

Pune's thought leadership must move to rapid action leadership'

Pune on My Mind: Ideas for Change

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RA Mashelkar. (Illustration: Shrikrishna Patkar)

Around ten years ago, I was invited to write about my dream of my Pune. I said: 'What we urgently need is a grand "shared vision" for Pune 2025. Ten Puneites of great reputation, whom Pune trusts and respects for their integrity, intellect and achievements should come together. They should

create an exciting vision by getting all the citizens of Pune involved. We should then back fold this future shared vision to the present and work towards achieving this in a true 'Team Pune' spirit'.

The first part of dream came true when Pune International Centre (PIC) was established. The second part is still work in progress. PIC is rapidly re-establishing Pune's reputation as a national thought leader. PIC is setting up an aspirational agenda for Pune, the latest being the ambition of Pune leading the march towards 'low carbon' urban economy while becoming the first 100% climate literate city in India. But for building such dramatically different future, we need to do things differently by embracing change.

What are the five major changes that I will like to see?

First, Pune's undeniable 'thought leadership' must now move to 'rapid action leadership'.

Why rapid action? Pune's growth without proper development plans is leading to unsustainable expansion and many challenges. Among other things, we have lack of quality power for all, good roads and good public transport. Multi-storey concrete jungles, rapidly spreading slums, loss of open and green space and environmental pollution are stark realities.

Take Pune traffic as an example. As a proud Punekar, I was sad to read the 2015 list of cities with worst traffic conditions that was published by Numbeo, a collaborative global data base. Pune was ranked as the third worst! The ranking is based on average time spent by a commuter on a one-way trip, CO2 release estimation in traffic, overall traffic system

inefficiencies, etc. Now we do have plans on two tier roads, underground Metro, BRTS, Intelligent Traffic System But we need rapid action!

The second change: Pune should rapidly multiply its own success stories to achieve transformation with speed, scale and sustainability.

The enormity of Pune's solid waste disposal challenge is such that we need a 'clean revolution' ultimately making Pune garbage free, landfill free and bin free! An innovative ward-wise zero-waste model established by Janwani and PMC, Swach decentralised garbage collection model, etc. have shown the way. We need rapid action to replicate these and other such successful models.

Third change is about raising the bar, where Pune is already doing well. We justifiably take pride that Pune is described as 'Oxford of East'. But then this is following and not leading! Pune must raise the ambition by moving from 'best practice' of Oxford to 'next practice' of Oxford plus! Pune must move from being an 'educational capital' to 'future ready educational capital'.

With the emergence of exponential technologies ranging from artificial intelligence to big data analytics to internet of things to 3D printing, the 'future' is going to be dramatically different. Some technology led jobless growth predictions show that 69% of current Indian jobs will vanish, but 55 entirely new jobs will emerge. Our 'future ready' educational systems must be such that the world should turn to Pune as a preferred destination for talent in all such emerging new jobs!

Start-up India movement is catching up fast. However, an IBM Institute—Oxford study recently showed that 90% of the current start-ups in India are

bound to fail due to lack of innovation. Pune must create strong IP led innovative Next-Gen start-ups. As co-chair of Maharashtra State Innovation Society, I feel proud that Maharashtra has announced possibly the boldest start-up policy. With these and other strong enablers, such as moving from venture capital to `ad`venture capital, Pune should show the way by setting up the biggest `incubator to IPO` movement!

Fourth change: Pune must set audacious goals of being the first, not just being `amongst` the first. Can Pune be the first one to go 100% digital, cashless, paperless, bureaucracy-free, citizen-empowered, corruption-free, carbon neutral, and climate literate city?

These impossible looking dreams can eventually come true if we make the most important fifth change. And that is the `Team Pune` spirit that I mentioned in my opening para.

This means achieving 100% social engagement and commitment with each of the 6 million Pune-kars saying `my Pune`, and `Pune first`.

I have talked about five changes, but there is one thing that I will not like to change in my Pune.

Pune is based on the foundation of talent, technology and also tolerance. Pune manages diversity of cultures, faiths, religions, languages like no other city does. Pune should become a role model of liberalism and tolerance, which is the need of the hour for the whole world.
