

Course correction – Avoidable crisis: on Sri Lanka's political crisis

President Sirisena's actions have put Sri Lankan democracy in peril

Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena's decision to withdraw his faction from the ruling coalition and replace Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe with former President Mahinda Rajapaksa has plunged the country into a political crisis. This was further complicated, a day later, by the President's move to suspend Parliament till November 16. Mr. Sirisena's fast-deteriorating relationship with Mr. Wickremesinghe was an open secret, and there were indications that he could be negotiating a possible partnership with Mr. Rajapaksa. But his sudden and secret manoeuvre caught everyone, including senior politicians, completely unawares. And before the details and implications of the political drama that was unfolding could sink in, Mr. Rajapaksa had been sworn in Prime Minister, beaming as he greeted the President, his chief rival until days ago. Mr. Wickremesinghe has termed his replacement "unconstitutional" and maintains that he remains Prime Minister. Confident of a majority, he has challenged the Rajapaksa-Sirisena combine to take a floor test in the 225-member House. By suspending Parliament, Mr. Sirisena is seen to have exposed his own insecurity about garnering the required strength. The next two weeks will be crucial, with attempts at horse-trading and assertions of political loyalty amid uncertainty. None of these is uncommon in Sri Lankan politics, but the circumstances, which are entirely of Mr. Sirisena's making, have led to a political upheaval that was avoidable. All this has come at a time of economic fragility, with a plummeting rupee, soaring unemployment and rising living costs.

Mr. Sirisena's appointment of Mr. Rajapaksa even before voting out Mr. Wickremesinghe on the floor of Parliament is nothing but blatant abuse of his executive powers. Guided by narrow political interests, the President's actions betray an utter disregard for the parliamentary process. In resorting to these emergency measures, he has not only put democracy in serious peril but also let down Sri Lankans, including a sizeable section of the Tamil and Muslim minorities that backed him in the critical 2015 election. The best forum to test political clout in a democracy is the legislature. An extra-parliamentary power struggle, that too using illegal means, heightens the risk of political thuggery and unrest. Still recovering from the violence and bloodbath during its nearly three-decade-long civil war, and grappling with the economic and social challenges in its aftermath, Sri Lanka cannot afford to recede from the democratic space that opened up in 2015. Mr. Sirisena and Mr. Wickremesinghe had come together in an exceptional political alliance that promised to put the country back on the path of democracy, after a decade of Mr. Rajapaksa's authoritarian rule. Leaving aside the irony of Mr. Sirisena joining hands with Mr. Rajapaksa, who he had left and subsequently unseated from office, his desire to consolidate power by hook or by crook is extremely unfortunate. Though much damage has been done already, a fair vote must be ensured when Parliament reconvenes, if possible before November 16.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Avoidable** - capable of being prevented
- **Crisis** - an urgent, difficult, or dangerous situation
- **Peril** - danger
- **Faction** - a small group within a larger group, consisting of people with different opinions from the rest
- **Coalition** - a temporary union of different political parties that agree to form a government together
- **Former** - used for describing someone or something that had a particular job, title, status etc in the past, but not now
- **Deteriorating** - to become worse
- **Open secret** - something that should be secret but is not because a lot of people know about it
- **Negotiate** - to try to reach an agreement by discussing something in a formal way, especially in a business or political situation

