

Course correction – **Running for President: On Sri Lanka polls**

A second Premadasa is against a second Rajapaksa in race for Sri Lanka's presidency

In fielding Sajith Premadasa, Sri Lanka's United National Party (UNP) has chosen arguably its strongest candidate to take on former Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa in the presidential election to be held on November 16. The party chose to back the claims of Mr. Premadasa, its deputy leader, over those of Ranil Wickremesinghe, its leader and the Prime Minister. The party may have reckoned that Mr. Premadasa, son of the late President Ranasinghe Premadasa, with a lineage not drawn from the urban elite, is its best bet while facing Mr. Gotabaya, a rival from another Sinhalese political family from the same southern region. The latter has the image of a strongman who guided the armed forces, as defence secretary, to victory over the separatist LTTE, and the UNP may need all the grassroots support that Mr. Premadasa can mobilise to recapture the presidency it lost in 1994. For Mr. Wickremesinghe, it will be the third consecutive election in which he has had to step aside from the contest in favour of another. In the 2015 election, as part of a grand opposition plan to unseat Mr. Rajapaksa, he backed Maithripala Sirisena, who recorded a historic victory on the promise of good governance, economic revival and ethnic reconciliation.

It is quite uncommon that the battle lines in a presidential election appear to be drawn even before it is known whether the incumbent will seek re-election or his party will field a candidate. In recent times, President Sirisena has been marginalised in the political arena, and his Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) is no more the organisation it was in its heyday. He has had a bitter parting of ways with Mr. Wickremesinghe, even though both have shared power for nearly five years. Last year, the president ousted Mr. Wickremesinghe from his post, but the courts reinstated him. Former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, who cannot run for president now because he has already completed two terms, has walked away with a significant part of the SLFP's support base, and leads the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP). He has fielded his brother, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, on its behalf. It will be primarily a contest to win the support of the majority Sinhalese. The leftist Janatha Vimukti Peramuna has chosen its leader Anura Dissanayake as its candidate, whose prospects may not be high, but can make a dent in the vote share of the two principal candidates. Lost in the perennial jockeying for power is the promise of abolishing the executive presidency, something that has been heard for the last 25 years. Sri Lanka will be holding one more election for the post, even while the idea of scrapping it remains a key issue. That there is no sign of the promised inclusive Constitution for the multi-ethnic country is another disappointing feature of recent Sri Lankan history.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **arguably** (adverb) – possibly, conceivably, maybe.
- **take on** (phrasal verb) – compete against, oppose, confront.
- **back** (verb) – support, endorse, uphold.
- **reckon** (verb) – believe, think, consider.
- **lineage** (noun) – ancestry, family/parentage, origin.
- **draw from** (phrasal verb) – obtain, get, acquire.
- **elite** (noun) – high society people; the group of most powerful people in a society.
- **separatist** (noun) – dissident, nonconformist, sectarian.
- **grassroots** (plural noun) – the most basic level of an organisation.
- **mobilise** (verb) – organize, call up, bring into play/generate.

- **step aside** (phrasal verb) – leave, quit, resign/withdraw.
- **unseat** (verb) – oust, remove from office, topple, overthrow.
- **revival** (noun) – improvement, re-establishment; restoration/comeback.
- **ethnic** (adjective) – relating to a population subgroup (cultural, national, traditional/folk) with a common national or cultural tradition.
- **reconciliation** (noun) – restoration of harmony, resolution, compromise.
- **incumbent** (noun) – current/present holder of a post/position.
- **marginalise** (verb) – treat as insignificant, treat as unimportant, neglected.
- **heyday** (noun) – prime time, peak period, crowning/high point.
- **parting of the ways** (phrase) – separation, splitting up, breaking up.
- **reinstate** (verb) – bring back, restore, return to power/position.
- **walk away** (phrasal verb) – leave, abandon, withdraw.
- **prospects** (noun) – chances, opportunities, possibilities.
- **dent** (noun) – reduction, depletion, deduction.
- **perennial** (adjective) – everlasting/unending, endless, permanent.
- **jockey** (verb) – compete, contend, vie, fight/struggle.
- **scrap** (verb) – abandon, cancel, abolish/throw out.
- **multi-ethnic** (adjective) – constituting several ethnic groups.

