SCIENCE

Not changing clothes can alter your room's ozone chemistry

The Hindu Bureau

Our daily habits, like how often we shower or change our clothes, depend on our environs and sometimes also on our energy levels. But obviously how dirty we are also affects our immediate environment. Atoms and molecules in the air can react with compounds on our skin and clothes to form airborne chemicals.

In a new study, researchers from China, Denmark, and the U.S. tested how our habits affect size of a telephone booth which chemicals are and asked three healthy formed. Their findings are men in their 20s to sit in-(un)pleasantly surprising. side for two to three hours They found that not bathat a time. A snorkel-like ing for three days made almask sent each volunteer's most no difference bebreath outside the chamcause glands quickly ber, where instruments received the emissions from replace the oils on the skin their skin and clothes. that have been washed off. However, wearing the Fresh air flowed through same unwashed clothes for the chamber about twice three days boosted ozoneevery hour, and the regenerated chemicals in the searchers could either keep ozone levels very low air by about 25%. The researchers built a (under 2 parts per billion,

steel chamber about the ppb) or add a gentle 10 ppb

breeze of ozone similar to that during a clean, sunny day outdoors.

In separate test runs, the team varied one of temperature, relative humidity, personal hygiene or clothing coverage while keeping the other settings constant.

Outside, they continuously analysed the air from the chamber with a sensitive mass spectrometer that tracked 11 marker chemicals, including acetone, 6-methyl-5-hepten-2one (6-MHO), geranyl acetone, and several aldehydes.

These compounds are well-known byproducts of the reaction of ozone with skin oil.

This way, they found that temperature and humidity hardly mattered. Between 22° C and 28° C the total ozone-driven emissions stagnated at around 4 micromoles per square metre per hour. Changing the relative humidity from 40% to 70% al-

so left emission rates unchanged.

However, while not bathing made little difference either, sticking to the same clothes for three days increased the production of 6-MHO and geranyl acetone, derived from squalene on the skin, by up to 77%. Clothes-only tests confirmed that fabric coated with old skin oil becomes its own chemical plant. The study was published in ACS Environmental Au on June 29.

SNAPSHOTS



Artificial intelligence tools are changing scientific writing

Scientists analysed over 15 million biomedical abstracts from 2010 to 2024 to look for excess vocabulary, words that appeared more often than past trends predict. They unearthed increasing use of tone-altering words like "delves", "showcasing", and "crucial" across papers published from late 2022 or so. The team has attributed this to the use of LLMs like ChatGPT to write papers. For 2024 alone, the team estimated 13.5% of that year's abstracts were written or polished with an LLM.



The innermost planet that causes its star to flare

Around 400 lightyears away, astronomers have found a star that flares almost always after its innermost planet crosses in front of it. The correlation suggests the planet's motion disturbs the star's magnetic field, triggering flares. The extra high-energy radiation and likely coronal-mass ejections bombard the planet, rarefying and stripping its already puffy atmosphere. According to the team, the star, HIP 67522, is a prototype system to study magnetic star-planet interactions.



Between hot and cold Life may not have needed very specialised conditions to emerge 1. How did earth's first protocells bring together the molecules they needed to set

2. Before cell membranes existed, a small temperature difference could have done the

in a temperature gradient can together confine molecules

4. The confinement led to protein synthesis where

RExpress, a cell-free protein synthesis kit made from Escherichia coli bacteria. The kit contains every major part of E. coli's protein-making machinery -DNA, RNA polymerase, amino acids, etc. - in purified form.

Before the experiment, the team diluted these contents threefold in order to keep the kit from being able to make proteins.

Next, they added a short piece of DNA that coded

Convection Environment 170 µm

A simple experiment. FLORONI, ET AL. (2025)

5. One question now is whether a steady temperature gradient is required or if a time-varying gradient will do

ween the sapphire plates. gradient.

froze the chambers to preserve their concentration profiles for later study. Then they split the frozen sample into three layers from top to bottom and analysed each slice.

synthesis. Over time, cell mem-

lecular machines.

Keep it simple

The researchers wrote that the phenomena they've proposed could be playing out around hydrothermal vents. This will need to be checked.

11

On early earth, a little heat could have led to complex life

Billions of years ago, a rock crack exuding heat could have gathered different types of biomolecules together and kickstarted protein synthesis

Vasudevan Mukunth

efore true cells existed on the earth, organic molecules floated freely in water. The first cell membrane created a compartment so that useful molecules like RNA and proteins could stay close enough to interact with each other, leading to more complex biological functions.

However, an important question remains: how did the first protocells on early earth bring together all the molecules they needed and set life-like chemistry in motion? According to a new study, simple heat, like the warmth of volcanic rocks, could have done the trick.

Putting it together

When one side of a small water-filled crack is warmer than the other, two things happen. Warm liquid rises and cooler liquid sinks, creating a gentle loop; second, many molecules drift from the hotter side towards the cooler side. Together, these flows can sweep dissolved molecules downwards and hold them there. The study, authored by scientists from Canada, Finland, Germany, and Italy, was published in *Nature Physics*. The scientists built small 170-micrometrechambers sandthick wiched between sapphire plates. The top plate was maintained at 40° C and the bottom plate at 27° C. Then they turned to PU-

life-like chemistry in motion?

trick, a new study has found 3. The study has shown that convection and thermophoresis

floating in water

previously there wasn't any, confirmed using a fluorescing protein

Then they opened a narrow channel at the top and pumped pure water for up to nine hours or a nutrient feed for up to 22 hours while maintaining the

Right after, the team

kickstarted protein

> branes let early cells set up ion gradients, i.e. different ion concentrations inside versus outside. When ions flowed back through primitive channels, the flux could power the first mo-

National Centre for Biological Sciences professor Shashi Thutupalli also said the phenomena described in the study "would rely on some steady gradient. Whether the timescale of the temperature gradients in nature are similar to those in the study needs to be checked."

He also said he was curious whether all kinds of molecules would move in response to the temperature gradient.

"In my opinion, I don't think we'll ever exactly fi

for a protein called green fluorescent protein (GFP) to each PURExpress mix. GFP fluoresces with a bright green light that can be seen under a microscope. As a result, the mix had a built-in light bulb that reported when and where protein synthesis happened.

The authors let the PU-RExpress mix 'express' itself for around 16 hours both with and without the temperature gradient bet-

Like a membrane

They found that there was 25 times more GFP in the bottom layer than in the top. Similarly, key ions including those of magnesi-

um (30x) and potassium (7x) and phosphate ions (70x) had accumulated more at the bottom than at the top. The team also found that DNA, RNA building blocks, and amino acids had become concentrated at the bottom.

waste diffused out, displaying membrane-like selectivity without an actual membrane. For added measure, the team also modelled the heat, flow, and diffusion and found that they reproduced the 3D concentra-

Once these molecules

mix

had

were crowded together,

the previously inactive PU-

switched on gene expres-

sion. The team found that

the mix was manufactur-

ing GFP only in the cham-

ber with the temperature

gradient, not in the cham-

ber without. In fact, even

when water flowed over-

head for nine hours, more

than 95% of the GFP was

trapped while small

amounts of phosphate

RExpress

molecules. Thus, according to the study, just a rock crack exuding heat could have gathered different types of biomolecules together and

tion profiles of various

gure out what exactly happened on early earth. But one takeaway is that maybe the start of life needn't have been very complicated or specialised," Dr. Thutupalli said.

For example, a March 2025 study in Science found that when neutral water is sprayed, it creates oppositely charged microdroplets that cause an electrical discharge, instigating chemical reactions around them.

New molecule tracks copper levels in living cells

Researchers have created F-NpCu1, a molecule that lights up when it encounters free copper inside the human body. It's built on a naphthalimide dye linked to a copper-reactive group and a fluorine tag, and is stable in cells and non-toxic. In cell cultures, mouse tissue, and human brain samples, the probe's brightness tracked known copper shortages and surpluses. The team wrote their work is an "advance towards development of the first clinical tool."

Evidence of a matrilineal society in neolithic China

D.P. Kasbekar

Evidence from two Neolithic cemeteries on China's eastern coast, reported recently by researchers at Peking University in Beijing in *Nature*, showed that some communities were organised in matrilineal clans 4,750-4,500 years

Scientists are still debating whether any early human societies were matrilineal. Numerous genetic studies have concluded that ancient societies were patriarchal. Some of the rare exceptions include the Chaco Canyon dynasty in (800-North America 1300 BC) and some Celtic communities in Germany (616-200 BC).

The new evidence came from analysing skeletal remains retrieved from cemeteries used for around 250 years, spanning at least 10 generations. The findings challenge scientists' assumptions about traditional societies.

YK

genome (DNA) is inherited equally from each parent. But around 0.0005% is inherited only from the mother. This is the mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA). Sperm cells don't normally transmit mitochondria. The non-mtDNA is located in the cell's nucleus. Nuclear DNA contains two genome sets and is organised in 23 pairs of chromosomes. One chromosome of each pair is inherited via the father's sperm and the other via the mother's egg. The sex chromosomes, X and Y, define one pair.

Most of an individual's

Both males and females inherit an X chromosome from the mother. Females receive their second X from the father, whereas males receive the Y chromosome that carries the maleness-determining gene. The Y chromosome carries about 1% of the nuclear DNA. Since the Y is transmitted by a father to all of his sons, it is patrili-

neally inherited.



Human remains found in the northern (top) and southern graves at the Neolithic site in Fujia, China. NING, ET AL. (2025)

Thus, sequence information from mtDNA and the Y-chromosome is used to trace maternal and palineages, respectively.

Isotope ratios

ternal

The researchers found that all individuals buried in neal affinity. each cemetery had the

matrilineal burial was also evident in two pairs of first-cousins. Each geographical locale has a characteristic ratio of the 87Sr isotope to that of the 86Sr isotope, depending on the mineral same mtDNA, but the composition of the local soil. The ratio in teeth indimtDNA in the two cemeteries was different. In concates the individual's childtrast, the Y chromosomes recovered from the male remains were diverse,

cousins. Two particular in-

dividuals interred in diffe-

rent cemeteries, NO1 and

S32, were a paternal aunt-

nephew pair or a niece-pa-

ternal uncle pair. Their

mtDNA was consistent

with where they were bu-

ried. This adherence to

hood location, while that in bones their adulthood location. If the ratios in teeth and bone differ, the meaning that in each cemetery, the burials were deindividual may have mitermined solely by matriligrated. The bones and teeth of the remains had Analyses of the rest of the same Sr ratio as local

the genome revealed frewild plants, meaning the quent intermarriages betindividuals were born and ween relatively distantly resided throughout their related individuals across lives in the same geograthe two matrilineal clans, phy. such as second or third

Similarly, the ratio of carbon isotopes ¹³C to ¹²C indicated a diet dominated by corn, sorghum, millet, sugarcane and switch-grass.

The researchers concluded that the population practiced millet-based agriculture and raised pigs for meat. Males and females had the same diet.

The findings exemplify how anthropology and archaeology are furthered by studying genomes and isotopes.

Agriculture, animal domestication, and settled communities began in the Neolithic period. That cemeteries from this time were organised around matrilineal clans suggests the existence of a matrilineal society in early human history.

D.P. Kasbekar is a retired scientist.

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Question Corner

Under pressure

How does a digital barometer work? – Yugandhara Muthukrishnan, Chennai

A barometer is a device to measure pressure. From the 17th to the 19th centuries, most designs had the same working principle: air pressure pushed down on an open column of fluid, which was allowed to move into a second column with a closed top. The aneroid barometer was invented in 1844: air acted on a capsule that was kept from collapsing by a spring. As the capsule contracted under pressure, it moved small levers attached to a needle on a gauge. Today, devices use digital

barometers. Here, a micro-electro-mechanical system (MEMS) converts changes in pressure to electronic signals. One way is to use the piezoresistive effect: when pressure is applied on a conductor, its resistivity changes. Another way is to expose one plate of a capacitor to air pressure: as the pressure changes, the inter-plate distance varies. The rest of the MEMS circuitry amplifies the changed resistance or capacitance signal, converts it into a pressure reading, and displays it on a screen.

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in



What are the pros and cons of the ELI scheme?

What are the incentives of the employment-linked incentive and whom will it benefit?

A. M. Jigeesh

The story so far:

he Union Cabinet approved an Employment-Linked Incentive (ELI) scheme with an outlay of ₹99,446 crore. The scheme, a promise made in the 2024-25 budget, is aimed at creating employment, particularly in the manufacturing sector. It is a part of the Prime Minister's package of five schemes to facilitate employment such as internships with big companies and measures to improve skills of the youth.

What are the key provisions?

The ELI scheme, according to the Labour Ministry, incentivises creation of more than 3.5 crore jobs over a period of two years. The Centre expects 1.92 crore newly employed people to get the benefit of the scheme, which comes into operation from August 1, 2025 and ends on July 31, 2027. The Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) will implement the scheme. Newly recruited employees, with salaries up to ₹1 lakh, will get a one-month EPF wage up to ₹15,000 in two installments. The EPFO will pay the first instalment after six months of service and the second instalment after 12 months of service - both as direct bank transfer. A portion of the incentive will be kept in "a savings instrument of deposit account for a

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-backed Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh has welcomed the ELI scheme with a rider that the government must expand the social security base and improve the quality of employment

can be withdrawn by the employee at a later date". The establishments, registered with EPFO, will get up to ₹3,000 per month, for two years, "for each additional

fixed period and

employee with sustained employment for at least six months". The Centre adds that for the manufacturing sector, incentives will be extended to third and fourth years as well.

How have employers responded?

