

Endless wait: on Afghanistan Presidential election

A prolonged election process will do little to end political instability in Afghanistan

The announcement of preliminary results for the Afghanistan Presidential election is a significant step for India's war-torn neighbour. The fourth Presidential poll since the Taliban's fall in 2001, it consolidates the country's democratic process in the face of odds, including continuing violence and terrorism there. According to the Independent Election Commission, President Ashraf Ghani has won 50.64% of the votes counted, which, if ratified, will obviate the need for a second round of polling. A second round — probably only after winter — would prolong the uncertainty around the polls, given that even these results took more than three months to announce. That these polls were held was a miracle, having been delayed for months, and almost cancelled after progress in reconciliation talks with Taliban leaders, who do not recognise the electoral process. The U.S.'s decision to cancel the talks in September — now resumed — gave the necessary breather for the September 28 polls and counting to be carried out. But questions remain. Voter turnout was a record low, with only about a quarter of 9.6 million registered voters voting. Thousands of votes were also disqualified after biometric match failures and other irregularities, setting off allegations of voter fraud. As a result, Afghanistan's former Chief Executive Officer and Mr. Ghani's chief rival, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, has rejected the preliminary results. Mr. Ghani's vote margin over Mr. Abdullah is only about 214,769, and if more votes are disqualified during the review process, the men may have to fight the second round. This will possibly be more divisive for Afghanistan given that Mr. Ghani, a Pashtun leader, has drawn much of his support from the Pashtun-majority south and Mr. Abdullah has won mainly in the Northern areas with Tajik presence. The U.S.-Taliban talks also cast a shadow over whether the results will be respected if the Taliban negotiates its way into a power-sharing arrangement in Kabul.

Setting aside the concerns, Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Mr. Ghani for winning the elections, a gesture which will be noted by Mr. Ghani and Vice President-elect Amrullah Saleh. Mr. Modi reaffirmed India's close and strategic partnership with Afghanistan since 2010. The move came in sharp contrast to the rest of world that has chosen to be more cautious at present; the U.S. Ambassador has reminded all that "many steps remain" before the final results are certified and declared, and the UN has called for all candidates to "safeguard and complete the election". It will be in everyone's interests, particularly the Afghans who braved violent attacks to go out and vote, if the remaining steps of the electoral process are completed at the earliest, and democracy is reaffirmed in Afghanistan.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **prolonged** (adjective) – continuous, lengthy, ongoing/constant.
- **war-torn** (adjective) – (of a place) devastated, ruined, wrecked (by war).
- **consolidate** (verb) – strengthen, make stronger, reinforce/fortify; combine, merge, integrate.
- **in the face of** (phrase) – when confronted with; despite, notwithstanding, regardless of.
- **odds** (noun) – (difficult/tough) probability, chances, conditions.
- **ratify** (verb) – confirm, approve, sanction, endorse.
- **obviate** (verb) – avoid, prevent, eliminate.
- **prolong** (verb) – extend, lengthen, continue.
- **reconciliation** (noun) – restoration of harmony, resolution, compromise.
- **breather** (noun) – break, rest/pause, interval after a period of activity.

- **biometric** (adjective) – relating to the metrics with human (physical & behavioural) characteristics used for identification and access control.
- **irregularity** (noun) – anomaly, abnormality, misconduct.
- **set off** (phrasal verb) – start out, set forth, embark on.
- **allegation** (noun) – charge, accusation, indictment.
- **divisive** (adjective) – alienating/isolating, disharmonious, discordant.
- **cast a shadow over** (phrase) – spoil, diminish, let down.
- **set aside** (phrasal verb) – discard, abandon, cast aside; reject, dismiss, nullify/cancel.
- **gesture** (noun) – action, deed, sign.
- **reaffirm** (verb) – assert, state, assure again strongly.
- **strategic partnership** (noun) – it is a long-term interaction between two countries based on political, economic, social and historical factors (Courtesy: **IDS**A (Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses)).
- **ambassador** (noun) – envoy, diplomat, consul.
- **call for** (phrasal verb) – require, need, necessitate/demand.
- **in someone's interests** (phrase) – of benefit to, to the advantage of, for the sake of.
- **brave** (verb) – endure, withstand, sustain.
- **at the earliest** (phrase) – not before the time/date specified; no earlier than the time/date mentioned.

