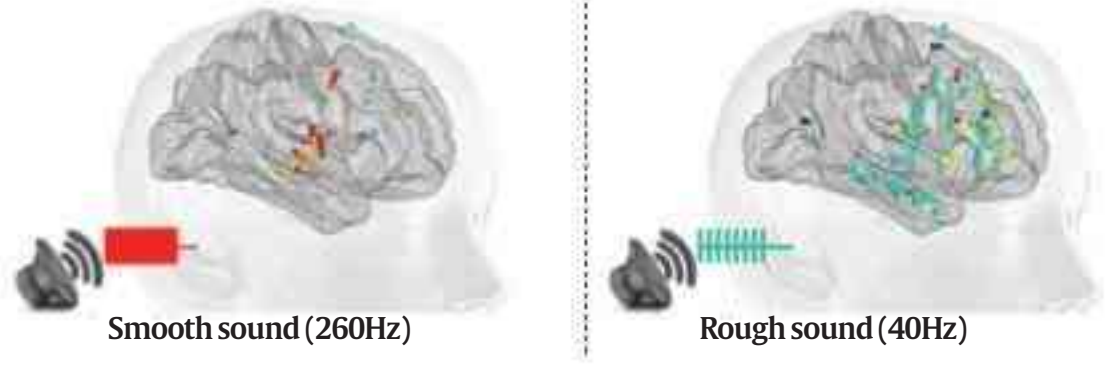


TELLING NUMBERS

Frequencies at which sounds are disturbing, and how brain reacts

CLASSICAL AUDITORY NETWORK

AVERSION NETWORK



While smooth sounds (above 130 Hz) induce responses in the brain's "classical" auditory system, rough sounds (40-80 Hz) activate a wider network involved in processing aversion and pain. *University of Geneva*

CERTAIN SOUNDS, such as a car horn or a human shriek, are jarring to the listener. Alarm sounds, too, are characterised by repetitive sound fluctuations, which are usually situated in frequencies within a certain range. But when a sound is heard within these frequencies, what happens in the brain to hold the listener's attention to such an extent? Neuroscientists from the University of Geneva (UNIGE) and Geneva University Hospitals (HUG) have now sought to analyse what goes on in the brain when people hear these frequencies. Their results, published in *Nature Communications*, have identified which frequencies are perceived as rough.

The researchers conducted experiments with participants who were made to listen to various sounds with frequencies between 0 and 250 Hz. "We then asked participants when they perceived the sounds as being rough (distinct from each other) and

when they perceived them as smooth (forming one continuous and single sound)," researcher Luc Arnal said in a statement released by UNIGE.

The researchers were able to establish that the upper limit of sound roughness is around 130 Hz, while the sounds considered intolerable were mainly between 40 and 80 Hz. When sounds are in the smooth range, the conventional auditory system is activated. But when sounds are perceived as harsh (especially in the 40-80 Hz range), they induce a persistent response that additionally recruits a large number of cortical and sub-cortical regions that are not part of the conventional auditory system. These regions are related to aversion and pain, Arnal said in the university statement.

This is the first time that sounds between 40 and 80 Hz have been shown to mobilise these neural networks, although these frequencies have been used for a long time in alarm systems.

THIS WORD MEANS

SAGITTARIUS A*

A black hole at the centre of the Milky Way. Why has its recent behaviour intrigued scientists?

A SUPERMASSIVE black hole sits 26,000 light years away from Earth, near the Galactic Centre, or the centre of the Milky Way. Called Sagittarius A*, it is one of the few black holes where we can witness the flow of matter nearby. Since the discovery of Sagittarius A* 24 years ago, it has been fairly calm. This year, however, Sagittarius A* has shown unusual activity, and the area around it has been much brighter than usual. In research published recently in *The Astrophysical Journal Letters*, scientists have sought to explain why this is happening.

It may be that the Sagittarius A* has become hungrier, and has been feeding on nearby matter at a markedly faster rate, which one researcher described as a "big feast". A black hole does not emit light by

itself, but the matter that it consumes can be a source of light. A large quantity of gas from the S0-2 star, which travelled close to the black hole last year, may now have reached the latter. Other possibilities of the heightened activity, the paper says, are that Sagittarius A* could be growing faster than usual in size, or that the current model that measures its level of brightness is inadequate and is in need of an update.

The researchers noted three extraordinary occasions this year that marked the black hole's unusual behaviour. On May 13, the area immediately outside Sagittarius A* was twice as bright as compared to any previously recorded instance. Reprocessed recordings from previous years reaffirmed that the brightness had indeed increased.

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Why 'final NRC' is not final

In consolidated list of National Register of Citizens applicants in Assam, a note has underlined that no one's position in it is final. What are the ways in which someone listed as a citizen can still be removed?

ABHISHEK SAHA
GUWAHATI, SEPTEMBER 22

WHEN THE National Register of Citizens (NRC) authorities in Assam published a consolidated family-wise list of applicants recently, they appended a note that those included may also be excluded later, and that no position in the list is permanent. As of now, the NRC has included 3.11 crore applicants as citizens, and excluded 19 lakh.

Under what circumstances can an included person's name be deleted?

- The note described three circumstances:
 - Any fact of misrepresentation of particulars/documents discovered by the authorities;
 - Discovery of a person being a Declared Foreigner (or a migrant of 1966-71 who is unregistered with a Foreigners Regional Registration Office [FRRO]); a person with a case pending at a Foreigners Tribunal, or a person being a D (Doubtful) voter or a descendant of such a person;
 - Receipt of an opinion by any Foreigners Tribunal declaring a person as a foreigner.

Who is a D-voter or a Declared Foreigner?

D-Voter is a category introduced in Assam in 1997 to mark people unable to prove their citizenship during verification. A Declared Foreigner is one identified as such by one of the 100 Foreigners Tribunals (FTs), which are quasi-judicial bodies that opine whether or not a person is a foreigner within the meaning of the Foreigners Act, 1946.

Under Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955, people who entered Assam between January 1, 1966 and March 25, 1971 need to register with an FRRO. They would have all rights of a citizen except the right to vote, which would be granted after 10 years. In the NRC note, those who entered Assam within this 1966-71 window but did not register themselves, too, are liable to be excluded.

How could such persons have been included in the NRC in the first place?