Employers have welcomed the scheme, with caveats. Former Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry president Subhrakant Panda said that ELI is a "laudable initiative". It will drive employment, especially in the manufacturing sector, through an innovative approach which combines support for those joining the workforce for the first time with incentives for creating sustained employment, he added. CII's office-bearer Sachit Jain said the ELI scheme has the potential to reshape India's employment landscape and boost labour-intensive sectors. The Sangh Parivar-backed Laghu Udyog Bharati pointed out that the focus of the scheme must be directed towards micro, small manufacturing units and allied service sectors. "We also urge that units with less than 20 employees, which form the majority, are not left behind. These units must be included under the scheme benefits," it demanded in a statement. The founder of the Association of Indian Entrepreneurs, K.E. Raghunathan, told The *Hindu* that the scheme must be repositioned under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, with a structured reimbursement model based on actual payroll data addition. "For every new employee a specific percentage of the salary must be paid to the employee and employer as a subsidy directly on a monthly basis, as long as the employee remains in service. Make it simple and ensure a wider coverage," he suggested.

What are the lessons from Telangana blast?

What are the safety and quality concerns, particularly in smaller pharmaceutical firms? Are regulatory checks not being carried out? What are the protocols to be followed? Are pollution norms being adhered to? How big is the pharma market?

Safety is

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pharma-

ceutical

industry

one of the

key aspects

of branding

<u>Serish Nanisetti</u>

The story so far:

n the morning of June 30 at 9.10 a.m., an explosion tore through Sigachi Industries, a pharmaceutical factory, and flattened a three-storeyed building in Pashamylaram on the outskirts of Hyderabad. The stock market-listed entity estimated the death toll at 39 of the 143 workers who were on-site during the explosion.

What happened?

A four-member committee is investigating the cause of the explosion. The committee is led by B. Venkateshwar Rao, emeritus scientist at CSIR-IICT, and includes T. Prathap Kumar, chief scientist at CSIR-IICT; Surya Narayana, retired scientist at CSIR-CLRI; and Santosh Ghuge, safety officer at CSIR-NCL, Pune. While the cause is being investigated, the pharmaceutical company has issued a statement, "The accident was not caused by the reactor explosion."

Sigachi Industries was incorporated in 1989 and was in the business of manufacturing microcrystalline cellulose. This is nothing more than refined wood pulp or powder. This powder is shaped into tablets and serves as an excipient or a non-reactive carrier of medicine. The wood pulp or slurry is processed in a spray dryer that strips it of moisture using hot air. Once processed like this, the wood pulp turns into a fine powder or microcrystalline cellulose. This fine powder is suspected to have blown up on that fateful Monday morning. One of the first such 'dust explosions' recorded was in Turin in Italy in 1785 when a boy working with flour in a bakery created a cloud of flour that got lit by the lamplight. Two persons, including the boy, were injured. There is a long record of similar dust



Huge explosion: Rescue personnel inspect the debris of the gutted pharmaceutical unit of Sigachi Industries, in Telangana on July 1. MOHD. ARIF

explosions in flour mills, coal mines, and grain silos killing dozens across the world. Fire forensic experts say the blast at Sigachi was a dust explosion considering the scale of damage, raw materials used and processes involved. Initially, the explosion was suspected to be a Boiling Liquid Expanding Vapour Explosion, a technical term regarding the pressure built up inside the reactor. But this has been ruled out by the company, as well as experts.

Was there a regulatory failure?

The laxity of the regulatory framework was stark on the day of the explosion. When fire department and emergency personnel rushed to the site they did not have any information about what they were up against. The State and central pollution control boards mandate a board outside factory premises listing details about the pollution potential of the institution and factory operations. The fire fighting and disaster rescue operations are guided by this information. The green board or environment display boards outside the Sigachi Industries did not have proforma environmental data leaving fire and disaster rescue workers clueless about the nature of material involved and how to douse the fire. A tough regulatory framework with periodic check-ups would have ensured that information was available for a faster emergency response. This incident comes close on the heels of other serious accidents in pharmaceutical firms in India. Six persons were killed in Sangareddy in the SB Organics factory in 2024, 17 were killed in August 2024 in Anakapalli in Andhra Pradesh, and two were killed in Parawada, Andhra Pradesh in June 2025.

What are the implications for the sector?

An American investments and real estate company in its April 2025 report said: "Telangana has emerged a pivotal contributor to India's life sciences landscape accounting for approximately one third of the country's pharmaceutical production, one fifth of pharmaceutical exports, and one third of global vaccine production. The State's position as a pharmaceutical manufacturing hub has attracted significant investments, with over \$1.49 billion channelled into the life sciences sector over the past four years." It also analysed the role of Hyderabad in this scheme of things. Over 20 life sciences and medical technology incubators are located in Hyderabad, which is the highest concentration in the country.

India, with Telangana as its hub, has emerged as a powerhouse in the pharmaceutical sector. But safety and quality concerns have dogged smaller pharmaceutical firms. The U.S. is one of the biggest markets for Indian medical exports that is regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The United States Pharmacopeia-National Formulary has a set of standards that regulate identity, strength, quality, purity, and packaging and labelling through the chain of manufacture and use. To keep being plugged into this profitable market, the standards have to match.

Safety is one of the key aspects of branding for the pharmaceutical industry that helps build trust among customers. Any laxity in any aspect of the drug processing has a cascading effect for the company as well as the industry. At stake is not just the safety of one factory but the systems and workflow that are hallmarks of stable and safe drug production. Two books, The Truth Pill - The Myth of Drug Regulation in India and Bottle of Lies: Ranbaxy and the Dark Side of Indian Pharma, by Dinesh S. Thakur and Prashant Reddy T. and Katherine Eban respectively have chronicled the regulatory leeway, and documented the dangerous practices resorted to by Indian pharma firms to keep costs low and profit margins high.

What about pollution control norms?

Hyderabad and Telangana's pharmaceutical industry growth has been aided by lax zoning and regulatory norms. Industrial areas have to be necessarily away from residential areas. The IDA Pashamylaram was established in the early 1980s drawing some of the biggest pharmaceutical firms to the area, away from Balanagar and Patancheru that led the initial growth of the industry in Hyderabad. The initially isolated industrial area is now surrounded by residential areas. In the absence of robust and reliable public transport, worker colonies have cropped up close to the factories and industrial area. This affects the livelihood and health of people in the industrial cluster and surrounding areas.

Environmentalists have documented how tonnes of toxic chemicals and effluents have been released into the ground and into water bodies around the region. The Musi River remains highly polluted with a study on 'Pharmaceutical pollution of the world's rivers' placing it in the 22nd position worldwide in terms of concentration of active pharmaceutical ingredients. This high pollution is linked to poor waste water management infrastructure, and pharmaceutical manufacturing processes. The chemicals in the water have also been linked to a rise in antimicrobial resistance.

What next?

The pharmaceutical sector holds the potential to attract investments and create high employment opportunities in Hyderabad and other places in India. To capitalise on this potential, India must establish a robust regulatory framework. The explosions and accidents are loud warning signs for the industry and the country.

Why is Maharashtra debating over Hindi?

What about trade unions?

Barring the RSS-backed Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), all 10 central trade unions have questioned the scheme. The BMS has welcomed the ELI scheme with a rider that the government must expand the social security base and improve the quality of employment. Other unions fear that workers' money will be used to incentivise employers. Citing the fate of the Production-Linked Incentive of 2020, wherein certain sectors were given sops by the Centre to create jobs, but the money had gone into the pockets of big companies. They argued that the EPFO had to conduct a probe and ban certain companies after finding the scheme was misused for employers' benefits.

What are some of the concerns?

There are concerns on the role of the EPFO in the scheme. As EPFO is only a custodian of savings of employees, unions are asking how it can act as an agency to implement the scheme. As the EPFO has no government funds in its books, there are doubts over the reimbursement of the money which could go to the employer or a newly recruited employee. As EPFO is not an agency with the responsibility of creating jobs, there are demands to create a separate agency to implement the scheme.

Industry experts are also questioning why the government is not addressing the slowdown in the economy, and not taking steps to improve the purchasing power of workers.

YK

Why is there resistance to introducing Hindi as the third language in primary education in government schools? What has the State government decided on the three-language policy? What does the National Education Policy, 2020 lay down?

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Vinaya Deshpande Pandit

The story so far:

he linguistic debate in Maharashtra continues days after the Maharashtra government withdrew two orders introducing Hindi as the third language in primary education across Marathi and English medium State Board schools. The government has appointed a committee under renowned economist Dr. Narendra Jadhav to study the three-language policy.

What is the language debate in Maharashtra?

On April 16, the Maharashtra government issued an order making Hindi mandatory as the third language in all English and Marathi medium schools of the State Board in Maharashtra. The government said that it was as per the provisions of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020. "At present, two languages are being taught from Grade 1 to Grade 4 in all the English and Marathi medium schools in the State. As per the State Education Framework, 2024, Hindi will be mandatory as the third language in all the English and Marathi medium schools from Grade 1 to Grade 5," the order stated. Till now, third language was introduced only in Grade 5 in English and Marathi medium State Board



Linguistic unity: Uddhav Thackeray, along with Raj Thackeray, Supriya Sule, and others, during a joint rally at Worli Dome in Mumbai on Saturday. ANI

schools. The other medium schools already have a three-language policy in primary education.

What was the reaction?

There was widespread opposition to the government's decision on two grounds – first, that a third language should not be imposed in primary school from Grade 1 to Grade 5. The second ground was about the imposition of Hindi. Regional linguistic groups, academics, civil society members, and prominent literary figures raised their voice against the move which was dubbed as an effort to 'force Hindi', and a move towards 'cultural hegemony'. The Maharashtra government's own language committee wrote to the government seeking its immediate revocation.

Experts argued that the NEP, 2020 focussed on R1 and R2, which is the mother-tongue, and an additional second language for primary education. They said that children should not be burdened with learning three languages in primary school. "Why should there be an imposition of Hindi? This is a concerted effort for cultural hegemony. This is in line with the RSS' plan of 'Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan'. In Maharashtra, the Marathi manoos will stand for his linguistic, cultural identity. This is a historic moment since the movement for the reorganisation of States on linguistic basis. The entire State has stood against the government's imposition of Hindi," Deepak Pawar of Marathi Abhyas Kendra said.

How did the government respond?

After a severe backlash, Maharashtra education minister Dada Bhuse promised to revise the government resolution (GR). "Hindi will not be mandatory," he announced. On June 17, the government revised the GR, making Hindi a 'general' third language in schools. It stated that the students had the option to learn any other Indian language as the third language, but that it was mandatory for at least 20 students to come together to make the demand. "The government will make a teacher available or will make provision for online learning if at least 20 students come together to learn any other Indian language apart from Hindi," the revised

• • •

GR stated.

However, this drew further backlash as academics and regional linguistic political parties called it an effort to impose Hindi through the backdoor. "The whole exercise of the meeting of the steering committee was carried out in secrecy by the government. The language committee of the government itself was never consulted on the move. The decision is illogical. It has no scientific backing by educationists, child psychologists. It has been taken without any consultation with the stakeholders and experts. At a time when the Marathi culture and language is not being respected by its own government, this is an assault on the linguistic identity of the State," said Laxmikant Deshmukh, head of Maharashtra's language committee.

What about political realignments?

The issue provided a fillip to Raj Thackeray's Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, which counts 'Marathi asmita' or linguistic chauvinism as its core ideology. "We are Hindus, not Hindis," he said. It paved the path for the reunification of the Thackeray cousins after two decades. Uddhav Thackeray and Raj Thackeray joined hands against the government's move, even holding a joint rally. Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar too openly expressed his displeasure with the government's decision and said that Hindi should not be imposed till Grade 4. This has led to an unease within the Mahayuti with Eknath Shinde not wanting to be seen as standing against the cause. In the face of upcoming local body elections, the language debate has led to changed political dynamics.

What is the way ahead?

The government has announced the scrapping of the two controversial GRs issued on April 16 and June 17. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis announced the formation of a committee under Dr. Narendra Jadhav to look into the three-language policy, and said the government will accept his report. Academics have raised questions on Dr. Jadhav's expertise in school education, and have demanded the scrapping of the committee as well as the decision to impose the three-language policy in primary education. Opposition parties have said the government should scrap the three-language policy altogether. "We will not accept the three-language policy," Sanjay Raut, Shiv Sena UBT leader, said.

PROFILES

The nuclear policeman

Rafael Grossi

The IAEA chief found himself in the middle of a controversy as Iran alleged that the agency prepared a misleading report about Tehran's compliance with non-proliferation obligations, which Israel and the U.S. used to justify their unprovoked aggression against the Islamic Republic

G. Sampath

n July 2, Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian ordered his country to suspend cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN's nuclear watchdog. He explained this decision as "a natural response to the unjustified, unconstructive, and destructive conduct" of the IAEA's Director General Rafael Grossi.

Tehran believes Mr. Grossi cleared the ground for Israel's unprovoked strikes on its nuclear facilities by preparing a "misleading" report on Iran's compliance with non-proliferation obligations. On the basis of this report, the IAEA's Board of Governors on June 12, one day before Israel's attack, adopted a resolution stating that Iran had "failed to cooperate fully" with the Agency and accused it of "repeatedly failing to provide the Agency with technically credible explanations" to its various queries. Israel and the U.S. used this resolution to push forward the narrative that Iran was on the verge of making a nuclear bomb and the only way to stop it was to destroy its nuclear installations through "pre-emptive" military strikes.

Subsequently, after Israel struck Iran's nuclear sites, Mr. Grossi made a clarification that seemed to walk back the impression created by the June 12 resolution. In an interview with CNN, he said, "We did not have any proof of a systematic effort by Iran to make a nuclear weapon." A spokesperson of Iran's Ministry of External Affairs shared the video clip of Mr. Grossi's interview on social media with the comment, "This is too late, Mr. Grossi: you obscured this truth in your absolutely biased report...Do you know how many innocent Iranians have been killed/maimed as a result of this criminal war? You've made IAEA a partner to this unjust war of aggression."