- **Manoeuvre** - an action or movement that you need care or skill to do
- **Catch someone unawares** - to surprise someone, often making them feel confused or embarrassed
- **Implication** - a possible effect or result
- **Unfolding** - to happen, or to develop
- **Sink in** - to become completely understood
- **Sworn in** - when someone is sworn in, they make a formal promise to be honest or loyal, either in a law court or when starting a new official job
- **Beaming** - if you beam, you smile in a very obvious way
- **Chief** - main or most important
- **Rival** - a person, team, or business that competes with another
- **Unconstitutional** - not allowed or not legal according to the constitution (=set of official rules or principles) of a particular country or organization
- **Maintain** - to continue to say that something is true, even if other people do not believe you
- **Floor test** - test of majority
- **Expose** - to allow something that is usually covered or hidden to be seen
- **Garner** - to collect or obtain a large amount of something useful or important
- **Horse-trading** - difficult and sometimes dishonest discussions between people who are trying to reach an agreement
- **Assertion** - a definite statement or claim that something is true
- **Amid** - if something happens amid particular feelings or events, it happens while people have these feelings or while these events are happening
- **Uncertainty** - a nervous feeling that you have because you think bad things might happen
- **Circumstance** - a fact or condition that affects a situation
- **Upheaval** - a sudden or violent change, especially one that affects people's lives
- **Avoidable** - capable of being prevented
- **Fragility** - the quality of being easily damaged or broken
- **Plummeting** - to fall straight down very quickly from a high position
- **Soaring** - to quickly increase to a high level
- **Blatant** - done in an obvious way that shows you are not embarrassed or ashamed to be doing something bad or illegal
- **Abuse** - the use of something in a bad, dishonest, or harmful way
- **Betray** - if you betray your country, or if you betray someone who needs your support, you deliberately do something that harms them or helps their opponents
- **Utter** - complete or extreme
- **Disregard** - the attitude of someone who does not respect something or consider it important
- **Resort to something** - to do something that you do not want to do because you cannot find any other way of achieving something
- **Let down** - to make someone disappointed by not doing something that they are expecting you to do
- **Sizeable** - fairly large
- **Minority** - a small number of people or things that are part of a larger group but different in some way from most of the group
- **Backed** - supported
- **Forum** - an organized event or meeting at which people discuss something
- **Clout** - the authority to make decisions, or the power to influence events
- **Thuggery** - violent behaviour
- **Unrest** - angry or violent behaviour by people who are protesting against something
- **Bloodbath** - a period of fighting in which a lot of people are killed or injured

- **Civil war** - a war fought between different groups of people within the same country
- **Grapple with** - to try hard to understand a difficult idea or to solve a difficult problem
- **Aftermath** - the effects and results of something bad or important
- **Recede** - to move back from a high point or level
- **Exceptional** - extremely good or impressive in a way that is unusual
- **Alliance** - an arrangement between two or more people, groups, or countries by which they agree to work together to achieve something
- **Authoritarian** - controlling everything and forcing people to obey strict rules and laws
- **Irony** - a strange, funny, or sad situation in which things happen in the opposite way to what you would expect
- **Subsequently** - after something else happened
- **Desire** - a strong feeling of wanting to have or to do something
- **Consolidate** - to make the power, position, or achievements you already have stronger or more effective so that they are likely to continue
- **By hook or by crook** - in whatever way is possible
- **Reconvene** - to start meeting again

Course correction – More from less: on BJP-JD(U) seat sharing in Bihar for 2019 poll

The BJP is giving up seats it won in Bihar to JD(U), a strategy that is not without its risks

It is easier to reach agreements in principle than to sign up on the specifics, but both the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Janata Dal (United) overcame a major hurdle when they decided they will contest an equal number of the 40 seats in Bihar in next year's Lok Sabha election. There is no word yet on what that number will be, as there are two other alliance partners in the equation, the Lok Janshakti Party of Ram Vilas Paswan and the Rashtriya Lok Samata Party of Upendra Kushwaha. In 2014, the NDA partners won 31 seats — BJP 22, LJP six, and RLSP three. The JD(U), which contested separately, won just two seats, but now wants to be treated as a senior partner of the alliance, having won about 16% of the vote in the 2014 Lok Sabha election and the 2015 Assembly election. What this means in real terms is that the BJP will have to stand in fewer seats than it won in 2014. Unless it manages to beat down the LJP's expectations, the BJP will not be able to contest in more than 16 seats. The JD(U) has not been a reliable ally, not for the BJP, and not for the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Congress. To give up seats it now holds to an ally not wholly trustworthy is a gamble, but the BJP realises the situation is vastly different from what obtained in 2014. In the 2015 Assembly election, the BJP's seat share dropped substantially in the face of a JD(U)-RJD-Congress alliance that polarised votes. The BJP was unable to come to power until after the JD(U) broke away from the RJD and the Congress and re-joined the NDA. It was a hard lesson, but it was learnt well. A humbled BJP evidently thinks it wiser to be more accommodative to allies than to pursue the high-risk strategy of trying to force multi-cornered contests in the hope of coming on top in the first-past-the-post system.

