***Just when one felt things couldn't get any worse, some rocket scientist in the BBMP came up with a plan to concretize storm-water drains.***





📷 Researchers TV Ramachandra and Bharath Aithal of the IISc claim that as much as 50% of the main storm water drain at Jakkasandra has been shrunk and concretized between 1908 and 2017. (Representational Image)

The third edition of a two-day thought conclave was held in the city recently. Several weighty topics were chosen for the eminent group of panelists to wrap their heads around: suffice it to say it was rather like the curate’s egg, good in parts. Take for example the topic, “Reforms: Time for Version 2.0”. Any captain of industry worth his salt would have feasted on it with the relish displayed by an unleashed Rottweiler for the fleshy calves of a Cubbon park jogger.

Instead we were subjected to tedious lectures by a bunch of preening, self-congratulatory panelists who held forth at length about the fantastic achievements made in BPO. One of them channeled his inner Baba Ramdev as he patted himself on the back with yogic suppleness, prior to rattling off a bunch of stats to highlight how “his team were now providing services that the US clients hadn’t even dreamt of...” or words to that effect.



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What precisely that had to do with reforms, as the actress said to the bishop, remained an abiding mystery. Thank god Vinita Bali was there to provide much needed perspective with her sharp focus on agrarian distress, farmer suicides, the callousness of produce marketing committees and how top-down solutions are well-meaning but ultimately, disastrous. At the end of the day, (as they say in corporatespeak), we can't solve our agricultural problems with an app.

“Who is a Bengalurian? Identities in a changing, cosmopolitan city” is a topic as succulent as a ripe Alfonso. Unfortunately, other than the remarkably erudite Jayant Kaikini, none of the panelists were able to get their teeth into the fruit. Part of the blame should go to the moderator, Vanamala Vishwanath, who plodded her way through an insufferably dull introduction. If she were the opener in a team sent to bore for India, nobody else would get any batting. Back in the 80's we had a Janata Dal Minister named Lakshmisagar who set off a nationwide furore when he suggested a “green card” system for aspiring Bangaloreans.

“See saar, we should interview the peoples who want to settle down here and checkup if they are suitable for adjusting with our culture, our value system and our way of life. Then only we should issue green card to them.” Dude, you nailed it, you the bee's knees, you the peach in the melba and the ghee in the Mysore pak! Where are you Laksmisagaru when Namma Bengaluru needs you?

Kaikini offered humour, insight and robust commonsense while he made a compelling case for his theory that, given the worldwide shift in power from governments to global



information sources, the media and marketers are now more powerful instruments for social and economic change. Why on earth the powers-that-be at the orga  and a millennial to give us some youthful perspective beats me.

Or for that matter, a crusty old codger from Jayanagar 4th Block to bemoan how its leafy, tree-lined boulevards have become asphalted wastelands? According to a recently published study, unchecked concretization coupled with acute loss of wetland and vegetation over the last two decades is the reasons why we experience flooding during a spell of heavy rain. Just when one felt things couldn't get any worse, some rocket scientist in the BBMP came up with a plan to concretize storm-water drains.

Researchers TV Ramachandra and Bharath Aithal of the IISc claim that as much as 50% of the main storm water drain at Jakkasandra has been shrunk and concretized between 1908 and 2017.

They forecast a dystopian future: "By 2020, India's IT capital will be an unlivable sea of concrete and glass with barely any trees, a victim of the unplanned urbanization that will reduce its greenery to barely 6.46% from the 63 per cent green cover it enjoyed in 1973." In the last 34 years, Bengaluru has seen a jump of 1005% in concrete area or paved surface.

Kudos to the organisers for conducting events which are necessary to jolt us out of our collective apathy; tragically what transpires is that gyanmeisters let off steam like the safety valve on a pressure cooker and then it's back to business as usual. In most progressive societies, conclaves such as this would attempt to identify core problems and propose a road map forward with robust solutions. Sadly we are a bunch of whining Chetan Bhagats with grandiose dreams of "Making India Awesome" without the slightest clue as to how to go about it.

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