Mr. Grossi, 64, is a diplomat from the Argentine Foreign Service. In a career spanning 40 years, he carved a niche for himself in nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, serving as president of the Nuclear

Suppliers Group (2014-2016) before assuming office as Director General of the IAEA on December 3, 2019. He said in a 2020 interview, "I feel like I prepared for this my whole life." Ås the IAEA chief, Mr. Grossi made

headlines in 2022 for his energetic efforts to secure Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, which was caught in the cross-fire of the Ukraine-Russia war. An accidental strike on it could unleash a nuclear disaster that would impact much of Europe. Mr. Grossi, at some risk to his own life, personally visited the nuclear plant near the frontline. With the consent of the Ukrainian leadership, he shut down all but one reactor, and as an additional safety measure, left behind a team of UN inspectors. But his efforts did not stop there.

A month later, he went to St. Petersburg and met Russian President Vladimir Putin. His mission: to extract an assurance that Russian forces would not target the Zaporizhzhia plant. Mr. Grossi's trip had the intended effect, with the Russians steering clear of attacking the facility.

IAEA's mandate

Mr. Grossi's actions were fully in keeping with the mandate of the IAEA, which is to promote and safeguard peaceful nuclear programmes all over the world. Today, however, the IAEA is known more as an agency tasked with verifying that nuclear materials meant for civilian use are not diverted for weaponisation. In fact, IAEA inspectors cannot, and are not mandated to, search for weapons. They merely monitor nuclear facilities to ensure that the signatory country is fulfilling its obligations under the **Comprehensive Safeguards** Agreement.

Critically, IAEA inspections, by design, are incapable of generating verifiable evidence of the absence of a military nuclear programme. Nor can its reports – with their catalogue of 'failures' in compliance or cooperation serve as a proxy for the existence of a weaponisation programme, in the absence of independent intel proving as much. Since IAEA inspections cannot possibly cover every square inch of a vast country, the problem of



'unknowns' at 'undeclared' locations are a given. While these might warrant further investigation, it is questionable whether they can be used to fuel speculation about a country's intentions at a time of escalating tensions.

And yet, the ambiguous wording in the IAEA resolution and Mr. Grossi's public statements did precisely that, lending credence to the narrative of Iran building a nuclear bomb. Ironically, American intel leaked to the media as well as a statement in March 2025 by the U.S. Director of National Intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, confirmed that Iran was not building a bomb. Another major element of this

narrative was that Iran had 400 kg of highly enriched uranium (HEU), which is not needed for civilian use. Mr. Grossi dwelled on this aspect often in his public pronouncements. Yet, it is not illegal under the NPT for a signatory country to hold uranium enriched to 60%. For Iran, however, it was prohibited, but only under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the 2015 agreement which limited its enrichment rights to 3.67% and capped its stockpiling of enriched uranium at 300kg.

But the JCPOA became defunct - at least from the Iranian perspective the moment the U.S. withdrew from it in 2018 and the sanctions relief

guaranteed under it for Iran failed to materialise. But Mr. Grossi went along with the position of holding Iran to a JCPOA the West had already scuttled, while disregarding the IAEA's own resolutions that prohibit military attacks on civilian nuclear installations.

Attacks prohibited

The IAEA's General Conference resolution (407) adopted in November 1983 states that "all armed attacks against nuclear installations devoted to peaceful purposes should be explicitly prohibited". A draft resolution of September 26, 1985, submitted jointly by Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden not only forbade Israel from targeting Iraq's civilian nuclear facilities, it further called "upon Israel urgently to place all its nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards" something difficult to envisage at a

time when exemption for Israel from international law is getting increasingly normalised. Under the IAEA statutes and the UN charter, Iran is entitled to a peaceful nuclear programme. It is also entitled to protection of its nuclear installations from military attacks. And yet, Mr. Grossi never condemned the Israeli and U.S. strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities. On the contrary, his words and deeds amplified suspicions about Iran's intentions, which were used by Israel and the U.S. to justify their attack.

Today, in the aftermath of a fragile and difficult ceasefire, Mr. Grossi is back to stoking fears about Iran's nuclear programme by claiming it could start enriching uranium again in a matter of months. Not surprisingly, Iran has refused to allow IAEA inspection of its bombed-out nuclear facilities, with the Foreign Minister, Abbas Araghchi, stating, "Grossi's insistence on visiting the bombed sites under the pretext of safeguards is meaningless and possibly even malign in intent."

Had Mr. Grossi displayed a little of the same urgency for protecting Iran's civilian nuclear facilities that he did for Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, it may have gone some way toward protecting the IAEA's credibility among nuclear threshold states.

THE GIST

In a career spanning 40 years Rafael Grossi, an Argentine diplomat, has carved a niche for himself in nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, serving as president of the Nuclear Suppliers Group before assuming office as Director General of the IAEA

As the IAEA chief, Grossi made headlines in 2022 for his energetic efforts to secure Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, which was caught in the cross-fire of the Ukraine-Russia war

After the Israeli-American attack on Iran in June, Grossi said the agency 'did not have any proof of a systematic effort by Iran to make a nuclear weapon', but stopped short of condemning the strikes

The Trust of Dalai Lama

Gaden Phodrang

The Tibetan spiritual leader says the institution he set up in 2011 and heads will be the sole authority in deciding who should succeed him

Suhasini Haidar

he 14th Dalai Lama's announcement in Dharamshala this week, asserting for the first time that the line will continue after him, was welcomed by followers of Tibetan Buddhism and fans of its Spiritual leader worldwide. However, it was his statement that the succession would be decided by the Gaden Phodrang Trust, which would be the "sole authority" on the issue, that has sparked a sharp response from Beijing, which believes it must be given the right to "approve" the candidate.

In an ironic twist for the Communist Party-led Chinese government in Beijing, it cites a Qing dynasty tradition, used a few times, of picking the Dalai Lama successor through lots from a "Golden Urn", as the method it hopes to follow. For the Dalai Lama, who has lived in India since 1959, when he fled Lhasa years after the Chinese annexed Tibet in 1951, it will be the Gaden Phodrang trust he set up in 2011, which he heads, along with an alternate Chairperson, who is also one of the most respected lamas in the community, Samdhong Rimpoche, that will take the call.

While the trust was set up and registered in Dha-

YK (



handing over the responsi-

bility for the welfare and

governance of the Tibetan

community worldwide to

the Sikyong, Central Tibe-

tan Administration (CTA)

and the Tibetan Parlia-

ment in Exile that are elect-

Within his own office.

the Office of His Holiness

The Dalai Lama (OHHDL),

he set up the Gaden Pho-

drang Trust to ensure the

continuity of spiritual and

traditional issues, and the

Dalai Lama Trust that un-

dertakes charitable and

welfare initiatives. Another

branch, the Gaden Pho-

drang Foundation, was set

up as a "non-profit, tax-ex-

"There should be no con-

ed every five years.

ramshala in the previous decade, the institution of Gaden Phodrang Labrang goes back hundreds of years, and refers to the office of the Dalai Lama as a continuing institution from the time of the 5th Dalai Lama. Gaden Phodrang was the name of the Tibetan government, established by the 5th Dalai La-

ma, Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso or 'the Great Fifth', as both the Spiritual and Political head of a unified Tibet. It was coined from the name of the historical estate of the Dalai Lamas at the Drepung Monastery.

Separation of powers

In 2011, the 14th Dalai Laempt institution registered ma set up the Gaden Phoin the Canton of Zurich drang Trust as he decided and under the supervision to separate the Spiritual of the Swiss Federal Deand Political powers of his partment of Home Affairs" post. "I have now voluntato promote non-violence rily brought this [unified and increase synergies betpower] to an end, proud ween religion and science. and satisfied that we can pursue the kind of demofusion, the Gaden Phocratic system of governdrang Trust that His Holiment flourishing elsewhness (Dalai Lama) referred ere in the world", he said, to is an entity in India,"

said Dhundup Gyalpo, Secretary of the Bureau of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in New Delhi.

According to the Dalai Lama's 2011 statement, which he has now reaffirmed, officers of the Gaden Phodrang Trust would bear the responsibility to recognise the 15th Dalai Lama – by a process he would leave written instructions about. This would include consulting various heads of Tibetan Buddhist traditions, seeking advice from them on the procedures required to search for the next Dalai Lama, believed to be reborn or reincarnated from the present one. In his latest book, Voice for the Voiceless, he has also said that given the role the next Dalai Lama must fill, it is necessary that his successor be born in the "free world", meaning outside of the Tibetan Autonomous Region in China.

At a press conference in Dharamshala ahead of the Dalai Lama's 90th birthday (July 6), Prof. Rimpoche said that the announcement has clarified the task ahead of the Gaden Phodrang Trust. Mr. Rimpoche added, however, that there may be some time before it needs to fulfil its mandate, particularly as the pontiff, who he said is in "good health", himself has said he expects to live to 110 years.

Songs of outrage

Bob Vylan

The British punk band, which is facing sanctions and investigations over the 'Death to IDF' chant, says it is not for the death of anyone but for 'the dismantling of a violent military machine'

S.R.Praveen

n June 28, at the Glastonbury music festival in the U.K., the BBC staff were on high alert. Scared of the possibility of protest music that could discomfit the powers that be, they had already decided not to live stream the performance of the Irish hip-hop trio Kneecap, which has in the past used its shows to accuse Israel of committing genocide in Palestine. Bob Vylan, the British punk rock duo, was nowhere in their radar.

This meant that all those who had tuned into the BBC stream heard the chants "free, free Palestine" and "death, death to the IDF" (referring to the Israel Defence Forces), initiated by lead singer Bobby Vylan (real name Pascal Robinson-Foster) and repeated by the large crowd waving Palestine flags. The band, which was just beginning to make its mark outside the punk underground, suddenly found itself at the centre of the global music spotlight as well as a political storm. Although a few pro-Israeli voices criticised them, the band found overwhelming support online, but the establishment was swift in its crackdown.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who had earlier demanded that Knee-



which brings together the

anti-establishment soul of

punk rock and hip-hop.

Some of their songs -

which have over this week

found lakhs of new listen-

ers – and the issues that

they talk about are remi-

niscent of rap metal le-

gends Rage Against the Ma-

chine, known for their

politically-charged perfor-

mances. Strongly protec-

tive of their privacy from

the "surveillance state",

the duo adopted the stage

names Bobby Vylan and

A pro-Palestinian stand has

always been a part of the

band's ideology, with the

lead singer participating in

protests since a young age.

Their lyrics such as "The

government, their not

helping no one out, except

for the rich people... It

makes me violent" or

"Give Churchill's statue the

rope and see if it floats" are

designed to provoke and

call attention to pertinent

issues. In a way, they are

Bobbie Vylan.

Protest music

cap not be given a platform at the festival, called it "appalling hate speech". Police launched a criminal investigation against the band. The BBC issued a formal apology, asked some senior staff involved in the event to step back from their duties and put Bob Vylan in the "high risk" category. The U.S. State department revoked the visas of the band members, making the band lose close to 20 scheduled shows in the country. Music festivals in France and Manchester dropped them.

But Bob Vylan appeared to expect the blowback and was aware of what they stood to lose for saying what they said. "We are not for the death of Jews, Arabs or any other race or group of people. We are for the dismantling of a violent military machine. A machine that has destroyed much of Gaza," the band wrote on Instagram.

Bob Vylan emerged in 2017 in Ipswich, catching attention with their music

sticking to the conventions of the genre, for sparking

REUTERS

outrage is par for the course for punk bands. Banning musicians is not a first for the BBC either. It had issued a total ban on punk band Sex Pistols in 1977 after they released the song God Save the Queen, which asked uncomfortable questions about the British monarchy. Bob Vylan also belongs to a long tradition of protest music, which witnessed its heights during the Vietnam War, when there were songs like Phil Ochs's Draft Dodger Rag, Pete Seeger's Waist Deep in the Big Muddy and Creedence Clearwater Revival's Fortunate Son and Bob Dylan's Masters of War.

The current spring of protest music led by Kneecap and Bob Vylan is certainly more direct and hard-hitting, partly due to a sense of helplessness. That is probably why their voices resonated with such a large number of music buffs, who have hit out at even the much-loved band Radiohead for their unclear stand on Palestine.

At one point, Bob Vylan appeared to be getting even more media attention than the ongoing deaths in Gaza. But as the band said, "We are not the story. We are a distraction. And whatever sanctions we receive will be a distraction." Gaza remains the story.

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NEW DELHI SUNDAY JULY 06, 2025

{ THE BIG PICTURE }

Between renewal & rebirth: The Dalai Lama succession

The stage is set for a metaphysical standoff: One Dalai Lama born of visions, dreams, and ritual recognition; another produced by committee, installed by fiat. It is less a theological debate than a collision between historical memory and statecraft between a displaced people's spiritual continuity and China's political choreography

n Tibetan Buddhism, the bardo is the space between lives — a liminal zone where the soul hovers, neither here nor there, waiting for its next embodiment. It is a place of uncertainty, transformation, and reckoning. Since 1950, Tibet has lived in such a

state. That year, Chinese forces entered Tibet. marking the start of a profound shift in the region's political and cultural landscape. In the years that followed, many Tibetans left their homeland, facing dislocation and uncertainty. Religious institutions were restructured, traditional ways of life transformed, and the Tibetan language and identity came under increasing strain. The Dalai Lama sought refuge in India in 1959, followed by thousands of his people. Around the world, there was sympathy, but little action. Tibet — never formally recog-

nised as an independent State by the major powers — drifted into a kind of political *bardo*: Not entirely forgotten, but no longer central to the world's attention.