If the agreement reached by BJP president Amit Shah and Chief Minister Nitish Kumar sticks, the electoral arithmetic will likely favour the NDA. But the RJD is clearly on a comeback trail, and the image of Chief Minister Kumar is much the worse for his years in power. The vote shares of the NDA constituents might not all neatly add up. In the opposing camp, the problem is not seat-sharing but putting together a winning combination. The RJD and Congress must be hoping that Mr. Kumar, after his frequent shifting of camps, will not be able to take his entire support base to the NDA. A better showing

in the by-elections was a morale-booster, and the RJD and the Congress might fancy their chances as they contend with the formidable numbers of the NDA.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Strategy** - a plan or method for achieving something, especially over a long period of time
- **In principle** - used for saying that something is possible in theory, although it has not yet been tried
- **Specifics** - the details of something
- **Hurdle** - one of several problems that you must solve before you can do something successfully
- **Contest** - a situation in which two or more people or groups are competing to gain power or an advantage
- **Reliable** - a reliable person is someone who you can trust to behave well, work hard, or do what you expect them to do
- **Trustworthy** - able to be trusted as being honest, safe, or reliable
- **Gamble** - to do something that involves risks but may result in benefits if things happen as you hope they will
- **Vastly** - to a great degree
- **Substantially** - by a large amount or degree
- **Polarise** - to form two very different groups, opinions, or situations that are completely opposite to each other, or to cause this to happen
- **Evidently** - in a way that is easy to see
- **Accommodative** - willing to adjust to differences in order to obtain agreement
- **Pursue** - to follow a course of activity
- **First-past-the-post** - a first-past-the-post system is one in which only the person or political party that gets the most votes is elected
- **Trail** - to be losing in a competition or election
- **Constituent** - someone who lives in a constituency and is allowed to vote in elections
- **Add up** - if small amounts add up, they gradually produce a large total
- **Camp** - a group of people within a larger group who have the same ideas or support the same person
- **By-election** - an election in one particular area to choose a new representative in parliament or on a council, or to replace someone who has died or left the job
- **Morale** - the amount of enthusiasm that a person or group of people feel about their situation at a particular time
- **Booster** - something that makes you feel more confident, more healthy etc
- **Fancy** - to believe that someone will be successful in doing something, especially winning a competition or fight
- **Contend with** - to have to deal with problems or difficulties, especially in order to achieve something
- **Formidable** - very impressive in size, power, or skill and therefore deserving respect and often difficult to deal with

Course correction – Averting polarisation: on SC pushing back Ayodhya verdict

The Supreme Court has judiciously pushed back the timeline for a verdict on Ayodhya

By declining to fix until January 2019 a date for hearing the Ayodhya case, the Supreme Court has judiciously diminished the possibility of a final verdict before the next Lok Sabha election. The adjournment is both

welcome and necessary, as it pushes back the prospect of any judgment in the run-up to the polls. It hardly needs reiteration that regardless of which way it goes, any verdict would polarise the nation. When a three-judge Bench refused to refer some questions of law in the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute to a seven-member Bench last month, it raised the prospects of an early final hearing in the appeals filed against the Allahabad High Court's judgment of 2010 in the main title suit. The court had then set October 29, 2018, for the next hearing. This had raised the hopes of aggressive proponents of Hindutva who have been expecting a favourable verdict for the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya. While it is true that courts should not tailor their timelines to election dates, it is equally important that religious sentiments are not stoked and exploited during election season. The decision of a Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi to put off even the exercise of fixing a date for the final hearing is quite pragmatic. In the eyes of the law, this may be just a title dispute. However, given the divisive effect the Ram temple movement has had on the country's politics and history, it would be unwise to equate this with any other judicial matter that can come up for disposal in due course.