Dangerous doublespeak: On government's NPR-NRC talk

The government's position on the NRC appears designed to create confusion

The Centre appears to have marginally mellowed its position on rolling out a National Register of Citizens (NRC), going by the statements of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah this week. But the Prime Minister's contention that the widespread concerns about the NRC are merely fear-mongering by his political opponents is disingenuous and lame. The Prime Minister said no discussion on NRC had taken place in the government, which may be a clever statement but is certainly not reassuring. The plans for a countrywide NRC were announced repeatedly by senior functionaries of the government including Mr. Shah, even in Parliament. The concern that such an exercise, in combination with the recently enacted Citizenship (Amendment) Act, or CAA, could lead to disenfranchisement and harassment of the poor and undocumented segments of the population was not born out of anyone's imagination. Such a link has been stated by the ruling dispensation. The political thought behind the CAA-NRC fusion is the distinction that Mr. Modi makes between "infiltrators" and "refugees", as if they could be separated on the basis of their religion. This argument was advanced in the 2014 campaign and it is ironical that the Prime Minister reiterated it in the same speech in which he accused the Opposition of spreading misinformation on the NRC. If the government has a rethink on its strident position on the NRC, it must say so upfront, and at any rate desist from denigrating critics. So far, what has come as clarification has only added to the confusion.

In fact, the government must seriously re-evaluate its position. India has a host of serious national challenges to tackle, the economy being the most critical. In his first Independence Day speech as Prime Minister, Mr. Modi had in 2014 called for a 10-year moratorium on communal and caste conflicts. He also promised to run the country on the basis of consensus and not of legislative majority. It is time he

redeemed that pledge, and worked to heal the deep wounds inflicted by his misguided policy priorities. The intolerance towards opposing views and political opponents is expressed in horrifying terms down the ladder. The Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath, vowed to take "revenge" against CAA-NRC protesters who turned violent. The Uttar Pradesh police have not explained satisfactorily how several people died of bullet injuries, while claiming that their personnel did not fire a single bullet. A Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA threatened to "wipe out" critics of CAA-NRC. Several other BJP functionaries have continued to make menacing statements regarding the NRC, even after the Prime Minister blamed the Opposition. The Prime Minister must demonstrate he is a man of his word, and that his writ runs in the party and the government.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **doublepeak** (noun) – prevarication, indecision, ambiguity/uncertainty.
- **mellow** (verb) – relax, soften, improve.
- **roll out** (phrasal verb) – launch, introduce, organize/inaugurate.
- **go by** (phrasal verb) – be known as, be called by.
- **contention** (noun) – disagreement, dispute, argument.
- **fear-mongering** (noun) – an act of spreading public fear intentionally on a particular topic/problem.
- **disingenuous** (adjective) – dishonest, deceitful, double-dealing.
- **lame** (adjective) – feeble, weak, poor.
- **disenfranchisement** (noun) – the condition of being stripped of the right (to vote).
- **harassment** (noun) – persecution, persistent annoyance, coercion/intimidation.
- **undocumented** (adjective) – not having the proper legal document.
- **born out of** (phrase) – as a result of, due to, because of.
- **dispensation** (noun) – administration; system, organization.
- **fusion** (noun) – joining, merging, integration.
- **distinction** (noun) – dissimilarity, difference, contrast.
- **infiltrator** (noun) – intruder, spy/agent, informer.
- **refugee** (noun) – displaced person, asylum seeker, escapee/exile.
- **ironical** (adjective) – paradoxical, incongruous, strange, weird.
- **reiterate** (verb) – repeat, say again, restate.
- **strident** (adjective) – in an excessively forceful way; high-pitched, loud & harsh.
- **upfront** (adverb) – in advance, beforehand, ahead of time, openly/frankly.
- **at any rate** (phrase) – in any case, anyhow, anyway
- **desist from** (verb) – abstain, refrain, hold back.
- **denigrate** (verb) – criticise, attack, insult.
- **critic** (noun) – fault-finder, detractor, censurer.
- **so far** (phrase) – until now, up to the present, up to this point.
- **add to** (verb) – increase, aggravate, worsen/deepen.
- **host** (noun) – presenter, link person, compere.
- **moratorium** (noun) – a temporary suspension of something; embargo, ban, prohibition.
- **consensus** (noun) – an idea or opinion that is shared by all the people in a group. agreement, concurrence.
- **redeem** (verb) – save, justify, vindicate.
- **pledge** (noun) – promise, agreement, vow.
- **inflict** (verb) – impose, force, thrust.
- **intolerance** (noun) – prejudice, bias, bigotry/partisanship.
- **ladder** (phrase) – hierarchy, scale, set of stages, grading, ranking.
- **vow** (verb) – oath, pledge, promise.

- **revenge** (noun) – retaliation, vengeance, retribution.
- **personnel** (noun) – staff, employees, workforce.
- **wipe out** (phrasal verb) – destroy, eradicate, eliminate.
- **menacing** (adjective) – threatening.
- **a man of his word** (phrase) – someone who keeps promises.
- **(one's) writ runs** (phrase) – someone has authority, control, or dominance (in or over something).

