



Last mile woes

Inflation should not be allowed to undermine the economic momentum

The latest retail inflation data from the National Statistical Office yet again highlights the challenge in achieving durable price stability. Provisional estimates for year-on-year price gains in August show the headline rate based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) quickened marginally to 3.65%, from July's 3.60%, as a sharp rebound in vegetable inflation led to a wider acceleration in overall food price gains. Price gains in vegetables – the third-largest constituent of the Consumer Food Price Index – surged by more than 380 basis points last month to 10.7%, spurring food price inflation to 5.66%. Among vegetables, year-on-year inflation in the most widely consumed potato and onion still remained in the high double digits for a sixth and 13th month at 64% and 54%, respectively, a moderation from July's levels notwithstanding. Other vegetables including carrot, pumpkin and brinjal experienced a surge in price gains with all three posting double-digit inflation. Also, disinflation in the prices of pulses and cereals remained slow, with year-on-year price gains in the former still in the double digits for a 15th straight month at 13.6%, while the latter logged an inflation reading of 7.3%. Disconcertingly, food inflation in the rural areas rebounded to exceed 6%, and this at a time when stuttering private consumption is trying to regain momentum in the economically crucial agrarian hinterland. As an external member of the Monetary Policy Committee Shashanka Bhide noted in his comments at the RBI's policy review meeting last month, "high food inflation would therefore hit growth adversely as it affects consumption".

A durable disinflation to the RBI's medium-term monetary policy goal of 4% headline retail inflation also faces other challenges, a key element being a resurgence in core inflation. The price gains measure, which strips out the more volatile food and fuel components, inched up to 3.38% after having snapped a 17-month decelerating streak in July. Based on responses from goods manufacturers polled for the monthly HSBC India Manufacturing PMI survey, HSBC observed this month that there was a "marked increase in prices charged for goods in August" with the rate of output-change inflation the second-fastest in close to 11 years. Add to this the spatial and temporal volatility of the monsoon, and the outlook for price stability becomes even more muted. RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das on Friday said that the last mile of disinflation was proving to be "challenging". With policymakers still having to traverse a fair distance to ensure inflation does not undermine broader economic momentum, he reassuringly acknowledged that authorities "cannot afford to look the other way".

Weather gods

Attempts at controlling the weather are still in the realm of uncertainty

Earlier this week the Union Cabinet cleared the ₹2,000 crore Mission Mausam, which primarily involves a major upgrade of instruments used by organisations such as the India Meteorological Department, the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM). These are the organisations that form the backbone of India's weather and climate forecasting system on multiple time-scales. In the first tranche of the mission until 2026, the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), the nodal body executing the exercise, hopes to procure and install up to 60 weather radars, 15 wind profilers and 15 radiosondes. These are instruments that give regular updates on the changing parameters of wind speeds, atmospheric pressure, humidity, and temperature at various elevations of the atmosphere. Had this been all that the Mission was about, it would not have been too different from the National Monsoon Mission, launched in 2012. The crux of that exercise was to evolve a new approach to forecasting the monsoon by developing weather models that relied on intensive computing. Thanks to this, India has an umbrella weather model that can be tweaked to generate forecasts on multiple timescales – from daily to seasonal monsoon predictions. Beyond the monsoon, such a model could be customised for heatwaves, cold waves and local forecasts.

Making weather forecasts more accurate and improving precision is a never-ending iteration but Mission Mausam seeks to open new vistas. Instead of being a slave to weather, humankind tries to control it. One of the proposals associated with the new mission is to set up a "cloud-seeding chamber" at the IITM, which will help model rain clouds. They would then test various "weather interventions" such as seeding clouds and tweaking them to control the rainfall from them. There are also plans to control lightning. As statistics reveal, lightning strikes are the number one cause of nature-propelled deaths, above floods and landslides, in India. While there are multiple socio-economic factors as to why this is so, meteorologists say they hope, one day, to be able to tweak the electrical characteristics of the cloud so that there are fewer lightning strikes that lethally traverse from sky to ground. While experiments have been done in other countries, there is much uncertainty on its feasibility. Investing in fundamental research in the atmospheric sciences is a welcome move. The complexities posed by climate change suggest that multiple fronts may have to be opened to mitigate the effects of greenhouse gas emissions. While weather modification may not be a panacea, it will not hurt to wholeheartedly understand it.

Editorial

Being 'trans' is being human



Kavita Krishnan
a feminist activist
and writer

Last year, at a closed door tribunal, I met several very young transpersons from rural and urban working class communities. It was heart-breaking to see teenagers brutalised and evicted by family, surviving suicide attempts as well as persecution and violence on the streets. In the stormy debates on the 'transgender question', their voices remind me of what stakes are real.

This is not about western culture wars, or debates over sex, gender, or sports. It is about the rights of every human being to be recognised and respected as themselves; to never be asked to deny, disguise, or defend their selfhood in order to enjoy civil rights and equality.

Universal today but problems in the past
Principles of human rights that are today established as universal, were once treated as 'questions', 'problems' and 'debates'. The slavery question. The woman question/problem. The (N-word) question/problem. The suffrage question. The segregation question. The untouchability question. The inter-racial/inter-caste marriage question. The age of consent question. The homosexual question/problem. The Jewish question/problem. These are all titles of writings by some of the best-known historical figures in the world, as well as letters to editors. Bathroom segregation was rationalised as necessary to protect white women from predatory black men on the prowl; police raids on bathrooms to arrest gay men were rationalised to keep boys safe. 'Bathroom bills' to keep transwomen from raping women in toilets are following a tired old script.

It was a Nazi member of the International Olympics Committee who proposed a policy that "ladies taking part in the Games 1940 shall produce doctors' certificates stating that they are women". Ironically, such a policy came into effect in 1948, after the Nazi defeat (at the London Games) – "Officials required female Olympians to submit an affidavit, signed by a doctor, certifying that they were women".

What seemed to be legitimate 'questions' back then were in fact designed to deny civil rights. Today, it is only the far-right that seeks to make those questions "great again", and unsurprisingly, it also derides trans rights. But it is 'gender critical' progressive intellectuals and activists who do what the openly bigoted far-right cannot: frame trans rights as a 'question' requiring reasonable debate. This allows trans rights activists to be accused of being an unreasonable mob that cancels critics through bullying and violence. Search the Internet though and one finds out that movements we celebrate today faced the same accusations. Having your realness 'debated' does make one angry. Black people, women, lesbians and gays were known to 'riot',

It is 'trans-sceptics' who are fragmenting the integral human self

smash windows, disrupt meetings, vandalise property, set buildings on fire, spit at the police and so on.

The gender-critical mantra is that "biological sex is real". The corollary is that transgender identity is not real. Gender-critical progressives lobby for laws penalising or prohibiting the acceptance of trans personhood as real (by textbooks, toilets, schools, sports, hospitals). And the far-right works to enact such laws. In 2022-23, Republican members of the U.S. Congress introduced a bill which, if passed, would prohibit federally-funded libraries and schools from keeping any material with information on sexual orientation, gender identity, or sex education. Predictably, these laws also penalise and prohibit the acceptance of homosexuality as real.

Existence is not an abstract debate
Social scientists cannot be agnostic on the 'question' of trans 'existence' but claim to offer an objective and dispassionate 'explanation' of the 'emergence' of transpersons as a symptom of political philosophy or ideology. 'Emergence' implies that being trans is a trend, here today, gone tomorrow. Existence is not an abstract debate. Human beings can enjoy their rights only if their identity is affirmed as 'real' in law, not 'lifestyle'. To say that trans persons are free to dress as they wish as long as their trans-identity is denied in law is no different from saying people are free to be gay in private, but must not 'haunt their lifestyle' by demanding the legal right to marry as heterosexuals do.

The openly partisan far-right discourse declares transpersons and non-binary sexualities to be synthetic symptoms of 'gender ideology' just as gender-critical discourse does. But the latter pretends not to notice that the former declares human rights, multiculturalism, the delegitimisation of hierarchies of caste, race and gender; abortion, and homosexuality also to be symptoms of 'liberal elite ideology'.

What is the relationship of sexual identity and gender to mind and body? It is biologically self-evident that a woman (to quote author and leading gender-critical campaigner J.K. Rowling) is a "human being who belongs to the sex class that produces large gametes (ova)".

Simone de Beauvoir's understanding was the opposite of Rowling's; her iconic work, *The Second Sex*, begins by questioning the definition of 'woman' as 'a womb, an ovary'. On the next page, she says the male/female binary is not as obvious as it seems: "the very meaning of division of the species into two sexes is not clear".

Her famous line, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" is far more radical than a rejection of the notion that (biological) sex determines (social) gender. In fact, she does not see the sexed body as an abstract fixed 'reality'

that is interpreted by the 'mind' as 'gender'. Our consciousness of the body is inseparable from the way we experience it in our social life: "the body is not a thing, it is a situation: it is our grasp on the world and the outline for our projects". The body (sex) does not determine the shape of gendered consciousness; but gendered consciousness too is not tied to a specific anatomical form. That is, "a consciousness without a body is inconceivable", but "this body need not possess this or that particular structure".

The Second Sex challenged the long-held status of the male/female sex binary as 'universal truth', and in doing so, built on the work of other philosophers who had challenged the Cartesian mind/body binary. The so-called 'culture wars' must not be dignified as a product of a uniquely bewildering disruption by transgressors of male/female, mind/body binaries. They are a garden variety reactionary backlash, seen every time a hitherto dehumanised and discriminated people forced the world to acknowledge their identity as entitled to the same dignity and civil liberties as those more privileged.

The issue of society's character

Science fiction can sometimes clarify contemporary conflicts by placing them in "space", outside the context of our own inherited prejudices. In an episode in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* ('The Measure of a Man') a judicial trial is held to decide if Data, an android and a beloved member of the crew, is the property of Star Fleet and can be dismantled for research against his will. A devastating demonstration argues that Data is not human, since a human being can dismember his limbs and shut down his body. In response, Captain Picard forces the court to look at Data as he sees himself: asserting his "right to choose", and his "rights and status" as a "person" rather than "property". What is on trial is the measure of humanity's character, not the measure of Data's personhood based on an examination of his parts. As Picard puts it: the verdict "will reveal the kind of a people we are", and "could significantly redefine the boundaries of personal liberty and freedom, expanding them for some, savagely curtailing them for others". It is our society's character, not the sexual and gender identity of transpersons, that is under 'question'. Black bodies (especially their private parts) were once studied with the same air of scientific detachment as trans and intersex bodies are today, to assess the extent to which they were 'real' humans.

It is trans-sceptics, not transpersons, who are fragmenting the integral human self.

To 'be' trans or gay is to 'be' human; to study their parts to determine their 'realness' is always already a dehumanising exercise.

The shock of crumbling infrastructure and the solution



Aikesh Kumar Sharma
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Reports on the collapse of a series of under-construction bridges in Bihar have highlighted the issues of quality control and project implementation in infrastructure in India. In some instances, these have been megaprojects. The number of such incidents where bridges have collapsed could be 10 or even more. The infrastructure sector has been one of the key drivers of the Indian economy. The government's aim of making India a developed nation by 2047 is linked to improvements in its infrastructure sector. Steps to advance India's infrastructure have taken shape in the form of the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan (NMP), the National Logistics Policy and the Smart Cities Mission among others. Further, the government increased its capital expenditure allocation to ₹11.1 lakh crore (3.4% of GDP) in Budget 2024, indicating the government's commitment towards infrastructure development.

The challenges within

However, the sector still struggles with certain issues and challenges. One of the most common issues faced by most projects, particularly those that are government-sponsored, are time delays and cost overruns. A report by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation reveals that as many as 431 infrastructure development projects, each with investments of ₹150 crore or more, suffered a cost overrun of ₹4.82 lakh crore, as of December 2023. Moreover, the percentage of delayed projects hit a three-year low in March this year. Out of 779 projects delayed, 36% were running behind schedule for a period between 25 to 60 months, 26% for one to 12 months, 23% for 13 to 24 months, and 15% for over 60 months averaging a three-year delay.

Any industrial or commercial activity in India requires multiple clearances from the time of conception to the commissioning of the project. The implementation status of most of the projects points to gaps in project management practices, especially in urban infrastructure projects, including a lack of comprehensive planning and

As a key driver of the Indian economy, the infrastructure sector cannot be subject to failures: having a robust programme management system is important

management by urban local bodies, and a lack of capacity of local self government institutions. All this results in an additional expenditure burden on the government, crowds out funding for more deserving projects and increases procurement costs. It has also been observed that sufficient attention, time and expertise are not devoted during the project planning stage. Therefore, building our experience in project management is crucial for India to continue on its high-growth trajectory in years ahead. While organisations are realising the need for structured project management, many are looking at short-term programmes to enhance the skill sets of their existing project teams.

Traditional practices need an overhaul

Traditional project management practices require an overhaul to integrate modern tools and techniques that involve real-time data management and then crunching that data. An enabling policy framework should consider global best standards on project management and prescribe procedures/guidelines for effective project execution in public sector and public-private partnership projects.

Various countries have adopted multi-pronged approaches to address these issues. In the United Kingdom, the Infrastructure and Projects Authority has a special emphasis on the processes involved for project completion. China, Saudi Arabia and a few other countries have set up similar agencies for end-to-end project deliveries.

Under PM Gati Shakti, the National Master Plan has been launched to break the silos in which government ministries/departments work to bring all stakeholders to work on an integrated platform. This initiative has set benchmarks for all departments to achieve proposed targets and deadlines. PM GatiShakti is being demonstrated through a GIS-based ERP portal wherein the objective is to monitor real-time progress. This will provide not only visual depiction of the National Master Plan but will also

integrate, through application programming interface, real-time progress of various departments. However, the quality of projects during implementation and the integrity of the team overseeing the projects will also be critical.

To address these challenges, a holistic "Program Management Approach" is needed. This approach was adopted in the industrial corridors development projects, beginning with the Shendra-Bidkin in Aurangabad, Maharashtra. This involved a disciplined and systematic coordination of human resources, time, money, and information to plan and deliver multiple projects in a unified manner. It is typically employed when the mission involves significant resource expenditure and requires the integration of diverse activities (as in Shendra-Bidkin, with over nine packages taken up simultaneously).

Set up an agency

Programme management relies on well-defined and proven business delivery processes and tools to achieve the overall mission objectives within specified time and budget constraints. This can only be achieved if we are able to develop an industry-ready workforce. Setting up an agency to conduct professional courses in project management along the lines of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India and chartered engineers in various other countries, will help in developing professional ethics and responsibilities in project execution, monitoring and oversight.

The government has allocated a substantial budget of taxpayers' money for infrastructure projects. As India moves ahead to become a global powerhouse, it is crucial to prevent time and cost overruns as well as the repeated failure of under-construction projects. Implementing a robust programme management system is essential to achieving this goal. Such a system will bring much-needed efficiency to create future-ready infrastructure, paving the way for an affluent and safe future for Indian citizens.

to convince people made him an affable leader. Highlighting issues in Parliament as an MP, he would politely disagree on certain issues, a rare quality in the political space.

Balasubramanian Pavan,
Sunderabad

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.com or mail carry the full postal address.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Independent judiciary

There cannot be two opinions that it was most improper on the part of the Chief Justice of India to have invited the Prime Minister to participate in a 'Ganesh puja at his house, which was a purely personal event. There is something like a separation of powers under the Constitution of

India and the judiciary sits in judgement over the actions of the executive. If every other judicial officer began to do what the CJI did, then people would lose confidence that the judiciary is the 'sentinel on the qui vive'. This is not to impute motives but Caesar's wife must be above suspicion (Inside pages,

"PM's visit to CJI's house for Ganesh puja sparks row", September 13).
N.G.R. Prasad,
Chennai

Sitaram Yechury

In the passing of Sitaram Yechury, the political spectrum in general and the Left in particular has lost a powerful voice ("Left leader

who could juggle multiple identities with élan", September 13). A great personality with

interpersonal skills, he was ever willing for negotiation, and was warm and affable. His conviction and the skills

Corrections & Clarifications

In a report, "WhatsApp Payments not looking to be a fintech firm" ('Business' page, September 13, 2024), the designation of Ravi Garg was wrongly mentioned as Vice President of WhatsApp India. It should have been Director, Business Messaging, Meta India.

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OPINION

The
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[OUR TAKE]

Real thaw with China still far

Despite significant progress in disengagement at the LAC, China's intractability remains a challenge. Also, India-China trade imbalance and border issues can't be dehyphenated

On a day that national security adviser Ajit Doval met his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in Russia and both sides agreed to work with urgency to ensure "complete disengagement" in the Ladakh sector of the Line of Actual Control (LAC), external affairs minister S Jaishankar said about 75% of this work has been completed by the two sides. However, Jaishankar was quick to point out other major issues bedevilling the bilateral relationship, including the increased militarisation of the disputed border, China's activities across the Indian Ocean, and the growing imbalance in two-way trade.

While it is true that India and China could have completed three-fourths of the disengagement of frontline forces in Ladakh sector after dozens of rounds of diplomatic and military talks in the past four years, the 25% that remains is the most complex part of the military face-off at Depsang and Demchok. Security experts have contended that these regions are more strategic for India's posture in this stretch of the LAC, which is probably why New Delhi is unwilling to accept any proposal from Beijing that would leave Indian troops in a disadvantageous position. Then, there is the issue of de-escalation, or pulling back the 50,000-odd troops arrayed by both sides on the LAC since mid-2020 to peacetime positions. The Chinese side has given no indication that it intends to revert to the position before the standoff, especially if its ramping up of military and dual-use infrastructure in the region opposite Ladakh and creation of dozens of villages, some in disputed territories, are anything to go by.

India, as Jaishankar put it, is yet to understand why China violated several long-standing border management agreements and moved troops close to the LAC. It is also telling that the Indian readout after the Doval-Wang meeting spoke of redoubling efforts to realise complete disengagement and abiding by past bilateral agreements, whereas the Chinese side's statement on the same event only mentioned the proper handling of differences with pragmatism.