There have been allegations that Declared Foreigners have entered the final NRC. Parallel citizenship determination processes intersect in Assam, and the NRC process worked without any synchronised database that



Applicants check their names in NRC during a hearing in Guwahati in May. PTI

would have reflected the real-time case status of a suspected foreigner. A centralised database is in the making, as a part of an e-FT programme, which will streamline databases of people declared or suspected to be foreigners by parallel processes (such as Foreigners Tribunals, Border Police reference, and NRC) and also store the biometrics of such people.

Another possible explanation is that a person declared to be a foreigner, having failed to produce papers to convince a Foreigners Tribunal, might have convinced the NRC with the same documents. In fact, many Declared Foreigners from the Foreigners Tribunal process have later been declared "Indian" in higher courts. Also, a large proportion of Tribunal cases are decided by *ex parte* rulings, so that the person has not argued his defence. These same persons could have presented documents to NRC officials.

An NRC official said that the Foreigners Tribunal is a superior authority to the NRC, as ruled by the Supreme Court — "it is of no consequence whether or not a Declared Foreigner is in the NRC".

Are there other circumstances in which a person listed in NRC can get removed?

State officials say it is "legally possible"

for the Border Police to make a reference against a person in the NRC. There is, however, no clarity whether the state will use that option. "If there is solid and genuine ground, then a reference can be made," a government official told *The Indian Express*.

This option with the Border Police was also highlighted by Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in an interview with the Assamese channel NewsLive recently. He said that the Border Police should investigate those they suspect of having "manipulated" legacy data for inclusion in the NRC.

Is it possible to go for re-verification of the NRC, as demanded by some?

In the interview, Sarma suggested that the government should approach the Supreme Court for re-verification, jointly with the All Assam Students' Union and the NGO Assam Public Works (APW), the original petitioner in the NRC case. APW president Aabhijeet Sharma told *The Indian Express* that they will move the Supreme Court demanding 100% re-verification.

Upamanyu Hazarika, Supreme Court advocate and convener of the anti-immigration platform Prabajan Virodhi Mancha, said in a recent press statement: "In case of the NRC

after its final publication Rule 10 of the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Card) Rule 2003 vests power in the Registrar General or his nominee to remove any names from the citizens list if it is found to be on the basis of incorrect particulars... The statutory position being that the executive has the authority to re-verify entries in the NRC, a fact-finding investigation in this regard will enable the Registrar General to undertake re-verification."

Rule 10 lists circumstances in which a person's name can be deleted from the final NRC — "by an order of the Registrar General of Citizen Registration or any officer authorised by him". These include (i) death; (ii) the person ceasing to be an Indian citizen under Section 8 of the Citizenship Act; (iii) revocation of Indian citizenship under Section 9; or (iv) particulars provided by the individual or the family found to be incorrect."

The NRC note, too, cites Rule 10 as a provision under which names can be deleted, but it does not mention re-verification.

What happens to the over 19 lakh who are already excluded?

They will have the chance to appeal at the Foreigners Tribunals. The first step is obtaining an "exclusion or rejection" order from the NRC authorities, but there is no clarity on how long this will take. As per amended rules, a person has 120 days (understood to be counted from the day of the issuance of the rejection order) to appeal. If no appeal is filed in 120 days, the Deputy Commissioner of that district will make a "reference" to the Tribunal.

The state government has announced that those excluded will get legal aid through the District Legal Services Authorities. "The real challenge is before FTs where extensive documentation is required. Getting certified copies of documents from appropriate authorities is the first big hurdle. The poor and the illiterate are baffled," said Gauhati High Court advocate Aman Wadud who is among a group of lawyers who have decided to offer *pro bono* services to the poor.

The BJP and its lawyers' body, the Akhil Bharatiya Adhivakta Parishad, are formulating ways to provide legal aid to "genuine Indian citizens". Several NGOs are also training volunteers to work as para-legals, while activists across the state have formed groups and are holding awareness meetings.

Is Indian Ocean helping Atlantic currents?

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 22

IN THE Atlantic operates a large system of ocean currents, circulating the waters between the north and the south. Called Atlantic Meridional Overturning Current, or AMOC, it ensures the oceans are continually mixed, and heat and energy are distributed around Earth.

For the last 15 years, however, scientists have been worried by signs that AMOC may be slowing, which could have drastic consequences on global climate.

Now a new study suggests that AMOC is getting help from the Indian Ocean. Warming as a result of climate change, the Indian Ocean is causing a series of cascading effects that is providing AMOC a "jump start", in one researcher's words.

How AMOC works

On its website, the UK Met Office likens AMOC to a conveyor belt and explains how it works. As warm water flows northwards in the Atlantic, it cools, while evaporation increases its salt content. Low temperature and a high salt content raise the density of the water, causing it to sink deep into the ocean. The cold, dense water deep below slowly spreads southward. Eventually, it gets pulled back to the surface and warms again, and the circulation is complete. This continual mixing of the oceans, and distribution of heat and energy around the planet, contribute to global climate.

Another oceanic system, which makes news more frequently, is the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO). This involves temperature changes of 1°-3°C in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean, over periods between three and seven years. El Niño refers to warming of the ocean surface and La Niña to cooling, while "Neutral" is between these extremes. This alternating pattern affects rainfall distribution in the tropics and can have a strong in-

fluence on weather in other parts of the world.

What is happening now

AMOC has been stable for thousands of years. Data since 2004, as well as projections, have given some scientists cause for concern. What is not clear, however, is whether the signs of slowing in AMOC are a result of global warming or only a short-term anomaly.

AMOC had weakened substantially 17,000 to 15,000 years ago, and it had global impacts, Yale University researcher Alexey Fedorov said in a statement released by the university. The new study, by Fedorov and Shineng Hu of Scripps Institution of Oceanography, appears in *Nature Climate Change*.

Indian Ocean's role

Fedorov and Hu's work involves climate mechanisms that may be shifting due to global warming. Using observed data and computer modelling, they have plotted out what effect such shifts might have over time. In this study,

they looked at warming in the Indian Ocean. "The Indian Ocean is one of the fingerprints of global warming," Hu said in the statement.

