

TRAFFIC TOIL

# CAR BOOM BRINGS GRIDLOCK MISERY TO 'HAPPY' BHUTAN

Bhutan has seen a more than five-fold increase in cars, buses and trucks on its roads in the last two decades, with capital Thimphu hardest hit by the influx of vehicles

Agence France-Presse

**THIMPHU, BHUTAN:** Famed for valuing Gross National Happiness over economic growth, Bhutan is a poster child for sustainable development.

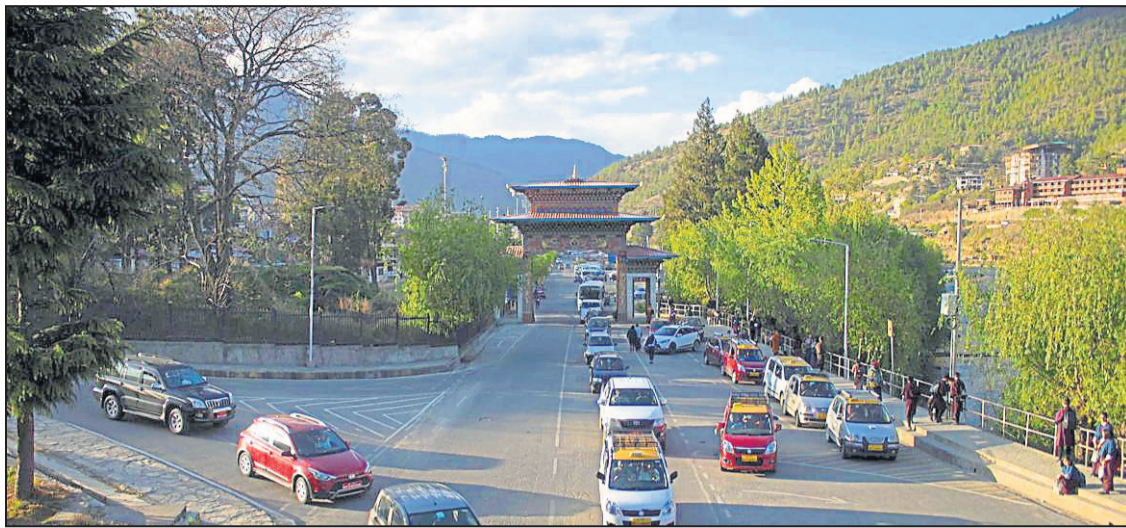
But booming car sales may impact efforts to preserve its rare status as a carbon negative country — and an increase in traffic is testing the good humour of its citizens.

Bhutan has seen a more than five-fold increase in cars, buses and trucks on its roads in the past two decades, according to transport authority director general Pemba Wangchuk with capital Thimphu hardest hit by the influx of vehicles.

Phuntscho Wangdi, a media consultant, says the congestion and lack of parking now makes driving stressful in the tiny Himalayan kingdom where there are no traffic lights.

"I wish there were fewer cars. It wasn't like this before," he adds of life in Thimphu, which is home to half the cars in the country. The nation's economy has grown 7.5% each year in the past decade, according to the World Bank. Officials estimate there is now one car for every seven people in Bhutan, which has a total population of 750,000.

But the nation's narrow country lanes and outdated city roads can barely cope. A lack of infrastructure, along with poor driving etique



A view of a traffic jam on a road in Bhutan's capital Thimphu. Famed for valuing Gross National Happiness over economic growth, Bhutan was a poster child for sustainable development, but a boom in car sale may jeopardise its rare status as a carbon-negative country.



ette -- some simply leave their cars parked in the middle of the road -- compounds the problem. "Every year the number of cars and the number of people are increasing, and the roads have remained the same, and it's a problem for us," Lhendup, a taxi driver, says.

Morning rush hour journeys that once took five minutes now take more than half an hour. This may seem a small figure compared to the hours of gridlock faced by commuters in Manila, Jakarta, and Bangkok, but it is a step-change for the Bhutanese who say the situation has rapidly deteriorated in the past year.

"It's chaotic. I eat my breakfast in the car now to save time," says Kuenzang Choden, who drops her

four-year-old daughter at school every day before heading to work. The traffic jams are a sign of the wider economic changes the nation is facing. Bhutan is renowned for prioritising Gross National Happiness over GDP, and has captured tourists' imagination as a tranquil, idyllic land, but there are signs of discontent.

Bhutan ranked 95th out of 156 countries in the 2019 UN World Happiness Report.