Today, that suspended state is once again being tested.

The 14th Dalai Lama, turning 90 today, has signalled that his successor will be born in exile, and identified through traditional methods - not selected by any government. Beijing, predictably, has other plans. It has codified its authority to

approve all reincarnations of Tibetan lamas and declared that the next Dalai Lama must be chosen according to Chinese law. The State even claims the right to employ the Golden Urn, an 18thcentury ritual once used to select high-ranking reincarnate lamas, to give its candidate a supposed veil of legitimacy. The stage is set for a metaphys-

ical standoff: One Dalai Lama born of visions, dreams, and ritual recognition; another produced by committee, installed by fiat. It is less a theological debate than a collision between historical memory and statecraft - between a displaced people's spiritual continuity and a powerful nation's political choreography. At the heart of this drama lies India.

India has, for more than 60 years, hosted the Dalai Lama and the Central Tibetan Administration in Dharamshala. It has given sanctuary, but not much more. In 2003, India formally acknowledged the Tibet Autonomous Region as part of China. The tension in that duality has always been there - between a moral responsibility to a people it sheltered and a geopolitical calculation to avoid provoking Beijing.

This next chapter will test the limits of

that careful ambiguity.

Nirupama

Rao

If, as expected, the next Dalai Lama is born in India, the country will become more than host — it will become caretaker of the lineage. The young reincarnate's education, his monastic training, his symbolic authority — all of it will unfold on Indian soil. India may say little. It may issue no declarations. But it will be, in every meaningful sense, the ground on which the Tibetan tradition stakes its future.

And this is where the past comes back to haunt the present. In recent years, the Dalai Lama has spoken with quiet pain of Tibet's abandonment. Of how, in those pivotal moments after 1950, when things might still have been altered, most nations - India among them — chose silence. For Tibetans, exile became not a temporary waiting room but a perma-

nent geography. "We are those in-between people," the Tibetan poet Tsering Wangmo Dhompa has written, "making up the rules as we go along, because there is no guidebook to living in exile.'

The longer exile lasts, the more it becomes an elusive inheritance.

Among the Tibetan diaspora, the idea of return has grown quieter. A generation has come of age for whom Tibet is not a place on a map but an idea passed down in language, in prayer, in the particular geometry of the mandala. In place of a homeland, they have built a spiritual architecture held together by teachers, temples, and the enduring magnetism of the Dalai Lama.

The Chinese State understands this, which is precisely why it wants to insert itself into the metaphysics. A reincarnation is not merely symbolic; it is a line of conti-

Among the Tibetan diaspora, the idea of return has grown quieter. A generation has come of age for whom Tibet is not a place on a map but an idea passed down in language, in prayer, in the particular geometry of the mandala

nuity, a claim to legitimacy. If Beijing can appoint the next Dalai Lama, it can assert control not just over territory but over the meaning of Tibet itself.

India is unlikely to challenge China directly. It shares a volatile border, has a history of military conflict with Beijing, and remains locked in a delicate geopolitical ballet. But there are other forms of resistance – quieter, less visible, no less significant. India can allow the monastic institutions in Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, and Ladakh to conduct the traditional search. It can ensure that the child chosen by Tibetan lamas is educated freely, without pressure or constraint. It can create, through silence and space, the conditions for authenticity to survive

This moment is not only about succession — it is about the layered architecture IF, AS EXPECTED, THE NEXT DALAI LAMA IS BORN IN INDIA, THE **COUNTRY WILL BECOME** MORE THAN HOST - IT WILL BECOME CARETAKER OF THE LINEAGE

heavy hand of power. When the child is found, there may be no headlines. The world may offer polite interest, followed by forgetfulness. China will move swiftly, naming its own candidate, embedding the chosen child in ritual, surrounding him with legitimacy devised by decree. And yet the real question will not be who claims the next Dalai Lama but who allowed the tradition itself to breathe.

Recognition, in this case, may not come with public endorsement. It may come through the soft gestures of refuge: a door left ajar, a temple left untouched, a people left free to remember who they are.

India's choices may remain unspoken. But the Tibetan people have always understood the weight of silence. They have lived in it, made meaning inside it, and carried it with them through generations of exile. Now, on the edge of another transition, they wait once again in the *bardo* — not just for a leader, but for the world to remember.

Nirupama Rao is a former foreign secretary. The views expressed are personal

{ SUNDAY SENTIMENTS } Karan Thapar

Wimbledon is on, it's time to watch tennis

• ve tried hard to like cricket but I camera can cover both the action on the haven't succeeded. Quite frankly, it time nothing or very little seems to colonies — America and Canada being the preat exceptions — no one seems to

court as well as where the players are very goes on for too long. A lot of the effectively. Even the full court frame, whether from behind one of the players happen. And other than former British or from the side, doesn't feel distant and removed. As a result, your involvement in the game is considerably enhanced Now consider cricket. To appreciate how a batsman's playing you need to know how the other team is positioned on the field. But for that you need wide shots which immediately diminish the batsman and bowler. You can either properly see the batsman and the ball being bowled or the full field. Not both. Certainly not at the same time. So, at no point do you get to see a com-plete picture of the full game.

1980s. We had ideal seats on centre court. just above the umpire's chair. But as soon as the game started I found we had to swivel our necks each time the ball was hit. Left, right, left, right. After an hour, it felt like a pain in the neck!

The next time I chose to sit behind one of the players. I no longer had to swing my neck in coordination with the ball. But now I was on the opposite end of the court to the other player. He felt rather far away.These problems don't occur when you're watching on television.

But Wimbledon is more than just brilliant tennis. It's also a social event. British industry does a lot of entertaining whilst the tennis is being played. It's part of the fun.

And you'll discover that quaffing strawberries and cream whilst balancing a glass of champagne is quite an ar

TENNIS IS A SPORT MADE FOR TELEVISION. FAR MORE SO THAN CRICKET OR FOOTBALL. AND THE **REASON IS SIMPLE. THE CAMERA CAN COVER** BOTH THE ACTION ON THE COURT AS WELL AS WHERE THE PLAYERS ARE VERY EFFECTIVELY. AS A RESULT, YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE GAME IS CONSIDERABLY ENHANCED

Pete Sampras, Boger Federer and Novak

India's on track to build a strong sporting culture

ports in India have undergone a significant transformation after the introduction of the National Sports Policy in 2001. India now participates in a wider range of sporting events and achieves commendable results, including in the Olympics. Given these developments, a new policy that aligns with contemporary India and gives voice to its growing sporting ambitions was needed.

The National Sports Policy 2025 — Khelo Bharat Niti — reflects a vision that we athletes have long aspired to. Abhinay Bindra and I were part of the initial commit-tee formed in 2014 to draft a new sports policy. We worked for a year, before the committee evolved and underwent several changes. Finally, the new policy has been introduced. It places strong emphasis on holistic Anju development — from nurturing Bobby grassroots talent and supporting George elite athletes, enhancing sports infrastructure, public-private partnership model and CSR activities to drive sports, strengthening anti-doping efforts, promoting economic and social wellbeing through sports, and ensuring greater transparency and accountability in national sports federations. For me, the standout feature of the policy is its emphasis on grassroots development. How do we generate interest in sports among schoolchildren and, just as importantly, their parents? At the elite level, we already have a functional structure in place. We've achieved important benchmarks, developed sports infrastructure, attracted CSR support for athletes and federations, and even the National Anti-Doping Agency is undergoing reform. But if we want to truly build a sports culture, it has to begin at the grassroots. We need to change the mindset that sports is not just an extracurricular activity. It must be seen as essential to a healthy lifestyle. Children should be introduced to sports from an early age. When it becomes part of the school curriculum, people will begin to take it seriously, and then it becomes a necessity and a habit for life. Sports shouldn't be viewed only as a means to win medals for the country, but as a vital

part of youth development and well-being of an individual. As children grow, academics often take precedence. A child who is academ ically inclined will take that path. But if introduced early, sports will become a part of their routine and help them stay fit. At a time when mental health issues and lifestyle diseases are on the rise, this could be a gamechanger. Promoting sports from a young age will reduce the burden on our health care system.

The new policy emphasises the importance of hosting sports competitions and leagues at

understand the game.

Tennis is very different. From serve to rally, it is continually exciting. A match rarely lasts more than three hours, but when it stretches towards five, it's riveting. And there are very few countries who don't play the game.

This week the All England Tennis Championship is underway at Wimble-don. This Sunday is in fact the traditional halfway point. Are you watching? If you're not, can I gently suggest you should?

For a start, tennis is a sport made for television. Far more so than cricket or football. And the reason is simple. The

In fact, the truth is tennis is probably better watched on television. Cricket and football ought to be seen in a stadium. The first time I visited Wimbledon was

to see the opening match sometime in the

I would say the best match I have seen was the Bjorn Borg versus John McEnroe final of 1980. In the fourth set Borg had seven championship points but couldn't win any of them. He lost the set. And then he had to battle game for game till he won the fifth 8-6. It was his fifth consecutive Wimbledon championship but he never won again. In 1981 he made it to the finals but McEnroe took his revenge.

This year, if Novak Djokovic wins. it will be his 25th grand slam. That's more than anyone else. If it is Carlos Alcaraz, he will become the fifth player in the open era, which began in 1968, to win three times in a row. The others are Bjorn Borg,

Djokovic.

Alcaraz will also be the first after Borg to win both the French Open and Wimbledon in the same year for a second consecutive time. Borg did it in 1980. And if the winner is Jannik Sinner he'll become the first Italian player to win Wimbledon, So far, the only Italian to make a Wimbledon final, Matteo Berrettini in 2021, lost to Diokovic.

Now, aren't those good reasons to watch?

> Karan Thapar is the author of Devil's Advocate: The Untold Story. The views expressed are personal

Credit, and contempt, for the paths to quick riches

Abhishek

Asthana

worth of a 23-year-old content creator". Many on the internet lost it. They beat their breasts, posting their marksheets and entrance exam ranks, and their current in-hand salary, and claimed life is unfair. I wonder. Young people getting rich quick isn't new. Almost every new IPL player has a similar rags to five-tattoos-on-arm story. Hindi newspapers have been forever

converting Day-0 dollar salaries to rupees to scare parents into packing their offspring off to Kota. A girl having poha in the college canteen being spotted by Subhash Ghai is not unheard of. So, why the commotion over influencers becoming famous and, subsequently, rich? Maybe this new path to wealth — earning money on the internet — is not yet cultur-

ally acceptable, hence the distaste among people.

Several acceptable ways to make money have become Bollywood tropes. Going to school is just a brief and annoying interruption before you hop onto a plane to New York to study film-making, eventually to return and manage your family's spare-parts business in Karol Bagh. "Vicky baba aaj hi vilayat se apni padhaai poori karke wapas laute hai (Vicky baba has returned home, after finishing his studies abroad)," an old caretaker helpfully tells the guests seated in the large living space. Clearly, Vicky baba's vilayati degree couldn't ensure employment, which is why he had to return. But nobody treats

screenshot on the internet Vicky *baba* like a loser, he is ripe to be mar-ried off by converting *dosti* (friendship) to ried off by converting dosti (friendship) to rishtedaari (relationship). A moviegoer in Muzaffarpur then aspires for this life.

Another acceptable and respected way to get rich young is to study very hard, sacrifice friends, cable TV, smartphones, and get an All India Rank that doesn't look like a phone number. The number of hours studied is akin to currency. News-channels will ask you about the number of hours studied

every day; smartness doesn't count, they just want to promptly report the number of hours, and a parent hearing that the topper studied 12 hours a day will use that benchmark to make their kid's life miserable.

Here again, several movies have glorified the academic path. A scene with a person studying under a street lamp moves to the same chap

jostling with scores of youngsters like him, gathered around a list stuck outside the Union Public Service Commission office, to find his name on it. Then he breaks down, uplifting music playing in the background. The academic path to wealth is the most common — the one that generates the least wealth at a young age and yet expects 70 hours of work a week.

And still another is for ones who won the genetic lottery, blessed with such good looks that a film director spots them even as they are having paani puri on the street. Most such multi-million dollar careers kick off when a car stops at the roadside, a window rolls down, and an offer is made. Within a year or two, the paani purieater is stepping



Influencers operate in range for people on the ground to take potshots.

out of a Land Rover, wearing oversized glasses, and making patronising small-talk with the paparazzi, while suffering from success. Very few in India begrudge such meteoric rise. It is, as they say, very acceptable.

So, why are content creators judged so harshly? There is a concept in differential calculus, called the 'Local Maxima'. It relates to the highest point of a mathematical function in the immediate neighbourhood. When the internet was not there, those good at academics (local maxima) got accolades from relatives and neighbours for cracking a tough exam. The comparisons were local. And the relative superiority gave happiness.

neighbourhood, and suddenly all the local maxima realised they aren't the global maxima. People their age were earning much more, while doing really, really less, and not necessarily studying 12 hours a day. It disturbed the local maximas' mental equations. Rags to riches stories, propelled by genetics and a bit of luck, always existed, but they were distant. With the internet, they are at

your doorstep. The rise is swift, and every bit is recorded. "My first two-wheeler" to "first foreign trip with parents" to "my first BMW", it is live-streaming large-scale hay production while the sun is shining.

Then, Bollywood is yet to validate this new path, glamourise it and make a serious actor of repute play the role of a content creator, making the general public root for an influencer. Perhaps till then, influencers won't be immune to day-today jealousy, like Bollywood stars are. Barely any layperson would be jealous of Aishwarya Rai. She and her kind are in the stratosphere already. Influencers, however, operate somewhere in the middle, within range for people on the ground to take potshots. People like me, however, who aren't genetically chiseled or have the content creation chops, would do better to focus on differential calculus.

