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IN BRIEF



25 more arrested; Uttarakhand seeks extra forces

NEW DELHI
Uttarakhand Police arrested 25 more people on Sunday for their alleged involvement in the violence that left five dead in Haldwani after a 'madrasa and masjid' were demolished during an anti-encroachment drive. All those arrested were from the Muslim community. The State has requested the Centre to send additional forces to Haldwani to maintain law and order there. » Page 12

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EDUCATION PLUS » PAGE 5

Direct tax kitty picks up pace, up 20.25% by Feb. 10

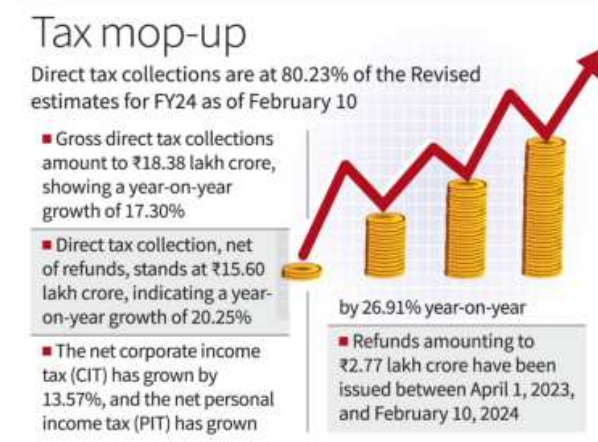
Net direct tax collections increase from ₹14.7 lakh cr. on Jan. 10 to hit ₹15.6 lakh cr. by Saturday; the Finance Minister had pegged revised estimates for direct taxes for this year at ₹19.5 lakh cr.

Vikas Dhoot
NEW DELHI

India's net direct tax collections picked up pace over the past month to rise 20.25% year-on-year by February 10, compared to a 19.4% uptick on the same date in January, show data released by the Finance Ministry on Sunday.

Growth in the Personal Income Tax (PIT) revenues continued to outstrip Corporate Income Tax (CIT), with a 26.91% uptick in net PIT collections vis-à-vis a 13.6% rise in CIT inflows so far this year.

From ₹14.7 lakh crore on January 10, net direct tax collections, that are calculated by deducting refunds from gross tax inflows, had hit ₹15.6 lakh crore by Saturday, making up 80.23%



of the revised estimates for direct taxes for this year.

Higher expectations
Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her interim Budget for 2024-25, had raised her hopes for the direct tax kitty for this year, pegging revised estimates

at ₹19.5 lakh crore, from the ₹18.23 lakh crore originally estimated for 2023-24.

"We are quite hopeful of meeting the Revised Estimates for the current year, as the asking rate is 17% growth for the next two months. But we don't

know how Advance Tax will come through, so let us see how much we are able to achieve because it is the product of the collections which will be made in the month of February and March and refunds which will be issued," Central Board of Direct Taxes chairperson Nitin Gupta told *The Hindu* last week.

"The provisional figures of direct tax collections continue to register steady growth. Direct tax collections up to February 10, 2024 show that gross collections are at ₹18.38 lakh crore, which is 17.30% higher than the gross collections for the corresponding period of last year," the Ministry said in a statement.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 10

Farmers may start Delhi march today as talks collapse



Precautionary measure: Barricades being placed on the Delhi-U.P. boundary to stop the protesting farmers, on Sunday. R.V. MOORTHY

A. M. Jigeeesh
NEW DELHI

Approximately one lakh farmers belonging to the Samyukt Kisan Morcha-Non Political (SKM-NP), a splinter group of the original SKM, started preparations for a rally in Delhi on Tuesday seeking guaranteed minimum support prices (MSPs) for their produce. The first round of talks with the Union government on this demand

had collapsed on Thursday, and farmers from neighbouring States have been gathering in preparation for a march to the national capital on Monday. SKM-NP leader Shiv Kumar Kakka, a former RSS functionary, was detained by the Madhya Pradesh Police on Sunday.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 10
BARRICADES AT BORDERS
» PAGE 2

3 key Pakistan parties step up efforts to form coalition govt.

Press Trust of India
ISLAMABAD/LAHORE

The three main political parties in Pakistan on Sunday intensified their efforts for the formation of a coalition government after it became clear the country faced a hung parliament after the general elections.

The Election Commission of Pakistan has announced the results of 264 out of the 265 contested seats in the 266-member National Assembly.

Independent candidates, mostly backed by jailed former PM Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, won 101 seats. They were followed by Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz with 75 seats. The Pakistan Peoples Party got 54 seats and Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan got 17 seats.

POLICE, SUPPORTERS CLASH
» PAGE 13

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PM brought respect to India's cultural heritage, says Shah

He says Ayodhya event, Kashi Vishwanath and Mahakal corridors are part of reviving India's centres of cultural consciousness; he assured that BJP will support Suttur Math's social service

The Hindu Bureau MYSURU

Union Home Minister Amit Shah has claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had brought respect to India's cultural heritage on the global stage by reviving the centres of cultural consciousness. Speaking after inaugurating the Smt Parvathamma and Sri Shamanur Shivashankarappa Guest House near Mysuru on Sunday, Mr. Shah described the consecration of Ram Temple, the construction of Kashi Vishwanath corridor in Varanasi, Mahakal corridor in Ujjain and the development of Kedarnath and Badri as part of revival of the country's centres of cultural consciousness.



Amit Shah inaugurated the Smt Parvathamma and Sri Shamanur Shivashankarappa Guest House near Mysuru on Sunday, M.A. SRIRAM

Math's social service and contribution to the society. He acknowledged the selfless service to society by the Suttur Math and the 24 Seers, who had headed the religious institution so far. While pointing out that the Math ran 350 educational institutions having more than 20,000 staff members and more than one lakh students, Mr. Shah made a special men-

commodate more 700 persons at a time, he said. State BJP President B. Y. Vijayendra, who also spoke on the occasion, said Suttur Mutt had done yeomen service not only in the field of education, but also in the area of providing healthcare and other sectors like culture and literature also. BJP meeting The State BJP's core committee meeting, chaired by Mr. Shah, resolved to counter the Congress campaign against the Centre over the alleged injustice to Karnataka by providing comprehensive information on release of Central funds to the State. BJP State chief B.Y. Vijayendra said the party would expose the State government's malicious campaign against the Centre.

Siddaramaiah dares Shah for debate on Cong. guarantees

The Hindu Bureau BENGALURU

Challenging Union Home Minister Amit Shah to a debate on guarantee schemes, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday said that if the BJP leaders had any objection to guarantee schemes they should clearly state it and announce discontinuation of all guarantee schemes in BJP-ruled States. "Why are BJP leaders trying to destabilise guarantee schemes in Karnataka? Do they harbour hatred for the people of Karnataka? If Mr. Shah believes that the treasury is empty because of guarantee schemes, he should participate in a public debate with me. I can prove that our treasury is not empty because of the guarantee schemes. Instead, there is an unfair distribution of taxes from the



Siddaramaiah

Centre," he said. He said that while BJP leaders oppose the guarantee schemes in Karnataka, they are promising to implement the same guarantee schemes in BJP-ruled States. "Mr. Modi, who opposed our guarantee schemes, has now stolen not only our guarantee schemes but also the name 'guarantee' and is advertising under the same name. This shows the anti-poor stance and intellectual bankruptcy of that party." The real opposition is not to the guarantee schemes, but the beneficiaries of the schemes, he said.