Their finding: As the Indian Ocean warms faster and faster, it generates additional precipitation. This draws more air from other parts of the world to the Indian Ocean, including the Atlantic. With so much precipitation in the Indian Ocean, there will be less precipitation in the Atlantic Ocean. Less precipitation will lead to higher salinity in the waters of the tropical portion of the Atlantic — because there won't be as much rainwater to dilute it. This saltier water in the Atlantic, as it comes north via AMOC, will get cold much quicker than usual and sink faster.

"This would act as a jump start for AMOC, intensifying the circulation," Fedorov said in the statement. "... We don't know how long this enhanced Indian Ocean warming will continue. If other tropical oceans' warming, especially the Pacific, catches up with the Indian Ocean, the advantage for AMOC will stop."

has worked very positively on climate change. The reality is that our agriculture and energy sectors are totally committed to sustainability. The big agri-business [which is often blamed for the forest fires], which has transformed Brazil into one of the most powerful agricultural centres of the world, is also committed to sustainability. I think there is a dimension of misperception about them.

Have the Brazilian President's statements on environmental governance encouraged illegal activities?

What I can tell you is that no important company in Brazil, be it agriculture or industry, will engage in illegal deforestation or illegal fires. There is not a single important Brazilian producer of agriculture, or industry, that would risk to engage in this illegal activity.

André Aranha Corrêa do Lago is Brazil's Ambassador to India. The above comments are excerpts from an interview given to Amitabh Sinha and Shubhajt Roy

Full interview on www.indianexpress.com

AN EXPERT EXPLAINS

Amazon fires: why issues around forest are complex, what Brazil is doing



ANDRÉ ARANHA CORRÊA DO LAGO

Forest fires in the Amazon are nothing new. But their numbers and intensity seem to have gone up of late. Are more trees being cut and burnt?

Most of the statistics being shown are in what we call the 'legal Amazon'. It is the denomination that includes some areas of Brazil that don't have the Amazon biome, but are very close to the Amazon. It was created in the 1950s for tax breaks and things like that. Many of the fires [being reported] are on land that has already been deforested for many years and is traditionally burnt every year. It is something similar to the agricultural burning you see in India in some months.

The other issue is of deforestation. The fight against deforestation in Brazil has been extremely successful since 2005. We have reduced more than 80 per cent deforestation rate in Brazil since then. There was an increase of deforestation last year and probably this year too, but you have to take into consideration that this is inside the 80 per cent reduction we have achieved in the last few years. So if you say that it increased by 10 per cent, it is 10 per cent of a very much reduced rate of deforestation. Illegal deforestation and illegal burning of trees is a crime. So it is a question of law enforcement.

But there is the issue of scale. The preserved Amazon is larger than all of India. Our President [Jair Messias Bolsonaro] has clearly said that he would allow zero illegal burnings. But there is legal fire too, an agricultural practice, and he has decided that even the legal fires would be forbidden for the next two months. So, even the farmers who have the right to burn, like in India, like everywhere else, would not be allowed to burn trees.

But why is there an increase in tree felling and burning?

There is a huge debate about that in

Brazil. There are those who believe that the fact that the President always had a very strong opinion on these things would have triggered some people in the region to do [cut and burn trees] more than they normally do. There is another set of people who believe that a reduction in the budget of the law-enforcement structure has led to this. Then, there are people who say that the dry season [usually conducive for forest fires] is particularly dry this year. There has been no change in policy, no new legislation, and no move that has reduced the capacity of the government to intervene and act.

Amazon fires were discussed at the recent G-7 meeting. The message that came across, going by what the French President said, is that the international community does not seem to have enough confidence in the Brazilian government's intention to act...

There is one very sensitive issue for my President, and that is the issue of sovereignty. One way in which the French President's statements were interpreted in Brazil was that he was questioning Brazil's sovereignty over the Amazon. I think coun-



Smoke from an area of the Amazon forest in Brazil on September 17. Reuters

tries need to be very careful when they talk about these things. The issue regarding the Amazon has complex elements that sometimes are not taken into consideration.

There is a degree of criticism that you can make, but this criticism cannot be in a sense that questions the capability of a country in dealing with the problem. Nobody knows the Amazon better than the Brazilian people and Brazilian institutions. It is useless to see it in a way that questions the capability of a country,

So, is the international focus on Amazon in a way questioning Brazil's capability, and also its right, to deal with the Amazon on its own?

I don't think anyone is doing it consciously. But there is a possibility that it would get interpreted in that way. That, in fact, is the interpretation of many people back in Brazil, who are worried about Brazil's right and freedom to develop... All these issues about environment and climate change are a discussion in the context of development.

How would Brazil assure the world that it is doing whatever best it can to control the Amazon fires?

The world can be sure that Amazon is a central issue for us. Of course, there is different opinion inside Brazil about what is to be done. Some people think there is too much forest, others think there is too little forest. Still others think that we need to exploit some minerals in that area. But one has to respect that this debate has to exist within the context of Brazil.

... The fires are real and probably there is an increase too. But the truth is that Brazil

has worked very positively on climate change. The reality is that our agriculture and energy sectors are totally committed to sustainability. The big agri-business [which is often blamed for the forest fires], which has transformed Brazil into one of the most powerful agricultural centres of the world, is also committed to sustainability. I think there is a dimension of misperception about them.

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André Aranha Corrêa do Lago is Brazil's Ambassador to India. The above comments are excerpts from an interview given to Amitabh Sinha and Shubhajt Roy

Full interview on www.indianexpress.com



VAN GOGH WOULD'VE SOLD MORE THAN ONE PAINTING IF HE'D PUT TIGERS IN THEM.
— BILL WATERSON

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

An inseparable destiny

The Indian Muslim's fate is tied to that of the country. Destroying one will severely affect the other



ABDUL KHALIQ

MISSING THE COUNT

Discrepancies in tiger census raise questions about the credibility of institutions involved in the exercise

IN JULY, THE tiger census report showcased a significant achievement for India's conservation efforts. The population of the animal had gone up by more than 700 since 2014, according to the report. That India was home to nearly 3,000 tigers was a remarkable improvement over 2006-2007, when the population of the animal in the country had hit an all-time low of about 1,400. An investigation by this newspaper, last week, has, however, raised questions over this enumeration. It shows that the survey conducted by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) over-reported the country's tiger population by 16 per cent. The tiger numbers had, no doubt, gone up. But the investigation revealed the population of the animal could be 221 less than that claimed by the survey.