The current situation at the LAC is not tenable for both countries, as having so many troops in close proximity to each other increases the possibility of a mishap or misunderstanding. Unless, of course, China's intention is to use in Ladakh the same playbook it has used so adroitly to push its position in the South China Sea, with scant regard for the international rules-based order. The other worrisome issues — the "very unfair and imbalanced" economic relationship, lack of access for Indian goods in Chinese markets, national security considerations with regard to Chinese investments and business ties, and China's growing maritime presence in the Indian Ocean — need to be clubbed with the situation on the frontier as India has always maintained, and not the other way around, as Beijing keeps insisting, if a worthwhile way forward is to be found by the two sides.

China is perceived by a majority of Indians as the country's foremost challenge. China's actions, be they at the LAC or in the South China Sea or in the Taiwan Strait, have only served to reinforce this opinion. Talk from Beijing about India and China, as two ancient eastern civilisations, working for the long-term interests of their peoples and a "win-win" situation will remain just that, and offer no real prospects for a lasting resolution of the border issue.

[THIRD EYE]
Barkha Dutt



Failure of political astuteness in West Bengal, Manipur

Often, the most obvious response to the crises such those in the two states is the appropriate one. It is resistance to the obvious that muddies the waters

The image of West Bengal chief minister (CM) Mamata Banerjee facing a row of empty white chairs, dressed up with blue bows, "waiting and waiting and waiting" for doctors to show up, is an intriguing one, especially when it was followed by the embattled CM folding hands and apologising for the failure to break the impasse with protesting doctors, capping it off with a dramatic and emotional "ready to resign" gambit.

Of course, the irony of the moment is lost on no one. These comments by the Trinamool Congress chief were live-streamed. And that was the precise issue over which the talks broke down before they could start.

The doctors — agitating for a month over the rape and murder of a young doctor at a government medical college and a series of missteps and attempted cover-ups that eventually followed — had made live-streaming the meeting with the CM a pre-condition. They have remained adamant on this demand, arguing that if the Supreme Court can live-stream the case, there is no reason for the West Bengal government to be diffident. The offer of recording the proceedings and releasing them with a Supreme Court go-ahead has not been accepted by the doctors so far.

In this zero-sum game, one has to see who blinks first. But one can't help but wonder why Banerjee simply did not do what she did this

week, right at the beginning of the protests. The folded hands, the mellow tone, the apology for not being able to break the stalemate, the emphasis on her waiting for over two hours for doctors — perhaps had this been the approach in the hours and days after the crime, there would have been no crisis to handle. For a politician born and shaped by agitations, it is surprising that the CM showed a remarkable lack of instinct. Even her revelation that the Kolkata police chief had offered to resign, but it was she who turned it down because of the impending festival season, was bewildering. As one young doctor said to me, "Who is thinking of festivities right now?"

While the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) may be on the front foot in the state in its criticism of the CM, similar questions about a perplexing lack of instinct should be redirected to the party leadership when it comes to Manipur.

Again, to be clear, I am not at all drawing any literal comparisons between a state where more than 200 people have been killed in violent ethnic clashes since May 2023 and the RG Kar case in West Bengal. The similarity is confined to how politicians respond in times of crisis, big and small. And how common sense seems to betray them when it is most needed.

ONE CAN'T HELP BUT WONDER WHY BANERJEE DID NOT DO WHAT SHE DID THIS WEEK, RIGHT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PROTESTS, THOUGH SHAPED BY AGITATIONS, SHE SHOWED A REMARKABLE LACK OF INSTINCT

Hindi, and its role in the unified future of India

Hindi Divas (Hindi Day), observed every year on September 14, calls for a reflection on the language's journey from adoption as the official language of India in 1949 to what it is today and what it is going to be tomorrow.

Today, Hindi has the fourth-largest speech community in the world. It is commonly spoken in ten states and three Union Territories. As per the 2011 Census, Hindi has 55 distinct varieties, and some of these may have their own dialects. The varieties differ mostly in the use of verb forms — for example, *kha rahi hai* (Hindi), *kha-wahe* (Chhattisgarhi), *khaiche* (Bajpuri), *khatari* (Bhojpuri), *khan* (Kumaoni) and *khahe hai* (Rajasthani/Jodhpuri). Hindi and its varieties have a preponderance of Sanskrit vocabulary in primary or derived forms. Mutual intelligibility across Hindi's varieties and with other major languages of India stems from the fact that Indian languages have either evolved from Sanskrit or are heavily influenced by it.

This journey has not been without problems. In a culturally and linguistically diverse country, arriving at a consensus is not always easy. The Constituent Assembly showed remarkable vision in adopting Hindi with the

Devanagari script as official language of the country. This showed India's true national character as many non-Hindi leaders supported Hindi for independent India. However, continuing with English as an official language indefinitely has not been without controversy. The 22 major languages listed in the Schedule VIII include languages from the Indo-Aryan (15), Dravidian (4), Tibeto-Burman (2) and Austro-Asiatic (1) families. A classification of our languages on the basis of five *prakrits* would have made more sense.

Since English posed tough competition, the government took several measures to enrich Hindi and promote its use in administration and education. The Central Hindi Directorate (CHD) was established in 1960 to promote Hindi in non-Hindi regions. The Commission for Scientific and Technical Terminology (CSTT) was established in 1961 to develop technical terminologies and content so that education and administration could happen through Indian languages. In 1967, the Central Hindi Committee (CHC) was set up. In 1971, the Central Hindi Translation Bureau was set up, followed by the department of official language (DOL) in 1975 to coordinate efforts for the development of Hindi. The Committee of Parliament on Official Language (CPOL) was constituted in 1976. The Central Hindi Training Institute was set up in 1985 to continuously train and facilitate the government officials/staff in using Hindi.



Girish Nath Jha



In Manipur, the BJP's stubborn refusal to remove N Biren Singh as CM is inexplicable. Political party lines have collapsed in Manipur. Of the ten legislators who have asked for the CM to be prosecuted for his role in the strife, seven are from the BJP

In Manipur, the BJP's stubborn refusal to remove N Biren Singh as CM is inexplicable. The situation in the state is so alarming that many have likened it to a civil war, where members of the Meitei and Kuki communities can no longer cross over into geographies dominated by the other. A former soldier of the Army was killed this week just because he accidentally crossed the "buffer zone" that separates the ethnic groups. Women are among 11 people killed since the beginning of this month. Thousands of weapons are in the hands of civilians in both communities, farmers and students.

Keyboard nationalists who otherwise run partition tests on everyone else and don't hesitate to label people as anti-national for the slightest dissent seem entirely unmoved at the situation. When former soldier Havaladar Limkholar Mate's wife said, as she did to me, that her husband "fought for India, but was killed

like an animal," where are all the self-appointed arbiters of nationalism? Political party lines have collapsed in Manipur. Of the ten legislators who have asked for the CM to be prosecuted for his role in the strife, seven are from the BJP. I can understand political continuity when the violence is external, for instance, during insurgencies or wartime. But this is a state at war with itself. This is a failure of law and order, yes, but it is, above all, a failure of politics. Removing Singh also affords a chance to bring the clashing parties to the dialogue table, besides being the obviously correct thing to do.

From West Bengal to Manipur, often, the most obvious response is the appropriate one. It is resistance to the obvious that muddies the waters — sometimes, beyond repair.

Barkha Dutt is an award-winning journalist and author. The views expressed are personal



Hindi has the fourth-largest speech community in the world

The Central efforts are coordinated by the DOL. Among the activities led by DOL, the meetings of the CPOL led by the home minister are perhaps the most important. This committee reviews the progress made in the use of Hindi in the official domain and recommends measures to the President for promotion and enrichment of Hindi. The DOL also coordinates the efforts of the Nagar Rajbhasha Karyaman Samitis and implementation by the government offices/institutions, to monitor Hindi's progress in official use. The development of necessary software tools like Kantastha, a machine translation system, has been a remarkable achievement. Integration of Kantastha with e-office is another initiative to facilitate the use of Hindi in government offices. LILA-Rajbhasha by CDAC facilitates Hindi-learning through 14 other Indian languages. The credit goes to the DOL for also leading the work on preparation of an online Hindi dictionary called Hindi Shabd Sindhu, an all-inclusive relational database of Hindi including words from various domains, dialects and other major Indian languages making it a truly *sarva samaveshi* Hindi kosha.

This kosha has more than 400,000 headwords and is equipped with an automatic speech recognition. The DOL has been periodically equipping its officers with staff in using Hindi in offices using digital tools.

To popularise Hindi and recognise the efforts to promote Hindi, the DOL organises the annual Hindi Divas celebrations and has been organising the Ashli Bharatiya Rajbhasha Sammelan since 2021. Rajbhasha Gaurav and Rajbhasha Kirti Purnaskar Yojanas by DOL are two popular schemes to promote writing in Hindi.

Hindi has been a popular language in the digital world. Though it ranks very low in its share of websites, it is the fourth most-used language on YouTube. The rise of Indian language users on the internet has also put pressure on software developers to develop tools. The tools from CDAC, Google (Google Assistant, Google Translate), Microsoft (Bing Translator), Microsoft-Swiftkey (mobile keyboard), and Amazon Alexa, among others, have facilitated Hindi, but more efforts are needed in the digital space. The online *shabd-sindhu* by DOL and searchable glossaries by CSTT are going to become more important in the future.

The forward march of Hindi has been impressive. It has to continue progressing with inclusiveness so that it is truly *sarva samaveshi*, for the unified and inclusive future of India. On the Artificial Intelligence (AI) front, there is a need to exercise some caution. Implementing AI solutions in a diverse nation as ours has been a challenge for various reasons. However, the current pace of efforts will go a long way in ensuring the suitable implementation of AI for Hindi and other languages.

Girish Nath Jha is chairman, Commission for Scientific and Technical Terminology. The views expressed are personal

[ANOTHER DAY]

Namita Bhandare



Why Kamala Harris is the voice the world needs

Not once did she refer to her gender or the historic possibility of becoming the first woman president of the United States. While referring to the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, not a word was said about the erasure of women's rights in that country. Acknowledging Israel's right to defend itself elicited an oblique reference to "far too many innocent Palestinians" being killed, but the full horror was hardly on display.

Gloved woman icon? Hardly. Flawed? Definitely. And yet Kamala Harris might just be

the voice the world needs right now. "The optics of a Harris win would certainly be very interesting," said Akshi Chawla, curator of WomenLed, which tracks the progress of women in politics globally. Already, Mexico has elected its first woman head of State, Claudia Sheinbaum, who, at 61, is just a couple of years older than Harris. "The possibility of another North American country being led by a woman is certainly powerful," added Chawla.

In 2024, women's political representation grew by just 0.4 percentage points with

26.9% female members of parliament as compared to 2022, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). It was also a year that saw three prominent women leaders — New Zealand's Jacinda Ardern, Finland's Sanna Marin and Scotland's Nicola Sturgeon — quitting, firing burnout and exhaustion. A win, for Harris will mean a win for women's representation in a world dominated by muscular male political leaders.

Eight years ago, another presidential debate saw Trump propping on the stage, standing uncomfortably close to Hillary Clinton. She lost and the cost of Trump's presidency became clear when his hand-picked judges rolled back abortion rights, taking away American women back half a century. Never has gender mattered as much or been as polarising as in the post-Trump years.

Globally, gender equality has stagnated or declined in 40% of countries between 2019 and 2022, according to Equal Measures 2030, a coalition of non-profits.

Events of the past month have unfolded like a horror movie. From Women's March in Kolkata, industrial-level sexual exploit-

ation unmasked in Kerala, a husband accused of inviting over 80 men in France to rape his wife who he dragged unconscious, the banning of women's voices along with their faces and bodies in Afghanistan, not to forget the ongoing battles in pretty much every nation in the world from Iran to Brazil.

Harris's dismissal of Trump is a masterstroke. The way she did it with such finesse, an arched eyebrow here, a smirk there and outright laughed elsewhere made it all the more delicious. If Trump had once dismissed her as "nuts" because of the way she laughs, then she chose to laugh openly, and repeatedly, at him, for instance when he spoke about immigrants "eating the dogs".

Trump did not stalk Harris the way he did Clinton. But his disrespect was apparent when he constantly referred to "her" or "she", not by the constitutional office she holds, or even just her name.

Harris's victory is by no means assured. But women all over the world will be watching and hoping.

Namita Bhandare writes on gender. The views expressed are personal

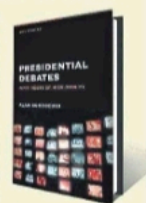
[EDITOR'S PICK]

HT's editors offer a book recommendation every Saturday, which provides history, context, and helps understand recent news events

TELEVIEWED JOUSTS, BEFORE THE REAL ONE

The Kamala Harris-Donald Trump debate was as much about matching wits as it was about winning the perception game. The first is a more "clear and hard" rules game, the latter is "manipulated". For now, Harris seems to have won both on wit and on perception. What goes into creating such "winners" and "losers"? Televised debate, and partisan analysis trying to deconstruct the debate in favour of the candidate they support.

This week, we recommend Alan Schroeder's *Presidential Debates: Fifty Years of High-Risk TV*, which offers a fascinating exploration of the evolution of televised debates, from their inception in 1960 with the Richard Nixon-John F Kennedy debate. The book delves into how debates have shaped public perception, not just by showcasing policies stances but by exposing candidates' personalities. Schroeder says debates have become spectacles of media strategy and theatrics, and their role in influencing electoral outcomes. For those seeking a deeper understanding of the role of debates in modern politics, *Presidential Debates* is an essential read.



Presidential Debates: Fifty Years of High-Risk TV: Alan Schroeder Year: 2008

EXPLAINED AI

WHAT IS OPENAI O1, THE AI MODEL THAT 'THINKS' BEFORE IT ANSWERS?

BLIJN JOSE
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 13

OPENAI, the world's premier artificial intelligence research organisation, on Thursday released its latest AI model. The new OpenAI o1 is the first in a planned series of "reasoning" models that have been designed to solve more complex tasks and problems in science, coding, and maths.

The model is part of the organisation's secretive Project Strawberry, which is expected to feature autonomous Internet research and dramatically improve AI reasoning capabilities.

How does the new model work?

According to OpenAI, o1 is designed to "think" more carefully about queries before answering — like how humans do while solving a complex problem. The organisation has trained the model to learn how to approach problems from different perspectives, check its output, and learn from its mistakes. This is a big leap forward in AI technology, OpenAI said.

OpenAI o1 is an early version and is yet to be equipped with other features such as browsing the web or managing files and images. The new update of this model is expected to perform similarly to PhD students on challenging benchmark tasks in physics, chemistry, and biology.

What about the safety of the model?

OpenAI said to make o1 safe to use, it has created a new way of training, which helps the model to understand and follow safety rules better by using its problem-solving skills.

The organisation has tested how well the model follows safety rules, even when users try to trick the AI into breaking them (known as AI jailbreaking). The company said that in one of its toughest tests, the earlier version of the AI model scored 22 out of 100, and the new version scored 84.

OpenAI has improved its safety efforts by working closely with the United Kingdom and the United States governments and their AI safety teams. It has also been given early access to a version of the model to safety groups for research.

How can it impact jobs and research?

Since the new model can solve complex problems, it may impact jobs that could include tasks such as software development, data analysis, coding, mathematical modelling, etc. Reasoning is an intellectual task, and automating it would likely reduce the need for human involvement in some routine coding and troubleshooting in industries such as IT, finance, and engineering.

When it comes to researchers, o1 can be an assistant in fields like physics, chemistry, biology, and healthcare as it can speed up problem-solving. The model's ability to generate formulae and analyse large datasets makes it a helpful tool for researchers looking for breakthroughs.

OpenAI o1 is a big step forward in AI's handling of tasks that are traditionally managed by highly skilled professionals.

Unpacking Kejriwal bail order

Where the judges on SC Bench agreed, disagreed

AJAY SINHA KARPURAM
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 13

ARVIND KEJRIWAL, walked out of Tihar Jail on Friday evening, hours after a Supreme Court Bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan delivered separate, concurring judgments granting him bail in the CBI case on the alleged "scam" in the Delhi excise policy.

The judges, however, delivered differing opinions on whether the Delhi Chief Minister's arrest by the CBI in June 2024 was necessary in the first place. Justice Kant upheld the arrest; Justice Bhuyan held that the grounds for arrest were "wholly untenable".

Why did the two judges disagree on the necessity to arrest Kejriwal? And what were their reasons for granting him bail?

Timeline of the case

Kejriwal was arrested twice in connection with the same excise policy case, first by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on March 21, 2024, and then by the CBI on June 26, when he was already in custody.

On July 12, the Supreme Court granted Kejriwal interim bail in the ED case. However, he was not released from jail because the CBI complaint proceedings were pending at the time. On August 5, the Delhi High Court upheld the CBI's decision to arrest Kejriwal, and directed him to approach the trial court for bail.

On August 12, Kejriwal challenged the Delhi HC's order at the Supreme Court. On August 14, the court refused to grant him interim bail, and heard arguments from both sides over the course of two hearings on August 23 and September 5. It delivered its verdict on Friday.

Diverging opinions on the necessity of arrest

During the hearings, both sides relied on Sections 41(1)(b) and 41A of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (CrPC). Section 41(1)(b) lays down the conditions for arrest without a warrant, and Section 41A deals with the appearance of an accused before police in cases where arrest is not required.

Kejriwal argued that none of the requirements for arrest listed under Section 41(1)(b) were met in his case, and that he was not served with a notice by police as required under Section 41A before he was interrogated by the CBI in June.

JUSTICE KANT held that Section 41(1)(b) does not apply in this case as the CBI Special Judge had allowed the agency's application to arrest Kejriwal on June 26. He also held that Section 41A "does not envisage or mandate the issuance of a notice to an individual already in judicial custody" — Kejriwal was already incarcerated in connection with the ED case at the time.

CrPC Section 41A(3) states that the police shall not arrest a person who "complies and continues to comply with the notice" of appearance under this section unless the police officer records the reasons why arrest is necessary.

Justice Kant held that the CBI had "clearly recorded the reasons as to why they deemed the Appellant's arrest necessary" in its application. The CBI had argued that Kejriwal gave "evasive replies" during interrogation, and it was necessary to confront him with the evidence to uncover the larger conspiracy.

JUSTICE BHUYAN did not accept this justification for Kejriwal's arrest.