EC 'snatched' NCP from its founders, says Sharad Pawar

Press Trust of India PUNE

Senior politician Sharad Pawar on Sunday said the Election Commission's (EC) decision to allot the NCP name and symbol to Ajit Pawar-led group was "surprising" as the poll body has "snatched" the party from the hands of its founders and gave it to others. In a setback to Sharad Pawar, the EC on February 6 recognised the Ajit Pawar faction as the real Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and also allotted the party symbol 'clock' to the group led by him. "I am confident that people will not support the EC ruling against which we have approached the Supreme Court," Mr. Pawar told reporters in Pune. "The EC snatched the party from the hands of those who founded and built it and gave it to others;



Sharad Pawar. FILE PHOTO

such a thing never happened before in the country," said Mr. Pawar, who founded the NCP in 1999 after breaking away from Congress. 'Oppn. targeted' Mr. Pawar claimed that no BJP leader has faced action from the Enforcement Directorate since the party has been in power. On seat-sharing talks for the upcoming poll, Mr. Pawar said, "Talks are under way with [Prakash Ambedkar-led] Prachit Bahujan Aghadi. We are asking them for their programmes ahead of the Lok Sabha poll."

NIT professor questioned after she 'praised Godse'

The Hindu Bureau KOZHIKODE

The Kunnammangalam police on Sunday interrogated National Institute of Technology-Calicut (NIT-C) professor Shaija Andavan as part of the ongoing investigation into a controversial Facebook comment by her which praised Nathuram Godse, Mahatma Gandhi's assassin, on the death an-

niversary of the Father of the Nation. The officers who reached the professor's house at Chathamangalam also directed her to report at the station on February 13. A case was registered against Ms. Andavan on February 3 under section 153 (Wantonly giving provocation with intent to cause riot) of the Indian Penal Code.

Bid to capture jumbo in Wayanad proves futile; Kerala to form panel

The Hindu Bureau KALPETTA/THRISSUR

An operation of the Rapid Response Team of the Forest Department on Sunday to capture Belur Makhna, the tuskless wild elephant that killed a farmer in Wayanad district of Kerala, on Saturday, proved futile. The forest officials launched the search

around 6.30 a.m. at Manunndi after receiving signals from the radio collar attached to the elephant. The animal later moved to the inner forest of the Baval section on the Kerala-Karnataka boundary. However, the officials could not tranquillise the elephant as they were unable to hem it in a suitable location, sources said.

Moreover, a group of farmer organisations called for a hartal in the district on Tuesday against the government's apathy to finding a solution to the man-animal conflict. Meanwhile, the Kerala government has decided to form an committee to monitor the movement of wild animals across State boundaries.

Advertisement for Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre recruitment. Text includes: भारत सरकार/Government of India, अंतरिक्ष विभाग/Department of Space, भारतीय अंतरिक्ष अनुसंधान संगठन/Indian Space Research Organisation, विक्रम साराभाई अंतरिक्ष केंद्र/VIKRAM SARABHAI SPACE CENTRE, लिखनतपुरम/Thiruvananthapuram-695 022. Recruitment details table with columns: क्रम सं./Sl No., पद का नाम / Name of the Post, पद संख्या / Post No., पदों की संख्या / No. of posts. Includes dates: शुद्धिपत्र दिनांक 12.02.2024 / CORRIGENDUM DATED 12.02.2024.

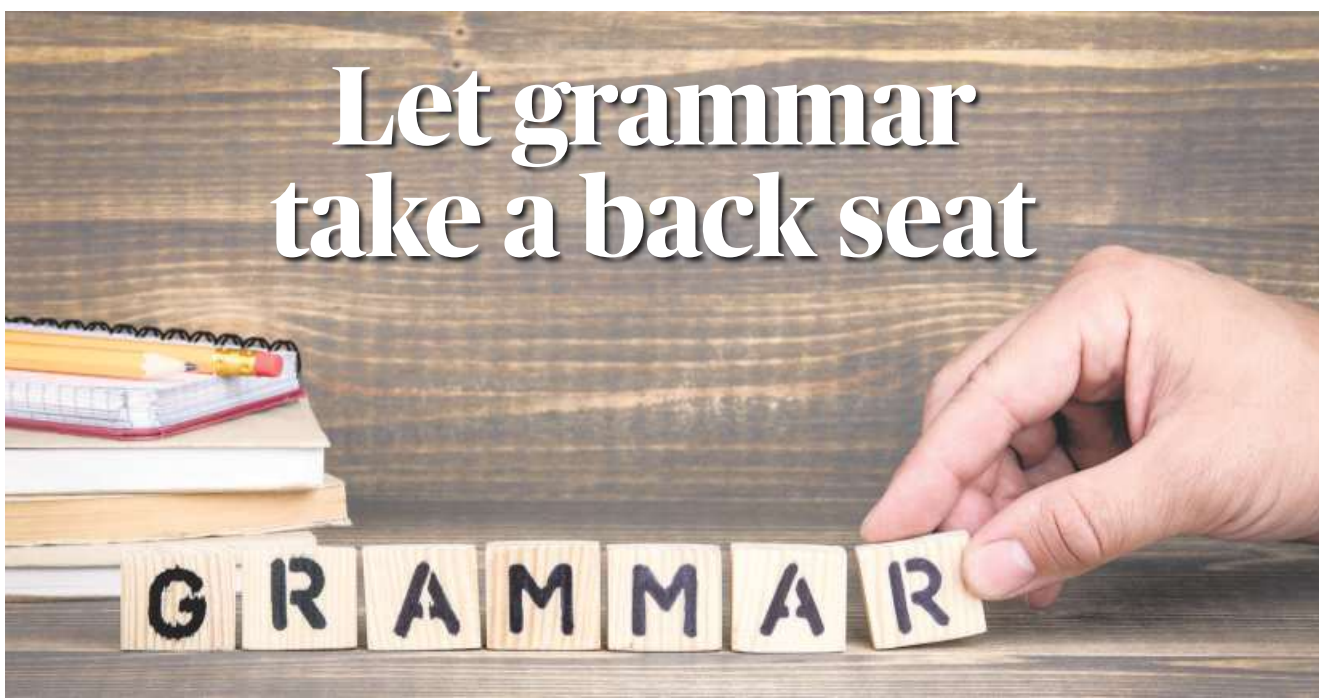
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K. Elango

Revolutionary shift is required in the realm of English language teaching to empower learners in acquiring linguistic competence. The current approaches, methods, strategies, and techniques in practice have not yielded the desired results. English remains an aspirational language, despite our country's centuries-long acquaintance with it. The theories and practices of the English language were predominately shaped by the British, especially the monolinguals who did not have much grip over the bi/tri/multilinguals' styles of acquiring languages. They laid undue emphasis on the peripherals of the language such as grammar and pronunciation and insisted on achieving a 'native-like fluency and accuracy'.

Obstacles to learning Let us examine how the grammar of English is an obstacle to learning the language, grounded on the experiences of numerous teachers and learners, but which remain unarticulated, as we are treated as non-native speakers. Drawing upon our experiential knowledge of mother tongues, we could affirm that we acquire them in 'immersive' contexts by watching, listening, imitating, and producing. The initial stages involve articulating sounds, gradually progressing to individual words, then expanding to chunks of words and ultimately maturing to produce simple sentences. Nota-



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Let grammar take a back seat

