

# THE BEACON

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## AI shaping global politics

PC Vanlalhlani

**BENGALURU:** Artificial Intelligence is evolving quickly, transforming not only business or daily life but also politics—personal and global, said Juan Antonio March, Diplomat and Author. He emphasised the need to shift from a nation-centric approach to a human-centric one. On September 8, the Bangalore International Centre (BIC) hosted a discussion on the theme “AI: The Architect of Politics.” The discussion explored the current transitional period in global politics, economics, and society, heavily influenced by technological advances, particularly artificial intelligence. March said that technology, if used wisely, can transform mobility, urbanisation, and political structure. The book also points out individual responsibility in shaping the political structure for future generations. He said, “The key thing is that we have to think that the centre of gravity has to be the individual, not the nations,” while emphasising the importance of individual needs and experiences in shaping future political frameworks. He also argued for transforming global governance structures, suggesting a move towards a “united humanity organisation” rather than a collection of nations. This would provide a more interconnected and cooperative global society in times of global crisis.

## Urban design beyond physical boundaries

Dibyaroop Ghosh

**BENGALURU:**

True “publicness” goes beyond a place's mere physical design, and public places should not just be defined by their physical attributes but also by their ability to facilitate social interaction and a sense of belonging, said Dr Gautam Bhan, a professor at the Indian Institute for Human Settlements. The Museum of Art and Photography (MAP) hosted a talk on September 8, 2024. The “City and Ideas of the Public” session explored the idea of different ‘publics’ and how a city's culture and sense of belonging change with time. The event brought in urbanists, urban planners, and architects to shed light on urban public spaces and the cultural identity associated with those places. Dr Bhan describes publicness as a set of “tensions” that society negotiates that occasionally sinks to urban



Dr. Bhan addressing the gathering at MAP.

Dibyaroop Ghosh

form. These tensions directly relate to the restrictions laid out by the state, the influences of the market on the availability of space, and the divisiveness. “Our public spaces cannot erase themselves of the divisions and stratifications of our society.” This acknowledgement calls for an intentional design that embraces diversity,

allowing different cultures to flourish. Cultural interlaps are critical in creating inclusive public spaces. He focused on “cultural production” by citing examples from cities where public spaces have been transformed through collective actions, from street art in Sao Paulo to local festivals in

Bangalore. These activities are remnants of cultural expression and tools for its construction and negotiations. “Insurgent publicness” brings up the power of grassroots movements that challenge existing norms with societal structures. Incidents like the protests in Shaheen Bagh highlight how public spaces

became “private enough” for public demonstrations and provided safety to the protesters amidst riots. Such incidents empower marginalised voices and radically change how we see public spaces. “The state regulates who can be in public and how,” he said, emphasising how the imposition of regulations hinders true inclusivity. This statement underscores the need for more advocacy and activism regarding the “openness” of public spaces to all people, regardless of their background. While talking to The Beacon about how architects and urban planners mitigate the issues regarding social exclusion and marginalisation of specific communities, Dr Bhan opined that urban planners need to intentionally use the design of a space to break the tensions that they know are coming with the area. He added that the initial problem they need to address is the use of space in how people interact.

## 'Motivational speech' sparks legal controversy

Tharun Adhitya

**BENGALURU:** In the wake of controversial comments by religious leader Mahavishnu, while delivering a lecture in government schools in Tamil Nadu that went viral on social media last week, constitutional experts opined that religious instruction of any kind in educational institutions is a violation of principles enshrined in the Constitution. State funds run these, and such instructions are disallowed, says PK Revanth Antony, an advocate and founder of Mannin Mainthargal Periyakkam. On Teachers' Day, Mahavishnu, the founder of the ParamPorul Foundation, addressed students from two government schools in