He held: "It cannot be the proposition that only when an accused answers the questions put to him by the investigation agency in the manner in which the investigating agency would like the accused to answer, would mean that the accused is cooperating with the investigation."



Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal acknowledges supporters after walking out of Tihar Jail in New Delhi on Friday. PTI

How bail conditions will work, may impact Govt

AJAY SINHA KARPURAM & MALICA JOSHI
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 13

WHILE GRANTING regular bail to Arvind Kejriwal in the CBI case on Friday, the Supreme Court imposed on him the same conditions that it had first put while giving him interim bail in the Enforcement Directorate (ED) case on July 12.

Justice Bhuyan said he has "serious reservations" about two of these conditions — which prevent Kejriwal from entering the Chief Minister's office and the Secretariat, and signing official files — but refrained from expressing his views further in accordance with "judicial discipline".

Conditions of bail imposed by the Supreme Court

Kejriwal was arrested by the ED on March 21, and by the CBI on June 26, when he was already in custody. The SC granted him interim bail in the ED case on May 10 to allow him to campaign for the Lok Sabha election. He returned to jail on June 2, and the SC again gave him bail in the ED case on July 12.

On both occasions, the Bench of Justices Sanjay Khanna and Dipankar Datta said that Kejriwal will

- Not be allowed to visit the Chief Minister's office and the Delhi Secretariat;
- Not sign official files unless it is required and necessary for obtaining clearance/approval of the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi;
- Not comment on his role in the present case; and
- Not interact with any of the witnesses in the case or have access to the official case files.

On Friday, the Bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan reiterated these conditions — and added that Kejriwal shall not make any public comments about the merits of the CBI case; be present at every trial court hearing unless an exemption is granted; and fully cooperate with the trial court so the case may be concluded expeditiously.

Impact of bail conditions on functioning of Delhi govt

The first condition flagged by Justice Bhuyan — the bar on Kejriwal visiting the CMO and Secretariat — may not present a steep hurdle, according to senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders. This is because Cabinet meetings can be routed "by circulation", they said — which means that files with sugges-

EXPLAINED SCIENCE

WHAT IS HELIUM AND WHY IS IT USED IN ROCKETS?

TWO NASA astronauts aboard Boeing's Starliner will stay on the International Space Station for months because of a faulty propulsion system whose problems included helium leaks.

Back on Earth, SpaceX's Polaris Dawn mission, which finally launched on Tuesday, was delayed because of helium issues on ground equipment.

Past missions that have been affected by pesky helium leaks include ISRO's Chandrayaan 2 and ESA's Ariane 5.

Why do spacecraft and rockets use helium?

Helium is inert — it does not react with other substances or combust — and its atomic number is 2, making it the second lightest element after hydrogen.

Rockets need to achieve specific speeds and altitude to reach and maintain orbit. A heavier rocket requires more energy, not only increasing fuel consumption but also needing more powerful engines, which are more expensive to develop, test, and maintain.

Helium has a very low boiling point (−268.9 degrees Celsius), allowing it to remain a gas even in super-cold environments, an important feature because many rocket fuels are stored in that temperature range.

How is helium used in spacecraft?

Helium is used to pressurise fuel tanks, ensuring fuel flows to the rocket's engines without interruption; and for cooling systems.

As fuel and oxidiser are burned in the rocket's engines, helium fills the resulting empty space in the tanks, maintaining the overall pressure inside.

Because it is non-reactive, it can safely mingle with the tanks' residual contents.

Is it prone to leaks?

Helium's small atomic size and low molecular weight mean its atoms can escape through small gaps or seals in storage tanks and fuel systems.

But because there is very little helium in the Earth's atmosphere, leaks can be easily detected — making the gas a important for spotting potential faults in a rocket or spacecraft's fuel systems.

The frequency of helium leaks across space-related systems, some engineers say, have highlighted an industry-wide need for innovation in valve design and more precise valve-tightening mechanisms.

REUTERS



Falcon 9 rocket before Polaris Dawn mission's launch on August 25. Reuters

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Port Blair and its historical connection to the Chola conquest of Srivijaya

ADRIJA ROYCHOWDHURY
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 13

PORT BLAIR will be renamed as Sri Vijaya Puram, Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced on Friday. The change of name was inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision "to free the nation from the colonial imprints", Shah said on X.

The name Sri Vijaya Puram symbolises the unique role of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in India's freedom struggle, and the territory "that once served as the naval base of the Chola Empire" is now set to become a critical base for achieving India's strategic aspirations, he said.

The 'discovery' of Port Blair

The capital city and port of entry into the Union Territory is named after Archibald Blair, a naval surveyor and lieutenant in the Bombay Marine, who carried out the first thorough survey of the islands. Blair, who joined the East India Company's navy in 1771, also surveyed the coasts of India, Iran, and Arabia, sailed up the Hooghly, and travelled to the Chagos archipelago south of the Maldives in the Indian Ocean.

In December 1778, Blair left on his first surveying voyage to Andaman from Calcutta with two ships, the *Elizabeth* and the *Viper*. The expedition, which lasted till April 1779, took him to a natural harbour on the east coast of the island, which he named Port Cornwallis after Commodore William Cornwallis, commander-in-chief of British India.

Blair was immediately aware of the significance of his discovery, and wrote a detailed report of his survey. He returned to England in 1795, and read an account of the Andaman Islands before the Royal Society of London in 1799.

The Company decided to colonise Andaman soon after Blair submitted his report, mainly to establish a safe base from which it could check the activities of Malay pirates. Several convicts were transported to the islands to serve as unpaid labour. The island was later named after Blair.

After the revolt of 1857, the British began sending large numbers of Indian prisoners to the islands. Port Blair was renovated and resettled mainly as a penal colony. Most convicts were sentenced to life imprisonment, and many died due to disease and the degrading conditions. Several were hanged.

As the freedom movement gained momentum, the British built the huge Cellular Jail in Port Blair in 1906. Among the freedom fighters who were jailed in 'Kala Paani' was Vinayak Damodar Savarkar.

Imperial Cholas & Srivijaya

Some historical records suggest that the Andaman Islands were used as a strategic naval base by the 11th century Chola emperor Rajendra I to carry out an attack on Srivijaya, which is part of today's Indonesia. An inscription found in Thanjavur dated to

1050 CE suggests the Cholas referred to the islands as *Ma-Nakkavaram* (great open/naked land), which possibly led to the modern name of Nicobar under the British.

In his co-edited book *Nagapattinam to Suvarnadwipa: Reflections on the Chola Naval Expeditions to Southeast Asia* (2010), the German Indologist Hermann Kulke noted that the Chola invasion of Srivijaya was a unique event in the history of India and "its otherwise peaceful relations with the states of Southeast Asia which had come under India's strong cultural influence for about a millennium".

Several scholars have speculated on the reason for the Chola maritime expedition to Srivijaya. KA Nilakanta Sastri wrote that "we have to assume either some attempt on the part of Srivijaya to throw obstacles in the way of the Chola trade with the East, or more probably, simply a desire on the part of Rajendra to extend his *digvijaya* to the countries across the sea, so well known to his subjects at home, and add lustre to his crown."

Others like the American historian G.W. Spencer interpreted the Srivijaya expedition as part of a decades-long process of Chola expansionism that culminated in wars with other empires of South India and Sri Lanka.

As per inscriptions, after attacking Srivijaya, Rajendra I captured king Sangrama Vijayottunggavarman, and looted the treasures of his kingdom, including the *Viduyadhara Torana*, the jewelled war gate of Srivijaya.



THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE
THOSE WHO SAY THEY UNDERSTAND
CHESS, UNDERSTAND NOTHING.

— ROBERT HOBNER

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Verdict is limited relief

In Arvind Kejriwal case, SC has asked trial and high courts to be alert to need to protect personal liberty



ALOK PRASANNA KUMAR

CALLING OUT THE PARROT

In his bail verdict, Justice Ujjal Bhuyan's criticism of CBI strikes many a chord — should be heard by those who pull the agency strings

A SERIES of welcome rulings recently, the Supreme Court has upheld the principle of bail as rule and jail as exception, while underlining the sacrosanct nature of the individual's right to personal liberty guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution, and emphasising that the process of justice must guard against turning into the punishment. This recasting, or rather reassertion of a principled bail jurisprudence by the Court is reassuring. This is especially so given that it seemed to have taken an unfortunate step back from it for a period coinciding with a domineering executive weaponising its control of Central agencies to selectively and disproportionately target its political opponents. The apex court order Friday caps the relief granted to the AAP, whose top leadership had languished for long in jail — a little over a month after his deputy, Manish Sisodia, was granted bail. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has been given a reprieve in the case involving allegations that his government had framed and implemented the 2021-22 excise policy, rolled back subsequently, to enhance profit margins of liquor manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers as part of a quid pro quo. The SC's order allows AAP leaders to breathe freely again. But it is heartening, most of all, because it asks important questions about the state's power to arrest an individual, laid down the necessity of due process and fairness, and emphasises the role of the courts in ensuring that investigations are not used as a tool of harassment.

"Deprivation of liberty even for a single day is one day too many," says the separate judgment by Justice Ujjal Bhuyan, one of the two judges on the bench. Justice Bhuyan agrees with Justice Surya Kant's conclusion that Kejriwal be given bail in a case that shows no signs of early closure. But he goes further. In a tone resonant with legal acumen and moral clarity, he also interrogates the necessity and timing of the arrest in the first place. He points to a sequence that is incriminating for the agencies whose responsibility it is to take forward the justice process. The CBI registered the case against Kejriwal in August 2022, filed four chargesheets, named 17 as accused, did not name Kejriwal. Only when a Special Judge granted regular bail to Kejriwal in an ED case nearly two years later that "the CBI activated its machinery and took the appellant into custody". Even on the date of his arrest by the CBI, Justice Bhuyan points out, Kejriwal had not been named as an accused. "Such action on the part of the CBI raises a serious mark... on the arrest itself," says the judge. In a system governed by the rule of law, Justice Bhuyan draws a vital distinction: "Power to arrest is one thing but the need to arrest is altogether a different thing..."

Justice Bhuyan's judgment interrogates a range of systemic delays and evasions, and he does not spare the institution he belongs to. He points to higher courts lobbying the bail to the lower courts, and to courts playing safe on bail. But his judgment is a strong indictment, most of all, of the CBI. "It is important that the CBI dispel the notion of it being a caged parrot. Rather, the perception should be that of an uncaged parrot," India's premier investigative agency, and those who pull its strings, must hear the court. Because, as the judge has underlined, the concepts of fair investigation and fair trial are inextricable from, and essential to, the just balance between the expansive powers of the state and a citizen's rights, assured and protected by the Constitution. Kejriwal has got bail, the prosecution is in the dock.

COURT JUDGMENTS IN India tend to hide reality behind a dense foliage of legal terms and formal words. So it comes as a refreshing surprise to read Justice Ujjal Bhuyan's partly-concurring judgment granting bail to Arvind Kejriwal in the excise policy case and holding his arrest by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to be illegal. Justice Bhuyan cuts through the CBI's arguments and says what is plain as daylight to an impartial observer — Kejriwal was arrested and kept in jail by the CBI to ensure he doesn't get the benefit of bail in the Enforcement Directorate case in the excise policy matter. The other judge on the bench, Justice Surya Kant, agrees that bail should be granted but disagrees on the correctness of the arrest.

Justice Bhuyan's judgment is more noteworthy for two reasons — the illegality of Kejriwal's arrest, and the CBI's attempt to use procedure as punishment. In saying so, Justice Bhuyan swims against the tide in refusing to succumb to a certain malaise that has gripped a section of India's judiciary — a preference for toeing the government's line in high-profile criminal cases. In these two issues and also in questioning the restrictive bail conditions imposed on Kejriwal, Justice Bhuyan (as Justice B Nagrahartha did in the Bilikis Bano case) quietly called out his colleagues for their lack of prompt and judicious action on civil rights issues.

Justices Kant and Bhuyan don't disagree on the law applicable to Kejriwal's arrest. They just differ on how deeply they should look at the CBI's justification for his arrest. Justice Kant is satisfied with the CBI's explanation as to why Kejriwal's arrest was needed. His judgment simply lays out the justification offered by the CBI without commenting on whether they were adequate. Justice Bhuyan, however, goes in depth into the adequacy of the reasons and finds that the CBI's justifications for arresting Kejriwal fall apart on even a little bit of scrutiny.

The CBI says that Kejriwal's arrest was

necessary because he gave "evasive replies" and was not "cooperating with the investigation". These are fairly bland and generic grounds which tell us nothing about why it was necessary to arrest Kejriwal — a man who had been in Tihar jail for 22 months — almost as soon as he got bail in the ED case. Justice Bhuyan is unafraid to cut a spade a spade here pointing out that it seems as if the CBI just wanted to make sure Kejriwal didn't get the benefit of bail in the ED case.

Justice Bhuyan points out that denying bail or arresting someone just because they don't give the answers the investigating agencies are looking for is a potential violation of Article 20(3) of the Constitution. What is the point of having a right against self-incrimination if an accused can be simply kept in jail till she confesses to her crimes? This would effectively punish someone without a clear finding of guilt.

While the judgment doesn't say it in so many terms, it does highlight the need to reconsider a long-standing problematic 11-judge bench Supreme Court judgment in *State v. Kashi Nath Oghad* (1961). Here the SC gave a very narrow interpretation to the right of self-incrimination holding that the right was not available at the pre-trial stage, that is, during custodial investigation. Since the 1980s, successive SC judgments have slowly whittled away at this judgment, expanding the right against self-incrimination. It is perhaps time for the Court to once and for all clear the confusion about the scope of Article 20(3). A clear judgment outlining the exact scope of the right against self-incrimination is still needed.

The use of procedure as punishment by investigating agencies is well known in India. It is cost free to use technicalities and sometimes blatant illegalities to make an accused sitting in jail run from court to court for bail. The CBI attempted something similar here by arguing before the SC that since a chargesheet had been filed against Kejriwal, he should be made to go back to the trial court to seek bail afresh. The CBI claimed, preposterously, that the SC not sending the matter back to the trial court would 'demoralise' the High Court judge who had denied bail to Kejriwal on this ground.

a chargesheet had been filed against Kejriwal, he should be made to go back to the trial court to seek bail afresh. The CBI claimed, preposterously, that the SC not sending the matter back to the trial court would 'demoralise' the High Court judge who had denied bail to Kejriwal on this ground.

Both judges would have none of it, pointing out the waste of the Court's time and the assault on liberty such a move would represent. More so in this case since the Delhi HC had already heard elaborate arguments before denying bail. Justice Bhuyan is especially critical of the Delhi HC for having asked Kejriwal to approach the trial court once again for bail after having heard elaborate arguments on the merits of the matter. He reiterated the need for trial courts and HCs to be "alert to the need to protect personal liberty", highlighting the unfortunate trend (also bemoaned by his colleague Justice B N Gopal) of trial court and high court judges simply denying bail to the accused in high profile cases, whether it is legally justified or not. This is of course a much larger issue, one which the SC's judicial orders cannot solve.

It is not a great win for justice that the Supreme Court granted bail in a criminal matter. It is at best a source of limited relief and at worst, evidence of a completely dysfunctional criminal justice system. Judgments such as Justice Bhuyan's statements inadvertently reveal what's broken in the criminal justice system — the judiciary. His judgment adds to the small, growing chorus in the SC over courts simply abandoning their constitutional duties either out of fear or favour. Judges seem to be under the impression that it is "safer" to simply deny bail and toe the government's line in criminal cases.

The writer is co-founder of
Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy

FROM STREET TO TABLE

In Kolkata, protesting doctors must take up the government's offer for talks, resolve stalemate

IN THE DAYS and weeks that followed the rape and murder of a doctor at R G Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata, the West Bengal government chose denial over engagement, accusations over introspection. The protesting doctors have demanded justice for the victim, a probe into the alleged tampering of evidence by the police, the removal of Kolkata Police Commissioner Vineet Gopal, increased security for healthcare workers and addressing the culture of intimidation by the government at state-run hospitals. Their demands are justified. The doctors have also dug in their heels in the face of attacks by lumpen elements, high-handed dismissals of their cause and accusations by the powerful — including and especially Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee — of being part of a "conspiracy by the Centre and Left parties". The doctors and medical students now need to realise that the politics of the street cannot be an end in itself. The protesters' refusal to meet CM Banerjee — and the images of her waiting "for over two hours" in an empty room — could hurt their cause.

The CM has now "apologised to the people of Bengal" and left the door open for talks. The protesters must walk through it. Their reasons for not attending are minor — the doctors wanted a 30-member delegation for the meeting, the government allowed 15; they wanted the discussion live-streamed, the government was open to video recording, not streaming as the matter is sub judice. This is not to say that the government's behaviour over the last month can be easily forgotten or there will be instant course correction. Expecting kudos for "not taking any action against protesters" despite the Supreme Court leaving room for the government to do so, did not behave the CM. But the fact that she is willing to negotiate must be seized on by the protesters — it is, after all, only through an elected government that their concerns can be addressed. It is also important that constitutional officers like Governor C V Ananda Bose not muddy the waters. His statements calling Mamata Banerjee "Lady Macbeth of Bengal" and saying he will "socially boycott" her are in poor taste at best.

CM Banerjee knows, better than most, the power of protest — and the trials protesters face. As a young opposition leader in Bengal, she too was attacked and mocked. The horror at R G Kar on August 9 has shaken the conscience of West Bengal and the country at large. The anguish of the protesting doctors is justified. Both sides must now begin talking, in good faith. That is the only way to ensure systemic change.



C P CHANDRASEKHAR

IN A LIFE that ended too early, Sitaram Yechury's contribution to the post-Emergency transformation of the Left and, in the process, to the discourse and practice of politics in India, was immense. Sita (as he was known to his friends) graduated from student to party politics, with experience of and lessons from the Emergency. He had realised the need to protect democracy. Sita was quickly absorbed into the discussions on the strategy and tactics of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM) and the Left in an environment that had seen the erosion of single party dominance.

Over his political career, he held many crucial positions: President of the Jawahar Nehru University Students' Union in its most celebrated years, president of the Student's Federation of India, Central Committee and Politburo member, head of the International Department of the CPM, General Secretary of the CPM, editor of party's weekly *People's Democracy* and its theoretical journal *Marxist*, and Rajya Sabha member. There was so much more he was expected to contribute, but that was not to be.