This is not the first time that questions have been asked of the tiger census. The crisis in Sariska in 2005, when this newspaper reported that all tigers had been wiped out from the national park in Rajasthan, shone a light on the flaws of the pug mark method used to arrive at the animal's population. This method was highly subjective and riddled with the possibility of duplication, scientists argued. After 2006, a more rigorous three-phase method was adopted to count tigers. This involved collecting data on the presence of the tiger and its prey base. Satellite surveys were used to assess the state of the animal's habitat. And, finally, camera-traps were set up in selected pockets to identify individual tigers. This method helped the country's conservation authorities to arrive at more realistic numbers of the animal than those enumerated through the pug mark method. Questions, however, continued to be raised about the tiger audits. For example, the quality of the camera traps was a major issue in many tiger habitats. But the WII and NTCA worked on fool-proofing the census's methods. However, the latest tiger census did not follow well-established norms of tiger population estimation. For example, population surveys typically disregard very young tigers because of their high mortality. But 46 tigers counted in the census were less than a year old. The survey also disregarded other protocols, including those used to identify the uniqueness of an individual animal through its stripes.

The Royal Bengal Tiger is the poster child of India's conservation efforts. Its numbers are a matter of international prestige for the country. Confined largely to India, the animal sits at the top of the food chain of several ecosystems and its population is a good indicator of the health of these habitats. Institutions responsible for its enumeration must, therefore, be guided by ecological imperatives — and eschew the temptation of scoring immediate brownie points.

LET PRICES RISE

Boosting farm incomes is essential for economic recovery. Government must avoid containing food inflation at all costs

ON FRIDAY, THE Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor Shaktikanta Das said that future interest rate reductions will depend on "incoming data". This came just a day after his statement that the current consumer price index (CPI) inflation levels allow enough "room" for continued monetary easing. While policy rate reductions, beyond the 110 basis points already effected this year, will certainly add to the feel-good from the finance minister's slashing of corporate taxes, a note of caution is in order. If overall retail inflation from September 2016 to August 2019 has averaged only 3.50 per cent, the credit goes mainly to food items, which have a 45.86 per cent in the CPI. Average consumer food inflation has been even lower, at 1.38 per cent, over this 36-month period. If CPI inflation has to remain within the RBI's target of 4 per cent, it would obviously hinge upon sustained low food prices.

This is where the temptation to engage in "supply management" to contain food inflation at any cost, should be avoided. Unfortunately, the beginnings of that are evident. On September 13, the commerce ministry imposed a minimum export price of \$850 per tonne on onions. Also, the state-run MMTC Ltd has been asked to import the bulb in order to control retail prices, which have crossed Rs 50/kg in major metros. These moves have angered onion growers, who say that the government showed no such enthusiasm when prices ruled consistently low for much of the last three years. They have a point. Suppressing food prices through artificial means is surely not the way to meet the RBI's inflation target. Between December 2018 and August 2019, annual wholesale price inflation for food articles has moved up from minus 0.42 per cent to 7.67 per cent. While retail food inflation in August was still only 2.99 per cent, it has to eventually catch up with the trend in wholesale prices. This, if anything, should be viewed as a much-needed price correction.

The supply disruptions and possible crop loss from excess monsoon rains — 15.3 per cent in August and 31.8 per cent so far this month — could well lead to some hardening of prices in the coming weeks. Onion apart, we are seeing this in pulses, maize, jowar and soyabean as well. But in all these cases, prices are only recovering from lows. Also, *arhar* and *moong* rates, while ruling higher than last year, are still trading below their official minimum support prices. The worst thing the government can do now is to invoke the Essential Commodities Act or ban exports alongside permitting duty-free imports. Boosting farm incomes is more likely to guarantee an economic recovery than slashing of interest rates. The current slowdown, remember, began with Bharat. It should end with Bharat.

AFTER A TOXIC election season when the Muslim was everybody's whipping horse, the Prime Minister, showing consummate magnanimity in victory, reached out to all who have felt stigmatised and excluded with a new inspirational slogan — *sabka saath sabka vikas sabka vishwas*. Heartened by this assurance, some Muslims named their new-born children "Narendra", even as Muslim leaders welcomed his resolve to win over the "trust" of the minorities.

Aware of the sheer magnitude of their powerlessness, most Muslims, however, live in dread of the future. The gratuitous cruelty of the last few years — lynchings, ghar wapsi, anti-Romeo squads, beef vigilantism and the rhetoric of pure hate, cannot be subsumed by catchy slogans of solidarity and togetherness. Had the Mahatma been alive today, he would remind the political class that brotherhood, like non-violence, "is not a garment to be put on and off at will. Its seat is in the heart and it must be an inseparable part of our being".

A few weeks back, the print media made passing mention of the Rajasthan High Court verdict acquitting five Muslims, mainly Kashmiris, of all charges relating to the 1996 Samleti blasts. That these men had spent 23 years in prison for a crime they did not commit aroused neither horror nor indignation, because such injustice has become commonplace. What these victims reportedly narrated of their experience in various prisons during those interminable years is Kafkaesque — bone-chilling techniques of torture, forced signing on blank paper, and hideous treatment at the hands of their fellow inmates. Even among these social outcasts living in wretched prison conditions, Muslims were targeted for being Muslim. It struck me that our jails are a microcosm of India today, with shades of an unwritten National Register of Citizens in force.

These five men have finally got back their freedom, but there are numerous Muslims who remain in custody as alleged terrorists. A 2012 study by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences found that although Muslims account for 10.6 per cent of the Maharashtra population, they comprise over 30 per cent of the prison population. The study observed

that the police and intelligence agencies' bias against Muslims led to a number of arrests under TADA and MCOC Acts, and even the Official Secrets Act. It is common knowledge that in the wake of a terrorist act, scores of Muslims are rounded up and incarcerated — actions viewed as unavoidable "collateral damage" in the war against terrorism.

Instead of addressing the colossal injustice suffered by this community, the government has recently strengthened the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) by introducing amendments that will further imperil the lives of innocent Muslims. The latest amendment — to name and shame an individual by designating him a terrorist even without conviction by a court — will ensure that he remains forever a suspect. An outcast in the eyes of society.