And while taxes have increased and restrictions put on vehicle loans, car buyers are not discouraged. Local financial institutions gave \$46 million in car loans in 2015, but by last year the amount had reached \$96 million.

## RADICAL MEASURES

Bhutan and Suriname are the only two countries to claim they are carbon negative. Public transport is poor, particularly in Thimphu, which is home to 100,000 people but barely 40 buses.

The capital's mayor Kinlay Dorji plans to introduce bus-only lanes on city roads and wants to buy more buses. "It's time for radical measures," he says. "We have to make public transport more attractive and discourage owning cars," he adds, warning that unless action was taken Thimphu risked grinding to a standstill. To ease congestion, the city is also building its first two multi-storey car parks that will each take about 600 cars.

## BOOK REVIEW

# A delightful learning experience!

Armaan Mathur

The book, titled *The Earth Carer's Guide to Climate Change*, is an intuitive effort to acquaint young readers with the adverse consequences of our actions on the planet. Brimming with colourful illustrations, quirky art and interactive language, the book is a must-read, especially for new readers. The book opens up with some beautifully composed poems on nature and social life, along with a touching Japanese folk tale, thereby setting the tone for the issues of Climate change and how it impacts on our future. The editor has made the composition engaging and easily comprehensible.

Let's start with the art. Things like climate change, the greenhouse effect, or even global warming are not easy to illustrate through flow charts and diagrams. The art was simply invigorating; for the duration of this book I was an 8-year-old again, gawking at the colourful illustrations and the quirky side notes. And by colourful, I don't mean only the traditional 'crying earth' illustrations; the art here is of a much more personal nature. I remember a poem titled *Woman by Alison Dummell* which was nothing but a woman fetching water with a matka (earthen pot). But the shades used and the atmosphere enhanced the appeal of the poem.

Unlike most educational books intended for a younger audience, this book didn't try too hard to be humorous or cool. The editor has refrained from using any sort of slang or even



abbreviations to ensure easy comprehension even at a layman level. Throughout the book readers have been encouraged to explore, discover, and comprehend rather than simply cram plain facts.

As the title suggests, it is a guide to climate change; but what I am really happy about is that instead of emphasising on what is out of our hands, the focus has been on what we can do as an individual. I have to admit that this book has cleared even my personal conceptual doubts regarding climate change. Another thing that can be mentioned is the little tidbits of information sprinkled very cleverly throughout the text. All in all, the book checks all the good boxes; beautiful art, simple language and most importantly, fun learning-check!

The contributor is a student of Class 11, Birla Vidya Niketan, Pushp Vihar

**Title:** The Earth Carer's Guide to Climate Change  
**Author:** Various  
**Edited by:** Geeta Dharmarajan  
**Publisher:** Katha Books  
**Price:** ₹195

## BULLETIN

### Boris Johnson to formally take charge as PM with promise to meet Brexit deadline

**LONDON:** Boris Johnson began putting together his top team as he prepared to take over as Britain's Prime Minister on Wednesday, on a mission to deliver Brexit by October 31 by any means necessary. The former London mayor, a divi-



Boris Johnson, leader of the Conservative Party, in London, on Tuesday

sive figure best known for his gaffes and rhetorical flourishes, was elected on Tuesday by members of the governing Conservative party to be their next leader.

### HAMMOND QUILTS AS FINANCE MINISTER

British finance minister Philip Hammond resigned from the government on Wednesday, following through on a promise to leave rather than serve under incoming prime minister Boris Johnson.

Hammond said he had left the economy in a state that would allow his successor to choose between tax cuts, higher spending or faster debt reduction if they left the EU smoothly.

### US announces antitrust review of big tech firms

**WASHINGTON:** The United States on Tuesday announced it would begin an antitrust review of major online platforms to determine if they have "stifled" innovation or reduced competition.

The announcement by the Justice Department did not name specific companies but appeared to signal the department was targeting Google, Facebook and Amazon, which dominate key sectors of the digital economy.

It was not immediately clear if the probe would also target Apple, which despite not being the dominant smartphone maker wields power over services via its App Store.

### Goa govt planning to launch water taxis

**PANAJI:** In a first, the BJP-led Goa government is planning to ply 'water taxis' in its inland waterways between Panaji and Old Goa, the Legislative Assembly was told on Wednesday. Chief minister Pramod Sawant also said ferry boats operating on solar power would be introduced on different routes. The announcement was made while

tabling the performance budget of the River Navigation department for the 2019-2020. "Water taxis will be introduced for Panaji to Old Goa route with the help of experts," stated the document. The department stated it was considering to replace three old ferry boats with new ones and procure solar energy-operated hybrid boats.

