

Class no bar for climate change

On Saturday, International Day for Climate Action, *Mumbai Mirror* took the environmental debate to the city's commoners to bring you views of how it affects day-to-day lives

VIRAT A SINGH

A unique gathering - Voices from Mumbai's Margins - at St Xavier's College, a section of the city's underprivileged got a platform to share their views on climate change. The event was co-hosted by various NGOs such as Oxfam India, Centre for Education and Documentation and Yuva. This *Mumbai Mirror* correspondent got talking with two people on their understanding of the Copenhagen meeting on climate change in December, and the much-banded-about term 'global warming'. They told us their day-to-day experiences indicative that the mercury is definitely on the rise.

Sushila Sabale, 42, a rag-picker in the past, now with Stree Mukti Sangathana

"I came to Mumbai from Jalna in 1972, and worked as a rag-picker. Back then, there was more greenery. I am not aware of global warming. However, I do know Mumbai's temperatures have gone up. Earlier, we found more paper in garbage, now we only get plastic. The volume of garbage has been increasing too, and segregating becomes difficult.

"Earlier, we had heavy rains for days, yet never any flooding. Today, there is flooding with barely minutes of light showers. Now, we never know season changes - be it winter, summer or monsoon they are all same.



Demonstrators at Marine Drive protesting global warming

"Rag-pickers start their day at 5 am, and pick around 60 kg of paper and plastic. There are about 20,000 women rag-pickers in Mumbai. People in the city, whose waste we segregate, do not even know the role we play in reducing the quantity of garbage and recycling loads of it."

Suresh Gawali, 45, cobbler

"I came from Jalgaon 35 years ago. Earlier, we needed warm woollies while working on footpaths during Diwali. Now, winters have been



postponed to December, so there must be something wrong in the climate. Even the monsoon arrives late, and the summers are unbearable. I may not be well educated, yet it does not take schooling to know that weather's undergone drastic changes, and Mumbai's environment has been eroded in the name of development.

"We have to work from pavements, and all the dust and pollution affects us adversely. Earlier, there was much less vehicle emission too. When I landed in Mumbai and lived in slums, we had no electricity and never needed fans. Today, one cannot be with-

out a fan even for a minute throughout the year. That explains the climate has changed to a large extent."

ORGANISERS SEE 'RED' OVER CALLOUS ACT

At a related event, where Indian Youth Climate Network (IYCN) and 350.org had gotten together a human chain along Marine Drive to commemorate the International Day for Climate Action, energy drinks company Red Bull gatecrashed, making the organisers irate.

A furious Ruchi Jain, Coordinator, 350.org hollered, "We are not associated with them in any way, and they just landed here and started distributing their free energy drinks. People and participants threw the empty cans all around, defeating the very purpose of the event. Our volunteers had to go around collecting these cans and disposing them properly in dustbins. We plan to send them a warning letter to prevent them from cashing in on our events like this. It was an event to spread awareness about environment degradation and not to promote their drinks.

Dhwani Shah, a volunteer, who collected empty cans, said, "It was sad that some volunteers threw the cans around. However, mostly it was the onlookers, who were littering after drinking their free drinks. If they wanted to promote their drinks, they should have also ensured they put up a bin asking people to throw the cans in it."