Our Constitution is a secular Republic, but the line separating the state and religion has blurred. Supremacist, ethnocentric Hindutva with its explicit anti-Muslim bias now provides the ideological underpinning for State social policy. There is profound disquiet at the government's plan to extend the National Register of Citizens (NRC) to the rest of the country. In blatant disregard of the fundamental principle of equality, the objective of the NRC is to identify and deport "infiltrators", barring Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Christians who are perceived as refugees fleeing persecution.

The entire exercise is clearly aimed at hounding undocumented Muslims and will, inevitably, punish even those among them who are Indian but have no documentary proof of birth or citizenship. This exercise to declare people "non-citizens" based on religion as one of the criteria, will go down in history as one of the most unrighteous state-sponsored acts in a democracy. The fact that the entire Assam NRC operation is being monitored by the Supreme Court makes it even more reprehensible.

The social ecosystem is steaming with schismatic tensions and ubiquitous daily cruelty. The sacred Jai Shri Ram chant has morphed into a political slogan of power and intimidation. On the first two days of the recent Parliament session, the central hall resonated

with religion-tainted sloganeering. BJP MPs chanted Jai Shri Ram to which the Opposition responded with shouts of Jai Hind and Allahu-Akbar. Predictably, the odious example set by Parliament members has spilled onto the streets, with regular incidents of Muslims being assaulted for refusing to chant Jai Shri Ram.

A leading social scientist has attributed BJP's thumping victory in 2019 to the spread of Hindutva through a relentless RSS machinery and the resultant capture of the collective consciousness of the majority. The decades of indoctrination of the young and old in the Shishu Mandirs, Vidya Bharati schools and shakhas — across the country, have come to fruition. Considering that the millions of disciples churned out by these institutions are infused with ultra-nationalistic fervour and rabid anti-minority views, there is reason for the minorities to be afraid.

In this fraught atmosphere comes the staggering Kashmir decision. A state which has been in turmoil for decades is now a hell-hole, incarcerated behind spools of barbed wire. This ill thought-out move has dealt a body-blow to peace and brotherhood in the country. And the endless strife in the Valley will inescapably also affect communal harmony in the mainland. As relations with Pakistan have reached a point of no return, the animosity against Pakistan, like always, will mutate into vilification of the "unpatriotic" Indian Muslim. Worst of all, the asymmetry and injustices of the social order and the fear that the dominant evoke in the dominated will turn the country into a veritable tinderbox, vulnerable to insurgency and terrorism.

Tragically, Gandhi's land is now one of the most hate-filled, violent societies on Earth. The state today is in thrall of using brute power to settle conflicts with one's own people. What the all-powerful forces seem to ignore is the inalienable truth that the Indian Muslim's destiny is inextricably tied to that of the country: Both will rise or fall together.

The writer, a former civil servant, is secretary general of the Lok Janshakti Party. Views are personal

Our Constitution is a secular Republic, but the line separating the state and religion has blurred. Supremacist, ethnocentric Hindutva with its explicit anti-Muslim bias now provides the ideological underpinning for State social policy. There is profound disquiet at the government's plan to extend the National Register of Citizens (NRC) to the rest of the country.

PHILOSOPHER OF THE FUTURE

Though controversial, Martin Heidegger offers clues to understanding modernity



IN GOOD FAITH

RAMIN JAHANBEGLOO

SEPTEMBER 26 MARKS the 130th birth anniversary of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger. More than 40 years after his death, the influence of Heidegger's work on different fields of thought is overwhelming. He is not only the most influential influential philosopher of modernity but also its most controversial thinker. His best known work, *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*), although notoriously difficult and complex, is generally considered to be the most important philosophical work of the 20th century. Heidegger is hailed today by many as a groundbreaking thinker whose work in ontology and metaphysics determined the course of 20th century philosophy and exerted a seminal influence on the development of contemporary thought including theology, architectural theory, psychology, literary criticism, cognitive science and political theory.

Heidegger has attracted most attention worldwide in the past 30 years. Part of this has also to do with the controversy around his politics and his Nazi connections in the 1930s, when he was the rector of the University of Freiburg. Heidegger's post-war silence about the Holocaust and his evasive interview with *Der Spiegel* in 1966, published posthumously, added to what is known today as the "Heidegger Affair". But it was Victor

Farias's *Heidegger and Nazism* that unleashed a series of articles, special issues of journals and books on Heidegger. Many of Heidegger's critics tried to establish a link between the ontological foundations of *Being and Time* and Heidegger's membership of the Nazi party.

All this criticism came down to one notorious phrase by Heidegger where he equated the phenomenon of concentration camp with the practice of mechanised agriculture and the nuclear threat. According to Heidegger, "Agriculture is today a motorised food industry, in essence the same as the manufacture of corpses in gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as the blockade and starvation of countries, the same as the manufacture of atomic bombs." What is shocking in Heidegger's observation is his fundamental incapacity for moral discernment. As George Steiner writes, "Like so many other intellectuals, Heidegger was manifestly caught up in the brutal, festive inebriation which swept across Germany after some 15 years of national humiliation and despair. As we know from the *Spiegel* interview, he was preparing a peculiarly mendacious posthumous apology for his own role in the 1930s and 40s. But the thinker of being found nothing to say of the Holocaust and the death-camps". Heidegger's silence on Auschwitz was the sign of a terrible truth which was never articulated by him in his phenomenology of the existential. As pointed out by many philosophers, includ-

ing Paul Ricoeur and Emmanuel Levinas, Heidegger's ontology overlooks or ignores the ethical relation between *dasein* (the state of being) and the other. We can also point to Hannah Arendt's analysis of Heidegger as a fundamentally un-political philosopher, one whose post-rectorial career was marked by total withdrawal from the public space.

Many of us might not consider Heidegger as an ethical person, but his philosophy continues to have the spiritual power of helping us raise questions about the destiny of humanity and the world. Some interpreters still regard him as a prophet who can show us a way out of modernity's dilemmas.

Generations to come might not spend more time than our contemporaries to savour the full body of Heidegger's writings, but they will certainly continue to relate to his mode of thinking through other fields of knowledge. This could even be easier when the missionary period of Heidegger studies is over. Heidegger offered us a way of thinking about fundamental human concerns that makes it difficult to pigeonhole him. To understand how thoughts come to us, as Heidegger says, is to learn to think of every other instance of living. Thus we can say, with Heidegger, that the only thing essential to thinking is thinking. If there is some truth to this claim, then the philosophy of Heidegger will belong to our future.