Course Correction – **Not their business: On OIC remarks on Article 370**

The OIC achieved little other than pleasing Pakistan through its Kashmir pronouncements

The statement issued by the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation's Kashmir Contact Group calling on India to "rescind its actions revoking Article 370", among other stipulations, may not even be worth the paper it is written on. If it has a dubious relevance, it is one that allows the Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan to sell the theory back at home that his trip to New York, focused on Kashmir, has met with some success. From the mid-1990s, when this Contact Group was formed, it has issued several statements on behalf of Pakistan, which happens, not surprisingly, to be a member, as does Turkey, Niger, Azerbaijan and Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman had Imran Khan flown on his private jet to Saudi Arabia for a two-day visit before speeding him on the same plane to New York and the UNGA. It is also no coincidence that OIC is headquartered in Jeddah and receives its financial raison d'être from its chief benefactor, Saudi Arabia. Further, though it boasts of a membership of 57 countries, its influence on world affairs has always been marginal. It is also extremely doubtful if the statement issued by the Contact Group reflects faithfully the national positions of the individual member states. The United Arab Emirates, for instance, conferred the Order of Zayed, its highest civilian award on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, more than a week after New Delhi's moves on Article 370, and declared that Kashmir was India's internal matter.

The OIC's record of conflict resolution when it comes to issues between OIC member states is poor. In practical terms, its fatuous attempts to meddle in Kashmir, including by appointing a so-called special envoy on Jammu and Kashmir, have amounted to nothing. The organisation, constituted on religious lines, but seeking to fulfil geopolitical interests, needs reforms from within. It could begin by asking Pakistan to change its state policy on terrorism. Imran Khan did admit at various fora that Pakistan had backed entities such as the al-Qaeda, but he should ensure that Pakistan abjures support to Kashmir-

centric groups such as the Jaish-e-Mohammed and the Lashkar-e-Taiba. It serves no useful purpose for the OIC to paint Kashmir in communal and religious political colours. India, though not a part of the OIC, has the second largest numbers of Muslims in the world, perhaps more than Pakistan and some of its most ardent backers put together. The OIC would do a lot better if it did something useful to better the lot of its members or mediate between warring Saudi Arabia and Yemen, for instance. In the meanwhile, New Delhi must demonstrate to the world that its new Kashmir policy is in the larger interest of all Kashmiris.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **pronouncement** (noun) – (formal) announcement, declaration, statement.
- **call on** (phrasal verb) – appeal to, ask, request.
- **rescind** (verb) – revoke, repeal, cancel/reverse.
- **revoke** (verb) – cancel, repeal, abrogate.
- **stipulation** (noun) – condition, requirement, provision.
- **dubious** (adjective) – suspicious, questionable, unreliable.
- **relevance** (noun) – significance, importance, appropriateness.
- **raison d'être** (noun) – responsibility, duty, obligation.
- **benefactor** (noun) – patron, sponsor/advocate, supporter/promoter.
- **reflect** (verb) – reveal, disclose, exhibit.
- **confer** (verb) – grant, bestow, present/give.
- **fatuous** (adjective) – foolish, stupid, idiotic.
- **meddle** (verb) – handle, interfere intrude/intervene unwantedly.
- **envoy** (noun) – ambassador, diplomat, consul.
- **amount to** (verb) – be regarded as, be equivalent/equal to, be tantamount to.
- **seek** (verb) – try, attempt, aim.
- **geopolitical** (adjective) – relating to (the study of) the effects of geography (human and physical) on politics and international relations.
- **admit** (verb) – acknowledge, accept, confess.
- **fora** plural form of **forum** (noun) – assembly, gathering, conference.
- **back** (verb) – support, endorse, uphold.
- **abjure** (verb) – renounce, relinquish, reject/forgo.
- **colour** (noun) – difference, dissimilarity, contrast.
- **ardent** (adjective) – passionate, enthusiastic, dedicated.
- **backer** (noun) – supporter, upholder, defender.
- **put together** (phrasal verb) – assemble, organize, arrange.

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Correction – Trump & impeachment: On foreign meddling in U.S. polls

He may find it hard to shrug off the charge of leaning on Kiev to meddle in domestic politics

U.S. President Donald Trump discussed former Vice-President Joe Biden in a July 2019 telephone conversation with Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky, allegedly in a bid to influence him to investigate the business dealings of Mr. Biden's son, Hunter. Now he faces the prospect of an impeachment inquiry. That happened, first, because of an "explosive" whistleblower complaint filed against Mr. Trump by a national security official, which also alleges that Mr. Trump used the call to

“solicit interference” in the 2020 election, and that the White House then intervened to “lock down” the transcript of the call. The whistleblower added that this was “not the first time” that Trump administration officials placed presidential call transcripts in a separate, classified system. The White House further exacerbated matters when they sought to block that complaint from reaching the House Intelligence Committee. Further, Mr. Trump is said to have personally ordered his staff to freeze more than \$391 million in aid to Ukraine, before his call with Mr. Zelensky, making his conditions to the Ukrainian President an outright quid pro quo. The Congress, even the Republican-controlled Senate, was having none of this. In a rare show of bipartisanship, the Senate passed unanimously a resolution calling for the White House to release the whistleblower complaint. Capitol Hill has now got both the memo of the call between Mr. Trump and Mr. Zelensky and the complaint, whose allegations House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff described as “deeply disturbing and very credible.”