Sita's route to the CPM's dominant decision-making bodies and then to being its General Secretary perhaps influenced both his political predilections and mode of functioning. While remaining loyal to his party and its ideals, Sita saw the need for flexibility in dealing with the democratic elements in the Indian political space. That perception was only strengthened when Indian politics took a turn towards authoritarianism in recent decades, with forces espousing a majoritar-

HE WHO TOOK EVERYONE ALONG

Sitaram Yechury, with his charm, made allies out of rivals for sake of democracy

ian agenda seeking to ensure a return to one party dominance. Making new allies and persuading them to accept a common minimum programme that embodies the principles and values of the Left appeared to be his overarching objective. In that endeavour, he put to use what he had learned from his experience as the party person in-charge of international relations, with the successes and failures of the Left across the world providing material which shaped his views on what needed to be done in India.

Those responsibilities were indeed weighty. But in shouldering them, Sita brought to bear a personality that was very different from the commonplace caricatures of the organisational strongmen (and they were largely men) who led and managed communist parties. Affable to the extreme, with a boyish charm, a sense of humour, and a keen sense of the other, Sita could win himself a following both within and outside the party without having to throw his weight.

In the small class of students constituting the first MA batch (1973-75) of the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning at JNU, he was not just clearly the most brilliant but the one who made everyone smile. He combined those qualities with remarkable intelligence, amply reflected in the results of his academic career, which gave up for the rough and tumble of politics, and a sharp memory, displayed when discussing matters varying from world and Indian history and communist traditions to Bollywood music and Sanskrit shlokes learnt as a child. These qualities helped

shape his style as a communist leader, his ability to connect and relate personally to the party cadre, enquiring about and expressing concern about each member of the family, and being with them to empathise when circumstances warranted it.

When the party decided to send Sita to the Rajya Sabha, it became clear that his skills extended to being an exemplary parliamentarian, mastering the rules of the House, displaying his oratorical skills and winning allies in the many causes he chose to take up. Legend has it that given his charm and where he came from, the Treasury benches were often confused as to why a person with his skills was sitting in Opposition and rubbing shoulders with the Left.

Not surprisingly, having learnt from the skills that one of his mentors, former CPM General Secretary Harikrishan Singh Surjewala was known for, Sita became a force in shaping Opposition alliances. He was trusted as an impartial and independent participant, capable of understanding the compromises that each player can and must make. Such alliances are proving to be increasingly crucial for the sustenance of Indian democracy. He will, therefore, be greatly missed not just within the CPM and the Left, but in the wider political world.

And for us, his friends, he will be much missed as a person who changed and achieved so much in public life, but remained the same "Sita" in private.

The writer is a former professor of
economics at JNU, Delhi

VISHY'S SUCCESSORS

Performance of Indian teams at Chess Olympiad signals the coming of age of prodigies

AT THE CHESS Olympiad in Budapest, Indian chess teams are making a mark. Both the teams, in the open section and the women's section, have begun their campaign with effortless victories in the first two rounds. The Indian team of Gukesh, Praggnanandhaa, Arjun Erigaisi and Vidit Gujrathi (with Pentala Harikrishna as the reserve player) is the strongest the country has sent to the Chess Olympiad, the most prestigious event the sport has to offer for national teams. Erigaisi who is ranking fifth in the world is only playing on the third board while Gukesh and Praggnanandhaa occupy the top two boards.

This is already a watershed year for Indian chess with Gukesh becoming the youngest-ever player to cut the throat Candidates tournament, Praggnanandhaa taking down Magnus Carlsen at the Norway Chess tournament for the first time in the classical format and Erigaisi vaulting into the world's top five ranking. Gukesh stands a very good chance of becoming the youngest-ever world champion at the age of 18. But before that, the Indian team has a chance to flex its collective muscle, by winning the Chess Olympiad gold medal.

Garry Kasparov had aptly summed up the state of affairs in world chess when he spoke of an "Indian earthquake" when Gukesh had won the Candidates tournament. "The children of Vishy Anand are on the loose," declared the product of the famous Soviet School of Chess, with some envy. In Budapest, chess players from over 190 countries are experiencing the tremors of this earthquake. The prodigies have come of age.



SEPTEMBER 14, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

AP SPEAKER QUILTS

THE BIZARRE DEVELOPMENTS in the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly took a new turn when M Baga Reddy abruptly resigned as protem Speaker 15 minutes after the third day's session commenced for taking up the motion of trust in the Bhaskara Rao ministry. Within hours of the resignation, Governor S D Shama named the Majlis Ittehadul Muslimeen (MIM) leader, Salahuddin Owaisi, as Reddy's successor. This was described by the former chief minister, N T Rama Rao, as part of a "conspiracy hatched by the ruling clique to avoid its miserable defeat on the floor of the House".

PUNJAB BANDH

A BANDH HAS been called in Punjab against

the gunning down of innocent passengers by terrorists in Gurdaspur district. The state Governor K T Sadasapur, declared that extremism would not be tolerated. The Governor who went to Sekhwan village, along with his Security Advisor, Lt Gen K Govri Shankar, and other officers, announced "an ex gratia grant of Rs 10,000 to next of kin of those killed and Rs 2,000 each to those injured."

OPPOSITION DEMAND

LEADERS OF 10 opposition parties, including the BJP and the CPM, presented a memorandum to President Zail Singh demanding the immediate dismissal of the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Bhaskara Rao, who had failed to prove his majority in the Assembly within the stipulated 30 days. The opposition lead-

ers also demanded that the gross injustice done to N T Rama Rao be corrected forthwith by restoring status quo ante with regard to his government. There should be no imposition of President's Rule or suspension of the assembly, the opposition leaders said.

INDO-CHINA TALKS

AN EARLY AND JUST settlement of the long-standing boundary question will be the Indian delegation's aim at next week's Sino-Indian talks opening in Beijing. Finishing touches were given to the Indian delegation at a high-level meeting in the Foreign Office. The Chairman of the Policy Planning Board, Mr G. Parthasarathy, presided over the meeting. This was the third meeting held this week to consider what stand India should take at the talks.

THE IDEAS PAGE



In US, Rahul Gandhi was divisive as usual

Instead of renouncing tradition, Rahul Gandhi should consider why his dream for the country is at odds with the dream of its people



GAURAV BHATIA

DURING HIS RECENT visit to the US, Rahul Gandhi once again maligned India, its people and institutions on foreign soil. As the Leader of Opposition, he holds a position of great responsibility. He should carefully calibrate his statements and ensure that his words align with national interest. However, his rhetoric is almost always replete with misleading claims. Rahul Gandhi stated that the Prime Minister is attacking the Indian Constitution. It is, in fact, Congress and the Gandhi purwar, which have single-handedly done the most damage to the Constitution. India Gandhi imposed the Emergency in 1975. More recently, Rahul Gandhi disrespected democratic norms by tearing an ordinance passed by the Manmohan Singh cabinet, displaying a disregard for parliamentary procedures.

In contrast, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stands tall as a global statesman and has the highest approval rating among world leaders. It is important to highlight the historical significance of PM Modi being elected for three consecutive terms, a remarkable achievement. This mandate reflects respect for his leadership, vision, and dedication to the nation.

On reservation, Rahul Gandhi, while speaking at Georgetown University, said, "We will think of scrapping reservations when India is a fair place. And India is not a fair place." This reflects the Congress party's stance on reservations. In contrast, the BJP has always championed the inclusion of marginalised communities through reservation. Leaders such as Prime Minister Narendra Modi, President Droupadi Murmu, Ram Nath Kovind, Kalyan Singh and Shivraj Singh Chouhan are examples of leaders from backward communities holding significant positions in the BJP regime — a testament to the party's commitment to uplifting these communities through representation in policymaking roles.

Rahul Gandhi's claim that the fight in India is about whether Sikhs will be allowed to wear their turbans or go to gunwars is not only misleading but an affront to the Sikh community. He needs to read Indian history, especially the chapter on the anti-Sikh riots in 1984 under the watch of his father. Some of those accused of inflicting gruesome violence were rewarded with ministerial berths by Congress.

Rahul Gandhi's statement on the imposition of Hindi is misleading and divisive. The BJP has always recognised the value of every language and culture. Such irresponsible statements create hostility among citizens. Only recently, Home Minister Amit Shah reiterated that Hindi will be a friend to all regional languages and one should not pit one language against the other. Rahul Gandhi's rhetoric, in contrast, often reveals his disregard for India's

diverse religious and regional identities.

A disturbing part of his speech was the open assault on India's traditions. He said that India dishonours skilled people. But it is important to mention that the BJP has conferred the Bharat Ratna on several scientists and artists such as M S Swaminathan, Bhupen Hazarika, Lata Mangeshkar and Ustad Bismillah Khan. In his remarks, Rahul Gandhi praised China, overlooking its many authoritarian practices. While he fails to acknowledge India's democratic strengths, Rahul Gandhi remains conspicuously silent about the plight of the Uyghur Muslim community in China — human rights violations, mass disappearances, and persecution of the community are well-documented. He overlooks the fact that, in India, under the BJP government, minorities are thriving. The Modi government has made significant strides in ensuring that every community receives equal opportunities for growth, education, and development. From implementing welfare schemes to promoting inclusive governance it has worked tirelessly to ensure that in India all citizens, regardless of faith, flourish and contribute to the nation's progress.

Rahul Gandhi's allegations against the RSS were yet another indication of his inherent aversion towards institutions that have rendered great services to the country. It reflects a lack of understanding of the organisation's role in India's history, including its contribution to the freedom struggle and national service. He seems unaware that Mahatma Gandhi himself visited an RSS training camp in Wardha in 1934.

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The writer is senior advocate and national spokesperson, BJP

It's not about where, it's what he's saying

Rahul Gandhi's speeches and interactions highlight how the PM has yet to hold a press conference, a non-choreographed interaction



SANJAY JHA

IN THE 24x7 television channels, geographical distances are bridged in the course of a nanosecond. There is nothing that Rahul says when he is in London or Texas that he has not stated before. His criticisms are laced with a mature dispassionate appraisal and are not ad hominem, which is what he is repeatedly subjected to. What hurts the BJP is the following trifecta. There is huge amplification without censorship and redactions of Rahul's speeches, an alternative viewpoint to the state-controlled disinformation campaigns and banal memes emerges, and PM Modi looks hugely dwarfed (pardon the oxymoron) given his inability or reluctance to have a similar free-wheeling question and answer session with young audiences. In 11 years, the Indian Prime Minister has not held a single press conference. Game, set and match to Rahul. That is the BJP's peeve.

A case in point is Iltan Omar, a US Congress representative from the Democrat party, who is the latest actor in the serial brouhaha created by the fake news manufacturing cell of the ruling party. It is a tragedy of epic dimensions. What Omar has said the same things about Kashmir, Article 370 abrogation, Citizenship Amendment Act, human rights abuses, etc., are not too dissimilar from those expressed by Kamala Harris in the past.

The latter could be the next US President. Will India's External Affairs Minister recommend a diplomatic reassessment of US-India ties because Kamala Harris has said the same things about Kashmir, Article 370 abrogation, Citizenship Amendment Act, human rights abuses, etc., are not too dissimilar from those expressed by Kamala Harris in the past.

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Rahul is setting the political narrative and the BJP is obediently responding with an unusually high level of anxiety to every word he utters. It is an extraordinary reversal of fortunes. Nothing illustrates the BJP's ludicrous Rahul preoccupation than when Rahul steps abroad to engage with the foreign press and diverse university audiences. The political conversation becomes nauseatingly vicious back home. A case in point is Rahul's current official visit as Leader of Opposition to the United States. The BJP seems to be discombobulated. It is important to understand the psychological paralysis.

BJP's mouthpieces say in belligerent unison: "Why does Rahul criticise India abroad? He hates India". It is a bizarre argument. The BJP is pretending to be splendidly oblivious to the fact that in the age of

The writer is a former spokesperson of the Congress Party

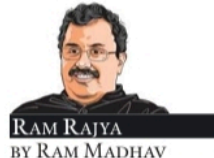
WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Dubious data prevents governments from saving lives. And mounting cases of infections lead to strained health workers and systems. Lawmakers must focus on eliminating health vulnerabilities."

— DAWN, PAKISTAN

The UN the world needs

The global body has proved ineffective in dealing with wars in Ukraine, Gaza. It needs to rethink its functioning, give greater voice to India



BY RAM MADHAV

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA Modi will travel to New York later this month to address the special global summit hosted by the United Nations on September 22-23. Ambitiously named "The UN Summit of the Future", the summit intends to forge a "new international consensus" on how to deliver "a better present and safeguard the future". It is, no doubt, a laudable theme, especially because the world today stands at a major inflection point and is passing through disruptive times.

However, a bigger issue bothering many is "the future of the UN" itself. Started eight decades ago in San Francisco with an initial membership of 51 countries, the organisation looks weary today. It comes out as an ineffective and inefficient instrument in tackling contemporary challenges. "The United Nations was not created in order to bring us to heaven, but in order to save us from hell," Dag Hammarskjöld, the Swedish diplomat who served as the second Secretary-General from 1953 to 1961, once said. Unfortunately, it is struggling to keep up that role in the face of growing geopolitical tensions, wars and competing national interests.

There is a growing realisation about this situation within the UN itself, prompting Dennis Francis, the Trinidadian diplomat and the President of the General Assembly, to choose "Rebuilding Trust and Reigniting Global Solidarity" as the theme of the 78th session held in September 2023. Addressing that special session, UN Secretary-General António Guterres stressed the need for reforming and modernising the multilateral system that dates back to the Second World War. "It is reform or rupture. The world has changed. Our institutions have not," he told world leaders.

To understand what ails the multilateral institution, one must go back to the dominant thought process of the early 20th century in the West. Western intellectuals like H G Wells, Albert Einstein, Aldous Huxley and John Foster Dulles were primarily influenced by the idea of the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon ethnic identity and argued for a world union commanded by the US and other "English-speaking nations". In one of his earliest best sellers, *Anticipations*, Wells prophesied about the emergence of a world state in which the English-speaking people assumed a central role in the "world state to come". Wells' prediction was that by the year 2000 the English-speaking people would constitute a federal state with its headquarters in the US, which will govern all the "non-white states of the present British empire, and in addition much of the South and Middle Pacific, the East and West Indies, the rest of America, and the larger part of black Africa". In 1935, he argued that "the common sense of the world demands that the

English-speaking community should get together on the issue of World Peace, and that means a common foreign policy". It was this dominant idea which propelled Roosevelt and Churchill to lay the foundations for the UN in 1941. It shouldn't be forgotten that a majority of the first 50 countries that had signed up for the UN in 1945 were from the sphere described by Wells in 1935. Over the years, the UN membership expanded and today it boasts of 193 member states and two observer states (the Holy See and Palestine). Yet, the mindset continued in different forms. Sometimes it was called "liberal internationalism" and at other times a "concert of democracies". Brexit to AUKUS to the less-talked-about CANZUK (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and UK) are all results of this mindset only.

This complex of ethnic domination became the nemesis of the UN. As the non-English-speaking countries rose in power and influence and started asserting themselves in world affairs, the dominant powers found a way to bypass the institution rather than making it more democratic and representative. In his address to the General Assembly in 2023, President Joe Biden talked at length about economic and climate issues, turning to the Ukraine War very briefly towards the end of his address.

The world body looks helpless in containing wars in Ukraine and Gaza, in imposing rules on the developed Global North over issues of food security and other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the developing Global South, and in forcing the industrialised North to compensate for climate compliance by the developing South. The seriousness of the paralysis in the UN system is evident from the fact that the US's dispute redressal mechanism has come to a grinding halt since December 2019 due to the refusal of the US to ratify the appointment of new judges to the appellate body. As of 2023, more than 600 bilateral and regional trade agreements languish without the trade body without any resolution.

India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ruchira Kamboj summed up this crisis aptly at the plenary session of the General Assembly in February that marked two years of hostilities in Ukraine. "As the conflict enters its third year, the United Nations, the cradle of international law, must pause and ask ourselves two pressing questions. Are we anywhere near a possible, acceptable solution? And if not, why is it that the UN system, particularly its principal organ, the United Nations Security Council, rendered completely ineffective in the resolution of the ongoing conflict?" she asked. Earlier, in January of this year, India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar diagnosed the problem correctly. "If you are going to ask five countries, saying would you mind changing the rules, that you would have less power, guess what the answer is going to be? If they are wise, the answer would be something else."

While the august body wants to talk about the future of the world, PM Modi may also talk about the future of the UN itself and the need for countries like India to have a greater voice and say in its affairs.

The writer, president, India Foundation, is with the BJP. Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TOWERING PRESENCE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Comrade, friend, ally' (IE, September 13). Sitaran Yechury was a towering communist leader who believed that communism as an ideology had not lost its relevance in the Indian context and emphasised its role as the only hope for the toiling masses. He was a shrewd leader who knew the importance of coalition politics in the new era of BJP-dominated politics. He played a pivotal role in the JPM government. He strongly opposed the US-India civil nuclear treaty. As a member of the Rajya Sabha, he raised his voice against the violation of democratic and human rights. He saw secularism as part and parcel of Indian culture that could ensure political stability and a bright future for India.

Azul Thalore Nagpur

IMPLEMENT IT RIGHT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A wider net' (IE, September 13). The Cabinet's approval of the expansion of the ABPM-JAY to include all citizens aged 70 and above, irrespective of their income level, is a big move in India's public healthcare landscape. There is no doubt that the scheme aims to solve a daunting problem that even the most developed nations are grappling with. However, finances need to be planned well, so that implementa-

MIXED SIGNALS

THIS REFERS TO the articles, 'Against their oaths' and 'It's personal, not political' (IE, September 13). The public display of the Prime Minister and Chief Justice together in *pugis* sends mixed signals to the public. At a time when several cases of homes of people from minority communities being bulldozed in mostly BJP-ruled states are pending before the courts, this show undermines the non-partisanship of the SC. The Maharashtra election is around the corner, with two political parties in conflict with each other, and the CJ is heading the bench that will adjudicate the matter. The Constitution gives one the right to practice religion but for two leaders to openly display faith is not in line with the principles of our Constitution.