Mahavishnu interacts with govt. school students Paramporul Foundation

Chennai. What was intended to be a motivational speech quickly turned controversial when he claimed that disabilities result from one's actions in past lives. His remarks sparked outrage and triggered the public and specially-abled community, particularly a blind teacher from the school. This speech propagated

superstitious beliefs among students which questioned how appropriate it is to have religious discussions in schools. Speaking to The Beacon, Antony explained that religious talks can only be allowed when the institution is privately funded. He mentioned that according to The National Commission for Minority

Educational Institutions Act, 2004, special provisions have been given to minorities to engage in religious discussions. “Still, it cannot be included in the course, nor can they do it during the class hours.” Anthony stressed that freedom of speech has certain limitations which must be followed. “Statements like these can't be covered in the right to speech as he didn't speak in his ashram but in a state-funded educational institution, which violates Article 28(1),” he added. The religious leader has been booked under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, remanded, and taken into judicial custody.

## Hybrid stories & Indian identity

Manjari Chatterjee

**BENGALURU:**

In an enriching session on Children's books, “An Indian Story,” Dr Shailaja Menon, co-editor, challenged the perception that Indian stories must fit into traditional stereotypes to be considered “Indian.” Contemporary Indian literature does not bound itself in such traditional definitions that confines it, she opined at the book discussion event held at the Bangalore International Centre (BIC) on September 8. Multiple cultures, languages, and systems influence Indian society. “In reality, Indian readers are all hybrid, especially in post-colonial societies like ours. However, subjectivity is inside us,” she said. Contemporary Indian literature reflects hybridisation, which makes it very grounded to Indian culture. Books like My Mother's Saree, Ammachi's Glasses, and The London Jungle Book do not fit into the stereotypes but are an inherent part of Indian Literature, she said. The richness of these narratives, she concluded, lies in their ability to embrace and reflect our complex reality.

## Awareness drives climate action

Daiti Baidur

**BENGALURU:** Climate change is real, and its effects are evident through the hotter summers, heavier rainfall, and colder winters sweeping across our country. The battle of controlling climate change is won if the cause is known, and therefore, awareness about the activities that generate carbon dioxide is desirable, said Rajan Mehta, author of “Backstage Climate”. The first step in tackling climate change is awareness, including its causes, risks, and outcomes. In an interview with The Beacon, Mehta opined, “During the COVID-19 lockdown, we experienced real environmental change,

even if it was a blip. The lockdown stopped the world from functioning at full capacity, leading individuals to think about how we operate and contribute to climate change in some form. Carrying our water bottles or remembering to switch off the lights when we leave the room can help fight against climate change.” He said these are all learned habits ingrained in us for a long time. He emphasised that educational institutions could spread awareness. “They can give people the skills and prepare them for the new industries that are conscious of climate change,” he said.

He mentioned that the whole economic and industrial structure would have to be remobilised, ensuring that factories start making biodegradable products. Machinery, sourcing, and manufacturing processes will have to be changed, along with the sales channels, which means that people with new skills are required to establish an industry of effectiveness. He opined that change starts from within, and actions speak louder than words. “If we start making a conscious effort and influence others, the domino effect will add momentum to counter climate change issues.”

## Open garbage poses health risks

Ananya KC

**BENGALURU:** Residents of Nagarabhavi expressed dissatisfaction on Sunday with the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) for not clearing the mounting piles of garbage lining their streets. This unauthorised waste disposal has increased rat and mosquito infestations, raising health hazards and concerns among residents. The residents have raised several complaints with the BBMP officials regarding the issue, but their complaints were unheeded. Prakash, the president of the Resident Welfare Association of Nagarabhavi, stated, “Many

complaints from the association have been brought to their notice, and yet there's no positive response; now we are clueless about what to do further...”. The situation has further deteriorated as commuters report increased rat infestations and mosquito bites, raising concerns about the potential spread of diseases. Stressing the health risks, Dr Deepak, a health expert, said, “The concentration of waste becomes deadly.” He further pointed out, “Open garbage is the source of diseases. Especially during the rainy season, people can contract dengue and leptospirosis.”