The undue emphasis given to grammatical rules when teaching English inhibits students from gaining linguistic competence

bly, grammar hardly figures in the scheme of learning. Polyglots vouch for this, as they constantly keep their antenna alive to pick up expressions from all possible sources and are least concerned about the grammatical correctness of their acquisition. A parallel can be drawn from migrant labourers, who focus on the 'survival language' in their place of residence and work. Even those who never stepped into schools can absorb the necessary language, unaware of their grammaticality. In informal settings such as homes or any non-institutionalised contexts, grammar takes a back seat, facilitating smoother and quicker lan-

guage acquisition. The insistence on grammar, particularly in institutionalised settings, reveals a distortion in the cognitive process, be it the mother tongue or other tongues. Recognising this, educational curriculums introduce the grammar of the mother tongue at a later stage; even then, learners are averse to its components. In our pedagogy, contrary to real-life ecosystems, the introduction of the language and grammar of English occur almost simultaneously, as if learners could acquire the language through grammar. This ignores the truth that grammar is about the language, not the language. Another misplacement sig-

nificance lies in attributing equal weightage to all four skills – Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing (LSRW) – disregarding the natural order of acquisition. Speaking and listening inherently take precedence over the other two. Therefore, prioritising speaking over the other skills, particularly in the in-

itial phases, is imperative. An often overlooked, yet crucial, distinction lies in the differences between the spoken and written forms. While written language adheres strictly to grammatical rules, spoken language provides leeway; a single word, a phrase, or an unfinished utterance can effectively convey the intended message. The additional advantage of the non-verbal elements such as gestures, postures, visual cues, and tonal variations can amplify meanings and keep the listeners captivated. Further, the spoken form could be imbued with emotions to sway the audience, but the written mode consistently maintains a for-

mal tone, follows a linear progression, and 'distanced' from readers. Regrettably, the grammar of written language is imposed onto the spoken mode, which acts as a stumbling block to gain speaking competence. Nevertheless, a liberating development is the acceptance of non-traditional grammar usage on social media, where code switching, and code mixing are liberally employed and embraced by all. Reading helps The most practical approach to gain grammatical sense is predominantly by reading, and this unconscious cognitive process seamlessly embeds grammar into long-term memory. In contrast, the conscious teaching of grammatical items may enable learners to comprehend, store, and recall but incapacitate them in application, serving little purpose. Learning can occur consciously, subconsciously, and unconsciously, and for grammar sub/unconscious learning through reading may prove far more effective than conscious drilling. Applied linguists emphatically state that the grammar of a language can be learnt without knowing the language and, conversely, a language can be learnt without knowing its grammar. For spoken communication grammar is not an absolute necessity; hence, we must cease to insist on it for the effective acquisition of English. The writer is a retired Professor of English and National Secretary of English Language Teachers Association of India (ELTAI).

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Behind the numbers: Delhi's youth ahead of 2024 elections

This Lokniti-CSDS survey among first-time voters in Delhi explores their political engagement and opinions on critical issues; the BJP leads with 70% support for national governance with 48% expressing strong liking for PM Modi, while AAP gains preference at 49% in Delhi's State-level governance

Lokniti team

As India prepares for the next general elections, a lot of discussions revolve around the participation of first-time voters in what is referred to as the 'festival of democracy'. The Election Commission of India (ECI) is actively promoting voter registration, with the introduction of four registration windows in a year. Several States have already signaled an increased number of first-time voters compared to the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, reflecting a growing engagement of the youth in the democratic process.

Recognising the crucial role these voters play, political parties are actively making efforts to connect with first-time voters. On National Voters' Day, observed on January 25th, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during the 'Nav Matdata Sammelan,' urged first-time voters to ensure their registration in the voters list. He also asked them to suggest inputs for the party's 2024 manifesto. Similarly, during his Bharat Jodo Yatra, Rahul Gandhi engaged in exclusive interviews with YouTubers as a move to reach out to the youth. With the elections just around the corner, political parties are reaching out to millions of first-time voters, recognising the importance of their support and participation.

A recent study by Lokniti-CSDS interviewed 1,290 first-time voters (47% young men and 53% young women) in Delhi, hoping to understand their perspectives on politics, their voting intentions, and their opinions on pressing issues.

Apathy or Enthusiasm

When it comes to the level of interest in politics among first-time voters, we asked them whether young individuals like themselves should be concerned about the country's affairs, or if it's a matter primarily for the older generations. Nine of every ten (91%) first-time voters expressed the view that they should indeed stay informed about these matters. Six per cent indicated a strong inclination to follow but admitted difficulty in understanding, while a mere 2% believed that such concerns were better left to the seniors.

When directly asked about their level of interest in politics, one-third (36%) of the first-time voters expressed a substantial interest, while four of every ten (43%) indicated a moderate level of interest. Only two in ten first-time voters conveyed either minimal interest or no interest at all in politics. This indicated a visible inclination towards political engagement among this demographic (Table 1). When it comes to engaging in political discussions, over six of every ten (60%) of the youngsters expressed that they actively participate in conversations about politics with friends and family. This indicated a substantive level of engagement about politics among the youth, demonstrating their heightened interest and connection to political developments. However, do young people's interest in politics translate into action, such as registering to vote and voting in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections?

More than half (51%) of first-time voters in Delhi are yet to register themselves. Upon closer examination, a notable trend surfaces. Among the 18-year-olds, a striking three-quarters are yet to register



Time to choose: More than half (51%) of first-time voters in Delhi are yet to register themselves. FILE PHOTO

Table 1: Youths' interest in politics

| Interest in politics | (%) |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Very interested | 36 |
| Somewhat interested | 43 |
| Not much interested | 12 |
| Not at all interested | 9 |

Table 2: Have first-time voters registered?

| | Registered as voters | |
|---------------------------|----------------------|----|
| | Yes | No |
| Overall first-time voters | 45 | 51 |
| 18 Years | 22 | 74 |
| 19 Years | 40 | 56 |
| 20 Years | 61 | 37 |
| 21 Years | 67 | 29 |
| 22 Years | 62 | 29 |

Note: Rest did not know whether they were registered or not

Table 3: Reasons for not registering in voter list

| Reasons cited by first-time voters | (%) |
|--|-----|
| Would register this time | 51 |
| Did not get time | 19 |
| Applied but not sure if name has been included | 11 |
| Not in possession of required documents | 6 |
| Not interested in voting | 5 |
| Not sure when or how to register | 3 |
| Applied but application was rejected | 2 |
| No response | 1 |

Note: Rest gave other responses

(Table 2). The trend persists as we look at those aged 19 years, with over half (56%) failing to register. However, there's a gradual decrease in this proportion of those non-registered for subsequent age groups.

While half the unregistered individuals (51%) plan to register for the upcoming elections, the rest cite various reasons for not doing so. Among these, two of every ten (19%) cite the lack of time and one of

Table 4: Narendra Modi's popularity among first-time voters

| How much do you like Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister of the country | (%) |
|---|-----|
| A lot | 48 |
| Somewhat | 33 |
| Not much | 10 |
| Not at all | 8 |

Note: Rest did not respond

Table 5: Reasons for liking Modi

| (If like Modi) What is the one thing about Prime Minister Narendra Modi that you like the most | (%) |
|--|-----|
| Oratory skill | 20 |
| India's image at international level | 19 |
| Charismatic leader | 17 |
| Decisiveness | 11 |
| Hardworking/dedication | 8 |
| His policies | 7 |
| Development | 5 |
| Political vision/administration | 4 |
| Nationalism/national security | 3 |

Note: Rest gave other reasons or did not respond

Table 6: Who from the Opposition can challenge Narendra Modi?

| Who can challenge PM Narendra Modi in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections | (%) |
|--|-----|
| No one | 40 |
| Rahul Gandhi | 17 |
| Arvind Kejriwal | 16 |
| Difficult to say | 18 |

Note: Rest gave other responses or did not respond

every ten (11%) were unsure of whether their registration had been accepted. One-sixth (16%) gave a range of other reasons – facing registration obstacles due to a lack of required documents, lack of interest in voting, lack of knowledge about the registration process, and applications were rejected (Table 3).

When questioned about their inclination to participate in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, nearly seven in 10 voters

expressed a high likelihood of voting, stating they are either very likely or somewhat likely to do so. Conversely, about one in 10 voters indicated a lower likelihood or complete unwillingness to vote. Additionally, two in 10 respondents mentioned that they would vote if they managed to register themselves by the time of the elections.

Narendra Modi's appeal

PM Modi appears to have considerable support among first-time voters. When a question tapped their sentiments towards Mr. Modi, nearly half of the first-time voters (48%) expressed a strong liking for him, with one-third indicating a moderate level of liking (33%). A little over one in ten had limited liking, and 8% expressed a strong negative rating (Table 4).

