

Dire strait: on Russia-Ukraine sea clash

Russia must be persuaded to lower tensions with Ukraine

Russia's capture of three Ukrainian naval ships and over 20 crew members in the disputed Azov Sea has refocused international attention on the conflict on Europe's eastern corridors. The rapid escalation in tensions following the flare-up is evident. Kiev has declared martial law and demanded that the sailors be treated as prisoners of war. A court in Russian-annexed Crimea, meanwhile, has ordered many of them to be held in pre-trial detention, charging them with illegally entering its territorial waters. Ukraine insists that the patrol of the Kerch Strait, where the vessels were impounded, was authorised under a bilateral agreement with Moscow. A new bridge over the strait that connects mainland Russia with Crimea has raised concerns about Moscow's greater control and influence in the region. The latest incident coincides with the anniversary of the November 2013 Maidan Square protests in Ukraine demanding integration with Europe, which was the prelude to Russia's invasion of Ukraine's Crimea in 2014. The protracted conflict has so far claimed about 10,000 lives and displaced millions, and no lasting resolution is in sight. The 2014-15 Minsk peace accords prohibited air strikes and heavy artillery firing. But the dispute has dragged on into a smouldering low-intensity combat. The Ukraine-Russia conflict has also widened religious schisms. The independence granted to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church from the Russian entity in October was criticised by Moscow. In turn, the election this month of the legislatures of two breakaway enclaves of Kiev, with Moscow's endorsement, drew criticism from Ukraine, leading European powers and the U.S. as violations of the Minsk accords.

There has been renewed Western diplomatic pressure since the weekend's skirmishes, with the UN Security Council and NATO calling on Moscow and Kiev to de-escalate tensions. But besides forcing Russian President Vladimir Putin to toughen his rhetoric *vis-à-vis* the big powers, the hardships from the economic sanctions since Crimea's occupation have achieved little by way of confidence-building in the region. European powers are divided between those advocating greater diplomatic engagement with the Kremlin and others wanting to press with further sanctions to punish perceived Russian political interference. But there has been little appreciation of the provocation for Moscow from NATO's continued expansion into the former Eastern Europe and the erstwhile USSR. The geopolitical imperative of greater engagement with Moscow has never been more urgent, as hawks in the U.S. administration make no secret of their preference for confrontation over dialogue. The recent escalations could serve well the leaders of both Russia and Ukraine to divert attention from the sagging popularity levels at home. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko faces a general election next year, which, it is widely forecast, he will lose. But the humanitarian situation arising from the continuing conflict brooks no delay in arriving at a speedy resolution.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Dire strait** - very bad situation
- **Clash** - a fight or battle between two groups of people
- **Persuade** - to make someone agree to do something by giving them reasons why they should
- **Naval** - relating to or belonging to a country's navy
- **Crew** - the people who work on a ship, aircraft etc
- **Disputed** - a disputed area is one that different countries claim belongs to them, so that there is a disagreement or war between them
- **Conflict** - angry disagreement between people or groups
- **Corridor** - used about an area of land that belongs to one country but is surrounded by another
- **Rapid** - happening, moving, or acting quickly

- **Escalation** - to become or make something become greater or more serious
- **Flare-up** - to become worse
- **Evident** - easy to see, notice, or understand
- **Martial law** - direct control of a country or area by the armed forces
- **Sailor** - someone who works on a boat or ship
- **Prisoners of war** - someone, usually a soldier, who is held as a prisoner by the enemy during a war
- **Annex** - to take control of a country or region by force
- **Meanwhile** - at the same time
- **Detention** - the state of being kept in a police station or prison and not being allowed to leave
- **Territorial** - relating to the land of a particular country
- **Insist** - to say very firmly that something must happen or must be done
- **Patrol** - a group of people or vehicles that move around a place in order to prevent trouble or crime
- **Vessel** - sa large boat or ship
- **Impound** - if the police or other officials impound something, they take it away from someone because they have done something illegal
- **Bilateral** - involving two groups or countries
- **Concern** - a feeling of worry about something, especially one that a lot of people have about an important issue
- **Coincide** - to happen at the same time as something else
- **Anniversary** - a date when you celebrate something that happened in a previous year that is important to you
- **Protest** - an occasion when people show that they disagree with something by standing somewhere, shouting, carrying signs, etc
- **Integration** - the process of becoming a full member of a group or society, and becoming involved completely in its activities
- **Prelude** - an event that happens before and introduces a more important event
- **Invasion** - an occasion when one country's army goes into another country to take control of it by force
- **Protracted** - continuing for a long time, especially longer than is normal or necessary
- **Claim** - if war, disease, or an accident claims someone's life, they die as a result of it
- **Displace** - to force someone to leave their own country and live somewhere else
- **Resolution** - a formal proposal that is considered by an organization and is usually voted on at a meeting
- **Accord** - a formal agreement between countries or groups
- **Artillery** - large powerful guns that are used by an army and are moved on wheels or fixed in one place
- **Smoulder** - to feel very strong emotions that you do not express in words, especially anger or sexual feelings
- **Intensity** - strength
- **Combat** - fighting during a war
- **Schism** - an occasion when one group divides into two groups because of a disagreement
- **Orthodox** - accepted by most people as the correct or usual idea or practice
- **Criticise** - to say what you think is wrong or bad about something
- **Breakaway** - consisting of people who have decided to separate from a larger group
- **Enclave** - an area of a country or city where a particular group of people live