A word of caution is in order. The postponement of the hearing does not preclude an aggressive campaign by those upset and impatient about what they see as a delay in achieving their objective of building a temple at the disputed site. Already there are voices clamouring, most imprudently, for an ordinance to enable the construction of a temple. These must be resisted, and the judiciary must be vigilant and resourceful in ensuring that the dispute remains within its jurisdiction. A solution, unless judicially driven, is unlikely to command constitutional legitimacy. Twenty four years ago the **Supreme Court** had resolutely refused to answer a controversial Presidential reference on whether a temple pre-existed the demolished masjid. It had restored the title suit and made it clear that the government is only a receiver of the land it had acquired in Ayodhya; and that it holds the land in trust, only to be handed over to the party that succeeds in the suit. This recourse to a judicial remedy should not be circumvented. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his Independence Day address in 2014, had called for a 10-year moratorium on communal and sectarian issues. As long as he sticks to the spirit behind this appeal, it will not be legitimate for anyone to demand a pre-emptive law in favour of a temple.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Avert** - to prevent something bad or harmful from happening
- **Polarisation** - the act of dividing something, especially something that contains different people or opinions, into two completely separate groups
- **Push back** - to delay something so that it happens later than planned
- **Verdict** - an official judgment made in a court
- **Judicious** - showing intelligence and good judgment
- **Timeline** - a plan of when something should happen or how much time something should take
- **Decline** - to refuse
- **Hearing** - a meeting of a court of law or official organization to find out the facts about something
- **Diminished** - reduced in amount, size, or importance
- **Adjournment** - a pause or rest during a formal meeting or trial, or the act of giving a pause or rest
- **Prospect** - the possibility that something will happen
- **Run-up** - to make something very quickly
- **Reiterate** - to repeat something in order to emphasize it or make it very clear to people
- **Regardless** - without being affected or influenced by someone or something
- **Polarise** - to form two very different groups, opinions, or situations that are completely opposite to each other, or to cause this to happen
- **Dispute** - a serious disagreement, especially one between groups of people that lasts for a long time
- **Aggressive** - someone who is aggressive is very determined to win or be successful
- **Proponent** - someone who publicly supports an idea, policy, plan etc
- **Favourable** - giving someone or something an advantage or a benefit
- **Tailor** - to make or prepare something following particular instructions
- **Stoke** - to make a feeling stronger

- **Exploit** - to use a situation so that you get benefit from it, even if it is wrong or unfair to do this
- **Put off** - to delay doing something, especially because you do not want to do it
- **Pragmatic** - involving or emphasizing practical results rather than theories and ideas
- **Divisive** - likely to cause arguments between people
- **Unwise** - stupid and likely to cause problems
- **Equate** - to consider something to be the same as something else
- **Caution** - careful thought and lack of hurry in order to try to avoid risks or danger
- **Postponement** - to decide that something will not be done at the time when it was planned for, but at a later time
- **Preclude** - if one thing precludes another, the first thing prevents the second one from happening
- **Campaign** - a series of actions intended to produce political or social change
- **Disputed** - a disputed area is one that different countries claim belongs to them, so that there is a disagreement or war between them
- **Clamour** - to say that you want something and must have it
- **Imprudent** - not sensible, especially in relation to the way that money is spent or invested
- **Vigilant** - always being careful to notice things, especially possible danger:
- **Resourceful** - good at finding effective ways to deal with problems
- **Ensure** - to make certain that something happens or is done
- **Legitimacy** - the fact that something is legal
- **Resolute** - extremely determined
- **Demolish** - to deliberately destroy a building
- **Acquire** - to get something
- **Remedy** - a solution to a particular problem
- **Circumvent** - to find a way of avoiding a rule or law that limits you, especially using a clever trick that does not break the law
- **Address** - a formal speech
- **Moratorium** - an official agreement to stop an activity temporarily
- **Sectarian** - caused by disagreements among people from different religious groups
- **Spirit** - a particular way of thinking, feeling, or behaving
- **Legitimate** - fair and reasonable
- **Pre-emptive** - done or said to prevent something from happening