Digging deeper into the reasons behind their liking, his oratory skills and India's international image under his leadership stood out – mentioned by two in every 10 youths. For close to two of every 10 (17%), it was his charisma, and one in every 10 (11%) identified his decisiveness as the most likable trait. Additionally, close to one in every 10 (8%) youth appreciated his hard work, while another one in every 10 (7%) highlighted his policies (Table 5). Beyond mere liking, a significant four in 10 young voters believe that no one from the Opposition parties can pose a challenge to Mr. Modi in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections (Table 6). Roughly an equal proportion mentioned Mr. Rahul Gandhi and Arvind Kejriwal (17% and 16%, respectively). All other leaders received minimal mentions. Fifteen percent found it difficult to give a name.

This sentiment not only strengthens Mr. Modi's political standing but also highlights the formidable task facing Opposition parties in presenting convincing alternatives capable of resonating with a significant portion of first-time voters.

A Study by Lokniti: CSDS Research Team which includes – Vibha Attri, Sanjay Kumar, Suhass Palshikar, Sandeep Shastri, Jyoti Mishra and Abhinav Pankaj Borbora This is the first of a two-part series on the first time Voters' in Delhi



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Sparrows have all but disappeared

It can be used to mean almost or almost completely

S. Upendran

Why do we say 'buttonhole someone'? (K Vaidyanathan, Chennai)

This is an expression frequently used in informal contexts. When you 'buttonhole someone', what you are doing is preventing the person from leaving; you catch hold of the individual and carry on a conversation with the very reluctant listener. He is unable to escape from your clutches.

The students buttonholed the Vice-Chancellor after the meeting.

I was late getting home because Sneha buttonholed me about the project.

The expression seems to suggest that the speaker is preventing the listener from leaving by holding on to his garment – perhaps, he has put a finger into the listener's shirt/coat buttonhole, thus preventing him from escaping. According to some scholars, the original expression was 'to buttonhold someone'. The speaker prevented the person from departing by holding on to the shirt/coat button. When 'buttonhold' is said quickly, the final 'd' is seldom heard – as a result, over a period of time, 'buttonhold' became 'buttonhole'.

How is the word 'insouciant' pronounced? (N Krishna, Bengaluru)

This rather formal word consists of four syllables. The first is pronounced like the word 'in', and the 'ou' in the second, sounds like the 'oo' in 'cool', 'pool' and 'fool'. The 'ci' is like the 'si' in 'sit', 'sip' and 'sin', and the following 'a' sounds like the 'a' in 'china'. The word is pronounced 'in-SUU-si-ent' with the stress on the second syllable. This French word literally means 'not caring': 'in' (not), 'souciant' (caring). If a person has a reputation of being 'insouciant', what it suggests is that the individual is rather carefree; he remains unperturbed by the things happening around him – he stays calm.

When Jai was informed that he was likely to be fired, he gave an insouciant shrug.

What is the difference between 'underemployed' and 'unemployed'? (Mangalam, Trichy)

'Unemployed' is the opposite of 'employed'; a person who is 'unemployed' has no job, and is in search of one. There are many unemployed people in our country. 'Underemployed' suggests that the individual has a job, but it is not very demanding or challenging – it is one that does not use the skillset of the individual to the fullest.

Vignesh prefers to be unemployed rather than underemployed.

Anuradha was underemployed and was very unhappy with her job.

What is the meaning of 'all but'? (B Vikram, Hissar)

The expression has several different meanings. It can be used to mean 'almost' or 'almost completely'.

In many cities in our country, sparrows have all but disappeared.

According to the media, the result of the upcoming election is all but certain.

The expression can also be used to mean 'except for'.

My manager rejected all but one of my suggestions.

upendrankye@gmail.com

THE DAILY QUIZ

With five awardees in this year, here is a quiz on India's highest civilian award, the Bharat Ratna

V. V. Ramanan

QUESTION 1
Name the three recipients of the Bharat Ratna when it was first awarded in 1954.

QUESTION 2
What is the Bharat Ratna shaped like and what are the two images on the obverse and reverse of the medallion?

QUESTION 3
Who are the only two non-Indian citizens to have been honoured with the award?

QUESTION 4
Who was the third woman, after Indira Gandhi and Mother Teresa, to be given the Bharat Ratna albeit posthumously?

QUESTION 5
Who are the two awardees who went on to become the President of India?

QUESTION 6
As of February 11, 2024, who are the three living recipients of the award?



Visual Question: Name this oldest (non-posthumous) recipient of the award. THE HINDU ARCHIVES

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. On February 9, 1959, the world's first intercontinental ballistic missile entered service for the Soviet Union. The missile part of it was called R-7. What was its launcher called? **Ans: Semyorka** 2. Identify the three countries that don't have operational ICBMs and name two countries not on the list that do have them. **Ans: Don't have: Australia, Japan, Saudi Arabia; have: Israel, the U.K.** 3. Name the military doctrine that is the foundation of nuclear peace – the idea that if two nuclear powers are armed with nuclear weapons and have both first- and second-strike capabilities, they don't have an incentive to attack each other nor to disarm. **Ans: Mutually assured destruction (MAD)** 4. Name the 1972 treaty under which the U.S. and the Soviet Union agreed to not develop anymore new ICBMs after the treaty date. **Ans: SALT I** 5. What does MIRV stand for? **Ans: Multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle** Visual: Name this ICBM developed by North Korea, first successfully tested in March or November 2022. **Ans: Hwasong-17** **Early Birds:** Parthi J. S | Masum Reja

Word of the day

Faze:
disturb or disconcert someone

Synonyms: embarrass, confuse, rattle

Usage: She's so calm, nothing seems to faze her.

Pronunciation: bit.ly/fazepro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /feɪz/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to **letters@thehindu.co.in** with the subject 'Text & Context'

MANILA
Death toll from landslide near Philippines gold mine jumps to 54



REUTERS

The death toll from a Philippine landslide near a gold mine abruptly rose to 54 on Sunday. Nineteen bodies were recovered from beneath the rubble in the village of Masara on Sunday, with 63 still missing. The landslide buried a bus terminal for employees of a gold mining firm and 55 nearby houses on Tuesday night. AFP

MANILA
Philippines accuses Chinese vessels of 'dangerous' manoeuvres



REUTERS

The Philippine Coast Guard on Sunday accused Chinese vessels of "dangerous" manoeuvres during a nine-day patrol near the Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea. Chinese Coast Guard vessels "performed dangerous and blocking manoeuvres at sea against BRP Teresa Magbanua four times," Manila said. AFP

DAKAR
Death of teenager takes casualties from Senegal protest to three



REUTERS

A 16-year-old died following clashes in Senegal's Ziguinchor, the third fatality in unrest after President Macky Sall postponed this month's election. Sall's decision to push back the February 25 presidential vote has plunged Senegal into one of its worst crises since independence from France in 1960. AFP

HELSINKI
Finland goes to the polls to elect President after entry to NATO



AP

Finns cast their ballots on Sunday in presidential elections in light of the country's NATO membership and rising tensions with Russia. Some 4.3 million voters are choosing between former conservative Prime Minister Alexander Stubb and ex-Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto, a Green Party MP running as an independent. AFP

Trump hints at backing Russian attack of NATO states

Agence France-Presse
WASHINGTON

White House hopeful Donald Trump said on Saturday he would "encourage" Russia to attack members of NATO who had not met their financial obligations, his most extreme broadside against the military alliance he has long expressed skepticism about..

NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg responded by warning against talk that "undermines security". "Any suggestion that allies will not defend each other undermines all of our security, including that of the U.S.," Mr. Stoltenberg said in a statement.

European Council President Charles Michel also denounced his comments as "reckless".

Pak. police seek to crush PTI protests against 'poll rigging'

Clashes reported in Rawalpindi and Lahore while dozens of other protests held across country without incident; police had warned earlier they would come down hard on illegal gatherings

Agence France-Presse
ISLAMABAD

The police fired tear gas to disperse supporters of jailed former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan Sunday after his party urged protests outside election offices where they said rigging had taken place in last week's national vote.

Clashes were reported in Rawalpindi city, south of the capital, and Lahore, in the east, while dozens of other protests were held across the country without incident.