- **Endorsement** - an occasion when someone gives official or public support to a particular person or thing
- **Violation** - an action that is in opposition to a law, agreement, principle etc
- **Accord** - a formal agreement between countries or groups
- **Diplomatic** - relating to the profession or skill of preserving or creating friendly relationships between countries
- **Skirmish** - an argument or a disagreement, especially a political one
- **De-escalate** - to (cause to) become less dangerous or difficult
- **Toughen** - to become more strict, or to make something more strict
- **Rhetoric** - a style of speaking or writing that is intended to influence people
- **Vis-à-vis** - compared to or relating to someone or something
- **Hardship** - a situation in which life is very difficult, usually because you do not have enough money
- **Sanction** - an official order to stop communication, trade, etc with a country that has broken international law
- **Advocate** - to publicly support a particular policy or way of doing things
- **Diplomatic** - relating to the profession or skill of preserving or creating friendly relationships between countries
- **Perceive** - to understand or think about something in a particular way
- **Interference** - the process of deliberately becoming involved in a situation and trying to influence the way that it develops, although you have no right to do this
- **Provocation** - something that causes you to react in an angry or violent way, often something that is intended to cause such a reaction
- **Former** - used for describing someone or something that had a particular job, title, status etc in the past, but not now
- **Erstwhile** - previous
- **Imperative** - extremely important and urgent
- **Hawk** - a politician who prefers using military force to more peaceful methods
- **Confrontation** - a situation in which people or groups are arguing angrily or are fighting
- **Dialogue** - a process in which two people or groups have discussions in order to solve problems
- **Sagging** - lower or less strong
- **Forecast** - a statement about what is likely to happen, based on available information and usually relating to the weather, business, or the economy
- **Humanitarian** - relating to efforts to help people who are living in very bad conditions and are suffering because of a war, flood, earthquake etc
- **Conflict** - angry disagreement between people or groups
- **Brook no something** - to not allow or accept something, especially a difference of opinion or intention
- **Resolution** - the action of solving a problem or dealing with a disagreement in a satisfactory way

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

Clemency question: The Rajiv Gandhi Assassination Case

The release of life convicts should be settled on legal principles alone

After failing to get the seven convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case released by exercising its statutory power to remit life sentences, the AIADMK government in Tamil Nadu has taken recourse to a possible constitutional remedy. It has decided to invoke the Governor's clemency power under Article 161 of the Constitution. The earlier attempt in 2014 to remit the sentences under the provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure was stayed by the Supreme Court, which ultimately held that the Centre had primacy in according remission to life convicts in a case that involves consultation between the Centre and the State. The Centre formally declined to concur with the State's proposal in April 2018, saying it would "set a very dangerous precedent and lead to international ramifications". There is no doubt that the sovereign clemency power vested in the President and the Governor is quite wide, but the Supreme Court has in the past cautioned against its use for political considerations. Tamil Nadu Governor Banwarilal Purohit will now have to take a call on the advice of the State's Council of Ministers and decide whether he is bound by it. The moot question is whether he will pause to consider the Centre's opinion against releasing those involved in a "diabolical plot" hatched by "a highly organised foreign terrorist organisation" and either reject the proposal or seek its reconsideration. In either case, he will be mindful of the fact that his decision will be subject to judicial review.