Aadiya Netawar, via email

Khokan Das, Kolkata



Junior doctors march towards Swasthya Bhawan, the headquarters of the West Bengal Health Department, protesting against the rape and murder of a doctor at R.G. Kar Hospital in Kolkata. PTI

At a time of festive cheer, a city seethes with rage

A month since the rape and murder of a trainee doctor at R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital, anger continues to simmer on the streets of Kolkata, posing the biggest challenge to Mamata Banerjee during her tenure as Chief Minister. **Moyurie Som, Shrabana Chatterjee, and Shiv Sahay Singh** report on the innovative ways in which the people are protesting and the government's attempts at quelling the agitation

Minutes past midnight on September 8, the mood was sombre at R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata, where a trainee doctor was brutally raped and murdered a month ago. As resident doctors arranged petals and candles at the gate of the emergency building, a doctor began singing a song: "Ek je chilo mein, taar bhari dukh, bhari dukh (Once there was a girl, she was full of sorrow, full of sorrow)".

Taking inspiration from a track from *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne*, a 1969 classic film by the director Satyajit Ray, the doctor's song narrated the gruesome tale of August 9.

"I wrote the lyrics just hours ago," said the medical officer at another state-run health facility. "Will this pain ever go? Will Tillotama (a name given to the victim) ever get justice?"

The hospital remained barricaded. Armed personnel of the Central Industrial Security Force and the Kolkata Police stood guard as resident doctors lit incense sticks at the memorial for the victim.

The doctors wore black bandanas on their forehead that read, "Justice for Abhaya" (another name given to the victim).

Holding a microphone, one of the doctors said, "We will never forget what happened to one of our sisters a month ago. We will remain awake the whole night in her memory." A month after the incident, which sparked outrage across the country, people from all walks of life — doctors, artists, lawyers, engineers, rickshaw pullers, taxi drivers — continued to participate in "Reclaim the Night" protests across the city. "Reclaim the Night" is a reference to the fact that the 31-year-old doctor was attacked at night while taking a break from duty, and also to the 1970s movement, where women occupied public spaces at night, marching against sexual violence. There have been hundreds of protests across the country since August 9.

The beleaguered Trinamool Congress government has attempted to pacify the protesters in many ways — by appealing to them, pleading with them, declaring that it stands with them, and chastising them. On September 3, in the State Assembly, it passed the Aparajita Women and Child (West Bengal Criminal Laws Amendment) Bill, 2024, which enhances punishment for rape, promises swift investigation, and even the death penalty in a few cases.

However, the anger, which has swept the city like a storm, has not subsided. On September 12, pushed to a corner, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said she was willing to resign in the interest of the people. She explained that the doctors' refusal to return to work was affecting the State's healthcare system. According to the West Bengal

We make Durga from clay. Won't we hit the streets for the Durga of flesh and blood?

SUBODH PAL
Artist

government, more than 6 lakh people have been denied outdoor patient services at State-run hospitals in the last month. The ongoing agitation is Banerjee's biggest political challenge in her 13 years as Chief Minister of West Bengal.

'An organic uprising'

On the same day, about 13 kilometres away from R.G. Kar, the victim's parents arrived at protests at Jadavpur's 8B bus stand on the southern fringes of the city. As soon as they walked in, the demonstrators at the venue stopped shouting slogans. They also stopped recording the event on their phones, to protect the identity of the parents (disclosing any detail which could help identify a victim of rape is prohibited by law).

The father took the stage. Holding back tears, he said, "I lost my daughter on August 9. From that day onwards, I have found a huge family... the thousands of protesters who are now on the road fighting for her... I am shocked to see the power my daughter had... I hope you will stay and protest until I get justice."

A few minutes later, slogans rent the air again: "Pusha aachi (We are with you)!"

Rimjhim Sinha, an independent researcher, is one of the faces of the protests. She helped organise three "Reclaim the Night" marches. "Right from the night of August 14 (when the first 'Reclaim the Night' march took place), this agitation has had massive resonance across West Bengal, India, and even abroad. Being a sociologist, I feel this is a historic moment. Women across classes, castes, religions, and locations have organised programmes and established a statement against rape culture," she said.

Some academics have said that this is an organic outpouring against the administration. "Af-

ter a long time, we are seeing such an uprising against the system. The R.G. Kar incident was a trigger. People have always taken note of the misdoings of the current government, such as the school recruitment scam and the Rose Valley chit fund scam, but the populist policies such as giving allowances to people was used by the government for buying their loyalty," said Amites Mukherjee, a professor at Jadavpur University.

On September 8, before midnight, Satyabrata Ghosal, 73, a retired professor of Library Science at Rabindra Bharati University, stood at the Shyambazar five-point crossing. The last time he had joined a protest was in the late 2000s against the forcible land acquisition by the Left Front government at Singur and Nandigram.

"I have been going to every protest over the last few days. There is an attempt to dub the R.G. Kar incident as another incident of rape and murder. But this reeks of systemic rot. A doctor was brutalised and all evidence [of the crime] was removed," alleged Ghosal. The family members of the victim and a majority of the protesters also believe that not one person, but several people were involved in the crime and there was tampering of evidence. So far, the police have arrested a man called Sanjay Roy for the crime.

At Jadavpur, a middle-aged man, who refused to disclose his identity, offered packaged water bottles to the protesters. "My identity is not important," he said. "I am one of you, we are all one in this. The people of this area came together to collect money and buy these bottles, so that we could supply them to the protesters daily."

Sinha said years of pent-up anger had found its way to the streets. The sentiment everywhere, she said, was simple: "Enough is enough."

A Chief Minister without an audience

Resident doctors of State-run health facilities, who have been at the forefront of the protests, have been highlighting some of the issues they face. The doctors have been on strike since August 9 and defied a Supreme Court appeal to reinjoin work by September 10. They set conditions to hold talks with the administration, which the government rejected. They demanded the resignation of Kolkata Police Commissioner Vineet Goyal as well as action against senior officials of the government, increased security for health workers, and an end to the "threat culture" in hospitals and medical colleges across the State.

On September 12, a team of 30 doctors reached the State administration headquarters, Nabanna Sabhaghar. However, they did not join the talks as the government refused to live-stream the meeting, which the doctors insisted would make the proceedings transparent. The Chief Minister waited at the Nabanna for nearly two hours before leaving the State Secretariat.

"We want our demands to be heard by the masses who have turned up in unprecedented numbers to show their support for our quest for justice," said Aniket Mahato, one of the protesting doctors, after the talks failed to take place.

Several doctors like Dr. Mahato have led the agitation, which has been innovative at times. On September 2, when Dr. Mahato and others laid siege to Lalbazar, the police headquarters, they carried a replica of a spinal cord as a gift to the police, to urge them to "desist from serving only the interests of their political bosses". Several associations of senior doctors have extended support to the resident doctors and dared the government to take action against them.

Keeping politicians at bay

It is not doctors alone who have been using inno-

Every political party has tried to hijack the movement. Some have sent drunk goons to our protests to cause a ruckus. But the people have managed to keep the parties away.

TORSA CHATTERJEE
Student, Jadavpur University

vative tools and slogans. At every rally, protesters can be seen carrying posters and graffiti depicting violence against women. They have been shouting slogans such as "Tillotamar bichar chali; Amar dilir bichar chali (We want justice for Tillotama; we want justice for our sister)" and "Sashak tomar koto bhoj, Dharshak tomar ke hoe (Why are the rulers scared, how are the rapists related to them?)". They have also found an anthem in the playback singer Arijit Singh's song "Aar Kobe (When?)" which has millions of views on social media. The cries have changed from "We want justice" to "We demand justice".

Unlike many other protests in Kolkata and elsewhere, which are appropriated by political parties or organisations affiliated to politicians, these agitations have been apolitical. Whenever politicians tried to join them, the protesters sent them a clear signal to stay away.

On August 14, for instance, a few days after the horrific incident when anger was spilling onto the streets, Banerjee herself went on a march, raising demands similar to those of the protesters. However, this was met with more anger, mockery, and disdain. Since then, the ruling party has stopped organising protests.

Similarly, on August 27, violence broke out during the 'March to Nabanna' protest, organised by the Paschim Banga Chatra Samaj, a little-known outfit connected to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the ideological parent organisation of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The next day, a 12-hour bandh called by the BJP disrupted normal life. While a section of civil society was worried that the movement may be hijacked, the people did not lose hope. They switched off lights in their houses and lit up the streets in quiet protest.

Torsa Chatterjee, a student of Jadavpur University and an organiser of a 'Reclaim the Night' march, admitted that it has been difficult to keep the protests free of party politics. "Every political party — whether the Trinamool, the BJP, or the CPI(M) — has tried to hijack the movement," she said. "Some of them have even sent drunk goons to our protests to cause a ruckus. But the people have managed to keep the parties away."

A dulled mood for celebrations

At this time of the year, the people of Kolkata gear up to celebrate the festival of Durga Puja. Thousands visit the elaborate pandals — massive, temporary structures that house idols of goddess Durga, shop for sweets and clothes, and visit loved ones across the city. In December 2021, UNESCO had added 'Durga Puja in Kolkata' to its Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list, giving the festival international recognition.

This year, however, most people are not in a mood to celebrate. While protesters have rolled the city, artists and theatre personalities have decided to agitate in their own ways, by returning awards presented to them by the State.

Chandan Sen, an 80-year-old thespian, returned the Dinabandhu Mitra Puraskar, one of the highest awards in theatre, presented to him by the West Bengal government. "My father was a doctor at a government hospital for over 40 years. I personally feel for this cause and the doctors' plight," he said.

Organisers of community Durga Puja have also returned the honorarium paid to them by the government. Several community Durga Puja committees have refused to accept the ₹85,000 that has been offered to them by the government. Prosenjit Ghosh, secretary of Uttarpara Shakti Sangha, a Durga Puja club, said, "There is no politics behind our decision. We feel this is our social responsibility. It is a small attempt by us to seek justice for the victim."

In an effort to revive the festive spirit, Banerjee urged the people to join the celebrations. However, her appeal was met with anger by the mother of the victim, who said that the family would never celebrate Durga Puja, now that their daughter is gone. "How can they ask the people to return to festivities," she asked, pained.

The protests are likely to impact Durga Puja and its related economy. A study by the British Council had pegged the creative economy around Durga Puja in 2019 at ₹32,377 crore, which was 2.58% of West Bengal's GDP.

With less than three weeks left for the Puja, Kumartuli, a colony of idol-makers in north Kolkata, is unusually quiet. "Unlike earlier years, the footfall of bloggers, tourists, and photographers to Kumartuli has drastically decreased this year," said idol-makers, Kakoli Pal and Bankim Pal.

On September 8, when the whole city was participating in protests, the idol-makers of Kumartuli also hit the streets. Bankim Pal said that thousands of people, including those in the locality who remain aloof in social events, also took part. Subodh Pal, another artist, said, "We make Durga from clay. Won't we hit the streets for the Durga of flesh and blood?"

Notwithstanding the economic impact of the protests on the festival season, sculptors, idol-makers, and theme artists feel that the pandals will also capture the collective anger over the crime. Idol designer and artist, Babashat Sutar, said, "In the last 50 years, I have never seen such a spontaneous and large-scale civil society movement. As an artist, I don't think the art of Durga Puja can be separated from this tragedy."

An official of a consulate in Kolkata, who has been facilitating art exhibitions during Durga Puja over the past few years, compared the situation to the story of a Satyajit Ray 1955 classic, *Pathar Panchali*. "The character Durga dies just before the Puja and the audience is shaken by it. This is exactly how we feel right now," he said.



Junior doctors during a rally in Kolkata. Doctors have refused to return to work. DEBASISH BHADURI

KARNATAKA

When small towns take flight

With nine airports, Karnataka is ranked third among States in terms of the total number of passengers who travel by air after Delhi and Maharashtra. A contributor to the bulk of it is Bengaluru's Kempegowda International Airport, but airports in the State's tier-2 and tier-3 cities have evolved in the last few years. **The Hindu** does a status check on them

The licence to operate flights from Shivamogga Airport, issued by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, will expire on September 23 unless the Karnataka State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation renews it. Authorities have raised safety concerns, and the renewal of the licence for Karnataka's newest airport — inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 27, 2023 — depends on a meeting on September 18.

With nine airports, Karnataka ranks third in the country in terms of air passengers, after Delhi and Maharashtra. However, the issues at Shivamogga Airport highlight the challenges faced by some regional airports. In July, around 35.5 lakh domestic and international passengers travelled to and from Karnataka, with a total of 24,304 flights.

A significant contributor to this traffic is Bengaluru's Kempegowda International Airport (KIA), which handled nearly 33 lakh passengers and 21,465 flights in July. However, airports in the State's tier-2 and tier-3 cities have also grown, offering air travel to residents in the coastal, Malnad, Kittur Karnataka, and Kalyana Karnataka regions.

Some of these airports have benefited from the Union government's UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik) scheme aimed at making air travel accessible and affordable for people, with airlines launching services on new, underserved routes. However, other airports face obstacles to their growth.

The Hindu looks at the current status of Karnataka's airports, which are managed by the Airports Authority of India, public-private partnerships, the State government, and private entities.

Mangaluru: International standards

Mangaluru International Airport, managed by Adani Airport Holdings Limited, connects to eight West Asian destinations (Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Muscat, Dammam, Bahrain, Doha, Kuwait, and Jeddah) and six domestic destinations (Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Mumbai, Pune, and Delhi). Daily flight movements range between 40 and 42.



Mangaluru International Airport. H.S. MANJUNATH

Precision approach lights are being installed to improve visibility for pilots. The airport's 2,450-metre runway meets international standards, and it offers basic facilities such as food stalls, prepaid taxis, free Wi-Fi, and separate areas for domestic and international departures. Additional services, like Pranaam, provide dedicated staff to assist passengers.

Ananthesh V. Prabhu, president of the Kanara Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), Mangaluru, says the business community is generally satisfied with the airport's amenities but would appreciate more food options at the terminal. "We are happy that the airport celebrates major festivals involving passengers and promoting local culture," he says.

Belagavi: Piece of history
Belagavi Airport in Sambra, originally operated by the Royal Air Force in 1942, has historical significance as it was the base for Operation Vijay during the Goa liberation movement. Expanded after land acquisition in 2018, the airport, as of August 1, 2024, connects ten domestic destinations — Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Tirupati, Nagpur, Jaipur, Ahmedabad, Surat, Bhuj, Mumbai, and Delhi.

However, frequent fliers are demanding more

Kalaburagi is fast developing as a major trade hub, and connectivity with cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Ahmedabad is the need of the hour.

SHASHIKANTH PATIL, secretary, Kalyana Karnataka Chamber of Commerce and Industry



Shivamogga Airport. ANI

direct flights to major cities like Bengaluru, Mumbai, and Delhi. They also want protection from rain in the arrival area and parking and pickup services improved so that they are beneficial to passengers rather than contractors.

There are plans to expand the airport by acquiring 60 additional acres of land. Also, Belagavi MP Jagadish Shettar has suggested that it be upgraded to an international one and has called for conducting an assessment survey.

Shivamogga: The youngest

Shivamogga Airport with a lotus-shaped terminal at Sogane, inaugurated last year, is the first



Shivamogga Airport. G.T. SATHISH

airport in Karnataka operated by the State government. Built on 775 acres at a cost of ₹450 crore, it has a 3.2 km runway capable of handling aircraft ranging from ATR 72 to Airbus A320. The first flight landed on August 31, 2023, and the airport operates services to Bengaluru (daily), Goa, Hyderabad and Tirupathi (Tuesday to Saturday) with an average occupancy of over 50%.

However, frequent cancellations due to poor visibility have caused frustration among passengers. Flights have even returned to Bengaluru without landing. Efforts are underway to install night-landing facilities, with the DGCA having approved the necessary Airport Ground Lighting equipment for all-weather operations.

Hubballi: Potential unexplored

Hubballi Airport, the fourth busiest in Karnataka, as per July 2024 data, operates flights to Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Pune, Mumbai, and Delhi. At present, the terminal is spread across 3,600 sq.m. and can handle 300 peak-hour passengers.

The Union government in 2023 approved ₹340 crores for expanding the terminal, anti-



Hubballi Airport. KIRAN BAKALE

padding increased demand after 2026. The area is proposed to be increased to 15,950 sq.m. with four aerobridges and infrastructure that can handle up to 2,400 passengers at a time.

The airport will also have a five-star GRIHA, or Green Rating for Integrated Habitat Assessment, which is an initiative by TERI (The Energy and Resources Institute) and the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy to promote sustainable and environmentally friendly construction of buildings.

Despite the growth in traffic, local industrialists and businesspeople believe the airport's potential to become an international hub remains untapped. Organisations such as the North Karnataka Small Scale Industries Association and the Karnataka Chamber of Commerce and Industry have urged the government to develop the airport as an international one. They say the 927 acres currently available now at the airport could be better utilised for this purpose rather than spend money on fresh land acquisition.

Mysuru: Expansion hopes

Mysuru Airport underwent an ₹82 crore upgrade in 2010, but its growth has been stunted by its short 1,740-metre runway, which only accommodates small ATR-type aircraft that can carry 60 to



Mysuru Airport. M.A. SRIRAM

70 passengers on short-haul flights.

At its peak, it operated 16 inbound and outbound flights connecting Bengaluru, Belagavi, Mangaluru, Kochi, Chennai, and Hyderabad. However, many services were subsequently withdrawn once the scheme of subsidised flights under UDAN expired.

Currently, the airport operates only two flights, connecting Mysuru to Chennai and Hyderabad, with a daily footfall of 300 to 350 passengers. However, the Airports Authority of India has plans to extend the runway to 2,400 metres, allowing for larger aircraft and longer flights. Mysuru Airport Director J.R. Anoop said the Karnataka Industrial Area Development Board (KIADB) is expected to hand over 206 acres to AAI for this expansion within six months.

Bidar: Grounded now

Civil aviation from Bidar dates back to 2008-09, with efforts to connect the city to Bengaluru. The State government convinced the Indian Air Force to give one of its runways for flights to Bengaluru. With the introduction of the UDAN, an additional 13.62 acres of land and better infrastructure, Star

Air began Bidar-Bengaluru flights in 2020. However, due to low passenger traffic, the services were prematurely discontinued on December 26, 2023.