The writer is professor-vice dean, Jindal Global University

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



SEPTEMBER 23, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

CHECKING HOARDERS
THE GOVERNMENT IS likely to arm itself with powers to detain without trial antisocial elements including hoarders and blackmarketeers. An ordinance will be issued in the next few days: The Union Cabinet, which gave its approval to the measure, felt there should be some means of curbing antisocial elements. Conscious of the criticism that such a step would evoke, the government would ensure that the detention was subject to review by a board whose members would be chosen by the chief justices of high courts. Under Article 22 of the Constitution, a law can be made to detain a person for three months "without obtaining the opinion of an advisory board".

CAMBODIA RELIEF
WHILE GOVERNMENTS AND aid agencies debate the politics and fine print of the problem, relief officials and diplomats say hundreds, if not thousands, may already be dying in Cambodia every day of hunger and disease. Why isn't large-scale international aid going to Cambodia — a country which has been stalked by wars and a reign of terror, and which now faces what US state department officials say is a famine "terrible beyond imagination?" US officials say the fault rests with the Phnom Penh government and its Vietnamese backers since they have thus far refused to agree on a programme of international controls over relief distributions.

PADDY PRICES FIXED
THE CENTRE HAS told state governments to ensure that the implementation of any system evolved by them for procurement of paddy, rice and coarse grains does not impede free flow of kharif cereals from one state to another. The method of procurement has been left to be determined by states taking into consideration local conditions. In a communication to the state governments and union territories, the union agriculture ministry has intimated procurement prices of different varieties of paddy. The procurement price of fine variety has been fixed at Rs 93 and superfine variety at Rs 103 for the 1979-80 marketing season.

THE IDEAS PAGE

A lifeline for India

In one year, PM-Jay has created a framework for comprehensive universal healthcare



PREETI SUDAN AND
INDU BHUSHAN

NINE YEAR-OLD Shiv, suffering from a leaky heart valve, sobbed as his despondent father took him back home after being told by the doctor in Bihar that the surgery he required would cost Rs 3 lakh — more than what his father could possibly earn in three years. He got a new heart, and a new life at Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences thanks to the timely and cashless treatment under Ayushman Bharat — the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY). When Shah Mohammad, 50, got treated for a fractured jaw in Gurugram, he could not believe that he did not have to pay a single rupee as he walked out of the private hospital, an exclusive bastion of the wealthy in India thus far. Singri, a 38 year-old, got a new lease of life after a football-sized tumor was removed from his head. Carrying the tumor since his teenage years, he says that PM-JAY helped him become fit and an eligible bachelor in his village in Jharkhand. These are only some of the myriad stories of joy, hope and triumph that have played out over the last few months in the country.

Ayushman Bharat is a conscious attempt to holistically address health, encompassing prevention, promotion and ambulatory care at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. It promises to bring healthcare to the poorest through two components: Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs) delivering comprehensive primary healthcare through the development of 1.5 lakh HWCs, and PM-JAY, the health assurance scheme delivering secondary and tertiary care to 55-crore people through a health cover of Rs 5 lakh per family per year. Ayushman Bharat has been designed on the fundamental precepts that prevention is better than cure, and that no one should fall into poverty because of expenditure on healthcare, or die, because they cannot afford treatment.

The journey of Ayushman Bharat started in Jangla in Chhattisgarh, on April 4, 2018, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the first HWC. On August 15 last year, he formally announced PM-JAY to the nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort. This promise of free healthcare to the poorest 55 crore people in the country would help them avoid the catastrophic healthcare expenditure that pushes an estimated 6 crore below the poverty line each year in India. A hugely ambitious and truly transformative scheme, PM-JAY has sought to cover a population larger than that of Canada, United States and Mexico put together. A year ago, on September 23, the prime minister launched the scheme in Ranchi, Jharkhand.

A year later, the dream of Ayushman Bharat, as envisioned by the prime minister, is on its way to becoming a reality and is off to a promising start. More than 20,000 HWCs have been made operational. More than five crore people have been screened for a whole range of common non-communicable diseases. Under PM-JAY, more than 45 lakh hospital admissions have taken place for cashless treatment in more than 18,000 empaneled hospitals across the country, resulting in savings of more than Rs 13,000 crore for the beneficiary families. Every three seconds, a beneficiary is being treated, and the numbers continue to rise.

Ayushman Bharat has provided a platform and framework for the country to ac-



CR Sasikumar

celerate its progress towards comprehensive universal healthcare. Envisaged as an alliance with states, PMJAY has, in several states and union territories, an opportunity to extend the benefits to far larger numbers, beyond those covered under the scheme. Eleven states/UTs have expanded the coverage to include almost all families. In addition, 23 states/UTs have expanded the beneficiary base with the same benefit cover as under PMJAY or lower in some cases. Several states have merged their many ongoing schemes with PMJAY to make implementation simpler for both beneficiaries and participating hospitals. They don't need to deal with different target groups, rates and reporting systems. Karnataka has merged seven different existing schemes into one, while Kerala has merged three different schemes.

The private sector has played an active role in the early pick up of the scheme. More than half of the empaneled hospitals are private. Over 62 per cent of the treatments have been done by private hospitals. PM-JAY has created a massive demand for private (and public) sector services by making hospital facilities accessible to 55 crore people. In tier II and tier III cities, private sector hospitals are already witnessing an almost 20 per cent increase in footfall. Some hospital chains are already contemplating plans for expanding their capacity or opening new facilities in underserved areas. Public sector facilities have streamlined their processes so as to improve service quality and amenities with funds from PMJAY.

With its focus on delivering healthcare to a large population, Ayushman Bharat is set to become one of the largest drivers of jobs in the country. With the setting up of 1.5 lakh HWCs by 2022, an expected 1.5 lakh jobs will be created for community health officers, including 50,000 multi-purpose health workers. It has generated an estimated 50,000-60,000 jobs in the first year itself and is expected to add over 12.5 lakh jobs in both public and private sectors over the next three to five years, with 90 per cent of them in the healthcare sector and the remaining in allied sectors such as insurance and implementation support. As more people seek in-patient care, 1.5 lakh beds will be added in existing and new hospitals. This, in turn, will lead to the creation of around 7.5 lakh new opportunities for doctors, nurses, technicians, phar-

Ayushman Bharat has provided a platform and framework for the country to accelerate its progress towards comprehensive universal health care. Envisaged as an alliance with states, PMJAY has in several states and union territories has an opportunity to extend the benefits to far larger numbers, beyond those covered under the scheme.

macists and frontline healthcare workers such as Pradhan Mantri Arogya Mitras (functionaries who are the key interface between beneficiaries and the scheme).