Abhishek Asthana is a tech and media entrepreneur, and tweets as @gabbbarsingh. The views expressed are personal.

{ SUNDAY LETTERS }

US-India relations Accept transgenders as humans

Hd

This is with reference to "Clearing the fog on the state of India-US relations" by Rudra Chaudhuri (June 29). Amid sensational headlines and social media noise, the real story is one of steady functional progress. TRUST and civil nuclear cooperation highlight a deeper strategic convergence.

Sanjay Chopra

This is with reference to "Transgender rights & transforming society" by Namita Bhandare (June 29). Society needs to change its mindset, perspective, and bring transgenders into the mainstream. Awareness and early education can foster inclusion.

Abhilasha Gupta

On political cartooning

This is in reference to "Emergency, seen in the cartoons of Sudhir Dar" with (28 June). It not only highlights the power of the cartoonist in those dark days, but also showcases how cartoons can deliver the message through laughter while provoking thought.

Vishwajit K

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Simple grass fields or mud tracks are enough, as long as they offer safe spaces for children to play freely. In countries like the US and across Europe, sports culture is deeply rooted. Parents go for a morning run, and their children follow. Sports training in schools is compulsory. Every child picks up a sport, supports a team, or follows sporting events. It's a way of their life.

The policy includes a focus on "build for economic development," aiming to boost industries such as tourism, manufacturing, and sports technology. My humble suggestion is to remove the GST on sports training and sports equipment. As far as Olympic medals are concerned, once a child is placed in a structured system from school onward, their ambition will take shape. With clear pathways to progress to the elite level, distractions will reduce. In the past, many athletes weren't sure how to reach the international stage. Today, there is a system in place.

Anju Bobby George won India's first World Championships medal in athletics. The views expressed are personal.

SHUTTERSTOCK

With the internet, the world became one's

of belief, and whether it can withstand the

WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM THE SUNDAY EXPRESS, JULY 6, 2025

PINION

Across THE AISLE



The word 'secular' is anathema to the supporters of Hindu rashtra but can a plural, diverse, multi-religious and democratic country be anything but secular? I admire the French who are predominantly Catholic but fiercely secular. The other word 'socialist' has no fixed meaning; it is often used to describe a welfare state and the BJP cannot deny that India is a welfare state. The addition of the words 'secular' and 'socialist' did not radically alter the basic structure of the

The spectre never went away

stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen's rights." Golwalkar is venerated by the RSS and

remains the fountainhead of RSS-thought. There is no evidence that the RSS has changed its views on Hindu rashtra. On the contrary, the RSS vocally supported the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA). The RSS also supports the government's efforts to throw out or push back 'unlawful' immigrants, especially Bangladeshis and Rohingyas. (The government paused the NRC only when it found that the implementation of the law had the unintended result of identifying many thousands of Hindus as non-citizens.)

Soon after Mr Modi formed his second government in 2019, he struck at the state of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K). The use of Article 370(1)(d) and (3) to nullify Article 370 was, to say the least, bizarre and constitutionally suspect. The Supreme Court held that the 'amendment' to the Constitution without following the procedure laid down in Article 368 was unconstitutional. Yet, the Supreme Court saved the situation for the government by holding that the exercise of power by the President under Article 370(1)(d), applying all the provisions of the Constitution to J&K, had the same *effect* as abrogation of Article 370. However, the Court left several seminal questions unanswered. The government won bragging rights though it lost on the legal issue of abrogation.

THE 400 PAAR FIASCO

In April 2024, emboldened by his belief that his 10-year rule had ushered in the Amrit Kaal (golden age), Mr Modi raised his sights and aimed at winning 400 seats in the Lok Sabha election. The I.N.D.I.A. parties waged a spirited battle with the slogan 'save the Constitution'. The slogan resonated with the people who voted in favour of continuing a BJPled government but with a severe limitation: they gave the BJP just 240 seats, less than a simple majority in the Lok Sabha. That check has constricted Mr Modi's power to amend the Constitution – so far.

UNDAUNTED, THE RSS has set the ball **ROLLING:**

The first arrow was the pseudodemocratic idea of One Nation, One Election (ONOE). A pre-scripted report was obtained and a joint parliamentary committee has been enabled to go around the country to obtain 'views' – until the time is ripe to pass the O.N.O.E. Bills.

The next arrow was shot by Mr Dattatreya Hosabale, general secretary of RSS. He dubbed as unconstitutional the addition of the words 'secular' and 'socialist' in the Preamble to the Constitution, and demanded their deletion. The Congress and other Opposition parties condemned the demand. The Vice President of India, Mr Jagdeep Dhankar, weighed in with the observation that the two words were a 'festering wound'. Mr Hosabale's demand triggered a *political* debate and Mr Dhankar wading into the debate raised eyebrows.

TO STOKE **COMMUNAL FIRES**

The word 'secular' is anathema to the supporters of Hindu *rashtra* but can a plural, diverse, multi-religious and democratic country be anything but secular? I admire the French who are pre-dominantly Catholic but fiercely secular. The other word 'socialist' has no fixed meaning; it is often used to describe a welfare state and the BJP cannot deny that India is a welfare state. The addition of the words 'secular' and 'socialist' did not radically alter the basic structure of the Constitution. In fact, the Supreme had held in 1973 that 'secularism' is a basic feature of the Constitution and in 1980 that 'socialism' permeated the Directive Principles of State Policy (Articles 36 to 51). The demand of Mr Hosabale is not based on any constitutional principle or societal need but is raised only to stoke the fires lit by the communal forces.

It will be a betrayal of their core principles if the TDP, JD(U), AIADMK, LJP, JD(S), NCP and others support the RSS/BJP. The I.N.D.I.A. parties must gear up for a battle which they will surely win.



Another idiotic exercise

IN AN upper caste village in Bihar during a recent election. I was taken to see the guarter in which the mouse-catcher community lived. On travels in rural India, I have often seen desperate poverty, but this 'Musahar' quarter was the worst I have seen in a very long time. This mousecatcher community was confined to living at some distance from the main village, in a largeish crater on the edge of a railway track. Mud hovels lined lanes so narrow that two people would find it hard to pass each other. When I went into one of the hovels, I found it frighteningly bereft of the ordinary things we need to survive – food, clothes, bedding.

The children I saw in this 'Musahar' quarter were barefoot and in rags, their hair and teeth showed signs of acute malnutrition. The men I spoke to said they made a living by doing odd jobs for the upper-caste families in the village. When I saw the excellent report in this newspaper last week on the Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls, I remembered that 'Musahar' quarter. It surprised me not at all that the reporters who wandered about Bihar to gauge the reaction of ordinary voters to the Election Commission's new demand for proof of identity found that they were puzzled and confused. They would have already found it hard enough to go through the process of getting the Aadhaar cards they all seemed to have. Speaking of Aadhaar cards, were we not told then that this card would supersede all our other cards and be final proof of identity? There are more questions that need to be asked of the officials who thought up this new exercise and proved yet again that Indian officialdom remains worryingly oblivious to Indian realities. Did those in the Election Commission, who designed this 'Special intensive Revision' remember that an estimated 94 lakh Bihari families live on less than Rs 6.000 a month? Did they remember that more than half the population of this state is believed to live in poverty when it is measured on a multi-dimensional index? The multi-dimensions involve measuring things like nutrition, access to clean water, schools, healthcare and other things. Did they remember that the per capita income of a Bihari is Rs 54,111, when the national average is Rs 1,85,000? The answer is that they probably did not and, in any case, they couldn't care less. They follow orders from their political masters who should know better since they are supposed to represent the people. But Lutyens' Delhi is a long, long way from Indian realities and the politicians who now inhabit its fine bungalows have lived there for more than a decade now. The next time you hear someone from the Bharatiya Janata Party, or one of their daft devotees, sneer at 'Lootyens', it is worth reminding them that the English-speaking elite they so despise does not live there anymore. They have taken their drawing rooms and refinements with them, and fled. This has totally changed the character of this tiny, privileged enclave, in which I spent my childhood and growing years. But that is a subject for another day. This week, I would like to stick to the idiocy of schemes that are devised in the highest echelons of India's government. An Opposition leader in Bihar has referred to this latest scheme as 'votebandi' and compared it to 'notebandi'. It is a valid comparison. That other exercise was supposed to cleanse India of 'black money' and forever end the ways in which 'black' money was used to fund terrorism, corrupt politicians and other such things. So millions of very poor Indians were forced to queue for hours in the sun to exchange their old notes for new. And women I met in villages shortly after wept as they told me that they had lost the stashes that they concealed from alcoholic or reckless husbands. They did not dare reveal these secret stashes, so the money became useless. Narendra Modi's demonetisation in 2016 failed so utterly to become the magic wand that he was told it would be when he was learning economics in his alma mater, the RSS, that he no longer mentions it when he boasts of his achievements. When elections come around, his income tax sleuths routinely find rooms full of illegal funds in the houses of politicians and the offices of political parties. The police routinely stop cars ferrying huge piles of cash to and from candidates. And, in a new chapter in this unending story of 'black money', a Supreme Court judge is likely to face impeachment because of singed piles of cash found in his backyard. We need to ask why our political leaders and high officials are so removed from the realities of India that they have not noticed that the people of Bihar are nearly all too poor to get more documents to prove their identity. The question we should also be asking is what this 'special' inspection of election rolls seeks to achieve. If it is to weed out Muslims from Myanmar and Bangladesh who might be trying to vote for 'secular' parties, then it is a wasted exercise. Bihar is such a poor state that its own citizens are forced to travel to Delhi and Mumbai in search of employment of the most menial kind.

FOUNTAINHEAD OF **RSS-THOUGHT** citizenship. The central pillar of a Hindu nation will be the Hindu religion. M. S. Golwalkar, the second sarsanghchalak of the RSS (1940-1973), called 'Guruji', in his book, We, or Our Nationhood Defined, wrote: either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e. of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate exis-Constitution tence to merge in the Hindu race, or may

Raising a boy is not like taming a tiger



A Kolkata periodical that shaped a revolution in Iran



EVERY TWO weeks, I read about what parents share regarding the challenges of raising their boys. As responsible members of society, they genuinely want to make a positive change in the world. Yet, the ongoing debate about "how to raise boys" feels fundamentally misguided. The premise suggests that boys are naturally different: Difficult, aggressive, and problems-in-the-making. This view is not accurate. Boys, just like girls, are simply children. We are already in the error zone once we start applying different parenting rules for boys and girls. Boys are neither monsters nor angels. They are children. Wonderful children. Both boys and girls are young, naive, curious individuals who need love, space, care, and freedom from gender stereotypes. Like girls, they need guidance, including education about sex.

As an academic paediatrician and a father of two now-adult children, here is my perspective:

Boys are not born aggressive or entitled. They learn those behaviours. Decades of research (including the landmark study on Adverse Childhood Experiences) show that children act out when they are hurt, ignored, or spoiled. A boy's punch and a girl's tantrum stem from the same roots: Frustration and feeling unheard.

Society often tells boys to "man up" when they are sad or scared, teaching them to bottle up emotions until they explode as anger. Boys are not naturally aggressive. They are conditioned that way. If we let them cry, talk, and ask for help like anyone else, they will grow into healthier, more balanced adults. That is true for girls as well.

The hard truth is that rude, selfish or bullying behaviour in your child usually

respectful but pick these traits up from adults who say, "Don't cry like a girl" or expect girls to clean up. Effective parenting is not about fixing the child. It is about fixing yourself.

THE RASHTRIYA Swayamsevak Sangh

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lish a Hindu rashtra (Hindu nation). The

concept of a Hindu rashtra is borrowed

from the Holy Roman Empire (800-1800

CE) or the Caliphate (632-1258 CE), and

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to Hindu scriptures. Sometimes, the RSS

may seem to retreat but will not wander

or go astray; it will wait for a propitious

time to strike. Hindu rashtra has many

sub-goals such as repealing Article 370

of the Constitution, building a grand Ram

temple at Ayodhya, laying exclusive

claim to holy places like Varanasi and

Mathura, and replacing the Babasaheb

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The modern nation-state is based on

"The foreign races in Hindusthan must

constitution based on Manusmriti.

It's all about modeling good behaviour, not preaching. Children are excellent at gauging your belief system. Choose an apple over fries. Share chores. Show that respect for women is non-negotiable. Admit mistakes and apologise. Demonstrate humility and compassion. Help an elderly neighbour; guide someone across a busy street. Teach kindness by example.

Lend a hand where you can. Values are not lectured. Children see their parents as their role models. Children, whether boys or girls, come to this world with a clean slate. A child raised with genuine kindness today reflects the same timeless principles that have shaped children for centuries.

When we label boys as potential monsters or obsess over "toxic masculinity," we are being biased and unfair to them. Boys can be tender, creative, and empathetic. They already are. They can also fail, cry, and get frustrated. It is part of growing up.

We label them "problems," and they become one. They are not predators but innocent kids, like girls, who deserve the freedom to be themselves without a stereotype suffocating them.

Raising boys is not complicated. It is no different from raising girls. It remains the same today as it was a century ago. It is not an engineering problem to solve. It is a human problem. Nourish them with love, not stereotypes. Give children a safe space to be soft, to speak up, and to feel heard. Be yourself, and they learn that everyone commits mistakes. Show them respect in every interaction, not because it is socially expected, but because it is simply the right thing to do. Practise timeless values yourself.

We should stop treating raising a boy like taming a tiger. They are simply children. Naughty, messy, fun-loving, and creative. Raise them well, and they will become men who respect women, parents, the elderly, the poor, and the weak. They will learn to manage their emotions responsibly, and strive to make the world a better place. Not because they are boys but because they are inherently good people. The writer is a professor of Paediatrics, AIIMS, New Delhi (How to Raise a Boy is a fortnightly column)

"WHAT IS Iran's illness?" "The principles of humanity," "The organization of constitutionalism," "Prosperity is the basis of liberty," "What is the reason that Iran's affairs cannot be organized?" "What are the benefits of an assembly for the people?"