It was also felt that the options of Rajiv Gandhi International Airport in Hyderabad and Kalaburagi Airport, less than 150 km away, have hit the potential of Bidar. Recently, the Lok Sabha member from Bidar, Sagar Khandre, appealed to the Civil Aviation Ministry to resume flight operations at Bidar.

Vijayanagar: Hampi connect

Jindal Vijayanagar Airport, owned by JSW Steel, is a key entry point for tourists visiting Hampi, 35 km away. Developed in 1997, it mainly served the staff of the steel company until, in 2006, it was opened for commercial operations. It operates Alliance Air flights to Bengaluru and Hyderabad and handled over 43,000 passengers last year.

Kalaburagi: For development

Located 12 km east of Kalaburagi, this airport serves five districts in northern Karnataka: Kalaburagi, Bidar, Vijayapura, Yadgir and Raichur. The State government built the ₹181 crore greenfield airport; the amount excludes the cost of acquiring the 742 acres required for the project.

With flights to Bengaluru, Delhi, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Tirupathi, there were hopes that the airport would spur the development of Kalyana Karnataka. But now there are only two flights to Bengaluru. Local business leaders are pushing



Kalaburagi Airport. ARUN KULKARNI

for the resumption of flights to major destinations and the introduction of international services, particularly to Gulf countries.

"Kalaburagi is fast developing as a major trade hub, and connectivity with cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Ahmedabad is the need of the hour. The Union government should resume UDAN to facilitate air connectivity with tier-2 cities," said Shashikanth Patil, secretary of the Kalyana Karnataka Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

In the offing

There are government plans for new airports. The initiative to build one at Ballari began in 2008 when the influence of mining baron G. Janardhana Reddy and his brothers was at its peak. In September of that year, the Karnataka government approved the greenfield project under the PPP model, designating 1,000 acres near the villages of Chaganur and Sriravara, 12 km northeast of Ballari city.

However, the project initially stalled due to opposition from villagers over the acquisition of their fertile lands. A year later, 900 acres were acquired after farmers relented. Although the foundation stone was laid on August 20, 2010, numerous delays followed, leading the government to cancel its contract with MARG Ltd. in December 2022.

Efforts are also underway to develop a small airport in Raichur. Currently, 382 acres of land are available, with notifications issued to acquire an additional 24 acres.

The groundbreaking ceremony took place during the previous BJP government, but Congress leaders raised concerns over what they called an "unscientific tender process". The project has now gained momentum.

Construction of Hassan Airport is progressing on 536 acres of land at Boovanhalli near Hassan, while the PWD is managing the Vijayapura Airport project. They are being designed to accommodate Airbus A320 and equivalent aircraft. Additionally, an airport is being developed by the Navy in Karwar, with a civilian enclave planned to support Airbus A320 and similar aircraft operations.

(With inputs from Hemanth C.S., Raviprasad Kamila, Rishikesh Bahadur Desai, Girish Pattanashetti, R. Krishnakumar, Sathish G.T., and Kumar Buradikatti)



MODERNISING UN
UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres
We need greater global solidarity today and with future generations, better management of critical issues of global concern and an upgraded United Nations that can meet the challenges of a new era

Monsoon blues

Floods in the southern and western states do not augur well for kharif season yields

THE PROSPECT OF above-normal rainfall during the southwest monsoon season — beginning June and possibly extending beyond September — is usually considered a good augury for a bountiful kharif crop output. But this depends on its spatial and temporal distribution. This year saw the monsoon revive after a pause in June and covered the entire country ahead of schedule. There has been copious rainfall during the second half of the season, which has caused massive floods in the southern and western states, including deadly landslides in Kerala's Wayanad district. In sharp contrast, there is rainfall deficiency in the eastern and north-eastern states. Overall, 71% of the 729 districts in the country have received normal to surplus showers so far this season. Due to climate change, the monsoon's behaviour is also increasingly wayward with extended dry spells and heavy wet spells. Around 45% of the districts are experiencing a "swapping trend" with flood-prone areas going dry and vice versa, according to a study by IPE Global and Esri India.

With the monsoon appearing to have a mind of its own, above-normal rainfall is not necessarily an unmitigated blessing. Although sowing operations for summer season crops like paddy, coarse cereals, pulses, and soyabean are almost over, copious rainfall may dampen kharif yields. The massive floods in Gujarat, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh are likely to impact output of groundnut, pulses, and cotton whose acreage is lower when compared to the last five years. If the rainfall extends to October, it could also affect the standing paddy crop. The union ministry for agriculture and farmers' welfare is soon expected to announce the first estimate of kharif production.

More significantly, copious rainfall has an important bearing in the poll-bound Maharashtra which is a major producer of soyabean and pulses like arhar dal. Although overall soyabean acreage is 1.7% higher than the average of the last five years, farmers are concerned that mandi prices are ruling below minimum support prices. Worried about the electoral fallout, the Centre has now decided to step in to procure soyabean from farmers. Given the highly erratic behaviour of the monsoon, there is a need for better prediction so that farmers are well-prepared for extreme events. Doing so appears a daunting challenge even with the most sophisticated weather models. However, a model-based extreme forecast index — estimated by the India Meteorological Department (IMD), Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, and European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts' model — has been useful in forecasting the rising incidence of very heavy and extremely heavy rainfall events as happened in Telangana and Andhra, according to Madhavan Nair Rajeevan, former secretary in the ministry of earth sciences.

The policy imperative must be to ensure that agriculture does not remain hostage to the monsoon's vagaries. The IMD's plans to revise the district agro-meteorological units under the Gramin Krishi Mausam Sewa scheme — which were earlier shut down — are a step in this direction as they provide timely weather advisories. The need is to build more irrigation facilities to reduce monsoon dependence, especially for small and marginal farmers in peninsular India. This is less of a concern in the vanguard agrarian region of Punjab, Haryana, and western Uttar Pradesh which have access to canal irrigation. In fact, the share of irrigation in paddy-growing states like Punjab is as high as 99.7% but as low as 31.5% in Odisha.

Yen rally a lesson in the lost art of FX intervention

JAPAN'S CURRENCY is enjoying an epic rally, heading for the biggest quarterly advance in years. That's quite a shift from a few months ago, when yen bulls were few and far between. Who can claim credit for this turnaround?

Looming interest-rate cuts by the Federal Reserve and a new hawkishness on the part of the Bank of Japan can make a claim to paternity. The difference in borrowing costs was the biggest driver of yen weakness, so the prospect of that gap narrowing is huge. One Japaner, however, isn't getting sufficient credit and that's the one with the most at stake: Japan itself. On several occasions, the government waded into the market and purchased its own currency. Alone, this wouldn't have sparked massive appreciation; the yen is up more than 10% against the dollar since early July. But the official action did lay down markers.

The experience reminds us that, while frowned upon as routine practice, intervention is a tool that authorities discard at their peril. Like quantitative easing, it's handy to have around. In the years after the demise of fixed exchange rates in the early 1970s, state meddling was common. While Japan by no means the only nation, Tokyo continued the practice longer than many. The top international official at the ministry, Etsuke Sakakibara, earned the nickname "Mr. Yen." Japan was active around the turn of the century before scaling back.

Conventional wisdom on foreign-exchange trading desks could use this as an instructive moment. When Ian Bremmer's FX news in London in the early 2000s, the mantra was that "intervention never works." I couldn't figure out why this was such an article of faith. Perhaps it reflected memories of the Asian financial crisis, when artificially high valuations collapsed. Prolonged trauma from the Bank of England's defeat at the hands of George Soros probably also played a role. And besides, ran the reasoning, markets are vastly bigger than governments. Daily FX turnover has swollen to \$7.5 trillion a day, according to the Bank for International Settlements.

Surely success or failure depends on the objective. Shielding a specific level is one thing. Cushioning sharp moves, and sometimes, nudging the psychology of the market is another. Make investors understand that at a some point, there will be resistance. Japan "set the floor on the yen this summer," Brad Setzer, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations who is an expert on capital flows, wrote in the *Financial Times* last month. "The odds about the general ineffectiveness of intervention need to be updated."

Japan's tactics were laudable. Officials were loath to identify an actual point at which they would join the fray. In practice, around 160 pence/dollar was a key threshold. In late April, MOF took the opportunity on a public holiday, when liquidity was thin, to pounce, and the yen's jump was notable. Another instance of sharp yen gains that had official fingerprints occurred on the evening of July 12 after the release of weaker-than-expected US inflation data. Those numbers triggered a general dollar decline. By waiting until the direction was favourable and giving an extra push, the government achieved a good result.

Two other things stand out. First, this year policymakers didn't hold press conferences or make statements after acting. You had to wait for monthly MOF accounts to be published. An element of mystery is important. That was a shift from late 2022 when the government announced its move. Second, the ministry waited for speculation to become excessive; leveraged funds had made historic commissions on a yen decline, according to the US Commodity Futures Trading Commission. "Things were getting a little bit silly, trading was one-sided," Stefan Angrick, senior economist at Moody's Analytics in Tokyo, told me. It also matters that Japan has considerable firepower: around \$1.2 trillion in reserves. And in the absence of a Fed pivot, things could have turned out differently. Had BOJ Governor Kazuo Ueda not flagged additional hikes, the yen might still be in big trouble. If Ueda doesn't deliver, the wobbles may well return.

The bureaucracy who had sat in Sakakibara's old chair for the past few years, Masato Kanda, stepped down at the end of July. On Tuesday, he was nominated to be the next president of the Asian Development Bank. As his plane heads toward Manila, Kanda can sit back and reflect on an important page in currency history.



DANIEL MOSS
Bloomberg

MONETARY PHENOMENON

REVIEW OF THE FLEXIBLE INFLATION TARGETING FRAMEWORK SOUGHT ON QUESTIONABLE GROUNDS

Review inflation target

IN THE ECONOMIC Survey of 2023-24, a suggestion was made that food be excluded from the inflation measure targeted by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). However, now the discussion has moved further, questioning the flexible inflation targeting (FIT) framework adopted by the RBI in 2015. Of course, any framework can be reviewed/refined and even abandoned, if so required. However, the grounds on which the review of the FIT framework is being sought are problematic.

First, it has been argued that since food inflation is not amenable to monetary policy action, it is unfair to the central bank to give it a target for inflation as a large portion of it is outside its control. A key question is not whether the central bank can control food inflation, which it cannot because interest rate is a tool for demand management, while food inflation is largely driven by supply-side factors. But would any inflation measure without food be meaningful, especially because food has a weight of 46% in the consumer price index (CPI) basket. Also, the risk of "second round" effects of high and persistent food inflation is real and cannot be wished away. For the sake of argument, let's assume that the central bank is targeting an inflation measure which excludes food. If the average food inflation remains below or close to the inflation target, there may not be a risk of second-round effects. However, if the average food inflation is much higher than the target inflation and remains persistent, there will be a serious risk of spilling it over to the headline inflation through the wage-

JANAK RAJ
Senior fellow at the Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP), New Delhi



price spiral. This is because food inflation, whether it is a part of the inflation target measure or not, will raise inflation expectations which, in turn, will be reflected in higher wages by workers. The literature is replete with enough evidence about the second-round effects, both in the domestic and international context.

As it is, elevated and persistent food inflation has been a concern in India. After the new CPI series (with base 2012) was released in January 2013 onwards, with back series data from January 2011 onwards, food inflation was "6% and above" in 76 months out of 151 (that is 50% of the time) and "8% and above" in 53 months (that is more than one-third of the time). Since the whole idea of excluding food from the target measure is to tolerate much higher food inflation than even from the present level, it cannot but impact the headline inflation.

Second, a related argument is made that in the recent period there is no evidence of second-round effects because in the face of persistent food inflation, non-food inflation has trended lower

and not higher. The current high food inflation but low core inflation can be explained by two factors: (i) the effect of monetary tightening of 250 basis points beginning May 2022; and (ii) food inflation, after peaking at 11.5% in July 2023, stabilised at 8.5-9% (between December 2023 and June 2024) and has trended significantly downwards in recent months. Should food inflation rise again and become persistent, it would push up the core and headline inflation with a lag.

Third, another argument made is that the FIT framework is not the only choice and that there are other ways to control inflation such as the multiple indicator (MI) approach followed by the RBI before the FIT framework was adopted. It is further argued that the inflation targeting framework by central banks is based on the premise that inflation is a monetary phenomenon, and that this theory has not held up well in last three decades and that real factors have a big role in fuelling inflation. The MI approach was adopted by the RBI in 1998 after the monetary targeting framework was abandoned, but the inflation target-

Inflation target and tolerance band are matters of detailed investigation. These need to be examined afresh when the inflation target comes up for a review in 2026

work was adopted. It is further argued that the inflation targeting framework by central banks is based on the premise that inflation is a monetary phenomenon, and that this theory has not held up well in last three decades and that real factors have a big role in fuelling inflation. The MI approach was adopted by the RBI in 1998 after the monetary targeting framework was abandoned, but the inflation target-

ing framework globally had not fully established by then. Today, around 55 countries have adopted the inflation targeting framework and there are good reasons why it has been gaining traction. Argentina is the only country which abandoned the inflation targeting framework in 2018 within 26 months after adopting it because of implementation inconsistencies.

It is not only the inflation targeting framework, but all monetary policy frameworks are also based on the principle that persistent inflation is a monetary phenomenon. This principle is at the core of monetary policy. To say that inflation is not a monetary phenomenon would mean that monetary policy has no role in inflation management. It is true that real factors such as terms of trade can also impact inflation dynamics. However, real factors cannot sustain inflation beyond a point.

To conclude, it would be extremely challenging to ensure price stability in the face of high and persistent food inflation as it spills over to headline inflation with a lag through the wage-price spiral. Persistent inflation is a monetary phenomenon, and it remains so under any monetary policy framework. An inflation target, currently at 4% with a tolerance band of +/- 2%, is fixed once in five years and the next review is due in 2026. However, both the inflation target and the tolerance band are matters of detailed investigation, and these need to be examined afresh when the inflation target comes up for a review in 2026. Therefore, it would be more productive to research, discuss, and debate whether the current inflation target and the tolerance band continue to be appropriate or they need to be tweaked.

Empower engineers as business leaders



ABHAY SINGHAL

Co-founder of InMobi and CEO, InMobi Advertising

I WAS READING up about Bret Taylor. He has one of the most impressive portfolios I've seen in recent times. Starting as an engineer at Google, he founded companies like FriendFeed and Quip before eventually becoming the co-chief executive officer of Salesforce.

His journey got me thinking about how having a deep understanding and passion for engineering is the foundation of his business success. And it's not just him. Satya Nadella, Elon Musk, Jyoti Bansal — the list is endless. Some of the most respected and successful business leaders are, by practice, engineers.

The problem with quiet genius

The trajectory from engineering excellence to business leadership has been a winning formula repeatedly. Of course, engineers in any tech company are closest to the product and often have the deepest understanding of the problems at hand.

But as is often the case, engineers aren't like being wrong — it must have something to do with years of conditioning and coaching where mistakes aren't tolerated. But that's a whole other article in itself. Engineers tend to analyse a thought from every possible angle before sharing it with a room. By then, the conversation has often moved along, leaving the engineer hesitant to blurt it. The only way to fix this is to nurture the habit of speaking.

Organisations must stop putting intermediaries between the engineers and the business — folks whose skills lie in "communicating the problem".

Engineers' voices get drowned out by those more outspoken, leaving a vacuum filled by others who may not share the same technical insights. Instead, encourage the engineer to share their analysis, solution, and own the consequence of their decisions.

Of course, this can only work in an environment where failure is an option, risk-taking is encouraged, and learning is shared openly.

Engineering first and centre

Give engineers control over their code and ownership of their work. This involves breaking the vicious cycle where engineers feel powerless, leading them to change jobs instead of addressing conflicts. When engineers avoid conflict, resentment builds, they stop caring, and companies suffer.

At InMobi, for example, we have events like "InMobi Builders" where representatives of specific engineering teams share their stories with the entire organisation — stories include those of failure and introspection. These practices build engineering pride in the company and shine a light on the heroes that make our products and services tick. The response to these events also encourages more and more engineers to take up their place in the limelight, own their work, and take responsibility for the

business outcomes.

We've been intentional about creating an environment that breaks this cycle and fosters a truly tech-first environment.

Psychological safety: We recognise that the only way for engineers to truly learn and grow is by doing, and that means embracing failure as a necessary part of the process. This ensures decisions are rooted in data and the inherent strengths of the engineering team, rather than being swayed by external influences.

Connecting the business dots: We've worked to tie the entire business together through a flow- ing, logical metrics system. This allows our engineers to see the big picture and understand how their work directly impacts the company's success.

A culture of speaking up

The transformation we've witnessed at InMobi has been nothing short of remarkable. Engineers who were once hesitant to speak up are now driving the conversation, sharing their insights, and shaping the direction of

the company.

Recently I was trying to understand specific aspects of private exchange. The conversation was between me and five InMobi leaders. Since none of us had the necessary expertise, we gave an open call for anyone with better understanding to join us in the discussion. To our surprise, a relatively new engineer responded to our outreach. "I know how to do this," she said and proceeded to educate all of us with an in-depth analysis covering everything we wanted to know. She became the most sought-after voice in that discussion.

If the conversation had ended in the meeting room with me and my leaders, this young engineer's knowledge would have never reached us. The organisation would have suffered on many counts.

My biggest learning from this experience: ask open-ended questions, invite people to come up to you and share their expertise, and crowd-source answers to challenging problems.

The goal is to help our "I-shaped" engineers become "T-shaped" leaders with deep technical expertise, business knowledge, and great leadership skills. Equip them to seamlessly navigate the intersection of technology and business. Nurture a new generation of business-leading, confident engineers.