The police warned earlier they would come down hard on illegal gatherings. There were no immediate



Chain reaction: Officials detain a supporter of Imran Khan during a protest in Lahore on Sunday. AP

reports of injuries from the protests.

Independent candidates - most linked to Mr. Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party - took the

most seats in the polls, scuppering the chances of the Army-backed Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) to win a ruling majority.

However, independents cannot form a government.

PTI leaders claim they would have won even more seats if not for vote rigging.

A nationwide election-day mobile telephone blackout and the slow counting of results led to suspicions the military establishment was influencing the process to ensure success for former premier Nawaz Sharif's PML-N.

"Throughout Pakistan, elections were manipulated in a subtle way," PTI chairman Gohar Ali Khan told a news conference on Saturday, calling on supporters to "protest peacefully" on Sunday.

Netanyahu promises 'safe passage' to Palestinians ahead of Rafah operation

Agence France-Presse
GAZA STRIP

The threat of an Israeli incursion into Gaza's southernmost town of Rafah persisted on Sunday, but Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu promised "safe passage" to civilians displaced there.

In an interview airing on Sunday, Mr. Netanyahu reiterated his intention to extend Israel's military operation against Hamas into Rafah.

"We're going to do it while providing safe passage for the civilian population so they can leave," he said.

It remains unclear however, where the large number of people pressed



Dark future: A blind Palestinian sits in the sun near the rubble of buildings destroyed by Israeli bombing in Rafah on Sunday. AFP

up against the border with Egypt and sheltering in makeshift tents can go.

When asked, Mr. Netanyahu would only say they are "working out a detailed plan".

Hamas on Sunday warned that any Israeli offensive in Gaza's far-south-

ern city of Rafah would scupper talks about the release of hostages seized in the October 7 attacks.

"Any attack by the occupation army on the city of Rafah would torpedo the exchange negotiations," a leader in the Palestinian militant group said.

'Sri Lanka's ban on foreign ships was to build technical capacity'

Foreign Minister says there was no pressure from India or objections from China on the decision; island nation's economy is recovering, needs collaboration, investment, not more loans, he adds

INTERVIEW

M.U.M. Ali Sabry

Suhasini Haidar



There was no pressure from India, and no objections from China to Sri Lanka's decision to ban research vessels for one year, says Sri Lankan Foreign Minister M.U.M. Ali Sabry in an interview to *The Hindu* on the sidelines of the Indian Ocean Conference in Perth. The Minister said that as Sri Lanka turns the corner on its economy, it is seeking investment and collaborations rather than handouts.

The World Bank says Sri Lanka is now in an economic recovery period. But are there still challenges when it comes to getting funds?

Yes, the immediate challenge is to complete our debt restructure process and start repaying the debt that we have suspended payments on. We need to win the confidence of the international community. The challenges remain, but we are confident compared to what we were two years ago.

Are you seeking more help from India in addition to the \$4.5 billion in credit lines, loans, currency swaps and debt moratoriums?

No, rather than credit lines and loans, we are keen to

work with India in terms of investments, technical collaboration, and knowledge sharing.

It has been six years since India and Sri Lanka signed MoUs for oil storage and connectivity projects in Trincomalee. When do you expect to see some movement, and what is holding them up?

We discussed this [with S. Jaishankar] here in Perth too. We are in the process of establishing joint working committees, and there is a desire to kickstart a "Joint Regional Authority" to decide on regulations. Given the need for commercial viability, involvement of private sector in these projects, they may take longer than anticipated to get the right partners and to complete the feasibility studies.

Are great power rivalries in the Indian Ocean, especially U.S.-China tensions an increasing concern?

We want to avoid having their rivalry coming to our doorstep. Sovereignty

ships which come for port calls, replenishment, and for joint exercises which is part of our commitment in UNCLOS.

Did China object to the decision, given it had a vessel in the area at the time?

We communicated our decision to whoever who has sent research vessels to Sri Lanka during the last 10 years or so, so probably most countries expected it. We have a good relationship with China for a long time.

When it comes to regional groupings, there seems to be more emphasis now on BIMSTEC than SAARC - given Indian tensions with Pakistan, Afghanistan and now Maldives, do you see the concept of SAARC going away?

For Sri Lanka, we hope there will be a time that India and Pakistan sit and negotiate and resolve their differences. But we cannot wait for that and need to look at the alternatives, and IOA and BIMSTEC are taking shape.

We have had very interesting BIMSTEC ministerial retreat at Bangkok last year, where we decided how we can expand and make the grouping more viable, and we hope to have a summit this year in Thailand, which was put off last year.

(The Hindu correspondent was an invitee to the Indian Ocean Conference)

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Can free will be used in making a nomination

COVERNOTE

Restrictions on nominations only to either spouse or children must be reviewed in view of changing times and also following large swathes of the society changing vastly and at different paces

K. Nitya Kalyani

Much as the government and regulators like to protect investors, the final say on their money matters and decisions about them rest with the investors themselves.

Inadequate awareness

However, levels of investment literacy and awareness of rights and responsibilities are terribly inadequate. Investors, even those who are literate, can be unaware and negligent.

We have been speaking of nominations in the last few instalments of CoverNote. Let us look briefly at a recent announcement that women government employees and pensioners are now permitted to nominate the family pension from their Employee Provident Fund (EPF) Account to their children overlooking their spouse.

Earlier, the family pension could go only to the surviving spouse and the children, with other family members becoming eligible only after the death of the spouse. This is pretty much micro-management.

Having said that, the current 'liberalisation' is not far from micro-management either. This amendment applies only where there are pending divorce proceedings or cases filed under laws such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, Dowry Prohibition Act or the Indian Penal Code.

And procedures exist to avail of the facility. A written request must be sent by the employee or pensioner concerned to the head of office stating that "family pension should be granted to her eligible child/ children in precedence to her spouse, in the event of her death during the ongoing proceedings."

One can appreciate the historical reasons for prescriptive and restrictive rules on nominations among other things. It indeed has cemented social security for families who lose the bread earner and who could have become indigent without this protective rule.

Changing times

Yet, sections of the society are changing vastly and at different paces. It is high time we undertake a meaningful and realistic review taking all this into account.

There are more questions, not so outlying as we may think.

Here is one such query, from a friend who finds EPF nomination rules falling short of her requirement.

Working in the private sector, she is a single woman with no children. She can nominate only her mother or brother under the rules, but her mother is much older and her brother is well off. "Why should I not be free to nominate somebody else, why not to a charitable organisation?" she asks.

And, why not?
(The writer is a business journalist specialising in insurance & corporate history)

Send queries on personal finance and investing to the moneywise@thehindu.co.in ID. Our experts in personal finance will respond to select queries, but will not give specific recommendations for investment in a particular mutual fund, share or fixed deposit.



Eye for returns: Non-Resident Indian parents with young kids also actively explore investment options in India to secure the financial future of their children. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

Options NRIs must explore for investing in India

Diversifying investment portfolio is crucial for NRIs to build a substantial corpus; these options, facilitate navigating the intricate world of investments while achieving long-term financial goals

INVESTMENT RADAR

Vivek Jain

Many NRIs still harbour aspirations to be a part of the India growth story. This inclination is strengthened by the country's resilient growth amid a global economic slowdown.

India also fosters a conducive environment for industrial development with robust FDI attraction to its credit. As a result, NRIs are increasingly considering India as a prime destination for investing, aiming at accruing profits from an early age and subsequently retiring in comfort.

Also, NRI parents with young kids actively explore investment options in India to secure the financial future of their children.

Dilemma for NRIs

However, investing in India comes with a bit of a dilemma for NRIs. Navigating the investment landscape requires careful consideration. Nevertheless, the substantial growth prospects outweigh the complexities.

India offers NRIs a diverse array of investment opportunities, allowing them to tailor their portfolios to their risk tolerance.