These were just a few headlines that appeared in Habl al-Matin, a Calcutta-based Persian periodical. While they may seem remarkably contemporary, given the current situation in Iran, these issues and ideas were published more than a century ago.

Habl al-Matin played a pivotal role in shaping Iran's Constitutional Revolution more than a century ago. Although this short-lived attempt (from 1906 to 1911) at parliamentary rule fell short of its ultimate aims, it set the stage for the Revolution of 1979 that ended monarchical rule in Iran.

THE FIRM CORD

Calcutta, the capital of British India, was a key point for the circulation of information, especially Persian-language publications, throughout the subcontinent in the 19th Century. The city had a Persian printing press, and people from Iran would come here to get their work printed.

One such publication was Habl al-Matin (The Firm Cord), launched in 1893 with the aim of reporting developments from the Kingdom of Persia – then ruled by the Qajar dynasty – to Persians both within and outside the country.

The periodical was founded by Jalal aldin Kashani (1863-1926) who hailed from the city of Kashan. "He was probably trained as an *akhund* (one who reads the Quran), and even though he hardly ever made his living as an 'alim, he never gave up the long flowing robe (the qaaba) and the white turban that identifies one," Kingshuk Chatterjee, professor at the University of Calcutta, wrote in Contours of Relationship: India and the Middle East (2017).

After trying to sell carpets in Turkey and Egypt, and travelling through Bombay, Madras, Penang, Java, Singapore, and possibly Rangoon, Kashani arrived in Calcutta around 1888. He would be the driving force of Hablal-Matin till his pass-



DENOUNCING QAJARS

Initially, Habl al-Matin was not overly critical of the Qajar dynasty. But the increasing unpopularity of ruler Muzaffar al-din Shah, who reigned from 1896 to 1906, led to a stark turnaround in the periodical's editorial stand by 1898.

The Shah had raised taxes, triggered a financial crisis because of his extravagant lifestyle, granted political and economic concessions to Europeans and Russians in return for loans, and publicly punished prominent merchants – policies that Habl al-Matin was critical of.

With the periodical advocating for reforms and limits to the authority of the Qajars, the Shah banned its circulation within the empire. But this only increased the magazine's popularity, with merchants smuggling it into Iran.

While on his deathbed, the Shah finally gave in to public pressure and signed into law the country's first Constitution, establishing a representative Assembly (the Majlis) in 1906. Hablal-Matin was one of the foremost proponents of constitutionalism (mashrutiyat), and a firm critic of those calling for a restoration of despotic rule.

Habl al-Matin along with other periodicals such as Akhtar (the Star) published in Istanbul, Hikmat (Wisdom) published in Cairo, and *Qanun* (Law) published in London, also helped add new vocabulary into Persian political language.

"Issues discussed in these periodicals included the rule of law, parliamentary democracy, women's rights, a reinterpretation of Iranian history from the bottom up rather than a mere dynastic chronicle, and descriptive accounts of progressive movements in Europe and the rest of the world," Hamid Dabash, professor at Columbia University, wrote in Iran Without Borders: Towards a Critique of the Founded in December 1893 by Jalal al-din Kashani, Habl al-Matin was printed in Wikimedia

Postcolonial Nation (2016).

In 1907, as press restrictions relaxed, Hablal-Matin opened an edition in Tehran as well. This edition later moved to the city of Rasht, and was published till July 1909.

SPARK FOR FUTURE

Habl al-Matin began to lose popularity by the later years of Iran's constitutional experiment, as print journalism proliferated in the country: from 35,000 copies at one point, the periodical could sell no more than two to three thousand copies by the 1910s, wrote Nassereddin Parvin in Encyclopedia Iranica (2002).

Like other publications by expatriate Iranian communities, Habl al-Matin does not seem to have made a lot of money as well. "Jalal al-din's wife is known frequently to have complained complained that the old man sunk his family's entire wealth from trade (especially of carpets) into the venture," Chatterjee wrote.

Jalal al-din Kashani died in 1926, and his daughter continued to print the periodical for the next four years, before finally shutting it down. But the periodical left behind an indelible mark in Iran's history – one that can be felt even today.

The Constitutional Revolution failed. British and Russian intervention effectively reinstated the monarchy of Qajars. But Habl al-Matin and other similar periodicals helped establish the direction of the debate about reforms in the country. They directed "the spirits of the French and Russian revolutions towards the making of the Constitutional Revolution, prompting the emergence of the first left, liberal, and Islamist political ideologies," Dabash wrote.

mirrors what they see at home. They show you a mirror. If you scream, they will scream. If you hit, they learn to hit. If you gossip about a neighbour, they will mock a classmate. If you treat service staff like inferiors, they will believe they deserve special treatment. Boys are not born dising, Chatterjee wrote.

Kashani continued to write most editorials even after losing his eyesight during the final decade of his life – he would dictate the text to his daughter, Fakr al-Sultan 'Mo'yedzadeh', who had by that time taken over the day-to-day affairs of the periodical.

The writer is Senior Correspondent, The Indian Express



"WHAT DOES your mother do?" "Nothing. She's a homemaker." The answer I gave during the early stages of life made me feel ashamed once I started living alone. And I regretted it recently, when I had to be in my mother's shoes for a few days when she suffered a medical emergency.

From cooking, cleaning and being an alarm clock for my brother and me, to buying things for the house and taking care of her terrace garden and the small farm where coconut trees, plantains and other species thrive — she did this all by herself. Even when she hit her 70s, she refused to hire a house help, ignoring our repeated requests.

Walking a mile in Amma's shoes

On her 75th birthday recently, when she suffered a fall, leading to a fracture that required surgery and implants, she was bedridden for the first time in over 40 years since we were born. I took the first flight home, with no clue about what lay ahead. It crushed me to see her in hospital, but duty took precedence over emotions. The days in hospital were manageable, though I was sleepless due to the constant monitoring of her IV drips and the machines with varying decibel levels that were attached to her. Painkillers and sedatives helped her wade through the toughest of days.

The day we reached home, a Pandora's box of challenges opened. I became the new mother of a 75-year-old. I finally understood why my friends with a family and children never had any time for themselves – not even to exercise for half an hour a day. For

the first time, I had messages unread for over 48 hours. When I sat with my phone at night, I would be too tired to look at it.

My brother and I shared the load, but both of us felt overburdened. We frantically looked for a full-time help so that we could get back to work. I had to don the role of a house nurse, domestic help, cook and cleaner, besides entertaining visitors. Exhausted, I would grow impatient with my mother for not eating or drinking enough water, for waking me up for basic needs. I was ashamed of myself, of this new realisation of being a failure.

Earlier, I was used to my friends telling me that they envied me for the way I lived my life the way I wanted. Now, I realise that I was doing only what any woman would do if she was not burdened with family responsibilities. I was taking care of only myself, which was no big deal.

I thought of the times when I had been sick – the five surgeries I had over a period of 15 years after I started working. I never heard Amma say she was exhausted. I loved visitors whenever I was sick and would always be surrounded by friends and relatives. I only had to gesture to Amma for tea or snacks for them, and it would be provided in the best possible way. The last time I was bedridden was in 2021, when Amma wasn't young anymore. But whatever I needed, she provided.

I came to a conclusion this time. Managing things at home requires a separate set of skills, nothing close to sitting on a chair in an air-conditioned newsroom. I don't regret to admit that I lack the crucial skills required to run a home. Cooking three meals a day for three people was no less than torture for me.

Finally we managed to find a full-time help, train her and trust her with everything, including our mother, who was still in severe pain and was agonising that she was going to be left alone with a stranger.

Amid all this, the only thing that brought a smile to her face was a photo that my brother clicked of the first fruit on a mangosteen tree in her farm. She had planted it eight years ago and would check it almost every other day for a flower or a fruit.

I now pin hopes on the mangosteen to win where her daughter failed – to motivate Amma to be back on her feet.

> The writer is Associate Editor, The Indian Express (National Editor Shalini Langer curates the fortnightly 'She Said' column)





FE SUNDAY 10

SUNDAY, JULY 6, 2025



Teeing off with the next generation



The word 'secular' is anathema to the supporters of Hindu *rashtra* but can a plural, diverse, multi-religious and democratic country be anything but secular? I admire the French who are pre-dominantly Catholic but fiercely secular. The other word 'socialist' has no fixed meaning; it is often used to describe a welfare state and the BJP cannot deny that India is a welfare state. The addition of the words 'secular' and 'socialist' did not radically alter the basic structure of the Constitution



People protesting against the Citizenship Amendment Act in Mumbai

EXPRESS FILE PHOTO



IKNEWI was in trouble when a 19-yearold I was playing a practice round with called me "Uncle" right before splitting the fairway with a 350-yard bomb off the tee.

"Good shot, *beta,*" I replied. With a straight face. Because sometimes sarcasm is your only defence.

It's official. I'm the elder statesman now. When did that happen? One moment, I was the brash young rebel wearing bucket hats and triple-checking my hairstyle before a round. The next, I'm explaining to a kid what a fax machine was.

Golf, unlike most sports, has a long shelf life. That's the beauty of it. You can still shoot under par with a dodgy back and a smarter short game. But somewhere along the way, the locker room chatter shifted from Tiger and Phil to "Dude, did you see that Ludvig Aberg swing breakdown on YouTube?"

Half of these kids don't even know what Jeev Milkha Singh meant to Indian golf. "You mean the golfer before Anirban Lahiri?" one of them asked me with genuine innocence. I almost fainted.

Let me be clear: I'm not bitter. Okay, maybe a little bitter. But mostly, I'm amazed. This new generation? They're built different. Literally. These kids walk onto the range with a protein shake in one hand, Mentoring the kids launch monitors in the is a different

other, and shoulders that look like they were sculpted by Marvel Studios. I recently played with

language — reels, one of our top juniors — I won't name him because I still have some pride – and watched him hit a 9-iron 180 yards. That's my 7-iron

on a good day with the wind behind me and the ball praying for distance."Do you want a yardage book?" I asked. "Nah, I've mapped every course on my Arccos," he said.

I miss the days when "mapping the course" meant walking it twice and

But they're listening. That surprised me. Despite the swagger and the sunglasses and the swing speeds that give TrackMan a seizure, these kids still crave direction. They want guidance – not in a "teach me how to grip the club" way, but in a "what do I do when I shoot 78 on Day 1 and still have to grind it out on Day 2" kind of way.

That's where experience matters. You can't Google what it feels like to choke on a five-footer for a playoff. You have to live it.And I've lived it.Alot. (Don't ask.) I tell them the same thing I tell myself: Learn to enjoy the boring parts of the game. Because golf isn't highlighting reels. It's routine. It's recovery. It's repeating the same damn drill until it becomes muscle memory.

They pretend to roll their eyes — and then quietly get to work.

The role reversal

One of the strangest things I've noticed is how often I find myself learning from them now.

There's this one kid who showed me a new putting routine that he picked up from a guy in the PGA Tour University system. It looked ridiculous at first bounce the ball three times, deep breath, laser focus – but then he started sinking everything inside ten feet. I tried it the next week. Made five more putts than usual.

You win, kid. You win.

ballgame. You

must speak their

DMs, and

Gen Z dialect

This exchange of knowledge – me passing down old-school grit, them sharing new-school tools — is what's keeping the game fresh for me. I may not

be bombing it 350 anymore, but I'm still growing. Still competing. Still smiling like an idiot every time I hit a pure iron shot.

The goal now isn't just to win. It's to contribute. To be part of a golfing ecosystem where mentorship isn't just a buzzword — it's a baton pass. And yes, sometimes it's handed over with a protein bar and a humble pie.

A word to the next gen (and their parents)

To the juniors reading this: Don't lose that fearlessness. It's your superpower. But also, don't ignore the mental game

THE RASHTRIYA SWAYAMSEVAK Sangh (RSS) is unwavering in its goal to establish a Hindu *rashtra* (Hindu nation). The concept of a Hindu rashtra is borrowed from the Holy Roman Empire (800-1800 CE) or the Caliphate (632-1258 CE), and prescribes a nation governed according to Hindu scriptures. Sometimes, the RSS may seem to retreat but will not wander or go astray; it will wait for a propitious time to strike. Hindu rashtra has many sub-goals such as repealing Article 370 of the Constitution, building a grand Ram temple at Ayodhya, laying exclusive claim to holy places like Varanasi and Mathura, and replacing the Babasaheb Ambedkar-drafted Constitution by a constitution based on Manusmriti.

Fountainhead of RSS-thought

The modern nation-state is based on citizenship. The central pillar of a Hindu nation will be the Hindu *religion*. MS Golwalkar, the second *sarsanghchalak* of the RSS (1940-1973), called 'Guruji', in his book, We, or Our Nationhood *Defined*, wrote:

"The foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e. of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less

The spectre never went away

any preferential treatment, not even citizen's rights."

Golwalkar is venerated by the RSS and remains the fountainhead of RSSthought. There is no evidence that the RSS has changed its views on Hindu rashtra. On the contrary, the RSS vocally supported the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA). The RSS also supports the government's efforts to throw out or push back 'unlawful' immigrants, especially Bangladeshis and Rohingyas. (The government paused the NRC only when it found that the *implementation* of the law had the unintended result of identifying many thousands of Hindus as non-citizens.)