This is a journey of continuous experimentation. We hypothesise, observe outcomes, and refine our approaches to empower a generation of leaders with strong engineering backgrounds, unique skill sets, and problem-solving abilities.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Labour force course correction needed

Apropos of "Bridging gender gap in labour force" (FE, September 13), despite the Periodic Labour Force Survey showing a rise in the labour force participation rate (LFPR) for both rural and urban women, there is still a huge gap between men and women. States such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, and Assam need to push their socks to improve their LFPR as

they are home to a significant chunk of women's population of India. Yes, a crèche facility in the place of work is a great boost for all women workers as a huge burden is off their mind then. One hopes India inc. takes note of it and does some course correction. —Bal Govind, Noida

Health boon

The recent announcement by the Union Cabinet that all senior citizens aged 70 years and above will be

eligible for free health insurance coverage of ₹5 lakh for a family under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana has come as a boon. It is a matter of great relief as senior citizens were sore with the Modi government for not taking such a welfare measure in the past decade of its rule and even denied the 50% concession on train fare that they once enjoyed. A large section of senior citizens and pensioners, including bank retirees, are unable to

get health insurance cover due to prohibitive premium costs and 18% goods and services tax. One hopes that enrolling for the new scheme will not be cumbersome. Further, hospitals should be instructed to offer immediate cashless treatment for those admitted. Whatever may be the reason for this decision, the Modi government deserves appreciation. —Tharicus S Fernando, Chennai

Write to us at letters@expressindia.com



The present condition of Kanavu at Nadavayal in Wayanad. E.M. MANOJ

A dream that struggles to reawaken

With K.J. Baby's untimely demise, the fate of Kanavu, an alternative school for tribal children in Kerala, which he established in 1991, is hanging in the balance. **E.M. Manoj** travels to the school campus and speaks with its former students to understand its social and cultural significance

(Trigger warning: The following article contains references to suicide. Please avoid reading it if you feel distressed by the subject.)

In the quaint hamlet of Palukkunnu, located about two km from Anchukunnu town in north Wayanad, Kerala, a young Leela Santhosh underwent a 'shocking transformation' that would ultimately shape her destiny. "The unfamiliar conditions in a public school inflicted the first shock of my life," recalls Leela, 37, a member of the Paniya tribal community who embarked on her educational journey three decades ago. Today, she stands as a beacon of hope and creativity for the Adivasi community, having been recognised as the first Adivasi filmmaker from Kerala.

What came to her rescue was Kanavu (which translates to 'dream'), an alternative residential school set up by writer-activist K.J. Baby in 1991 at Cheengode, about two km from the nearest town of Nadavayal. Leela was able to feel at home on the school campus and is now an integral part of it as a trustee.

The names Kanavu and Baby remained closely intertwined, and the fluctuations in the fortunes of one affected the other. When the school ceased to function in 2007-08, Baby's dreams took a hit. The death of his wife, Shirley, a retired English professor and his pillar of support, two years ago plunged him into depression. Last week, Baby, 70, took his life at the school *kalar*, a structure built to train students in the martial art of Kalarippayattu and folk dances.

Standing on the verdant campus of Kanavu, Leela recounts her days at a public school when her native Paniya tribal tongue was unwelcome by her classmates, who spoke Malayalam. She felt isolated and unwanted. It's this alienation, she says, that forces tribal children to drop out of school. But life at Kanavu made her feel at home and encouraged her to learn.

Unique experiences and cultures

At the heart of Leela's activism lies a critical examination of the differences between conventional school systems and the special pedagogy Baby formulated for Kanavu. "There is a fundamental difference," she asserts, emphasising the need for educational methods that resonate with the unique experiences and cultures of marginalised communities.

In 2010, she gained recognition for her compelling 45-minute documentary, *Nizhalukal Nashedupetta Gotrabhumi*, which explores the opulent rituals and culture of various Adivasi communities in Wayanad, shedding light on stories that often go untold.

Through her work at Kanavu and her artistic endeavours, Leela embodies the spirit of resilience and change, paving the way for a brighter future for Adivasi children. Her story, she says, is not one of personal growth but an example of how inclusive schooling that respects cultural identities can help a child thrive.

When her family relocated from Palukkunnu to her mother's village in Nadavayal, Baby was revising his *Nadugadhika*, a maverick street play on



Divided into small groups, we ventured into villages, learning from interactions with the public. Each evening, we wrote down our experiences, honing our skills and perspectives.

LEELA SANTHOSH
Former student at Kanavu

the culture of the Adivasi tribe, penned and staged by him in the 1970s. The government briefly banned the play in the early 1980s due to its alleged links with the extremist Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist).

Leela and her friends were captivated by the play's rehearsals and the wealth of knowledge shared by Baby and his wife, Shirley. They were *Baby mama* (uncle) and *Shirley amma* (mother) to the children. The rehearsals were interspersed with lessons in clay modelling, drawing, and storytelling, in both their tribal language and Malayalam.

Nurturing environment

During this creative explosion, a dedicated group of around 30 children, aged between five and 13, thrived in this nurturing environment. The bond between the children and Baby's family, which also included his young daughters, laid the foundation for the ground-breaking initiative of establishing an alternative school.

With financial backing from Visthar, a Bengaluru-based NGO, Baby acquired six acres of land, where the dream took root. Alongside local children, the construction of roads, huts, and makeshift buildings began, setting the stage for a unique educational experiment.

Kanavu welcomed 30 students, primarily from tribal communities such as Paniya and Kutunayakka. Initially a day school, it later evolved into a residential institution, operating under a curriculum crafted with care and distinction. Baby, a settler from Kannur, found inspiration in the tribal way of life—their rich traditions, folklore, songs, myths, and art forms—which ignited

his passion for writing. He built the school on that foundation.

His vision was for education to be rooted in culture and creativity, treating all children—including his daughters—as equals, Leela recalls.

Classes began with storytelling in their native languages and gradually transitioned to Malayalam. "We performed better than our peers in regular schools," says Leela. "Divided into small groups, we ventured into villages, learning from interactions with the public. Each evening, we wrote down our experiences, honing our skills and perspectives," she adds.

The Kanavu experience was unlike any other, offering children exposure to illustrious literary figures and artists. Noted personalities such as writers Kunjunn, K. Satchidanandan, Arundhati Roy, and Sara Joseph, actors Nedumudi Venu and Sreenivasan, and film director Lohithadas graced the campus, sharing their insights and inspiring the children.

Diverse curriculum

At its peak, Kanavu boasted over 50 students and a dedicated team of seven teachers. Each day commenced at 5 a.m. with lessons in Kalarippayattu or Yoga. The curriculum was diverse, encompassing subjects from English and the sciences to psychology, mathematics, and even film studies. Afternoon sessions were devoted to music, traditional dance forms such as Mohiniyattam and Bharatanatyam, and hands-on agricultural activities, where students cultivated crops on their land.

Learning through experience became the mantra at Kanavu, where a musical troupe was born. This ensemble performed tribal folk songs across the country, generating funds for the school. Kanavu thrived, nurturing creativity and independence among its students.

However, plans for self-sufficiency launched in 2006 brought challenges. Despite efforts to generate funds through performances and agricultural activities—including cultivating plantains, rice, and elephant yam—financial hardships began to impact its day-to-day operations. Compounding these troubles were issues surrounding Baby's film *Guda*, based on the rituals related to tribal girls' menarche, which further strained the institution's resources.

Ultimately, the stewardship of Kanavu was transferred to the Kanavu Makal Trust—a 12-member board made up of tribal students, including Leela. Many former students pursued their own paths, launching successful careers in various fields, including martial arts, stone carving, and wellness. However, the school itself eventually ceased to function.

Leela's husband Santhosh, a Kalarippayattu

trainer in Kollam, was also a student of Kanavu. "The lessons we learned here made us self-reliant," he says.

E.A. Anitha, who taught at Kanavu for nearly three years, describes her experience as uniquely enriching. She first learned about Kanavu during a visit to the Narayana Gurukulam of Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati. While teaching, she also picked up the fundamentals of musical instruments alongside her students. "The experiences at the school greatly contributed to my career," says Anitha, now a public school teacher.

Her husband, P.G. Hari, a homeopath, was likewise deeply involved with the institution for many years. "Initially, I organised monthly medical camps for the children, but eventually, I became more integrated into the school community," he says. Throughout his time there, he gained valuable insights into the culture, traditions, and diverse knowledge across various subjects.

Today, there is an ambitious plan to rejuvenate Kanavu. However, the trustees face a pressing challenge: securing the necessary funding to revive the dreams once envisioned, says Leela.

At Kanavu, Baby's influence reached far beyond the realm of education. He masterfully harnessed the power of theatre and music as vehicles for social change, says Civic Chandran, activist and writer. "Theatre was not just a form of entertainment for Baby; it was a platform for activism," says Chandran, referring to *Nadugadhika*. Baby skillfully integrated tribal art and music into his work, both to preserve cultural heritage and advocate for social justice.

Chandran recalls that the play was staged over 600 times under the banner of the Janakeya Samskarka Veda, a cultural organisation aligned with the CP(M-L). The play deftly combined drama with political discourse and cultural commentary, though Baby was never a formal member of the party, says Chandran. On many occasions, these performances were framed by poetic introductions from prominent writers, including Satchidanandan, B. Rajeevan, and Balachandran Chullikkad, he adds.

Chandran himself took to the stage to introduce the play at hundreds of venues. Even after it was banned during a performance in Kozhikode, Baby and his troupe continued to inspire, performing the play inside the prison in Kozhikode after their arrest.

Baby's wife Shirley translated the play into English. Both the Malayalam and English versions of the play were later included in the syllabus of Calicut University.

Though their friendship had strained at one point, Chandran and Baby renewed their bond with Baby's novel *Maveli Mantran*, which was also set in the tribal milieu. "Perhaps I was the first reader of all his writings," Chandran reflects fondly, underscoring their deep friendship. The novel won the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award in 1994.

Baby later wrote *Bespukkana* and *Goodbye Malabar*.

His final novel *Goodbye Malabar*, published in 2019, is set in Malabar between 1884 and 1888, from the second arrival of William Logan, the author of *Malabar Manual*, as Malabar Collector, up to his transfer to Kadappa district in Andhra Pradesh. It is primarily narrated through the eyes of Annie, Logan's wife.

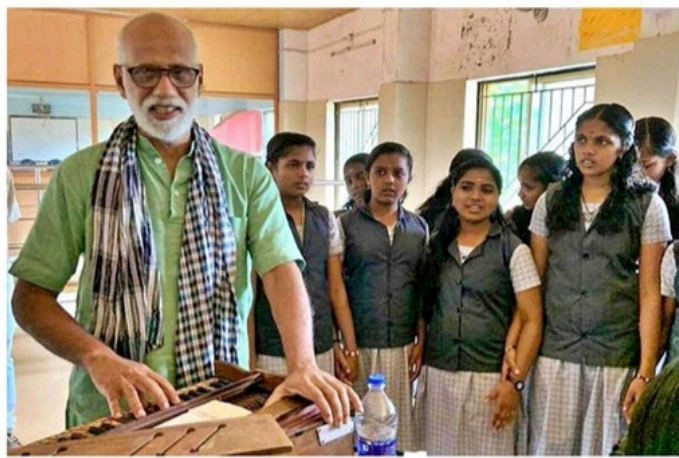
Art as catalyst for social awareness

Baby's work at Kanavu continues to resonate, illustrating the profound impact of art as a catalyst for social awareness and cultural preservation in Kerala's tribal communities, says Kerala's Tribal Development Minister O.R. Keli. His legacy remains a vivid chapter in the narrative of using creativity as a force for change, he adds.

Kanavu had established a model for providing informal education and career development for tribal children at a time when the school dropout rate among these children was a significant concern in the underdeveloped district of Wayanad, says the Minister.

But there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel for Kanavu, Baby's dream school.

(Suicide prevention helpline: DISHA 1056, Life-line Foundation: 9088030303)



K.J. Baby interacting with a group of students at Kanavu.

MAHARASHTRA



Maintaining vigil: Police personnel keeping guard outside Rajkot Fort, where the statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji collapsed on August 26, at Malvan in Maharashtra's Sindhudurg district. EMMAHUAL YOGINI

Toppling politics: from monument to mess

The collapse of Chhatrapati Shivaji's larger-than-life statue in the coastal town of Malvan in Maharashtra, which is heading for the Assembly election, has ruffled feathers across political parties in the State and the country. The sculptor is now in jail on charges of murder though no one was killed in the incident, reports **Maitri Porecha**

For a moment, Jaydeep Apte's black mask falls. Seated on a wooden bench on the veranda of the Malvan courthouse on September 10, he catches a glimpse of his nine-year-old daughter. His face breaks out in a smile, and he holds her eye briefly, until he is led into the courtroom. Apte, 39, is the primary accused in the case of the recent collapse of a statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji in southern Maharashtra's Sindhudurg district.

Commissioned by the Indian Navy, with a deadline of six months, the 28-foot-high statue, from sandal to sword, designed by Apte has caused great political turmoil, both in Maharashtra and at the Centre. The 17th-century Maratha king is seen as a challenger of British and Mughal (Muslim) authority, and a preserver of the (Hindu) faith. A number of political parties in the State derive their muscular imagery from Shivaji's Maratha might. Inaugurated at Rajkot Fort by Prime Minister Narendra Modi last year on Navy Day, December 4, the statue collapsed on August 26.

The court overlooks the Arabian Sea — turbulent during the monsoon, the lifeline of fisherfolk the rest of the year, and water sports enthusiasts' summer sojourn. Now, winds blow, and swimming has been banned. It was the strong winds, at 45 km per hour, and lashing rain that brought the statue down, cracking at the ankles. That, and poor construction, say prosecution lawyers.

With Apte is structural engineer Chetan Patil. They have been charged under Sections 109 (attempt to murder), 110 (attempt to commit culpable homicide), 125 (act endangering life and personal safety of others), 318 (cheating), and 315 (criminal act with common intention) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. However, when the statue collapsed, nobody was present at the site, so there was no loss of life.

Within the courtroom, with its weather-friendly sloping tiled roof, legal arguments begin on whether Apte's police custody should be extended to five more days, or whether he should be remanded in judicial custody in Sawantwadi Jail, about 50 km away.

The police press for an extension, saying their interrogation has not yet been completed. They are also awaiting the report of a Kolhapur-based forensic team that had collected metal samples from the statue and its supporting structure to check for wear and tear. The judge obliges; police custody is extended till September 13.

Apte's daughter, wife Nishigandha, 33; and mother, 65, sit stoically through the court proceedings. "After the statue collapsed, my husband received a call from the Navy asking him to visit Rajkot Fort," she says. "He was scared for his life, and went into hiding."

A band of five or six men, affiliated to the extremist youth organisation, Sambhaji Brigade, named after Shivaji's son and successor, had shown up at their apartment block in Thane district's Kalyan and flung eggs on the door, she says. "They pasted blown up pictures of him on the corridor walls and painted them black." His lawyer, Ganesh Sovani, says they also labelled Apte 'Shivdrohi' (someone against Shivaji).

My husband told me that there was immense pressure to finish the statue amid tight deadlines. After the parts arrived, the next 10 days were spent in securing electrical connection permissions

NISHIGANDHA
Sculptor Jaydeep Apte's wife

abandon his work, and spent the week in acute anxiety, before surrendering," says Nishigandha. Apte was arrested on September 4 in Kalyan.

Political pedalling

Within an hour of the collapse, Vaibhav Naik, a local MLA belonging to the Shiv Sena (UBT), visited the site. From here, armed with a long stick, he headed to the adjoining Public Works Department office. Later, videos of him entering the building aggressively and brandishing the weapon, and breaking wooden tables and glass windows were circulated on social media.

Over the next three days, at least 11 politicians across political parties visited the fort. On August 28, about 150 supporters of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP from Ratnagiri-Sindhudurg Narayan Rane and Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray clashed at the site when they arrived around the same time. They flung bricks, injuring at least two police personnel on duty.

On August 30, Modi was addressing a gathering in Palghar to lay the foundation stone of the Vadhavan Port, a project fisherfolk have been objecting to for the past three decades. There, he deified Shivaji, apologising to the warrior king, saying he bowed down at his feet. Shivaji was not just a king but also his 'aaradhy dev (god)', he claimed. He also asked for the forgiveness of Shivaji's followers. In the same speech, he also spoke about Hindutva proponent V.D. Savarkar.

On May 13, a hoarding had collapsed at Ghatkopar in Mumbai following heavy rainfall, killing 17 people and injuring 74. Modi had held an election roadshow in the area two days later, with Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut saying it was "inhuman" to do so. The collapse, however, did not elicit any reaction from the PM at the rally.

Playing statue

Navy Day commemorates Operation Trident, when the force had sunk three Pakistani naval ships during the 1971 Indo-Pak war. Usually, the day is celebrated with a display of naval might in Mumbai and Visakhapatnam. Last year's theme was 'Operational Efficiency, Readiness, and Mission Accomplishment in the Maritime Domain'.

Sources say the Defence Ministry and the Prime Minister's Office in New Delhi had asked

the Navy to build the statue and officials were keen on it being installed at Sindhudurg Fort, built on an islet in the Arabian Sea. The event was just four months away from the Lok Sabha election, beginning in April, and political leaders were on a ribbon-cutting, might-displaying spree.

Since people living inside the fort were opposed to the plan, a green patch of land on the coast adjacent to a *buruz* (watch tower), historically known as Rajkot Fort, was cleared to build the statue. It lay north-west of Sindhudurg Fort and belonged to the Maharashtra government. A fort-like structure mimicking erstwhile Maratha architecture was developed to house the statue.

Sources in the Defence Ministry say nearly ₹2.45 crore was transferred to the Navy by the State government, which is headed by the *Ma-hayuti* alliance, comprising the Shiv Sena led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, the BJP, and Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party. Even though the Navy has claimed that an official tender was put out, with five bidders, investigating police officers have said its copy has yet not been made available to them.

On September 2, 2022, Modi had unveiled the Indian Navy's new ensign, which did away with St. George's Cross, used in Britain from the Middle Ages, symbolic of the Christian military saint, and considered a colonial vestige. It was replaced with a design inspired by Rajmudra, Shivaji's royal seal. "There is a stark difference of opinion in the Navy on the new ensign," according to a source from the Defence Ministry. The Prime Minister has earlier referred to Shivaji as the 'Father of the Indian Navy', which sources say isn't a description that the Navy officially subscribes to.