This ambitious scheme is supported by a strong IT backbone that facilitates the identification of beneficiaries, records treatments, processes claims, receives feedback, and addresses grievances. A live dashboard helps in monitoring and improving performance, based on real-time data and regular analysis. This platform also helps states to compare their performance. A strong and sophisticated fraud prevention, detection and control system at the national and state level has proved to be critical for PM-JAY to ensure that frauds are largely prevented. If attempted, they are quickly detected and strong action is taken.

A good beginning has been made, but a lot needs to be achieved before we reach our goals. Opportunities that lie ahead need to be effectively harnessed. One such lies in exploiting the potential of collective bargaining and leveraging economies of scale. This could deliver more affordable and quality healthcare by negotiating better prices for various devices, implants and supplies, and also leveraging other policies such as Make in India. Ensuring quality treatment of patients by prescribing and ensuring adherence to standard treatment protocols is another opportunity waiting to be fully harnessed. Further strengthening the linkage between HWCs and PMJAY will improve the backward and forward referrals and enhance overall healthcare services, especially to the poor. "Green field" states with no past experience of implementing healthcare schemes have to work harder to scale up their progress. All states will need to make sincere efforts towards providing seamless health services to the last mile.

As the Ayushman Bharat revolution unfolds, we are optimistic that India will make sure healthcare is no longer a privilege and is available to every Indian. Thus, many more stories of joy, hope and triumph will be written, like those of Shiv, Shah Mohammed and Singri, and of so many others will be assured the gift of life and good health.

Sudan is secretary, Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. Bhushan is CEO, PM-JAY

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Trump's outsourcing of the asylum process sets an un-American example to the world."

WASHINGTON POST

Us and them

Politics after NRC threatens to change the old framework of Assamese nationalism for a new identity politics that privileges religion over region



KABIR FIRAUQUE

A DISTANT BUT distinct memory from my student days, which I often recall with fondness, concerns an incident so trivial that I would never have thought of bringing it up in connection with something as serious as the National Register of Citizens (NRC). Yet there can be no better illustration of what our identity meant to us:

It was after dinner at our engineering college hostel, and we were taking a new boarder through an introductory routine. We asked him to chant the national anthem; he faltered a little. Are you not Indian, we asked. I am Naga, the freshman said with pride. You are Naga but Indian first, one senior started to preach, when another interrupted him: Let him be Naga first if he wishes, as long as he is Indian; just as we are Assamese first and also Indian.

No need for anyone to outrage. Nearly every Assamese I know is as proud of his or her nationality as an Indian from any other state. That observation by my friend was just a reflection of the times. In the wisdom of the 1980s, "Assamese first" was the identity we wore on our sleeve. A logician might find the idea questionable — each one of us was all his identities simultaneously — but what the phrase conveyed was tied with emotion. It remains in circulation today; the question is whether it carries the same import as before. As we get more and more "mainstreamed" and a new politics of religion competes with the regional pride of old, every Assamese may one day need to reflect on what we once were, and what we are turning out to be.

Take the NRC. The exercise was religion-neutral at its core, seeking to identify citizens on the basis of a cut-off date. But after its completion, the focus has been on the religious faith of one section among the 19 lakh excluded — Bengali Hindus, who may eventually be given citizenship — and even more on one section among the 3.11 crore included. The NRC has given legitimacy to lakhs of migrant-origin Muslims, who had papers to show that they or their ancestors had entered Assam before the cut-off date. For this very reason, many of them had welcomed the NRC, but it turns out that they are still being viewed with suspicion despite — and because of — their high inclusion in districts bordering Bangladesh.

What I have set out to reflect on is not, however, whether the number of exclusions is too low or just right, or the unanswered question of what will happen to those who will still be left out after the NRC is trimmed further after the appeals and legislation. This is about a puzzle called the Assamese identity, now confounded by religion.

Religion has cast its shadow in strange ways. Take the "Miya Poetry" controversy, when verses of self-assertion by Bengal-origin Muslims caused offence to many

Assamese, leading to police booking them. Those who had filed the complaints included a number of Assamese Muslim organisations. In one news report, a complainant was quoted as saying that "we are Assamese first and Muslims later". Those two words again, so nostalgic and relatable. Come to think of it, however, it begs a question: Is it necessary to mention your religious faith to show that you are more Assamese than others?

Indeed, the idea of Assamese identity, for some, has often coexisted with contempt for the other. The 1979-85 agitation against illegal immigration may have limited its focus to those who had entered Assam after a cut-off date, but the emotions it generated were built on larger Assamese anxieties around the migrant communities as a whole. When the cut-off was agreed and signed, it came with the implicit premise that the greater Assamese society would accommodate migrants on the right side of that date. Instead, a number of factors, including population growth and political consolidation around the AIUDF, have raised the anxieties around Bengal-origin Muslims, while the proposed Citizenship Amendment Bill has threatened to reopen a fault line between Assamese and Bengali Hindus.

When the Bill returns, seeking to accommodate Hindu migrants from Bangladesh, it will upset the section of Assamese whose opposition to illegal migrants does not recognise religion. It will also raise a new question, between one Assamese and another. If a Hindu migrant is a better migrant than a Muslim migrant, does it mean, by extension, that an Assamese Muslim is less Assamese than an Assamese Hindu?

As a society, we appear to be holding on. We still pat each other on the back, thump our secular chests with Assamese pride, and still celebrate our shared culture and shared history of centuries — from the Battle of Saraighat when our ancestors brought Mughal invaders to their knees, to the language riots when our elders were killed, and the agitation against illegal immigration when 855 of our generation became martyrs.

As voters, however, we are already divided. In 2016, when the BJP won Assam for the first time, a survey by Lokniti-CSDS, published in this paper, found that two-thirds of Assamese Hindus had voted for the BJP and two-thirds of Assamese Muslims for the Congress. Like Assamese Hindus, two-thirds of Bengali Hindus had voted for the BJP, while Bengali Muslims had split evenly between the Congress and AIUDF.