Course correction—Zia, cornered: on BNP facing setback in Bangladesh

The BNP suffers yet another setback as Bangladesh's elections

approach

Former Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's conviction in yet another case of corruption imperils her Bangladesh Nationalist Party's already meagre prospects in the coming parliamentary elections. She has been sentenced to seven years of rigorous imprisonment. With her son and acting chairman of the BNP, Tarique Rahman, in exile, and convicted in absentia and sentenced to life imprisonment for his alleged role in a grenade attack on an Awami League rally, the party's leadership has been effectively crippled. It is no wonder that the BNP has formed an alliance, the Jatiya Oikya Front, with other minor parties, under the leadership of secular icon and civil society leader Kamal Hossain to bolster its fortunes in what looks like a lopsided battle against the entrenched Awami League. The Awami League and the BNP have rarely engaged each other as healthy political rivals. There has been no love lost between the leaders of the two parties, Ms. Zia and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina: they have tended to view each other with a sense of vengeance. Yet it would be misleading to claim that the punitive actions ordered against the BNP's leaders by the judiciary are entirely due to any pressure from the ruling party. The BNP's last term in government, from 2001 to 2006, was marked by corruption, support for fundamentalism and repressive measures against the Opposition.

The BNP is now caught in a bind. It had boycotted the parliamentary election in 2014 to give the process a veneer of illegitimacy, leaving the Awami League as the only major political force in contention. But the BNP's decision backfired. Bangladesh under Awami rule has recorded steady economic growth and has had creditable successes in welfare delivery and public health measures, seen tangibly in the lowered infant mortality and fertility rates and in sanitation. There have been some misgivings too, as Prime Minister Hasina has increasingly tended to be authoritarian and impatient with critics. While the judiciary has found the BNP's leadership to be guilty of corruption and misdemeanours, the crackdown on the BNP rank and file, with thousands of activists targeted by the police, is a sign of the government's overreach. A new digital security law, most ominously, has been passed with stringent punishment to anyone secretly recording state officials and spreading "negative propaganda" about the Liberation War, among other things. This manoeuvre is clearly intended to have a chilling effect on the Bangladeshi media. A healthy democracy must allow for differences of opinion. The government must not pursue this quasi-authoritarian bent at a time when its leading opposition has been emasculated. This would only help delegitimise the formal aspects of democracy, such as elections, among the government's critics and the electorate.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Setback** - a problem that delays or that stops progress or makes a situation worse
- **Former** - used for describing someone or something that had a particular job, title, status etc in the past, but not now
- **Conviction** - a decision by a court of law that someone is guilty of a crime
- **Imperil** - to put someone or something in danger
- **Meagre** - smaller or less than you want or need
- **Prospect** - the possibility that something will happen, especially something good
- **Sentence** - when a judge sentences someone, they officially state what someone's punishment will be
- **Rigorous** - strict, or severe
- **Imprisonment** - the punishment of being put into prison
- **Acting** - someone who does a job for a short time while the person who usually does that job is not there
- **Exile** - a situation in which you are forced to live in a foreign country because you cannot live in your own country, usually for political reasons
- **Convicted** - proved to be guilty of a crime by a court of law
- **In absentia** - if something happens in absentia, the person involved is not present when it happens
- **Alleged** - claimed to be true, even though this has not been proved
- **Grenade** - a small bomb that someone throws or fires from a gun
- **Rally** - a public meeting that a lot of people go to in order to support someone or something or to protest against someone or something
- **Cripple** - to damage something severely, or to prevent it from working properly
- **Alliance** - an arrangement between two or more people, groups, or countries by which they agree to work together to achieve something
- **Minor** - not very important in comparison with people or things of the same type
- **Secular** - not religious, or not connected with religion
- **Icon** - someone who is very famous and who people think represents a particular idea
- **Bolster** - to make something stronger or more effective
- **Fortunes** - the things that happen to someone or something and the changing degree to which they are successful
- **Lopsided** - not equal
- **Entrenched** - entrenched attitudes or feelings have existed for a long time and are difficult to change
- **League** - a group of people or things that are similar in their quality, skills, or achievements
- **Rival** - a person, team, or business that competes with another
- **Vengeance** - the act of harming or killing someone because they have done something bad to you
- **Misleading** - intended or likely to make someone believe something that is incorrect or not true
- **Punitive** - relating to or causing punishment or great difficulty