The devil in the details

Between July and August last year, after Apte's firm M/S Aristry had been finalised for the project, he and several Navy officials paid three visits to the site. A five-foot-high clay model of the statue was approved by the Maharashtra government, and by August 14, the eve of Independence Day, it was subjected to 3D scanning and digital editing, enlarging the design to 28 feet. This was printed in plastic and divided into nine major parts and 637 sub-parts for pattern-making and moulding; each weighing 500-700 kg. They were cast in silicon bronze, a copper alloy, at three different foundries and welded together prior to transportation to Sindhudurg. The six-tonne statue would stand on a 10-foot pedestal resting on a five-foot underground plinth.

The heavy parts reached the assembly site at Rajkot Fort on October 25 last year. Apte had not received any advance from the government and mortgaged his home for a loan of ₹65 lakh to put in the initial money. He was paid in April 2024.

"My husband told me that there was immense pressure to finish the statue amid tight deadlines. After the parts arrived, the next 10 days were spent in securing electrical connection permissions [from the Maharashtra State Electricity Board]. My husband and his team were expected to erect a statue under 20 days by the end of November last year," says Nishigandha.

Apte had made sure to incorporate a scar on Shivaji's face, which legend suggests was inflicted on him during a skirmish with Afzal Khan, a general of the Bijapur Sultanate, and his men. Earlier statues of Shivaji and miniature paintings housed in the Chhatrapati Shivaji Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai, did not feature the scar.

Experts speak about how Shivaji's first sculpture in Pune was made in a single cast, as opposed to an assembly of parts by sculptor Vinyak Karmarkar. "In 1934, a second statue of Shivaji, housed in Sayaji Baug, Vadodra, was sculpted by G.K. Mhatre, and it still stands 90 years later," says Sandeep Dahisarkar, a Mumbai-based archaeologist and art historian. He says this shows Shivaji mounted on a horse, which gives it more stability.

Anil Sutar, who along with his father Ram Sutar, 99, is one of the last living legendary sculptors belonging to the Bombay School of Art, took five years to complete the about 600-foot-tall Statue of Unity of a standing Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in Gujarat. "The structural engineering and construction work was done by Larsen & Toubro. The statue was subjected to extensive wind velocity checks and tested to withstand earthquakes among other safety analyses," Anil says.

A government official on the condition of anonymity says, "We are not sure if all the safety tests were conducted on the Shivaji statue. Structural engineer Chetan Patil was only responsible for the certification of the pedestal and the plinth."

However, Apte's lawyer says "withstandability tests" were carried out. According to experts, statues are usually built and tested to withstand cyclonic winds of up to 150 km per hour. A joint technical expert committee has been constituted by the Navy and the State government to ascertain the exact reason for the statue's collapse.

Tourists and residents

Once the statue was inaugurated, Police Inspector Pravin Kolhe, in-charge of the Malvan police station, says about five lakh tourists visited the fort. Local beach resorts proudly added it to the list of sightseeing attractions in the town.

Sitting in her double-storeyed home overlooking the now-barricaded area with an empty pedestal wrapped in white tarpaulin sheets, Anita Redkar, 53, recalls hearing a loud thud amid stormy winds the day the statue collapsed. "I initially thought a part of our roof or house had collapsed," she says. Anita and her husband Babban, 62, a former fisherman, had started a snack stall when the statue came up to cater to tourists.

A staunch loyalist of Rane, who is affiliated with the BJP but was earlier with the undivided Shiv Sena and then the Congress, Babban says, "When I heard that his statue is being built here and Rane as well as his party is patronising it, I helped with arranging electric supply, water, and so on." He says he felt it would be *sewa* (service) and fetch his family some business from tourists.

"During the peak season [in winter], 5,000 tourists would arrive in a week to see the statue. Our daily income from providing tea and snacks ranged between ₹500 and ₹2,000. Now, who will come?" he says, desolately.

At least 30 police personnel guard the site 24x7, camping on the upper floor of the Redkar residence. Up to 40 others patrol various parts of the town to prevent any more political scuffles.

Around Malvan, shops have a small statue or a poster venerating Shivaji as a warrior hero. The police station too has one. "There are two factions in Maharashtra: one that considers him a great war hero, and another that reveres him as a Hindu God," says a local, asking not to be named.

A portrait of Shivaji's coronation hanging at a local eatery says: "Kashi ki kala jaati, Mathura main Masjid vasti, agar Shivaji na hote to sunnat sabki hoti" (The art of Kashi would be lost, Mathura would house mosques; but for Shivaji, everyone would have been converted to Islam).

Plans are afoot to install more Shivaji statues in the State for a political push ahead of the Assembly election, which is due later this year. These include the world's tallest equestrian sculpture at 696 feet in the Arabian Sea near



Tweedledum Vs Tweedledee

Vacuous Trump-Harris debate, bad news for world

Three days ago the world was treated to fresh evidence on why the idea of America no longer inspires either Americans or non-Americans. An ex-president, Donald Trump, who is trying to return to office and an incumbent vice-president, Kamala Harris, who is running for the same office, engaged each other in a televised 'debate'.



However, the format of the 'debate' made it more of a boxing match than a discussion of new and innovative ideas. It was designed for TRPs and with 110 million people watching, or at least tuned in, the TV station was perhaps the only winner. Neither Trump nor Harris succeeded in changing how they are perceived by the voters — who, actually, may not matter very much because the American president is elected indirectly by an electoral college which can sometimes vote differently from what the popular votes indicate. This has happened a few times. The debate was meant to be about what should really matter to Americans. And it revealed in stark relief the paucity of political talent and ideas in the US. Even rhetoric, or what we call jumlas, was missing. Trump appeared, as always, to nationalism which is a collective abstraction, while Harris preferred individual rights and entitlements like healthcare and abortion. In that limited sense, it was not unlike the election strategies of the BJP and the Congress.

Trump called Harris a Marxist which is a term of abuse in the US — just like 'running dog of capitalism' used to be in China — and she almost called him a criminal because of all the pending court cases against him. That was the level of debate between two presidential candidates in a country that likes to see itself as a political exemplar to the rest of the world. Both promised future prosperity by ensuring low inflation and more jobs. They would have fooled no one, because neither had a 'plan' despite claiming to have one. Both dissed each other and were probably unable to convince American voters that they had any fresh ideas to offer. They were like Tweedledum and Tweedledee, and this problem is reflected in the near 50:50 political division in the country.

Overall, the debate is unlikely to have changed voter preferences and sentiment in the swing states which have a large number of undecided voters. The surveys a week from now will make things clearer. The pundits say that it's unlikely to change very much and expect to remain within a margin of error of plus or minus 3 per cent. The vets are saying that they don't know enough about Harris, and an equal number say they know everything they wanted to know about Trump. The rest of the world should be worried by what lies ahead because regardless of who wins, there is wide political and popular consensus over issues of trade and immigration policies. America could become even more disruptive because it no longer has the power to impose its writ. India and Indians should be wary of the prospect of a superpower blundering along without a sense of purpose.

FROM THE VIEWROOM.

Paralympics joy

B Baskar

India's best-ever show in the recently concluded Paralympics in Paris was indeed heart-warming — a true testament to the grit and spirit of the Indian parathletes. With 29 medals — seven Golds, nine Silvers and 13 Bronzes — Indian parathletes surpassed their 19-medal haul at Tokyo Paralympics three years ago. There were several standout performances — shooter Avani Lekhara and javelin thrower Sumit Antil defended their Gold medals. High jumper Mariyappan Thangavelu won his third successive medal with a Bronze medal; he had won a Gold in Rio and Silver in Tokyo. Sheetal Devi, the armless archer's Bronze medal winning performance was perhaps the most viewed video on social media. Visually impaired Simran Sharma's Bronze in the 200 metres sprint, with the help of her guide Abhay Singh, was another terrific performance on the athletics track. In para-athletics, Indian para-athletes won 17 medals in all categories, followed by

para-badminton (five) and para-shooting (four). The most commendable aspect of this performance was the government and corporate support for our para-athletes. The government has announced ₹75 lakh for Gold medalists, ₹50 lakh for Silver medalists and ₹30 lakh for Bronze medalists. Mixed events athletes have been promised ₹22.5 lakh. The Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya has also promised support to the para-athletes for the 2028 Los Angeles Paralympics. The government's Khelo India and TOPS (Target Olympic Podium Scheme) have played a key role in our para-athletes shining at the global level. Indian Oil has now promised monthly scholarships and medical insurance to India's para-athletes. This should spur more corporates to step in and also provide more support through product endorsements. While we celebrate our para-athletes, their splendid performances must spur us to make our society more inclusive and disabled-friendly, especially public infrastructure, which remains woefully inadequate for the differently-abled.

CAPITAL IDEAS.



RICH MISHRA

A recent post on X by Awanish K Awasthi, Advisor to the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, attracted attention. It read: "ONGC, recognised as India's largest crude oil explorer, intends to construct a refinery and petrochemical complex in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, with a significant financial commitment of ₹70,000 crore."

The public sector oil giant's intent to diversify is not new. Addressing shareholders at the 31st Annual General Meeting of the company on August 30, Arun Kumar Singh, Chairman and CEO of the company, said: "Petrochemicals demand in the country is expected to remain strong, and will continue to be a key driver of oil and gas demand in the future. The focus on petrochemicals is part of ONGC's diversification strategy."

"The company is planning to increase its presence in oil-to-chemicals that will convert crude oil directly into high value chemical products and adding value proposition in the changing energy landscape," he went on to say. The question is not ONGC's intent to diversify into petrochemicals, but whether the country's top most hydrocarbon explorer and producer should focus on downstream?

Whether the entities under ONGC Group which have expertise in downstream and petrochemicals should be the ones taking such an initiative?

Whether before making such announcements a proper due diligence should be done or not, after all ONGC is a listed entity.

A counter can be that recently Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, following his meeting with Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd's top management, had posted: "...We explored the establishment of an oil refinery and petrochemical complex in Andhra Pradesh with an investment of ₹60,000-70,000 crore. I have sought a detailed plan and feasibility report in 90 days. About 5,000 acres of land will be required for this project, which the government looks forward to facilitating in a hassle-free manner."

Just as in the current situation where ONGC has not responded to the post, at that time BPCL also remained silent. Also, whether a on-land project makes a viable proposition as it will also require creation of infrastructure to flow the feedstock — crude oil or natural gas, and if LNG is used, to create storage facility.

ONGC's Energy Strategy 2040 talks about downstream petrochemicals too. It reads: "ONGC already has a significant presence in the market through OMPL, OPAL and HPCL's

Let ONGC chart its own course

Political interests should not be allowed to govern the public sector giant's business decisions



petchem investments. There is a potential opportunity for ONGC to expand capacity and target a play in the C2 and C3 chains across bulk and intermediate products."

"Considering the scale benefits in both capex and opex, ONGC should evaluate an at-scale play (around 1 MTPA). Several players are evaluating green field/brownfield capacity addition in attractive segments of the value chain. If it is unable to move quickly to claim the space, ONGC should wait for competitive moves to play out in the near to medium term before reassessing the investment case," the strategy statement said.

Those tracking ONGC point out, as a standalone entity, ONGC's focus should be on domestic and international oil and gas exploration and production business opportunities as well as provide value linkages in other

sectors of energy business. Critics also question the location — Prayagraj. On the face of it, the decision looks more political than a proper business decision. Years back also an attempt was made to set up a refinery in and around Prayagraj (erstwhile Allahabad), but after doing the feasibility study the project was left in the back-burner.

sectors of energy business.

Whatsoever may be the case, petrochemicals are the normal transition for energy majors today. But there are also entities supposed to undertake these activities.

ONGC's first diversification to downstream happened when it acquired stakes in MRPL, the second was acquiring HPCL. Today, all entities under ONGC Group umbrella have a predefined task. While MRPL and HPCL are into refining and retailing, OPAL is into petrochem business and OTPL is into power. Recently, ONGC Green came into existence.

Spelling out the future outlook at the AGM, the Chairman and CEO had said: "We continue with our stable capex programme with emphasis on focused exploration, rejuvenation of mature western offshore fields and faster monetisation of eastern offshore deep-water fields."

The vision statement on downstream/midstream investments reads thus: "Globally, NOCs have invested in midstream and/or downstream opportunities internationally to gain or consolidate upstream access or as a part of larger value proposition for the country beyond oil and gas. For example, Chinese NOCs and government agencies in Africa have historically leveraged a comprehensive orchestrated value proposition (that extends beyond oil and gas into other areas) for priority upstream access."

The pertinent point is that it states that "Investments to be driven by a strong business case: ONGC's approach towards international downstream investments should be guided by a strong business case that targets."

"Attractive returns in downstream/midstream target countries where there is capacity deficit (e.g. refining capacity deficit in some African markets) and in value-chain segments where ONGC's ability to win is high (e.g. higher group capability in refining driven by domestic refining portfolio)," it said.

Clearly, if political interests are left aside, the PSU giant knows what it wants to do. As is the case with most public sector undertakings, decisions are taken depending on what political masters decide. The entities should be left alone to find their own course.

Harris now looks at a challenging fifty days

She needs to explain her plans, particularly on immigration — especially to those who are still in the 'undecided' category

Sridhar Krishnaswami

Except for media pundits and political strategists, few are analysing the outcome of the first debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. Even Republican operatives are convinced, some reluctantly, that Tuesday evening was not certainly with the former President who simply could not stay away from his rants. Neither could he resist the temptation of repeating a wild and nonsensical assertion that immigrants in Ohio were killing dogs and cats and eating them.

Trump strategists and debate preps must have been quite edgy every time the 45th President wandered into a set up of Harris, a skillful play of wantonly getting him worked up so much as to make him ramble or say things that were simply incoherent.

There's barely 50 days to go for the final showdown in November, and the campaigns are down to business. Harris may have scored a facile win of 63 to 37 per cent in a post debate flash poll; and

mega stars like Taylor Swift have endorsed her.

But the numbers are still tight with Trump continuing to do well on economy and immigration. And this is what advisors of the former President are telling him: stay focused on the issues as crowd sizes, cats and dogs are not critical.

TAUNTING TRUMP

It is official now — at least for the time being — that there will not be a second debate between Trump and Harris as the former President has taken to his social media site to announce his decision. But Harris continues to taunt Trump for a second appearance stressing that they owed it to the people as she made it known in a rally at North Carolina, a state that has not been with Democrats since 2008 but now seen in a "can win" category.

Harris may have done well in the first encounter but still has a long way to go by way of fine tuning economic and immigration policies of her administration. Trump may have exaggerated notions of "millions and



GOOD START. Long way to go

millions" of illegals laying waste to America and pulling the country down, but many analysts believe that Harris must have a clear plan of how to tackle the illegal immigrant problem — put at around 12 million — including securing the borders and a pathway to citizenship.

The former President takes the view that illegals drain the economy without acknowledging the contributions; likewise crime rates are going down, not "going through the roof" as claimed by Trump. The challenge for Harris is not in the absence of a plan but in clearly

explaining it to people, especially those who are yet in the 'undecided' category.

Even as the campaigns are restlessly counting the days to November 5, they are also looking at September 30: the deadline to reach a compromise on a Continuing Resolution to keep the federal government running. The uneasiness seems more with the Republicans, especially in the swing states, on the implications of a shutdown and in the context of Trump urging the Grand Old Party to take a hard-line on "election security" language.

In a Truth Social post, Trump said that if Republicans do not get absolute assurances "... They should, in no way, shape or form, go forward with a Continuing Resolution". Even a partial shutdown of the governments make lawmakers edgy. Or as one unnamed Republican legislator put it, "We are not going to shut the government down. Trump must want a Democrat majority in the House. We don't."

The writer is a senior journalist who has reported from Washington DC on North America and United Nations

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A pragmatic comrade

This refers to 'Left loses its moderate voice, bids adieu to Yechury' (September 13). In the death of Sitaram Yechury, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) has lost a pragmatic comrade who showed the rare willingness to test the limitations of hard ideologies for Marxist ideology for the imperatives of democratic and practical politics. His inspiring journey from a firebrand student leader to General Secretary of the CPI(M) and how he leveraged each of his positions to protect the idea of India and democracy holds lessons for budding leaders across the political spectrum. A warm and articulate person with a good sense of humour, he endeared himself to leaders and the public

alike. His ideological and moral clarity as well as political-tactical mindsets will be missed.

M Jeyaram

Shivamangal, TN

Hydrogen powered trains

This refers to 'Indian Railways plans field trials of hydrogen powered trains by January 2025' (September 13). With this, Indian Railways (IR) is adding another feather to its cap. At a time when many developed countries such as China and Italy have just entered this field and are at initial stages, IR's progress in having reached field trial is simply amazing. With hydrogen as a source of its rolling stock, the Railways would move towards being a net-zero carbon emitter by 2030. It would help in the long run in reducing

consumption of electricity produced through coal. It would be better if IR plans to deploy the first set of hydrogen based fuel engines on freight corridors for maximising the usage of its energies.

RV Baskaran

Chennai

Health Insurance for aged

The government's recently announced health insurance scheme for the super seniors is welcome. The scheme looks to be attractive, but it has left out many areas. The scheme pertains only to hospitalised ailments and treatment. Most aged person suffer from ailments that requires them to incur medical expenses on a long-term basis. For such seniors, regular diagnostic tests are inevitable and these can cost a

substantial amount. Periodic geriatric consultations, even in the absence of visible health issues, are necessary. The scheme, therefore, fails to address the entire health issues of the aged population.

AN Rajarohan

Amritapuri, AP

GST on research

Apogee "On the research runway" (September 13), the removal of GST on universities shows the government's realisation that it will impede constructive research which could result in inventions and innovations. Also, continuous research in areas with high import dependency, especially semiconductors, pharmaceutical goods and solar panels, is the need of the hour.

Expecting immediate returns on research is unreasonable.

Researchers must be allowed to carry-out both academic and industrial research without being pressured to deliver results quickly.

NR Nagarajan

Sivakasi, TN

Forward farming

Apogee "Bayer launches initiative 'Forward Farming' in India" (September 13), if the focus is on direct seeding of rice, Bayer must provide the farmers with an environment-friendly pre-emergent weedicide since DSR method results in severe weed growth, which poses threat during harvest apart from higher moisture consumption.

Rajeev Magal

Halemy Village, Karnataka