The Tamil Nadu government believes there is no legal bar on the convicts getting the benefit of Article 161, even though the mercy petitions of some of them have been rejected by both the Governor and the President. But the issue has thrown up a number of questions that relate to process. For instance, what happens to the four Sri Lankan nationals among the convicts? Will they remain in India or be repatriated? Also, shouldn't there be a case-by-case evaluation for releasing those sentenced for life? An omnibus order of release clearly will not address the particularities in each case, or evaluate the gravity of their role in the crime and the effect on society of releasing them. In principle, the idea that convicts who have suffered prolonged incarceration require compassion cannot be faulted. The idea of locking away a person for life, without so much as a sliver of hope of freedom, is not in keeping with the ideals of a truly modern society. However, it is impossible to ignore the impact of such a decision on capital punishment. When lifelong **imprisonment** is regarded as a humane alternative to capital punishment, releasing life convicts may only strengthen the demand for the imposition of the death

penalty — which would be retrograde. Although there are many political considerations behind the move to release the convicts, this case must be decided on the basis of legal principles alone.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Clemency** - a decision not to punish someone severely, made by someone in a position of authority
- **Assassination** - the murder of a famous or important person, especially for political reasons
- **Convict** - someone who is in prison because they are guilty of a crime
- **Statutory** - controlled by a law or statute
- **Remit** - to reduce a period of time that someone must spend in prison
- **Life sentence** - a punishment in which someone is sent to prison for the rest of their life
- **Recourse** - the use of something so that you can get what you want or need in a difficult situation
- **Remedy** - a solution to a particular problem
- **Invoke** - to use a law or rule in order to achieve something
- **Ultimately** - after a process or activity has ended
- **Primacy** - the fact of being more powerful or important than anything else
- **Concur** - to agree with someone or something
- **Precedent** - an action or event in the past that is used as an example or reason for a present action or event
- **Ramification** - a complicated or unexpected way in which a decision, process, or event affects other things
- **Sovereign** - having the highest power or being completely independent
- **Caution** - to tell someone about a danger or problem that they need to know about or avoid
- **Moot question** - a moot point, question, or issue is one that people disagree about
- **Diabolical** - evil or cruel
- **Hatch** - if you hatch something such as a plan, you plan it, especially in secret
- **Mindful** - careful about or conscious of something
- **Subject to something** - likely to experience something or to be affected by something
- **Mercy** - the act of forgiving someone or not treating them severely, especially someone who you have the authority to punish
- **For instance** - for example
- **Repatriate** - to send someone back to the country that is legally their own
- **Omnibus** - comprising several items
- **Address** - to give attention to or deal with a matter or problem
- **Gravity** - the seriousness or importance of something
- **Prolonged** - continuing for a long time
- **Incarceration** - to put someone in prison
- **Compassion** - a feeling of sympathy for someone who is in a bad situation because you understand and care about them
- **Sliver of** - a small thin piece of something
- **Impact** - an effect, or an influence
- **Capital punishment** - the punishment of being legally killed
- **Humane** - caring about the quality of people's or animal's lives and trying to be kind to them
- **Retrograde** - returning to a condition or situation that is worse than the present one

TOWARDS STABILITY

Nepal must hasten the process of government formation

A month after the Left Alliance secured a **decisive** victory in Nepal's parliamentary elections, a government is yet to be formed in Kathmandu. The Alliance was **forged** just before the elections

between the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre). The transfer of power from the Nepali Congress to the UML led **coalition** was delayed **initially** due to **procedural** issues. The Upper House, or the National Assembly, needed to be indirectly elected by the **provincial** assemblies. The parties had disagreed on the means of this indirect election, with the NC advocating a **proportional** representation single transferable vote system, and the UML seeking a majority vote. After President Bidhya Devi Bhandari **ratified** a long pending **ordinance** that allowed elections based on the single transferable vote in late December 2017, this issue appeared to have been **resolved**. But there are other procedural issues to be sorted out. In **consultation** with the Left Alliance, the caretaker government has to first appoint governors to the seven provinces. Then, the process of choosing their capitals, in order to **convene** the Assemblies, can be completed. Tentative proposals on new capitals had given rise to protests in several towns, and the main political parties are unwilling to take a clear position on the issue. The caretaker NC government does not seem to be particularly keen on resolving this, and a proposal has been floated to allow the provincial assemblies to convene in Kathmandu first. In the absence of a **consensus**, this may be best.