It was in this backdrop that Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced an inquiry into impeachment proceedings against Mr. Trump, to begin after she meets with colleagues next week. Neither the complaint nor the edited transcript of the call are exculpatory of Mr. Trump. Even the edited memo of the call makes clear that Mr. Trump is linking the payment of military aid to Ukraine to Mr. Zelensky agreeing to investigate Hunter Biden’s role on the board of Burisma Holdings, a Ukrainian gas company. This, despite Ukraine’s public prosecutor, Yuriy Lutsenko, saying that he had no evidence of wrongdoing by the younger Biden. Contrarily, Mr. Trump may find it hard to shrug off the prospect of an ignominious impeachment. At least 140 House Democrats and one Independent have said that they would support impeachment proceedings against Mr. Trump for leaning on a foreign power to meddle in domestic politics, which would constitute a betrayal of the oath of office and compromise of national security. Ultimately the inquiry leading to such an outcome would turn on whether there is, in the complaint, a “smoking gun” of the kind that brought down Richard Nixon.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **impeachment** (noun) – the act of charging or accusing (a public official) with a crime done while in office.
- **meddle** (verb) – handle, interfere intrude/intervene unwantedly.
- **shrug off** (phrasal verb) – disregard, dismiss, ignore.
- **lean on** (phrasal verb) – depend on, count on, rely on.
- **allegedly** (adverb) – supposedly, purportedly, reportedly.
- **bid** (noun) – attempt, effort, endeavour/try.
- **whistleblower** (noun) – one who reveals others’ illegal activities in public or to the government/authority.
- **allege** (verb) – declare, affirm, claim.
- **solicit** (verb) – ask for, request, appeal to/canvass.
- **interference** (noun) – intervention, meddling, unwarranted involvement.
- **lock down** (phrasal verb) – confine, restraint, detain/encircle.
- **transcript** (noun) – written version/copy, reproduction, record/text.
- **exacerbate** (verb) – make worse, worsen, aggravate, compound.
- **sought** past and past participle of **seek** (verb) – try, attempt, aim.
- **freeze** (verb) – fix, hold, set.
- **outright** (adjective) – complete, utter, absolute.
- **quid pro quo** (noun) – exchange, trade, payments.
- **bipartisanship** (noun) – agreement/cooperation between two (opposite & big) political parties.
- **unanimously** (adverb) – without opposition, agreed to by everyone involved.
- **call for** (phrasal verb) – require, necessitate, demand.
- **allegation** (noun) – charge, accusation, indictment.
- **credible** (adjective) – convincing, acceptable; reasonable/valid.

- **backdrop** (noun) – situation, scenario, context.
- **exculpatory** (adjective) – justifiable, explainable, permissible.
- **prosecutor** (noun) – a lawyer who presents the government’s case against someone accused of a crime.
- **contrarily** (adverb) – in a conflicting manner.
- **ignominious** (adjective) – humiliating, disgraceful, embarrassing/shameful.
- **betrayal** (noun) – revelation, disclosure, disloyalty.
- **compromise** (verb) – undermine, weaken, be detrimental to, damage.
- **smoking gun** (noun) – an unquestionable/conclusive evidence which proves that someone has done a crime/wrongdoing.
- **bring down** (phrasal verb) – oust, remove, dismiss (from a position/power).

Course Correction – **Brexit Interrupted: On U.K. Supreme Court ruling**

Boris Johnson has lost his way while seeking to navigate Britain out of the European Union

The U.K. Supreme Court’s landmark ruling that the prorogation of the British Parliament was unlawful has rendered Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s continuance morally untenable. While the judges dwelt at length on the limits of executive power and the detrimental effects of the suspension on the country’s democratic process, they scrupulously steered clear of pronouncing any views on Britain’s withdrawal from the EU. Yet, eurosceptics have attacked the verdict as one that was influenced by a pro-remain establishment elite. For his part, Mr. Johnson remains defiant that he may seek another prorogation to commence a fresh session with the Queen’s address. There is no indication that he would step down. Notwithstanding its response, the government’s options over leaving the EU have considerably reduced. Above all, Mr. Johnson is duty-bound to respect the law enacted by Parliament earlier this month to prevent him from taking the U.K. out of the EU without an agreement on October 31. Failing which, he is obliged to seek a three-month extension under Article 50 of the EU treaty.