Soon after Mr Modi formed his second government in 2019, he struck at the state of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K). The use of Article 370(1)(d) and (3) to nullify Article 370 was, to say the least, bizarre and constitutionally suspect. The Supreme Court held that the 'amendment' to the Constitution without following the procedure laid down in Article 368 was unconstitutional. Yet, the Supreme Court saved the situation for the government by holding that the exercise of power by the President under Article 370(1)(d), applying all the provisions of the Constitution to J&K, had the same *effect* as abrogation of Article 370. However, the Court left several seminal questions unanswered. The government won bragging rights though it lost on the legal issue of abrogation.

The 400 paar fiasco

In April 2024, emboldened by his belief that his 10-year rule had ushered in the Amrit Kaal (golden age), Mr Modi raised his sights and aimed at winning 400 seats in the Lok Sabha election. The I.N.D.I.A. parties waged a spirited battle with the slogan 'save the Constitution'. The slogan resonated with the people who voted in favour of continuing a BJP-led government <u>but</u> with a severe limitation: they gave the BJP just 240 seats, less than a simple majority in the Lok Sabha. That check has constricted Mr Modi's power to amend the Constitution — so far.

Undaunted, the RSS has set the ball rolling:

The first arrow was the pseudo-democratic idea of One Nation, One Election (ONOE). A pre-scripted report was obtained and a joint parliamentary committee has been enabled to go around the country to obtain 'views' – until the time is ripe to pass the O.N.O.E. Bills.

The next arrow was shot by Mr Dattatreya Hosabale, general secretary of RSS. He dubbed as unconstitutional the addition of the words 'secular' and 'socialist' in the Preamble to the Constitution, and demanded their deletion. The Congress and other Opposition parties condemned the demand. The Vice President of India, Mr Jagdeep Dhankar, weighed in with the observation that the two words were a 'festering wound'. Mr Hosabale's demand triggered a *political* debate and Mr Dhankar wading into the debate raised eyebrows.

To stoke communal fires

The word 'secular' is anathema to the supporters of Hindu rashtra but can a plural, diverse, multi-religious and democratic country be anything but secular? I admire the French who are pre-dominantly Catholic but fiercely secular. The other word 'socialist' has no fixed meaning; it is often used to describe a welfare state and the BJP cannot deny that India is a welfare state. The addition of the words 'secular' and 'socialist' did not radically alter the basic structure of the Constitution. In fact, the Supreme had held in 1973 that 'secularism' is a basic feature of the Constitution and in 1980 that 'social ism' permeated the Directive Principles of State Policy (Articles 36 to 51). The demand of Mr Hosabale is not based on any constitutional principle or societal need but is raised only to stoke the fires lit by the communal forces.

It will be a betrayal of their core principles if the TDP, JD(U), AIADMK, LJP, JD(S), NCP and others support the RSS/BJP. The I.N.D.I.A. parties must gear up for a battle which they will surely win.

> Website: pchidambaram.in \mathbb{X} X: @Pchidambaram IN



IN AN UPPER caste village in Bihar dur-

Another idiotic exercise

and confused. They would have already found it hard enough to go through the process of getting the Aadhaar cards

cians who now inhabit its fine bungalows have lived there for more than a decade now. The next time you hear

money became useless. Narendra Modi's demonetisation in 2016 failed so utterly to become the

trusting your gut. These days, gut is something you're not even allowed to have. Six-packs are the new standard issue.

But you know what? I love it.

Because when I look past the jokes and the Uncle tags, I see something that gives me real hope for Indian golf. I see kids who are more disciplined, more informed, and more fearless than I ever was at that age.

We were taught to respect the game. They're taught to own it.

And somewhere between those two mindsets lies the evolution of golf in our country.

Coaching the Insta generation

Now, mentoring these kids is a whole different ballgame. You must speak their language — and I don't mean Hindi or English. I mean Reels, DMs, and that weird Gen Z dialect where "fire" means "awesome" and "sus" is not short for suspect, but apparently a lifestyle.

You don't just give swing tips anymore. You must curate their practice playlists, approve their social media captions, and yes, help them find the right lighting for that one-handed chip shot video.

- that's where tournaments are won. And while you're at it, call your coaches "Sir" and maybe just once call me "Bhai" instead of "Uncle." I'll Venmo you.

To their parents: Let them breathe. Let them fail. A bogey today isn't the end of the world. It's just a comma, not a full stop.

Golf is a long, humbling journey. And sometimes the most important lessons come in the form of a missed cut, a broken driver, or a grumpy old pro who tells you to stop rushing your transition.

Still in the game

So yes, I now carry Tiger Balm in my golf bag. Yes, I stretch for longer than I actually play. And yes, I've reached the age where my Spotify Wrapped has more Kishore Kumar than Kendrick Lamar. But I wouldn't trade places with any of them. Because every time I tee it up with the Next Gen whether it's a rising amateur, a brash teen, or a newly minted pro – I see the future of Indian golf staring back at me. And it looks pretty darn good. Even if it does call me Uncle.

> Rahil Gangjee is a professional golfer, sharing through this column what life on a golf course is like

ing a recent election, I was taken to see the quarter in which the mouse-catcher community lived. On travels in rural India, I have often seen desperate poverty, but this 'Musahar' quarter was the worst I have seen in a very long time. This mouse-catcher community was confined to living at some distance from the main village, in a largeish crater on the edge of a railway track. Mud hovels lined lanes so narrow that two people would find it hard to pass each other. When I went into one of the hovels, I found it frighteningly bereft of the ordinary things we need to survive - food, clothes, bedding.

The children I saw in this 'Musahar' quarter were barefoot and in rags, their hair and teeth showed signs of acute malnutrition. The men I spoke to said they made a living by doing odd jobs for the upper-caste families in the village. When I saw the excellent report in this newspaper last week on the Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls, I remembered that 'Musahar' quarter. It surprised me not at all that the reporters who wandered about Bihar to gauge the reaction of ordinary voters to the Election Commission's new demand for proof of identity found that they were puzzled

they all seemed to have.

Speaking of Aadhaar cards, were we not told then that this card would supersede all our other cards and be final proof of identity?

There are more questions that need to be asked of the officials who thought up this new exercise and proved yet again that Indian officialdom remains worryingly oblivious to Indian realities. Did those in the Election Commission, who designed this 'Special intensive Revision' remember that an estimated 94 lakh Bihari families live on less than ₹6,000 a month? Did they remember that more than half the population of this state is believed to live in poverty when it is measured on a multi-dimensional index? The multi-dimensions involve measuring things like nutrition, access to clean water, schools, healthcare and other things. Did they remember that the per capita income of a Bihari is ₹54,111, when the national average is ₹1,85,000?

The answer is that they probably did not and, in any case, they couldn't care less. They follow orders from their political masters who should know better since they are supposed to represent the people.But Lutyens'Delhi is a long, long way from Indian realities and the politisomeone from the Bharatiya Janata Party, or one of their daft devotees, sneer at 'Lootyens', it is worth reminding them that the English-speaking elite they so despise does not live there anymore. They have taken their drawing rooms and refinements with them, and fled. This has totally changed the character of this tiny, privileged enclave, in which I spent my childhood and growing years. But that is a subject for another day.

This week, I would like to stick to the idiocy of schemes that are devised in the highest echelons of India's government. An Opposition leader in Bihar has referred to this latest scheme as 'votebandi' and compared it to 'notebandi'. It is a valid comparison. That other exercise was supposed to cleanse India of 'black money' and forever end the ways in which 'black' money was used to fund terrorism, corrupt politicians and other such things. So millions of very poor Indians were forced to queue for hours in the sun to exchange their old notes for new. And women I met in villages shortly after wept as they told me that they had lost the stashes that they concealed from alcoholic or reckless husbands. They did not dare reveal these secret stashes, so the

magic wand that he was told it would be when he was learning economics in his alma mater, the RSS, that he no longer mentions it when he boasts of his achievements. When elections come around, his income tax sleuths routinely find rooms full of illegal funds in the houses of politicians and the offices of political parties. The police routinely stop cars ferrying huge piles of cash to and from candidates. And, in a new chapter in this unending story of 'black money', a Supreme Court judge is likely to face impeachment because of singed piles of cash found in his backyard.

We need to ask why our political leaders and high officials are so removed from the realities of India that they have not noticed that the people of Bihar are nearly all too poor to get more documents to prove their identity. The question we should also be asking is what this 'special' inspection of election rolls seeks to achieve. If it is to weed out Muslims from Myanmar and Bangladesh who might be trying to vote for 'secular' parties, then it is a wasted exercise. Bihar is such a poor state that its own citizens are forced to travel to Delhi and Mumbai in search of employment of the most menial kind.

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SUNDAY 06.07



If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito buzzing around Dalai Lama

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VOTERS TO STARTUPS: THE ORDEALS OF **IDENTITY IN INDIA**

HYDERABAD

VERY few years, the managers of India's operating system find ways to reinvent the debate on an old problem. A decade and a half after the inception of Aadhaar—and the global celebration of its contribution to India's digital public infrastructure—the old chestnut of identity has surfaced vet again.

The Election Commission of India, on June 24, issued instructions for holding a 'special intensive revision' of the electoral rolls in Bihar. The objective: ensure eligible voters are included and no ineligible voter is on the rolls. There can be no quarrel with the objective of transparency, but the process has triggered a bunch of conspiracy theories and is the subject of rhetoric by the opposition parties.

The revision of rolls—the first since 2003—requires voters not listed to provide proof of their place of birth and a declaration of citizenship. Of the 7.9 crore voters in Bihar, over 4.9 crore need only an extract of the 2003 listing. Those not on the rolls, though, must present documents—if born before 1 July 1987 for themselves; if born between 1987 and 2004, for themselves and one parent; and those born after December 2004, for themselves and for both parents.

Among the documents allowed for verification of citizenship are: identity card/ pension payment order issued to government/PSU employee, identity card issued by government, banks, post office and LIC, educational certificate issued by recognised



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tificate, forest right certificate, caste certificate, land/ house allotment, family register, national register, passport and birth certificate. Size and scale matter for processes. Bihar, with a population of over 13.1 crore, would rank as the 11th largest country alongside Mexico.

entities, permanent residence cer-

As per the Bihar State Caste Survey, a mere 15 percent have finished class 10 and only 6 percent are graduates. The National Family Health Survey 5 reveals Bihar has the low-

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LL the president's mien matters. On June 30, the ancient city of Gorakhpur did not merely host the ceremonial arrival of India's President, but it bore witness to a deeper continuity. Beneath mon-

soon-laden skies, President Droupadi Murmu stepped into the sanctum of the Gorakhpur temple—the beating heart of the math presided over by Yogi Adityanath—not just for prayer, but to represent political will.

Her visit was not a routine gesture of the State, but a ritual of affirmation of faith, of governance, and of the quiet revolution underway in India's moral geography. Murmu's presidency—like that of Rajendra Prasad walking barefoot into shrines post-independence, or APJ Abdul Kalam igniting young minds in forgotten towns—marks a rare alignment of constitutional stature and popular symbolism. The President's travels do not merely decorate the calendar. Instead, they re-map India's emotional

and political terrain, bringing the margins into the nation's beating heart. But hers is a presidency unlike few others'. In less than three years in of-

fice, she has spent 203 days travelling

To appreciate the significance of Murmu's presidency, one must place it in the long shadow of her predecessors'. There have been presidents who inspired widely through intellect—Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, who held forth on the Bhagavad Gita at Oxford, and Zakir Husain, who championed Hindustani culture and basic education. Others, like K R Narayanan, stood as constitutional purists, refusing to toe the line when In-

dia flirted with instability.

THE NEW SUNDAY EXPRESS

Even Kalam's travels, significant as they were, did not encompass the range or symbolism of Murmu's journeys. Where Kalam represented aspiration, Murmu embodies dignity reclaimed. Where Kalam reached towards the future. Murmu grounds herself in the

soil of forgotten pasts: tribal pasts, feminine pasts, marginal pasts that the national narrative has too often edited out. From Karnataka to the Northeast, from Tamil Nadu to Telangana, from Kerala's convocation halls to the saltswept coasts of Andhra Pradesh, her visits are not mere protocol; she undertakes pilgrimages of presence. In Odisha, her

home state, she has laid railways' foundations in tribal belts, inaugurated statues, temples, and hostels. In Chennai, she opened a women's university, drawing a straight line from her journey from a Santhal village in Mayurbhanj to the presidency and the dreams of young women still fighting for space. Each visit is a brushstroke. Together, they paint a republic that sees, hears, and includes. Make no mistake, there is a political message here. Her presidency is aligned—sometimes overtly, sometimes subtly—with the BJP's political vision of cultural assertion, grassroots integration, and regional consolidation. In this, she is both symbol and force: an emblem of the BJP's cultural-national-

ist outreach, yes; but also a subtle reminder that the republic's soul is shaped by inclusion, not exclusion.

She extends the Rashtrapati's gaze beyond Delhi's Lutyens' lawns to the tea gardens of Assam, tribal hamlets of Odisha and university halls of Bareilly, rendering her presidency a moving shrine of constitutional morality. Murmu's travels echo Prime Minister Narendra Modi's attempt to build a narrative of inclusive Hindutva, where tribal heritage, women's empowerment, and infrastructural progress all find a place within the saffron canvas.

But to reduce Murmu to a mascot of the BJP would be to miss the deeper current she is channelling. Her presidency reclaims the spiritual purpose of

> theological terms, but in civilisational tropes. She carries the Vedic chant and the graduation scroll with equal conviction. She sits among elephants during the Mysuru Dasara and listens to Rabindra Sangeet in Kolkata with the same grace. Hers is a presidency that neither denies India's diversity nor flattens it into abstraction.

the republic—not in

Where some presidents sought prestige abroad, Murmu seeks meaning at home. Where others curated distance, she cultivates familiarity. Her travelogue is not only extensive, but is existential too. It answers a fundamental question: who belongs to India? And her answer, delivered not in declarations but in deeds, is clear: everyone does. Constitutions, Babasaheb Ambedkar warned, are only as good as the people who are in charge of protecting it. In Murmu's presidency, the Indian Constitution finds a quiet revival not in legal argument, but in lived ethic. When Murmu moves among plantation workers in Assam or tribal children in Mizoram, she is not performing sympa-

thy; she is restoring parity.