Creating a robust portfolio necessitates a balanced ratio of risk and returns which is offered by insurance-cum-investment products. The products, combining life cover and investment elements, safeguard dependents while

India fosters a conducive environment for robust FDI attraction as a result of which NRIs are increasingly considering the country as a prime investment destination

generating wealth through returns. The flexibility and customisation options enable NRIs to construct a personalised investment strategy. Here are the unique features of the plans:

Investing in ULIPs

Unit Linked Insurance Plans (ULIPs) provide wealth accumulation with the protection of insurance, proving to be a versatile investment option. Investors can diversify funds between debt and equity, benefitting from market-linked returns that have historically reaped as high as 12-15%.

ULIPs also offer flexibility of fund selection for capital which eases financial planning. NRIs enjoy tax benefits on premium up to ₹2.5 lakh and tax-free maturity proceeds, making them more tax-efficient than avenues such as mutual funds.

Guaranteed plans

Guaranteed plans ensure policyholders absolute security through fixed and stable returns, even in volatile market conditions. With fixed return rates reaching up to 7.5% in new-age plans, the policies offer

India offers NRIs a diverse array of investment opportunities, allowing them to tailor their portfolios to their risk tolerance behaviour

a steady income stream even in a fluctuating market. Tailored for those averse to risk, these plans also serve as an ideal safety net for retirement planning. Choosing payout frequency aligns with your individual financial needs.

Investing in the plans is crucial considering the diminishing returns across asset classes.

As India's pursuit of becoming a developed nation gets closer to reality, return rates are likely to slide further. So, timing is important

Security, growth

After considering guaranteed and market-linked plans, you might be looking to strike a balance between the two.

Capital Guarantee Plans help you find this balance by combining guaranteed returns with a potential market-driven growth.

Allocating a portion to guaranteed return products ensures 100% capital protection, while the remainder is allocated towards market-related gains.

This guarantees security and returns, preserving the initial capital. Tax be-

nefits and exemptions enhance the appeal of the plans for NRIs.

Retirement planning

Annuity Plans offer a dependable solution for NRIs nearing retirement, providing a fixed monthly income for life. This ensures financial security with flexibility in choosing pay-out frequencies. Predictability in these plans eliminates concerns about outliving savings. Joint annuity plans extend financial support to spouses.

Child plans

Considering you can invest for your child as early as 90 days from birth, child plans ensure long-term benefits with higher returns.

A key feature is the waiver of premium optional add-on, which provides financial security even in policyholder's absence. In the unfortunate event of the policyholder's death, the child receives maturity amount to fulfil their goals.

The plans also offer tax benefits under Section 80C which makes them a strategic choice for prudent financial planning.

Diversifying the investment portfolio is crucial for NRIs to build a substantial corpus.

These options, offering security, stability, and growth potential, facilitate navigating the intricate world of investments while achieving long-term financial goals.

(The writer is Head, Investments, Policybazaar.com)

Personal Loans

| Rates and Charges | | Loan amount 5 lakh Tenure 5 years | Loan amount 1 lakh Tenure 5 years | (% of loan amount) |
|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Name of Lender | Interest Rate (%) | EMI (Rs) | EMI (Rs) | Processing fee |
| HDFC Bank | 10.50 onwards | 10,747 onwards | 2,149 onwards | Up to Rs 4,999 |
| Tata Capital | 10.99 onwards | 10,869 onwards | 2,174 onwards | Up to 5.5% |
| State Bank of India | 11.15-15.30 | 10,909-11,974 | 2,182-2,395 | 1.5% (Rs 1,000-Rs 15,000) |
| ICICI Bank | 10.65 onwards | 10,784 onwards | 2,157 onwards | Up to 2.50% |
| Bank of Baroda | 11.40-18.75 | 10,971-12,902 | 2,194-2,580 | Up to 2% (min Rs 1,000, max Rs 10,000) |
| Axis Bank | 10.49 onwards | 10,744 onwards | 2,149 onwards | Up to 2% |
| Kotak Mahindra Bank | 10.99 onwards | 10,869 onwards | 2,174 onwards | Up to 3% |
| Bank of India | 10.75-14.75 | 10,809-11,829 | 2,162-2,366 | Up to 1% (Maximum Rs 5,000) |
| Canara Bank | 10.95-15.95 | 10,859-12,146 | 2,172-2,429 | NIL |
| Punjab National Bank* | 10.40-17.95 | 10,772-12,683 | 2,144-2,537 | Up to 1% |
| HSBC Bank | 9.99-16.00 | 10,621-12,159 | 2,124-2,432 | Up to 2% |
| Federal Bank | 11.49 onwards | 10,994 onwards | 2,199 onwards | Up to 3% |
| Union Bank of India | 11.35-15.45 | 10,959-12,013 | 2,192-2,403 | Up to 1% (Maximum Rs 7,500) |
| Bajaj Finserv | 11.00 onwards | 10,871 onwards | 2,174 onwards | Up to 3.93% |
| Punjab & Sind Bank | 10.15-12.80 | 10,660-11,325 | 2,132-2,265 | Up to 1% |
| South Indian Bank | 12.85-20.60 | 11,338-13,414 | 2,268-2,683 | Up to 2% |
| UCO Bank | 12.45-12.85 | 11,236-11,338 | 2,247-2,268 | Up to 1% (Minimum Rs 750) |
| IDFC First Bank | 10.75 onwards | 10,809 onwards | 2,162 onwards | Up to 3.50% |
| Bank of Maharashtra | 10.00-12.80 | 10,624-11,325 | 2,125-2,265 | 1% (Rs 1,000-Rs 10,000) |
| Karnataka Bank | 13.43 | 11,487 | 2,297 | Up to 2% of loan amount (Minimum Rs 2,500, Maximum Rs 8,500) |
| IndusInd Bank | 10.49 onwards | 10,744 onwards | 2,149 onwards | Up to 3% |

Car Loans

| Rates and Charges | | Loan amount 5 lakh Tenure 5 years | (% of loan amount) |
|-------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Name of Lender | Interest Rate (%) | EMI (Rs) | Processing fee |
| Union Bank of India | 8.70 - 10.45 | 10,307 - 10,735 | Rs 1,000 |
| Punjab National Bank | 8.75 - 10.60 | 10,319 - 10,772 | 0.25% (Rs. 1,000 - Rs. 1,500) |
| Bank of Baroda | 8.80 - 12.70 | 10,331 - 11,300 | Up to Rs 10,000 |
| Canara Bank | 8.70 - 11.95 | 10,307 - 11,110 | Waived off till 31st January 2024 |
| Bank of India | 8.75 - 10.75 | 10,319 - 10,809 | Nil |
| UCO Bank | 8.45 - 10.55 | 10,246 - 10,759 | Nil |
| State Bank of India | 8.75 - 9.80 | 10,319 - 10,554 | Up to Rs 1,500 |
| Bank of Maharashtra* | 8.70 - 13.00 | 10,307 - 11,377 | Nil |
| Indian Overseas Bank** | 8.85 onwards | 10,343 onwards | 0.50% (Rs 500 - Rs 5,000) |
| ICICI Bank | 9.10 onwards | 10,403 onwards | Rs 999 - Rs 8,500 |
| HDFC Bank | 8.75 onwards | 10,319 onwards | 0.50% (Rs 3,500 - Rs 8,000) |
| Karnataka Bank | 8.88 - 11.36 | 10,350 - 10,961 | 0.60% (Rs 3,000 - Rs 11,000) |
| Federal Bank | 8.85 onwards | 10,343 onwards | Rs 2,000 - Rs 4,500 |
| Punjab and Sind Bank*** | 8.85 - 10.25 | 10,343 - 10,685 | 0.25% (Rs. 1,000 - Rs. 15,000) |
| South Indian Bank | 8.75 onwards | 10,319 onwards | 1% (Max: Rs 10,000) |
| City Union Bank | 14.35 - 14.85 | 11,725 - 11,586 | 1.25% (Min: Rs 1,000) |

*0.25% interest rate concession for existing housing loan borrowers and corporate salary account holders.
**0.50% interest rate concession to borrowers with credit scores of 750 and above. Interest rate concession of 0.20% to borrowers for financing Electric 4 Wheelers. 0.20% concession to existing Housing Loan Borrowers.
***Concession of up to 50% on processing fee for PSB Apna Vahan Sugam

Rates and charges as on February 6

Source: Paisabazaar.com

It was about changing Umran's mindset: J&K bowling coach Krishnakumar

The coach helped the fast bowler by sending videos to bring about the shift; it has yielded the desired results and given the pacer renewed confidence

S. Prasanna Venkatesan
PUDUCHERRY

Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) bowling coach P. Krishnakumar on Sunday said that he had to change India pacer Umran Malik's mindset to make him feel confident of pitching the ball up and swinging it both ways at his natural speed.