- **Judiciary** - the part of government that consists of all the judges and courts in a country
- **Fundamentalism** - the belief that the original laws of a religion should be followed very strictly and not be changed
- **Repressive** - ruling or controlling people by the use of force or violence, or by laws that put unreasonable limits on their freedom
- **Boycott** - to not take part in an event, or to not buy or use something as a protest
- **Veneer** - a pleasant appearance, or a polite way of behaving that is not sincere
- **Illegitimacy** - not legal or fair
- **Contention** - an opinion or statement that something is true, especially one made during a discussion or argument
- **Backfire** - if a plan or idea backfires, it has the opposite effect to the one that you wanted
- **Creditable** - good enough to deserve some praise or admiration
- **Tangible** - important and noticeable
- **Infant** - a baby, or a very young child
- **Mortality** - the number of deaths within a particular area, group etc
- **Fertility** - a woman's ability to have babies
- **Sanitation** - conditions and processes relating to people's health, especially the systems that supply water and deal with human waste
- **Misgiving** - a feeling of fear or doubt about whether something is right or will have a good result
- **Authoritarian** - controlling everything and forcing people to obey strict rules and laws
- **Impatient** - annoyed because something is not happening as quickly as you want or in the way you want
- **Critic** - someone who does not like something and states their opinion about it
- **Guilty** - someone who is guilty has committed a crime
- **Misdemeanour** - an action that is bad or wrong, but not in a serious way
- **Crackdown** - strong action that someone in authority takes to stop a particular activity
- **Overreach** - to try to do more than your ability, authority, or money will allow
- **Ominous** - making you think that something bad will happen
- **Stringent** - stringent rules or conditions are strict and make you achieve high standards
- **Propaganda** - information, especially false information, that a government or organization spreads in order to influence people's opinions and beliefs
- **Liberate** - to make a place or the people in it free from soldiers who have been controlling it
- **Manoeuvre** - an action or movement that you need care or skill to do
- **Chilling** - making you feel suddenly very frightened or worried
- **Pursue** - to follow a course of activity
- **Quasi** - partly
- **Authoritarian** - controlling everything and forcing people to obey strict rules and laws
- **Emasculate** - to reduce the power or effectiveness of something
- **Delegitimise** - to make something seem not valid or not acceptable
- **Electorate** - all the people who are allowed to vote in an election

☞ "THERE ARE ONLY TWO WAYS TO LIVE YOUR LIFE. ONE IS AS THOUGH
 NOTHING IS A MIRACLE. THE OTHER IS AS THOUGH EVERYTHING IS A MIRACLE."
 "ALBERT EINSTEIN"☞