Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports

At the Climate Summit, India Makes the Case for a Sunday Bike Ride

At COP31 in Antalya, Fit India presented Sundays on Cycle, a weekly ride that has not missed a Sunday since December 2024, and invited every country to host one community ride in the next year.

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Most of the talk at a United Nations climate summit is about energy, finance and technology. On Saturday afternoon, at the International Solar Alliance Pavilion at COP31, India's Fit India Movement made a smaller argument: that the climate fight is also won on ordinary streets, one weekend ride at a time.

"A city can build a bicycle lane, but only if its citizens choose to ride on it," Mayank Srivastava, deputy director general of the Sports Authority of India, told the audience. "Infrastructure alone does not change how people live."



The hour-long session, “Sundays on Cycle: From a Weekly Ride to a Way of Life,” was held at the pavilion (D 610) on the summit’s Children, Youth, Education and Skills Day at COP31, the 31st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Launched by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi on 29 August 2019, the Fit India Movement reflects his vision of building a healthy, active, and prosperous India. The movement aims to make fitness an integral part of every Indian’s daily life by encouraging people to adopt healthy lifestyles, engage in regular physical activities, practise yoga, and participate in sports.

The Fit India Movement of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports presented the ride as a working example of Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment), India’s campaign for sustainable lifestyles, with a simple message: one pedal, one purpose, one healthier world.

Sundays on Cycle, a free community ride, has been held every Sunday since Dec. 22, 2024. “It has not missed a single Sunday,” Mr. Srivastava said. Participation has reached close to 3.7 million at more than 30,000 locations across India, he said, and on World Bicycle Day this year, held with cycling’s world governing body, the Union Cycliste Internationale, organisers planned for 100,000 riders and about 400,000 turned up.

“More than the numbers, people have begun to take cycling seriously,” he said. “They return Sunday after Sunday, and what began as a campaign is becoming a habit.”

He argued that timing matters for countries like India. Many cities in the Global South are still being built, he said, and most trips in them are short enough to cycle. “If cycling becomes a habit before car dependence takes hold, those emissions need never be produced,” he said. “Avoiding them now is far cheaper than removing them later.”

Lindita Xhaferi-Salihu, who leads sectors engagement for Global Climate Action at UN Climate Change, delivered the keynote. She described Fit India as “a great model that can be replicated everywhere,” and spoke about her husband, who arrived in a new country as an 18-year-old refugee and found a community through a local handball club. “A community is only a community if somebody brings it together,” she said. “We cannot talk about communities if we don’t have somebody like Fit India bringing together people who share the same purpose and can act collectively for the betterment of their societies.” Climate negotiations, she added, are so technical that it has been hard to bring people along, and sport can be the “connective tissue” that does it.



A short film on the ride's journey followed. In it, Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya, India's minister for youth affairs and sports, who launched Sundays on Cycle in December 2024, described cycling as "much more than exercise" and "a powerful medium to carry the Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's message of Fit India." "Through initiatives like Fit India Sundays on Cycle," he said, "we must take this passion to every household and every community."

A panel moderated by Dr. Bhairavi Joshi, an adviser to Fit India, asked whether a weekend ride can change how cities are built.

Jim Walker of the Walk21 Foundation, who joined a Sundays on Cycle ride in Delhi last month, pointed to Bogotá, Colombia, where a similar street opening began about 50 years ago and now draws about 1.6 million people every Sunday onto 125 kilometres of car-free streets. "We get stuck in the habits of our cities," he said.

Felipe A. Ramírez Buitrago, director of urban mobility at the WRI Ross Center for Sustainable Cities, said such events "teach with example." Once people enjoy the streets, he said, cities can make the case for protected lanes and links to mass transit.

Gashaw Aberra of ITDP Africa said car-free days in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, had helped produce the country's first non-motorised transport strategy, which sets targets for walkways and cycle tracks. "Instead of what can we learn from Africa, I would say, what can Africa learn from India," he said.

Sanjay Seth, executive director of The Energy and Resources Institute, said walking and cycling should be counted in India's climate commitments and in state and city plans, not treated only as awareness campaigns. "We need to make sure that we build safely; then behaviour will follow," he said.

Asked for one action every city should take in the next 12 months, the panellists answered in a word or two: Maud De Vries, chief executive of BYCS, said "just do it"; others named infrastructure, community engagement and obstruction-free pathways.

Closing the session, Ms. Amarjyoti, executive director of Fit India, invited every nation, city and partner present to host at least one community-led "active morning" over the next 12 months and to share the experience through the One Planet Network. The Turkish Cycling Federation, she said, was the first partner to join. "A cycling culture is not built in a day," she said. "It is built week after week by people who keep showing up."



The organisers also released an impact report on the first 97 editions of the ride.

Ashish Khanna, director general of the International Solar Alliance, delivered a special address. He said the session had drawn the largest attendance the pavilion had seen, and urged sports facilities, from stadiums to gyms, to adopt solar power. "We are so proud that we could fit something related to sports and cycling in our agenda," he said.

The ride's 100th edition will be held across India on Nov. 29. Fit India said it would share a Sundays on Cycle toolkit to help other cities start their own rides, and invited people around the world to ride that day in their own communities.

Fit India also invited COP31 delegates to a special Sundays on Cycle ride in Antalya on Sunday, Nov. 15, held with the Turkish Cycling Federation (Türkiye Bisiklet Federasyonu) from Konyaaltı to the old town of Kaleiçi, carrying the Sunday ride from India's neighbourhoods to the summit's host city. In India, the ride's 98th edition on the same day marked Children's Day with cycling and Zumba.

"Ride together, change together," Ms. Amarjyoti said.

This special edition of Sundays on Cycle at COP31 was held under the banner "India Pedals & The World Joins In!", and was organised in partnership with the Turkish Cycling Federation in Antalya, Türkiye, on Sunday, November 15, 2026. The route saw cyclists begin the rally at Konyaaltı Caddesi and conclude at Işıklar.

About Fit India – Sundays on Cycle

Launched by Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya, Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports, in December 2024, Fit India – Sundays on Cycle is organised by the Sports Authority of India under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, in collaboration with the Cycling Federation of India, Navavrati Foundation, Fitspire, the Centre for Integrative Health, MY Bharat and other partners. Rides are held every Sunday in all States and Union Territories, including at SAI Regional Centres, National Centres of Excellence, SAI Training Centres, Khelo India State Centres of Excellence and Khelo India Centres.

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