"Earlier, he was pitching it a little short and was not able to swing the ball regularly. But now, he's swinging the ball regularly, and his pitching has gone between 6 and 7 metres which is fantastic.

"He also feels like, 'I'm confident that I can pitch it there.' If you want to play at the International level, I feel you have to go to that channel between 6 and 7 metres, then only you can get the edges," he said after Jammu & Kashmir's 19-run win over Pondicherry at the Cricket Association of Pondicherry (CAP) Siechem ground here.

The coach said he had a long chat with the pacer on his absence from the National squad. "Obviously, we had a long chat. He has played for India, he knows everything. It was more about changing his mindset. That was very important. Because, he had the mindset, 'I will bowl quick.' At the end of the day, the right-hand column (wickets column in the bowling analysis) is very important in Indian cricket. We go by quantity. You have to have wickets if you want to get selected. There's no doubt he has been given a lot of chances to play for India on the basis of the talent he has. But at the end of the day, I feel the right-hand column is very important."

The 50-year-old said he kept sending Umran video clips of great pacers to force the change in mindset. "What I did was, I sent him almost 100 videos - of (James) Anderson, of (Andrew) Flintoff, and all the great bowlers. I forced him to think." You have to pitch it up there if you want to take wickets in international cricket.

"Almost everyday, he was getting a video. So, then, it changes the mindset. Now, he's bowling fantastically well and I think he should get a nod in the Indian team."

Myth busted

Former Rajasthan pacer, Krishnakumar had to bust the myth that it's hard to control the ball when bowling at great speed. "Dale Steyn, Brett Lee, (Jasprit) Bumrah." There are a lot of examples. There are a lot of myths going around. Because he's a young boy, he listens to all those myths, and it goes into the mind. So, I forced him by sending the videos to think like that (differently). Like, 'No, I can swing it.'

"When I joined (the J&K team), he was not sure. He said: 'Sir, I don't think I'll swing that much at 150 kph.' So, I told him and he did it himself. Then, he was like, 'Sir, it's happening!' The ball is moving and he's swinging the ball both ways now!"

He referred to Umran's bowling against Delhi and Odisha in the ongoing Ranji Trophy to highlight that his ward has imbibed the guidance to bowl better.

"You should have seen his bowling against Delhi and Odisha! You should see



All in the mind: Umran looks hungry for more success after switching to a new process. EMMANUAL YOGINI

the videos. He bowled brilliantly. It was unlucky that he couldn't get wickets, but he bowled fantastically well." Now, he's saying, 'Sir, I'm very, very confident that I can pitch it (up) there.'"

On his first season with the Jammu & Kashmir team now, Krishnakumar says

that he had to earn the pacer's trust in him. "The best part about Umran is that he listens to things properly and he applies it. But as a coach, that trust, I had to develop with him since it's my first year. Now, the trust is there since things have been happening. I was telling, 'See

this will happen,' and that happened."

Asked for the standout quality in Umran, he said: "I think he's very down to earth, even after playing for India. He's always eager to learn. That eagerness is there and that I think is the standout quality of Umran."

THE GIST

Umran was pitching it a little short and not able to swing the ball regularly. But now he's swinging the ball regularly: Krishnakumar

The coach says he sent him almost 100 videos of all the great bowlers and forced him to think

About the standout quality in Umran, Krishnakumar says the speedster is down to earth even after representing the country

Svrcina continues to fight far from home, both on and off the court

Nihit Sachdeva
CHENNAI

Staying true to his name, which means 'fighting far away', Dalibor Svrcina battled hard before bowing out with a creditable semifinal finish at the Chennai Open, an ATP Challenger Tour event, roughly 7000 kilometres away from his hometown in Czechia.

Svrcina played three three-setters before losing to Sumit Nagal in straight sets in the semifinal. The last of those deciding set battles, against Mukund Sasikumar in the quarterfinals, was the longest at two hours 54 minutes and in some of the most difficult conditions despite the match beginning around 5pm local time. "It was one of the toughest matches because I was sweating like crazy. It's very humid here. I was sweating throughout the first set. I had to go and change after the first set which lasted one-and-a-half hours, which maybe was the longest set that I ever played," said Svrcina, moments after a cool down run around the outside courts at the SDAT Stadium in Nungambakkam.

In tennis terms, at 5'10", Svrcina is not one of the tallest guys and neither does he have a big serve to gain free points. However, what he lacks in reach, he makes up for with his quick court coverage and ability to counter-punch, reminiscent of former World No. 8 Diego Schwartzman. The Argentine is three inches shorter though!

The journey so far

Svrcina's parents are doctors. He has two older siblings - a sister and a brother - who are in their mid 30s. "I was always very active as a child. My parents wanted me to do some sport. My siblings and my parents did sports but never professionally. So, they put me to play football first, and then I started playing tennis at the age of 6," he said.

"I chose tennis. I was very happy playing tennis when I was 9-11 years old. I spent a lot of time on the court playing and I started doing well. So, I stayed with it."

At 14, Svrcina was a member of the squad that led Czechia to its first Junior Davis Cup title after 20 years in 2017. A year later, he was ranked



R. RAVINDRAN

amongst the world's Top 10 boys. In 2019, partnering compatriot Jonas Forejtsek, he won the boys' doubles crown at the Junior Australian Open. He shifted to the senior circuit

soon, but had to wait for his major breakthrough which came in 2021 when he clinched his maiden title on the Challenger Tour as a wildcard in Prague. That propelled him into the



I try to have my coach with me and it's already quite difficult to pay for all the flights and all the meals at the hotel

Top 400 in the ATP Rankings. A runner-up finish at the same event next year helped him make his Top 200 debut.

In 2023, Svrcina qualified for the main draw of a Grand Slam for the first time at the Australian Open and defeated the then World No. 64 Jaume Munar of Spain in the opening round.

Being ranked high enough to make the cut for the qualifying rounds of the Majors since 2022 Roland Garros has somewhat helped Svrcina take care of the finances, something which a sponsor covered till the age of 18. "I'm paying for everything myself. When you make it at least to the qualifying grand Slams, it's a big help. Of course, I cannot travel with three-four people but I try to have my coach with me and it's already quite

difficult to pay for all the flights and all the meals at the hotel," said the 21-year-old.

Svrcina mentioned that he admires Rafael Nadal but with time, has started to look up to Novak Djokovic. "As I'm growing older, I have started to appreciate Djokovic much more. All the players and the people in the world can learn from him because he's very open minded. In the interviews, he talks very openly even about his private life and what he is doing off the court. I resonate with him very well," said World No. 186 about the top-ranked player in men's tennis.

Avid reader

When he is not playing tennis, Svrcina likes to spend his time reading. His brother, who is studying philosophy in Prague, advised him to develop this habit when he was 18. "I read a lot of books from Hinduism and Buddhism. I also started thinking a little bit differently and I'm very glad about that. I have a different view on life. I know that even though I am very much into tennis, it's not the most important thing in life," he said.