### NTPC and BHEL ink pact for power plant

**NEW DELHI:** State-owned power producer NTPC on Wednesday said it has signed a pact with BHEL to set up an 800 MW technology demonstration plant (TDP) at its power plant in Chhattisgarh. The TDP will be set up through a joint venture (JV) company, NTPC said. It

said the plant shall be the most efficient and environmental-friendly power plant in the world, once it becomes operational, resulting in reduction of carbon dioxide emission by about 20 per cent as compared to the conventional sub-critical technology.

### Swift, Grande lead VMA nominations

**LOS ANGELES:** Taylor Swift and Ariana Grande dominated nominations on Tuesday for the MTV Video Music Awards (VMA) with 10 apiece, but some K-pop fans cried foul when best-selling Korean bands were placed in a separate category. Grande's breakup anthem 'thank u, next' and Swift's 'You Need to Calm Down,' will contend for the top prizes of song of the year, best pop and video of the year.



American singer Taylor Swift

## HT CHRONICLE July 25 >> from the archives of the Hindustan Times



### Milkha Singh wins a gold medal for India

**CARDIFF:** India won her first gold medal at the British Empire and Commonwealth Games here today (July 24) when Milkha Singh won the 440 yards, setting up a new Games and Commonwealth record. His time was 46.6 sec.

The Indian not only bettered the previous record of 47.1 sec. set by Gosper (Australia) in 1954 but also the South African, Malcolm Spence's Commonwealth record of 46.8 sec. set up last year at Port Elizabeth.

When the Indian mounted the rostrum to receive his medal, he received one of the biggest cheers of the day from the crowd in the Cardiff Arms Park. Millions of Britons also saw him receiving the medal on TV. He said afterwards: "I am very proud of having won the first medal for India." He hoped to compete in the 1960 Olympic Games at Rome. It was a very popular victory.

Although drawn in the worst lane possible, No.5 Singh ran a well judged race to beat the favourite, Spence (South Africa) by a few inches. Everyone here knew that Milkha Singh was the Asian champion but not having had any real competition with world-class quarter milers, few gave him a chance to win the title.

The final was a really thrilling well-fought out duel. At the last bend, it looked as if Spence had the edge over the others. Down the straight, it was either Spence or Tobacco but Singh was coming up very fast and he made it—he breasted the tape a few inches ahead of the South African.



### Longowal, PM reach agreement

**New Delhi:** A comprehensive accord was reached between Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Akali Dal president Sant Harchand Singh Longowal here today (July 24) on the entire range of issues concerning Punjab, marking a welcome end to the prolonged crisis in the border State that has bedevilled the nation.

The 11-point Memorandum of Settlement signed at 5-30 p.m. in Parliament House provides for transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab, two high-power commissions to decide on the territorial disputes between Punjab and Haryana and a tribunal on the Ravi-Beas water systems, reference of the controversial Anandpur Sahib resolution to the Sarkaria Commission widening of the scope of the inquiry into last November's riots, rehabilitation of those discharged from the Army, and compensation to the families of all the innocent people killed in agitation and riots since August 1982.



### Bindra shoots a first for India

**New Delhi:** ABHINAV BINDRA is known for inviting tags that were not exactly kind. Some called him a snob, others self-centred. On Monday, the world tagged the marksman a champ. The 24-year-old from Chandigarh did a first for an Indian when he clinched the 10-metre air-rifle gold at the quadrennial ISSF World Shooting Championships in Zagreb, Croatia. The previous best was the silver-medal performance of legendary trap shooter Maharaja

Karni Singh at the Cairo World Championships in 1962. Bindra, a 2004 Athens Olympics finalist, scored a superb 597 in the preliminary round and shot a 102.1 in the final round.

With this, Bindra also qualified for the 2008 Beijing Olympics (joining Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore, Anjali Bhagwat, Manavjit Singh and Gagan Narang). "I'm thrilled. I just spoke to my



mom in Chandigarh and my entire family is thrilled," Bindra told HT from Zagreb. "I've worked hard and have got the results." What makes success sweeter is that Bindra has been fighting a back injury that forced him out of some events. He will soon go in for a surgery, and then for the next target: Olympic gold.

### WATCH OUT THIS SPACE FOR QUIZ ON FRIDAYS

The quiz will be based on HT archives. Send in your answers at [htacedelhi@hindustantimes.com](http://htacedelhi@hindustantimes.com)