

BRT Corridor

From: Hazards Centre (hazardscentre@gmail.com)



Sent:

Wednesday, April 30, 2008 2:18:46 PM

To:

edit@timesgroups.com

Dear Mr Editor,

I am attaching a letter to the editor signed by 90 persons who come from scientific and professional backgrounds and are part of the middle class constituency whom you have been so assiduously wooing through your paper. They are all dismayed by what is becoming of a once great newspaper known for objective reporting and analysis.

Since your policies seem to be flexible enough to devote a great amount of space in your paper to the events happening around the Bus Rapid Transport Corridor in Delhi (as well as other cities), it is only proper that you publish this letter in its entirety. If it cannot come in the Letters Column (which has shrunk significantly over the years), you may consider placing it elsewhere on the editorial page.

If you do not do so, it will be only another indicator of the selective bias that now characterises the Times of India.

Yours sincerely

Dunu Roy

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To
The Editor
The Times of India
Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg
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The High Capacity Bus System has found many ardent advocates the world over as a relatively inexpensive and efficient mass transport system. Renamed – somewhat incorrectly – as the Bus Rapid Transport (BRT) in the city of Delhi, it has been designed not only for the most widely used form of public transport (the bus carries about 40% of the 15 million passenger trips per day in the city), but also provides demarcated space for the cyclist and the pedestrian (who account for another 42%), while leaving a substantial two lanes for the private cars and two/three-wheelers (which account for the remaining 8% and 10% respectively).

Nevertheless, some media channels – particularly the Times of India – have been carrying on a sustained campaign against the first BRT corridor being constructed in Delhi calling it, amongst other things, a “manic mess”, “killer corridor”, and “Tughluqian disaster”. These various newspapers and television channels (who seem to be more intent on being newsmakers) are legitimately entitled to present the views of various citizens groups – although it is striking that most of the ‘citizens’ interviewed are private car owners – but there is also an ethical limit to how the news and views should be presented.

The recent front-page headline in the Times of India of April 25, 2008, reads, “IIT dept behind BRT gets funds from bus makers” and accuses “Dinesh Mohan and Geetam Tiwari from IIT-D’s Transport Research and Injury Prevention Programme” of being patronised by the “Volvo Education Research Foundation and Ford Motor Company”.

We would, firstly, like to point out that it is the Government of India’s stated policy to encourage all public science research institutions to raise their own funds from charitable trusts and foundations and industry and not depend solely upon the University Grants Commission – and this is part of the process of ‘liberalisation’ that has been enthusiastically supported and promoted by the editors of many newspapers, including the Times of India.

Secondly, to resort to this kind of journalistic innuendo that, therefore, all scientific research must inevitably follow the dictates of the funding agencies casts grave aspersions on the character of objective research conducted at recognised world-class institutions like the IIT. Using discredited methods of rapid opinion-polls, which are known to be biased and a popular means of market promotion, the Times of India is challenging a system based on sound scientific research, in a clear effort to protect the interests of a minority of car drivers, without publicly clarifying what is the rational basis for their ‘research’ methodology, nor what is the source of their inspiration.

We condemn, in no uncertain terms, this violation of journalistic ethics by a daily that claims the pride of being India’s widest read English newspaper and demand that the editors immediately publish an unqualified apology to the concerned scientists.

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