The patterns of global warming are more important than its levels

No one has been able to fully explain the patterns of warming associated with the earth's surface exceeding the 1.5 degrees C warming threshold. This is important because warming patterns matter the most for our ability to manage the disasters associated with global warming

Raghu Murtugudde

Many warming records were broken in 2023 along with climate disasters such as wildfires, cyclones, droughts, and floods. In this time, the focus of the public narrative – often with the participation of scientists – has often been on whether we crossed the 'magical' warming threshold of 1.5 degrees C. The best estimates, derived from data recorded by instruments, say the planet is just under this threshold.

But did we really cross the 1.5 degrees C threshold in 2023?

Before we discuss the answer, let's remember that 1.5 degrees C is not a scientific threshold. It became enshrined in the Paris Agreement after intense negotiations by member-countries of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). But it's not a round number by accident: it comes from a figure – 2 degrees C – European politicians found easier to aim at in the 1990s.

Measuring the crossing

Now a new study, published on February 5 in *Nature*, has added fuel to the fire of the threshold-crossing controversy. Based on estimates of warming from palaeo-thermometry, scientists from Australia and the U.S. have said that the earth's surface has already warmed by more than 1.5 degrees C on average over pre-industrial levels. A major caveat of the study is that the scientists have collected warming data from only one location and have extrapolated it to be indicative of the global mean temperature trend.

This said, these so-called 'palaeo proxies' constitute an amazing technique that uses chemical evidence stored in various organic matter, such as corals, stalactites, and stalagmites, to approximate the temperature at some point in the past. But just as insightful as this chemical evidence can be, we should remember that it is still only indirect evidence of temperature changes with respect to a baseline temperature. The evidence can't measure the actual overall temperatures.

Since palaeo proxies don't directly measure the temperature, we call them proxies of past temperature deviations (the 'palaeo' denotes the past).

Researchers carefully calibrate the various chemical compounds assimilated by some species into their biogenic materials – such as calcium carbonate or chalk – in modernity to establish the relationships between those chemicals



Global warming is moderated or amplified by local conditions. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

and the prevailing local temperature.

When such a biogenic material from the past is found, scientists can piece together when the biogenic material was deposited (using the quantity of certain isotopes that decay at a steady rate over time). They then study the assimilated chemicals to deduce the temperature deviations during that time period. The results are very local temperature anomaly estimates from the past, so they can't be the basis for any scientifically robust claims about tiny deviations of past temperatures from instrumental records.

No explanation for patterns

Next, let's examine the significance of crossing the 1.5 degrees C threshold. The expositions that made this claim – articles, headlines, etc. – do not really offer any clear explanation of why such exceptional warming occurred or how it can explain some location-specific disasters.

Even worse, no one has been able to fully explain the patterns of warming associated with this threshold exceedance or, in fact, the pattern of any level of global warming. This is important because warming patterns matter the most for our ability to manage the disasters associated with global warming.

Even the amount and the distribution of the 2023 monsoons have not been explained yet, and it is unclear how the combination of the El Niño, its unusual pattern, and global warming conspired together to produce the monsoons India



1.5 degrees C is not a scientific threshold. It became enshrined in the Paris Agreement after intense negotiations by member-countries

experienced. Note also that the Indian subcontinent experienced significant cooling during 2023.

We will be ignoring the lessons we have learned from various El Niños and their impacts on global warming and on the monsoon if we continue to focus on the extent of global warming rather than its spatial variations and how they evolve.

El Niño as a warming paradigm

The tropical Pacific Ocean keeps soaking up heat during normal and La Niña years and belches it out in an El Niño year. This causes a mini global warming, with consequences at distant locations – the so-called teleconnections; the latter is what tells us that the pattern of warming really matters.

Depending on whether warming due to an El Niño is in the eastern Pacific Ocean or closer to the international dateline, the impacts on the monsoon and the other parts of the world can be very different.

An added difficulty is that the El Niño teleconnections themselves also modify the warming pattern. As a result, droughts can have a stronger feedback

that affects temperature than floods in many instances. The massive deluges that California is experiencing this winter are driven by the El Niño but likely amplified by global warming. The amounts of rain and snow will subsequently feedback to local and global temperatures.

These same processes work in the global warming regime as well. As human-made greenhouse gases initiate the warming, the warming pattern is amplified in the Arctic and over the desert regions of the Middle East but damped over the eastern Pacific and the northern Atlantic oceans. These local warmings and coolings and their magnitudes determine the net effect of natural variability and global warming in a particular locality.

Need for accurate predictions

It is hardly possible to over-emphasise our need for accurate predictions of warming patterns to manage the climate change impacts that have already landed. We need such predictions not only on an event-to-event basis but also in order to adapt to the changing seasons and the unavoidable harm they are rendering to lives, livelihoods, and economies.

In sum, we will be better served by keeping the global warming patterns in mind when arbitrary thresholds lacking in any real scientific basis threaten to sweep us away.

(Raghu Murtugudde is a visiting professor at IIT Bombay and an emeritus professor at the University of Maryland.)

THE GIST

Palaeo proxies use chemical evidence stored in various organic matter, such as corals, stalactites, and stalagmites, to approximate the temperature at some point in the past

Even the amount and distribution of the monsoon of 2023 has defied explanation, and it is unclear how the combination of the El Niño, its unusual pattern, and global warming conspired together to produce the monsoons India experienced

Accurate predictions of warming patterns are essential to manage climate change impacts. Predictions are needed to adapt to changing seasons and the harm they cause to lives, livelihoods, and economies

BIG SHOT



Workers repair a pipeline that carries hot water from the Svartsengi geothermal power plant to the Reykjanes peninsula, in Grindavik, Iceland, February 9, 2024. Repairs on the pipes went on overnight in temperatures as low as minus 14 degrees C, utility company H.S. Orka said, after they were damaged by a volcanic eruption in southwestern Iceland.

AP

WHAT IS IT?

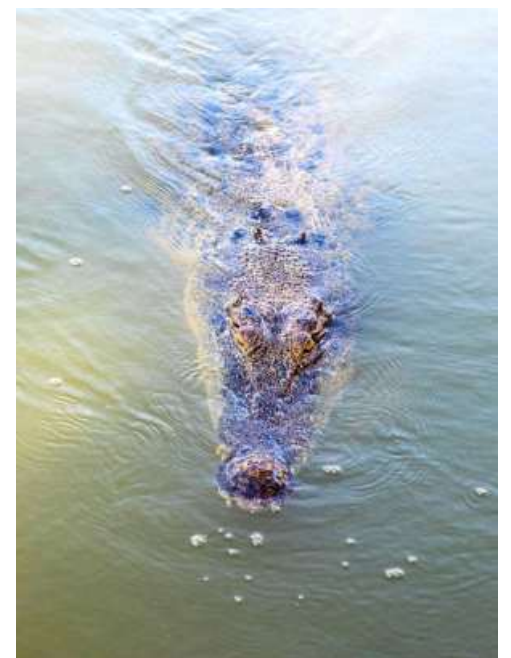
Brumation: winter is coming for reptiles

Arkatapa Basu

Is an alligator lying still underwater, with its snout alone sticking out, alive or dead? If this is the situation, there's a third possibility: brumation. This is the name to describe a period of dormancy or slowed activity in reptiles, much like hibernation in mammals. It typically occurs during colder months, when temperatures drop and food becomes scarce. Reptiles enter a state of brumation to conserve energy and survive these adverse environmental conditions.

During brumation, reptiles may retreat to underground burrows, rock crevices or other sheltered areas where temperatures are relatively more stable. Their metabolism slows significantly, allowing them to go weeks or even months without eating. This period of reduced activity allows reptiles to conserve energy and minimise their resource requirements.

Researchers have observed instances of brumation in various reptilian species across habitats. Such species include box turtles and painted turtles, which burrow into the mud at the bottom of ponds or lakes. Snakes may seek refuge in underground dens or caves while lizards may hide under rocks or within vegetation. Brumation is crucial for reptiles



During brumation reptiles can slow metabolism significantly, allowing them to go weeks or even months without eating. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

to survive cold climes and endure challenging environmental conditions, until they can reemerge to feed and reproduce in more favourable climes.

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