This is especially crucial in a time when the State's embrace often seems more punitive than paternal. As institutions centralise and dissent narrows, Murmu's message is softly radical: inclusion by example. Unlike the activist President Narayanan—who questioned the government from within—Murmu reforms the presidency by expanding its emotional radius. She does not confront; she consecrates. She does not thunder; she testifies. In that sense, she is both constitutional and mythic—a figure who reasserts the moral imagination of the state without wielding its coercive powers.

Droupadi Murmu has made the presidency mobile, modest, and meaningful. She does not just visit districts; she blesses aspirations. She does not merely cut ribbons; she sows futures. Her presidency is not one of flamboyance, but also of pilgrimage to temples and hospitals, universities and bridges, tea gardens and tribal hills.

President Murmu still has three more years to go on Raisina Hill, but her legacy is already being etched—not in marble busts or state portraits, but in rail tracks laid across tribal land, in convocation medals handed to first-generation graduates, in the laughter of children who, for once, see someone like them at the helm. And perhaps that is the point. The presidency, at its best, is not about power. It is about presence.

Murmu's is not just a political presence, but a philosophical one reminding India of what it is, and what it must continue to be: not merely a territory, but a moral idea in motive. If the Rashtrapati Bhavan was once a cloistered echo of colonial grandeur, it now travels in tribal shawls, in convoys through forgotten districts, speaking the language of aspiration, equity, and rooted pride. For a long time, the Rashtrapati Bhavan was seen as a colonial triumph that yielded to the spirit of independence: an imperial palace now draped in Gandhian modesty. It hosted banquets, the signing of bills, and dignitaries who waved at parades. In Droupadi Murmu, India does not just see a President. It sees itself.



NATIONALIST PRESIDENT ON THE MOVE

Revolution, and *Accidental India* (shankkar.aiyar@gmail.com)

SHANKKAR AIYAR

Author of The Gated Republic, Aadhaai

A Biometric History of India's 12 Digit

est literacy—55 percent for women and 76 percent among men. The Eco-

nomic Survey of Bihar states that just 6.7 percent of workers are employed with the government or PSUs.

What has stirred political hives is the list of documents not eligible for verification. Consider the list of exclusions. Aadhaar, which by definition certifies residency and not citizenship, driving licence, PAN card, MGNREGS card, ration card, and even the photo ID issued by the Election Commission. Also, the invalidation of the ration and MGNREGS cards is intriguing, given that some, if not all, of the ₹44 lakh crore welfare payments made via direct transfers are backed by these instruments of eligibility.

The requirement of birth certificates itself flies in the face of the track record of governments to register births and deaths. The 2024 annual report of the home ministry reveals a rather dismal picture of government efficiency in states. Across the country, only 15 states register over 90 percent of births, nine register 50-80 percent and seven less than 50 percent.

How does Bihar fare? NFHS 5 reveals that one in four births in the state is not registered. This is now. The first-time voters would have been born sometime after 2005. What was the registration of births in Bihar in 2005? The 2005 home ministry annual report states that "less than 40 percent of the births were getting registered" in Bihar. Now imagine getting documents for parents born in the 1980s. While the need for establishing voter eligibility is paramount, so is the need for evangelising the registrations and fixing the gaps in making the services accessible.

The ordeal of navigating the landscape of identity and its verification is not limited to politics, but actually haunts the political economy, too. Beyond the expression of intent on ease of doing business, the fact is entrepreneurs and startups must wade through an array of ministries, depending on the domain of business, to register, maintain and present a plethora of certifications and over 69,000 compliances to operate in India.

The entrepreneur or startup must have an Aadhaar card, a PAN card and additional ID proof. The corporate affairs ministry requires a CIN or a corporate identity number, a Limited Liability Partnership Identification Number for LLPs, and a FCRN or FLLPIN for foreign companies, DIN or director identity number, a SPICe form, and digital signature certificate. The finance ministry wants a GST number, and a TAN or tax deduction account number. The labour ministry needs EPFO and ESIC registration. The MSME ministry requires registration of an Udhyam number. Then there are other registrations required for operations like the Shop & Establishment Act registration, trade licence, professional tax registration and local certificate for office premises.

Effectively, the MCA knows the entrepreneur through CIN, LLPIN, DIN, and the finance ministry through PAN, GSTN and TAN—and the twain do not meet. It is arguable that these are necessary to start businesses. But in reality, beyond the initiation of registrations, the entrepreneur must maintain and present all or any of the certifications every time it is asked for. Why not create a common identity—say, a BIN or Bharat Investor Number which is interoperable across ministries, and represents the underlying compliances? This will afford the ease of business and visibility for data, not discretion-driven governance.

The triumvirate of ease of living, governance and business requires reforms at what the government calls the 'last mile', but is really the first mile of governance.

across the country. She has undertaken 110 trips, including 11 to her home state Odisha, and on other occasions to 34 other states and Union Territories—a record for any President. This is not ceremonial restlessness. It is a deliberate redrawing of the moral map of the republic, where forgotten towns, remote tribal regions, and small universities matter just as much as capital cities and international forums.

SUCCESSION STAKES ON ROOF OF THE WORLD



CLAUDE ARPI Director, Pavilion of Tibetan Culture at Auroville, and author of *Tibet: The Lost Frontier*

OBODY can disagree that the world is in turmoil today. Time seems to have accelerated and violence has reached every corner of the planet. In the midst of all this, one man is preaching ahimsa and karuna,

love and compassion, to other human beings. This man is Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet. He is also the leader of one million followers from the Indian Himalava-from Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh—as well as several million Buddhists the world over. Today. this man turns 90.

On October 7, 1950, after Chinese troops crossed the Upper Yangtze, they began their occupation of Eastern Tibet. Hardly three weeks later, in Lhasa, the gods are said to have spoken through the Nechung oracle—'Make him king', referring to the young Dalai Lama. Thus, Tenzin Gyatso was enthroned at the young age of 15. The 'god king' became the temporal and religious leader of Tibet.

In May 2011, the Dalai Lama decided to

relinquish his secular power and offer it to the people of Tibet, who could thereafter elect their own political leader. Today, a *sikyong* or president runs the Tibetan administration from Dharamsala, where the Dalai Lama has lived since 1960.

In September 2012, he released a long statement about his succession, mentioning two options: a traditional reincarnation (leaving written instructions on how to find the reincarnation) or an emanation, which means transfer of his consciousness and knowledge into a selected young boy or girl.

In the same message, the leader of Tibetans wrote that he would consult senior lamas: "When I am about 90, I will consult the high lamas of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions, the Tibetan public, and other concerned people who follow Tibetan Buddhism, and re-evaluate whether the institution of the Dalai Lama should continue or not." No wonder that during the last few weeks, a lot of excitement and expectation was palpable around Dharamsala.

Finally, on July 2, a statement was released reaffirming that the institution of the Dalai Lama will continue. It also reiterated: the "responsibility for doing so will rest exclusively with members of the Gaden Phodrang Trust, the Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama", and that it will be "the sole authority to recognise the future reincarnation; no one else has any such authority to interfere in this matter". It was a clear message to China. Earlier this year, the Tibetan leader

had released a book, Voice for the Voice*less*, in which he asserted: "Since the purpose of a reincarnation is to carry on the work of the predecessor, the new Dalai Lama will be born in the free world (outside China), so that the traditional mission to be the voice for universal compassion, the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism, and the symbol of Tibet embodying the aspirations of the Tibetan people, will continue."

It was certainly a shock for Beijing, which expects to control the succession process and the next Dalai Lama.

China was quick to react. The communist party's The Global Times newspaper



Days before his 90th birthday, the Dalai Lama clarified that Beijing cannot interfere in his succession. In the past, such meddling has helped China push back on India's historical influence in Tibet's spiritual affairs

asserted: "At its core, his intention remains the same—to deny the traditional religious rituals and historical conventions that have governed the Dalai Lama's reincarnation system for centuries, and to manipulate the reincarnation process for his own purposes."

It is strange that an atheist state that believes that "Religion is poison", as Mao Zedong declared, can be so affirmative on such an esoteric issue like reincarnation. In recent years, the succession has been widely debated there.

However, the process entails a 20-year gap till a new Dalai Lama reaches maturity in spiritual governance—a period often used by China to intervene in Tibet's affairs. Many believe that this gap is too risky and Buddhism should adapt to the modern world and a new system of succession should be devised. But ultimately, it remains the choice of the Dalai Lama alone and not of any communist government to decide where a lama's soul will migrate.

On June 6, President Xi Jinping summoned China's appointee as the 11th Panchen Lama, a young monk imposed by Beijing as the second hierarch after the Dalai Lama. Xi urged him to "play an even better role in forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation, systematically promoting the principle that religions in China must be Chinese in orientation".

In plain words, it means the Sinicisation of Tibetan Buddhism and eradication of the Indian origin and influence in the spread of Buddhism on the plateau.

Given this context, the Dalai Lama's statement this week must have been a relief for the 120 senior lamas representing different schools of Tibetan Buddhism and the Bon faith assembled in Dharamsala. They unanimously welcomed the Dalai Lama's message. However, the lack of precision may encourage Beijing to interfere in the process.

The world hopes more details will eventually emerge from Dharamsala. It's amply clear to all that the planet needs a Dalai Lama. (Views are personal)



(July 5). It's a very nice effort from the Madhya Pradesh government. It will not only felicitate present students, but also encourage future generations to score higher marks. Direct credit also ensures that no middlemen are involved and cannot siphon off the money, as we have come to expect of such schemes. Hope more students will benefit from such a gesture in the future. Adinarayan Prabhukhot, email

QUOTE CORNER

Westminster is broken but the real crisis is deeper. Just 50 families now own more wealth than half the UK population. Poverty is growing. The inequality is obscene and the two-party system offers nothing but managed decline and broken promises.

Zarah Sultana, 31-year-old member of UK parliament who resigned from Labour this week to form a new party with MP Jeremy Corbyn

This was part of our tourism campaign. It has been one of the most innovative and eye-catching ones... It's all in good humour and creativity.

Biju K, Kerala's tourism secretary, after his department posted an Algenerated image of a stranded British F35 jet surrounded by coconut trees

It doesn't make sense. We were together just recently in the national team, and you just got married... Rest in peace, Diogo and Andre. We'll all miss you.

Cristiano Ronaldo, Portugal teammate, after the death of footballer Diogo Jota, 28, and his brother in a car crash in Spain



Half-cooked biryani

Ref: Policy thrust to grow manufacturing futile sans enhanced skills (Jul 5). So much for Make in India! It seems we forgot to add 'With skilled people'. Foxconn calling back its Chinese techies is like asking chefs to leave a half-cooked biryani. If we plan to be the world's iPhone factory, we need talent that knows which chip goes where. Time to trade slogans for screwdrivers and turn our workforce into worldclass assembly ninjas. Otherwise, India might just be manufacturing missed opportunities. K Chidanand Kumar, Bengaluru

Dynasty threat

Ref: Heartburn over rebels with a cause (Jul 5). Every talented leader in the Congress is viewed as a potent threat to the dynasty. There is nothing wrong in Narendra Modi using the services of Shashi Tharoor as an emissary to foreign nations to dispel the falsehood fabricated around Operation Sindoor.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee represented the nation at the 📗 UN on Kashmir at the request of P V Narasimha Rao. No one in the BJP questioned Vajpayee then. G Nataraja Perumal, Chennai

Borrowed knife

Ref: China helped Pak during Op Sindoor (Jul 5). At a seminar on new-age military technologies, Lt Gen R R Singh stated that China used Pakistan as a "borrowed knife" and a "live lab" to harm India. Türkiye's military aid, he noted, was symbolic, aiming to align with Islamic nations. China acted like a sly neighbour by avoiding direct involvement in border skirmishes. While India may not yet match China's power, strengthening its C4ISR system and civilmilitary fusion, along with DRDO's upcoming Agni V programme, will bolster national defence.

R S Narula, Patiala

Onam assistance

Ref: Centre continuing negative stand towards Kerala: CM Vijavan (Jul 3). The central government's decision to stop providing Kerala with additional rice and wheat during Onam has sparked strong protests. The move has put the state in a difficult position. Central assistance is crucial to control prices during the festival. The central government must discharge its federal responsibility. Political leaders must come forward to explain the gravity of this issue to the PM. The discrimination must end. Padmanabha Survanaravana, Kochi

Preamble debate

Ref: No ifs and buts about Constitution's amended *Preamble* (Jul 4). Socialism for India is not how the world sees it. Though the state is secular, religiousness in India can be pampered at different governmental levels. The problem is that these valuable concepts have not been subjected to debate in parliament and among the public before being inserted in the Preamble. There is a dire need for a fresh debate. The Preamble indeed needs to be sacrosanct. Geetha B K. Kannur

Encouraging students

Ref: ₹235 cr credited to 94K Class 12 MP students

Trump's gamble

Ref: Rural hospitals brace for GOP's \$1T Medicaid cuts (Jul 5). Beyond Medicaid, Trump's Big, Beautiful Bill extends tax cuts that would give a \$63,000 windfall to the top 1 percent of earners, while the bottom 20 percent stand to lose \$800 by 2027. It slashes a food programme, imposes strict work requirements, and redirects \$50 billion to border walls. With green subsidies rolled back and debt projected to rise by \$3.8 trillion, the bill risks widening inequality, weakening long-term growth, and burdening future generations. Sagartirtha Chakraborty, Guwahati

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