

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.

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

Evidence of a matrilineal society in neolithic China

Under pressure

LAND USE

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

On 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."

As 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



ILLUSTRATION: R. RAJESH

'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

The 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-



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 Lama, 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 Lama set up the Gaden Phodrang Trust as he decided to separate the Spiritual and Political powers of his post. "I have now voluntarily brought this [unified power] to an end, proud and satisfied that we can pursue the kind of democratic system of government flourishing elsewhere in the world", he said,

handing over the responsibility for the welfare and governance of the Tibetan community worldwide to the Sikyong, Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) and the Tibetan Parliament in Exile that are elected every five years.

Within his own office, the Office of His Holiness The Dalai Lama (OHHDL), he set up the Gaden Phodrang Trust to ensure the continuity of spiritual and traditional issues, and the Dalai Lama Trust that undertakes charitable and welfare initiatives. Another branch, the Gaden Phodrang Foundation, was set up as a "non-profit, tax-exempt institution registered in the Canton of Zurich and under the supervision of the Swiss Federal Department of Home Affairs" to promote non-violence and increase synergies between religion and science. "There should be no confusion, the Gaden Phodrang Trust that His Holiness (Dalai Lama) referred 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. Rimpoché said that the announcement has clarified the task ahead of the Gaden Phodrang Trust. Mr. Rimpoché 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

On 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 Bob 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 Kneecap



REUTERS

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

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 listeners – and the issues that they talk about are reminiscent of rap metal legends Rage Against the Machine, known for their politically-charged performances. Strongly protective of their privacy from the "surveillance state", the duo adopted the stage names Bobby Vylan and Bobbie Vylan.

Protest music

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

sticking to the conventions of the genre, for sparking 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.

{ 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

In 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 18th-century ritual once used to select high-ranking reincarnate lamas, to give its candidate a supposed veil of legitimacy. 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 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. 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 permanent 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 guide-book 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-



Nirupama Rao



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AFP

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

of belief, and whether it can withstand the 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

I've tried hard to like cricket but I haven't succeeded. Quite frankly, it goes on for too long. A lot of the time nothing or very little seems to happen. And other than former British colonies — America and Canada being the great exceptions — no one seems to 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 Wimbledon. 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

camera can cover both the action on the court as well as where the players are very effectively. Even the full court frame, whether from behind one of the players 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 enter 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 complete picture of the full game. 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

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 art. 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,

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, Roger Federer and Novak 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 Djokovic. 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

India's on track to build a strong sporting culture

Sports 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 — Kheelo Bharat Niti — reflects a vision that we athletes have long aspired to. Abhinav Bindra, and I were part of the initial committee 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 development — from nurturing grassroots talent and supporting elite athletes, enhancing sports infrastructure, public-private partnership model and CSR activities to drive sports, strengthening anti-doping efforts, promoting economic and social well-being 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 academically 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 the community, school, district, and panchayat levels. Every panchayat and district should have its own playgrounds and involve former sports persons in promoting physical literacy. In the past, schools used to have their own open playgrounds, but now many schools have small buildings without access to proper playground facilities. We don't need expensive infrastructure like synthetic or cemented tracks; especially for young children, these can even lead to injuries. 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.



Anju Bobby George

Credit, and contempt, for the paths to quick riches

A screenshot on the internet screamed, "41 crores! That's the net 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 culturally 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 padhai पूरी करके वापस लौटे है" (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

Vicky baba like a loser, he is ripe to be married off by converting *dosti* (friendship) to *rishwadaari* (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 puri* eater is stepping



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

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. With the internet, the world became one's 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 maxima's 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-to-day 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.



Abhishek Asthana

{ SUNDAY LETTERS }

US-India relations

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

Accept transgenders as humans

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

Write to us at: letters@hindustantimes.com

VOTERS TO STARTUPS: THE ORDEALS OF IDENTITY IN INDIA

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 yet 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 entities, permanent residence certificate, 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. 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 lowest literacy—55 percent for women and 76 percent among men. The Economic 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 FCN 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 Udhyaam 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.

NATIONALIST PRESIDENT ON THE MOVE



POWER & POLITICS

PRABHU CHAWLA
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ALL 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 monsoon-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 office, she has spent 203 days travelling 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.

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 India flirted with instability.

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 salt-swept 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-nationalist 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 the republic—not in 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.

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 sympathy; 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.



PTI



THE THIRD EYE

SHANKKAR AIYAR

Author of *The Gated Republic, Aadhaar: A Biometric History of India's 12 Digit Revolution, and Accidental India* (shankkar.aiyar@gmail.com)

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OPINION

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

NOBODY 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 Himalaya—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 Voiceless*, 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

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 succes-



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

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sion 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 Sincisation 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)*

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 AI-generated 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 world-class 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 civil-military 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 Vijayan (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 Suryanarayana, 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

(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

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