Maybe I worry too much, but I keep an eye on the Muslim population, already over one-third of Assam's total by 2011. Yes, that population includes both Assamese and Bengal-origin Muslims. But if it keeps growing, will an Assamese who looks at me as a fellow Assamese today, see instead a Muslim tomorrow?

Who knows, that day too may come. It can never be sweeping, though; there will always be some who continue to believe in what we once were. Defined by the cliché we used that night more than three decades ago. Assamese first. Non-negotiable.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BOOST FOR ECONOMY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial 'Taxing times' (IE, September 20). No matter how forcefully the Centre tells us about the fast recovery of the economy, the ripple effects of the slowdown will negate all its assertions. The low collection of taxes will discourage spending which is necessary for circulation of money in the market. A leap of faith will not perk up the economy.

Tarsem Singh, Mahilpur

WRONG TARGET

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Vapourised' (IE, September 20). It is perplexing that vaping has been banned when there are more injurious variants of tobacco. Is there any empirical data to back the measure? The ban gives an undue advantage to conventional tobacco business.

Deepak Singhal, Chennai

MAKE IT SAFE

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'SC calls it own verdict on SC/ST act against spirit of Constitution' (IE, September 19). Manual scavenging is unsafe, unhygienic and an underpaid job. The governance has still not provide a large number of people involved in this profession with proper safety equipment like masks and oxygen cylinders. Every few days, someone in this country dies while doing this hazardous job.

Ayushi Bisht, Dehradun

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to editpage@expressindia.com or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301. Letter writers should mention their postal address and phone number.

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

NOT MY LANGUAGE

THIS REFERS TO 'The Hindi scare' (IE September, 2019). In the context of languages playing vital role in cultural integration, we need to ask: Which language and what culture? Hindi could fit the bill, the purpose is to foist the dominant Hindu culture on the languages of the South. But then, subaltern groups in India speak more than 780 dialects. Their world view cannot be articulated in any Sanskritised language.

Dev Athawale, Amravati

VIEW FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD



A weekly look at the public conversations shaping ideas beyond borders — in the Subcontinent. Curated by Aakash Joshi

KASHMIR AND THE WORLD

IN PAKISTAN AT least, if not the Subcontinent as a whole, the Narendra Modi government's decision last month to alter the status of Jammu and Kashmir is going to be the focus at the UN General Assembly. Two leading newspapers, *Dawn* and *The Express Tribune*, have editorials on the subject, though with quite differing approaches.

On September 19, *Dawn* comments on the "speculation" that "there has been speculation of a possible meeting on the Kashmir issue at the multilateral moot, with Washington playing the role of facilitator". But the assertion is followed by a caveat: "However, considering India's intransigence — with its stubborn insistence that the decades-old Kashmir issue is an 'internal' or 'bilateral' matter — as well as the American leader's own mercurial nature, it is obvious that not too much hope should be pinned on any breakthroughs in the US over the next few days."

The editorial, then, moves on to criticising the ongoing communications blockade in Kashmir, the arrest of political leaders, most recently Farooq Abdullah, and alleged human rights violations by Indian forces. Yet, what it does not do is use the upcoming UNGA as a peg to praise the Pakistan government's diplomacy. Instead, it calls for New

Delhi to engage in a dialogue with both Pakistan as well as Kashmiris.

The Express Tribune, however, takes a different approach. Taking of from the discussion on Kashmir in the European Union parliament, the editorial first says that EU Minister Tytti Tuppurainen — speaking on behalf of European Commission Vice President Federica Mogherini "said the EU would continue to closely monitor the situation, while demanding that freedom of movement and means of communication in the besieged territory should be fully restored as well as access to all essential services".

Then, it makes a jump to claiming a jingoistic diplomatic victory: "The incumbent government's efforts to internationalise India's illegal annexation of Kashmir on August 5 and the barbarism that continues there ever since are commendable. The PM and his team are leaving no stone unturned to keep the issue burning bright."

MEDIA MUZZLED

Going by the press, the freedom of the press and to dissent is under threat across South Asia. In the last week alone, two leading English-language newspapers have commented

"Should we expect public floggings of journalists, as in the days of Gen Zia?" That's how *Dawn's* editorial ends on September 20.

The newspaper's reaction is understandable, given that the Pakistan government has approved the creation of "media courts" to "dispose with complaints relating to the media within 90 days".

Calling it an "extremely unwise and provocative idea", and acknowledging the "qualifiers" the PTI government in Pakistan has put in place, the editorial claims that "no one buys the fiction that such courts are desired for any benign purpose". It calls the last year "an unrelenting attack on the press".

Dawn acknowledges that no government, especially the military dictatorships of Pakistan, has been comfortable with a free press. It also recalls the "plethora of 'press advices'" issued during the dictatorship of General Ziaul Haq and the restrictions put in place by the Nawaz Sharif government. Yet, it asks this government to hold itself to higher standard rather than do worse than its predecessors: "Instead of acquiring the reputation of a regime that recalls the darkest days of censorship, the government should strengthen Pemra and PCP by respecting their autonomy rather than proposing a system whereby they would function as mere post offices."

VIP CULTURE

The Kathmandu Post in its September 16 ed-

itorial also defends the freedom of speech and expression, and the right to criticise the government. The problem began when Minister for Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation Yogesh Bhattarai allegedly delayed a flight and were confronted and criticised by passengers. First, a half-hearted apology was issued by an aide of the minister. But soon, "Gyanendra Shahi, one of the passengers who heavily criticised Bhattarai, was detained by the police. The minister's apology, issued by his aide, followed yet another statement by the ruling party's youth wing, declaring that Shahi has been banned from entering Kaski district."

The editorial marks the fatigue in Nepal of this VIP culture, of the entitlement of certain sections of the ruling classes. Recently, there was a protest in which citizens honked the horns of their cars in unison to protest ambulances being delayed due to VIP convoys.

It also counsels the ruling communist party and its affiliates: "This unnecessary show of power from the government and the NCP is undemocratic. While Shahi's behaviour in the matter could be considered aggressive, he was only attempting to vent his frustration — show his dissent — at the way government officials have been acting. In a democracy, the ruling party and the government must not attempt to suppress people's views, especially when those views are critical of the government."