The clear and decisive choice by the electorate in the polls has put the responsibility of operationalizing the **intricate** provincial model on the Left Alliance. Once the process of nominations to the National Assembly is complete – with 33% of the overall representation in Parliament reserved for women – the election of the Prime Minister will follow. It is a **foregone** conclusion that UML leader K.P.Oli will be elected: the party got close to the majority mark on its own in the first part the post seats. Ten years since the end of the civil war and the convening of the Constituent Assembly, the promise of economic development has been **belied**. This is one of the reasons behind agitations called by democratic and republican forces seeking a new CA. Nepal's economy continues to be highly dependent on **remittances** from Nepali **migrants** as the **agrarian** sector and industrial growth, especially in the hydro-energy sector, have **stagnated**. For too long, political posturing and the game of thrones involving the major parties, the UML, the NC and the Maoists, in Kathmandu have become **pursuits** in themselves. With the Left Alliance promising a greater degree of **cohesion** and winning a clear victory, the sooner the process of election of a new Prime Minister is **accomplished**, the faster Nepal can get on with the business of governance.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Decisive** : (definite)
Synonym: conclusive, critical, crucial, definite, determined, fateful, forceful, influential, momentous, resolute, significant.
- **Forged** : (fake)
Synonym: counterfeit, spurious, supposititious
- **Coalition** : (allied group, association)
Synonym: affiliation, alliance, amalgam, amalgamation, block, combination, combine, compact, conduction, consolidation, conspiracy, faction, federation, merging, party, unification.
- **Initially** : (at first)
Synonym: originally, first, at the beginning
- **Procedural** :
 1. Relating to an established or official way of doing something.
Example : "The developers had complied with all the relevant procedural requirements"
 2. A television series, film or novel characterised by detailed, realistic treatment of professional procedures, especially police procedures.
Example : "the procedural about police officers going undercover will debut later this month"

- **Provincial** : (countrified; limited)
Synonym: local, rural, bucolic, country, homespun, narrow, pastoral, petty, rustic, sectarian
 - **Proportional** : (equivalent, proportionate)
Synonym: commensurate, corresponding, reciprocal, comparative, correlative, equal, even, relative, symmetrical
 - **Ratify** : (affirm, authorize)
Synonym : approve, confirm, endorse, establish, okay, sign, uphold, accredit, authenticate, bind, bless, certify
 - **Ordinance** : (law, rule)
Synonym : authorization, cannon, code, command, decree, dictum, direction, edict, enactment, fiat, mandate, order, precept, prescript, regulation, ruling.
 - **Resolve** : (make up one’s mind; find solution)
Synonym: agree, answer, clear up, conclude, deal with, decide, determine, fix, settle, workout, undertake, analyse
 - **Consultation** : (asking, conference)
Synonym: appointment, conference, deliberation, dialogue, discussion, examination, hearing, interview, meeting, session
 - **Convene** : (bring together; meet)
Synonym: assemble, gather, open, summon, call, congregate, muster, come together
 - **Consensus** : (general agreement)
Synonym: accord, consent, harmony, unanimity, unity, concord
 - **Intricate** : (complicated, elaborate)
Synonym: baroque, complex, difficult, sophisticated, tangled, tortuous, tricky
 - **Foregone** : (predestined)
Synonym: destined, certain, inescapable, inevitable, predictable
 - **Belie** : (disprove, deceive)
Synonym: contradict, negate, repudiate, confute, contravene, controvert, deny, disagree, explode, oppose
 - **Remittances** : (as in alimony, allowance, compensation, discharge)
(money paid in support of a former spouse)
Synonym: keep, livelihood, living, maintenance, provision, subsistence, sustenance, upkeep
 - **Migrant** : (Person who moves to a foreign place)
Synonym : emigrant, evacuee, expatriate, immigrant, traveller, gypsy.
 - **Agrarian** : (concerning land, farming)
Synonym : agricultural, rural, natural, peasant, rustic
 - **Stagnate** : (deteriorate by lack of action)
Synonym : fester, hibernate, languish, stall, stand still, constipate, decay, decline, idle
 - **Pursuit** : (chase, search)
Synonym : hunt, enquiry, quest, following, pursual, stalk, tracking, trail.
 - **Cohesion** : (union)
Synonym : coherence, adherence, attachment
 - **Accomplished** : (skilled in activity)
Synonym : adept, consummate, gifted, polished, proficient, skilful, talented, cultivated, savvy
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“UNTIL YOU SPREAD YOUR WINGS YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW FAR YOU WILL FLY”