With the 21 Conservative rebel MPs sacked for defying the whip on that crucial legislation, Mr. Johnson also lost his majority in the Commons during that tumultuous week before the prorogation. His attempt to circumvent the will of Parliament by calling a general election was similarly rebuffed. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has in the past demanded the government’s resignation over its failure to negotiate an EU agreement that could command cross-party approval. But in the changed circumstances of recent weeks, he has rightly prioritised securing a further extension from the EU pending a definitive agreement, over moving a vote of no-confidence against Mr. Johnson’s minority government. That position does not seem to warrant modification even in the aftermath of the Supreme Court verdict, unless the Labour leader’s alternative of a national unity government — only to see through the EU extension and subsequent elections — draws wider support. Mr. Corbyn’s party is also correct about its decision to defer calls for a second referendum until it has captured power. Retaining the latter as the very last option would commend itself as a democratic alternative both to EU remainers and leavers. The Labour party’s current stance is consistent with the country’s utmost urgency to avert a costly and chaotic exit, as also to install a stable government at Westminster. The introduction of customs checks in Northern Ireland, as an alternative to a U.K.-wide customs union, is a possible item in the fresh proposals Mr. Johnson’s team is expected to unveil in Brussels in early October. If they elicit backing from the rest of the bloc, the next challenge would be to gain domestic approval. A third Brexit extension would be insurance against uncertainty on those two counts.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Brexit** (noun) – a term used for the (supposed) departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union.
- **lose one's way** (phrase) – not having a clear idea.
- **navigate** (Verb) – steer, guide, direct/handle.
- **prorogation** (noun) – the action of discontinuing a session of a parliament.
- **untenable** (adjective) – undefendable, unjustified, unacceptable.
- **dwell on** (phrasal verb) – linger over, think about, mull over.
- **detrimental** (adjective) – damaging, inimical, dangerous.
- **scrupulously** (adverb) – religiously, consistently, constantly/regularly.
- **steer clear of** (phrase) – keep away from, have nothing to do with, avoid/shun.
- **euro-sceptic** (noun) – a person who is opposing to increase the powers of the European Union.
- **elite** (noun) – high society people; the group of most powerful people in a society.
- **defiant** (adjective) – aggressive, belligerent/bellicose; uncooperative, non-compliant.
- **seek** (verb) – ask for, request, appeal for; try, attempt, aim.
- **step down** (phrasal verb) – resign, stand down, give up one's job, give up one's post, bow out.
- **notwithstanding** (preposition) – in spite of, despite, regardless of.
- **duty-bound** (adjective) – under an obligation, filled with gratitude, appreciative.
- **oblige** (verb) – require, bind, compel.
- **whip** (noun) – a member of a political party who is in charge of written notice provide to their members in Parliament to vote (to support the act/policy).
- **House of Commons** (noun) – the lower house of the Parliament of the United Kingdom ("the House of Lords" is the upper house).
- **tumultuous** (adjective) – volatile; restless/uncontrolled.
- **circumvent** (verb) – avoid, evade/dodge, bypass/sidestep.
- **rebuff** (verb) – reject, refuse, decline.
- **warrant** (verb) – justify/necessitate, vindicate/validate, call for.
- **aftermath** (noun) – consequence, result/outcome, repercussion.
- **see through** (phrasal verb) – realize, understand, fathom.
- **defer** (verb) – postpone, hold off, delay.
- **referendum** (noun) – public vote; a direct vote in which people cast ballots to decide on a specific issue or policy.
- **stance** (noun) – attitude, outlook, point of view.
- **utmost** (adjective) – greatest, maximum, most extreme.
- **avert** (verb) – avoid, prevent, stop.
- **chaotic** (adjective) – confused, disrupted, messy/disorganized.
- **Westminster** (noun) – a place/town (borough) in London which contains the Houses of Parliament and many government offices).
- **unveil** (verb) – present, announce, disclose/make public.
- **Brussels** (noun) – The headquarters of the European Union. Brussels is a **metonym** of the European Union.
- **elicit** (verb) – obtain, bring forth/bring out, draw out.
- **backing** (noun) – support, endorsement.
- **bloc** (noun) – alliance, association, union.
- **insurance** (noun) – protection, defence, shelter.
- **count** (noun) – matter, account.

Course Correction – **The real deal: On India-U.S. trade deal**

Even a limited trade agreement between India and the U.S. is some distance away

After the backslapping bonhomie and high of Houston, it was time for a reality check in New York. Contrary to expectations that were consciously generated and managed by both sides, India and the United States failed to arrive at a limited trade deal that was to have been announced during this visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the U.S. The deal stumbled over duties imposed by India on ICT (information and communication technology) products — the U.S. wanted the 20% duty on mobile phones and ethernet switches to be reduced or eliminated. America is also understood to have demanded greater access to the Indian market for medical devices such as stents and knee implants apart from its dairy and agricultural products. These are sensitive products politically for the Indian side as Mr. Modi has often taken credit for making them affordable. Loosening price controls now is not an option for India as that would push up prices of these products in the country. For its part, India wanted the Generalised System of Preferences which gives preferential market access for its products in the U.S., restored. These are so far as a "limited trade deal" goes; a full scale trade agreement would pose bigger challenges on issues such as intellectual property, e-commerce and the ticklish subject of H1B visas.

Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale has said that the two sides "narrowed" down their differences and made "significant progress" but it is clear that there is still a wide gulf even assuming that India is willing to go more than half the way to strike a deal. That a deal could not be struck despite Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal winging his way to New York to lead negotiations tells the story. For U.S. President Trump, even a limited deal with India will be something to talk about as he approaches election year. This is especially because trade talks with China are going nowhere. China has not only taken Mr. Trump's punitive tariffs on its chin but has retaliated in kind, picking the products that could hurt his constituency and supporters. This explains the hectic, behind-the-scenes activity with India in the last few weeks. With its economy in the grip of a major slowdown, any concessions from India on imports of American products may not have gone down well both politically and in economic terms. Going by the limited information in the public domain, it appears that India has played tough and refused to yield to U.S. demands. Trade negotiations are never easy and for them to succeed, both sides have to believe in a policy of give and take. It does not help if one side tries to bulldoze the other into submitting totally to its interests. At this point in time it does seem that even a limited trade deal between India and the U.S. is some distance away.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **backslapping** (adjective) – friendly, genial, affable, amiable/companionable.
- **bonhomie** (noun) – friendliness, warmth, geniality/affability.
- **reality check** (noun) – something which helps us to see a situation with the real facts than ideas, concepts, hopes & etc.
- **stumble** (verb) – stagger, flounder, blunder.
- **Generalised System of Preferences (GSP)** (noun) – The Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) is a U.S. trade program designed to promote economic growth in the developing world by providing preferential duty-free entry for thousands of products from 129 designated beneficiary countries and territories.

- **intellectual property** (noun) – a category of property that includes intangible creations of the human intellect. The most well-known types are copyrights, patents, trademarks, and trade secrets.
- **ticklish** (adjective) – tricky, problematic, controversial.
- **narrow down** (phrasal verb) – reduce, lessen, decrease.
- **gulf** (noun) – division/divergence, separation, difference.
- **strike a deal/bargain** (phrase) – to come to an agreement.
- **wing one's way** (phrase) – to travel somewhere in an aircraft.
- **go nowhere** (phrase) – make no progress.
- **punitive tariff** (noun) – another name for retaliatory tariff; An extra tariff/tax that a country charges on import goods from another country to punish the another country for charging tax on its own export goods.
- **take it on the chin** (phrase) – accept something unpleasant courageously.
- **retaliate** (verb) – hit back, counterattack, take revenge.
- **hectic** (adjective) – frenzied, feverish, restless.
- **behind-the-scenes** (phrase) – secretly, privately, surreptitiously.
- **in the grip of** (phrase) – affected by something undesirable.
- **slowdown** (noun) – economic decline, recession, slump/depression.
- **go down well** (phrase) – be successful, achieve success, triumph, make an impression.
- **yield** (verb) – surrender, capitulate, submit/give in.
- **give and take** (phrase) – compromise, concession; cooperation/teamwork.
- **bulldoze** (verb) – muscle, force one's way, push; destroy/demolish.
- **point in time** (phrase) – a particular moment.

☞ “LIVE AS IF YOU WERE TO DIE TOMORROW.
LEARN AS IF YOU WERE TO LIVE FOREVER”☞