Mind the gap: On gender gap

A rounded approach is necessary to ensure women's access to resources, opportunities

Assessing women's access to equal opportunity and resources against the access that men have would be a scientific way of evaluating a nation's commitment to the advancement of its citizens. But going by the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2020, released last week, questions can easily be raised about whether this government is doing the right thing by the country's women. India has dropped four points from 2018, to take the 112th rank on the Index. The Index measures the extent of gender-based gaps on four key parameters — economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. Notably, it measures gender-based gaps in access to resources and opportunities in countries, rather than the actual levels of the available resources and opportunities. Despite a small score improvement, India has lost four positions as some countries ranked lower than India have shown better improvement. The country has reportedly closed two thirds of its overall gender gap, with a score of 66.8%, but the report notes with concern that the condition of women in large fringes of Indian society is 'precarious'. Of significant concern is the economic gender gap, with a score of 35.4%, at the 149th place, among 153 countries, and down seven places since the previous edition, indicating only a third of the gap has been bridged. The participation of women in the labour force is also among the lowest in the world, and the female estimated earned income is only one-fifth of male income. An alarming statistic is India's position (150th rank) on the very bottom of the Health and Survival subindex, determined largely by the skewed sex ratio at birth, violence, forced marriage and discrimination in access to health. It is on the educational attainment (112th rank) and political empowerment (18th rank) fronts that the relative good news is buried.

There is no question that the Gender Gap Index presents India with an opportunity to make the necessary amends forthwith. Doing what the government is currently doing is clearly not going to be sufficient; it needs to engage intimately with all aspects indicated by the Index to improve the score, and set targets to reduce the gender gap in the foreseeable future. It will have to drastically scale up efforts it has introduced to encourage women's participation, and increase opportunities for them. To do so it also needs to make sure there is actual implementation at the ground level. While a good score on any global index is a target worth pursuing, what is being questioned here is basic — is the state renegeing on its commitment to half its population? A commitment to ameliorate the conditions for women is a non-negotiable duty of any state.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **rounded** (adjective) – complete and balanced, well developed (with all aspects).
- **go by** (phrasal verb) – be known as, be called by.
- **index** (noun) – measure; guide, indication.
- **attainment** (noun) – achievement, accomplishment, completion.
- **empowerment** (noun) – accreditation, authorization, validation.
- **notably** (adverb) – especially, particularly, primarily.

- **fringe** (noun) – the border, the outer edges (of an area/group).
- **precarious** (adjective) – uncertain/unsure, insecure, unreliable/risky.
- **bridge** (verb) – join, link, connect, unite.
- **alarming** (adjective) – worrying, disturbing, shocking/distressing.
- **skewed** (adjective) – distorted, altered, changed; misrepresented, falsified.
- **discrimination** (noun) – inequity, prejudice, unfairness/bigotry.
- **relative** (adjective) – respective, comparable/reasonable, correlative.
- **forthwith** (adverb) – immediately, right away, without delay.
- **intimately** (adverb) – in a method that involves thorough knowledge of something.
- **scale up** (phrasal verb) – increase.
- **pursue** (verb) – strive for, push/work towards, try for, aim for.
- **renege on** (verb) – fail to honour, go back on, default on, break one's word/promise (a commitment/contract).
- **ameliorate** (verb) – make something better, improve, enhance.
- **non-negotiable** (adjective) – absolute, unchallengeable, unassailable.

Decisive shift: On Chief of Defence Staff

The Chief of Defence Staff could finally bring about unison among the armed forces

The government has acted with reasonable alacrity to create the post of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), who will head the Department of Military Affairs (DMA). It was only four months ago, on August 15, that the Prime Minister stressed the importance of creating this post, whereas two Defence Ministers came and went after Manohar Parrikar promised that this move was very much on the government's agenda. To be fair, the delay has been more a result of fears in the minds of the three services — the Indian Army, Indian Navy and Indian Air Force — of how such a development could impact on the role and functioning of the three arms of the **armed forces**, in terms of curtailing or inflating their importance. There must have been a parallel thought in the bureaucracy how such a shift would affect them too. This move will install the CDS, in the rank of a four star general, as Secretary, DMA.

There is no doubt that the job of the CDS will be exceedingly challenging, a task which is easier set than done. The job calls for total transformation of traditional military mindset. The CDS has to restructure the military commands into appropriate theatre or joint commands for which a critical prerequisite is 'jointness' — a term that envisions the various arms of the armed forces working in unison towards a goal. This is a very tall order, considering India's experience. Since Independence, the armed forces have been working separately, with no concept of jointness. The only jointness that comes into play effectively is when officers of the various services go to courses in, say, Wellington, at the Defence Services Staff College, or at the National Defence College, Delhi. All that will have to change, and change quickly, for a variety of reasons, not least the security environment in the region, with the Americans preparing to move out of Afghanistan and the restiveness consequent to the dilution of Article 370. According to the cabinet release, the new incumbent will have three years to achieve this. It flows from this urgency therefore that the name of the next CDS will have to be soon announced. It is also necessary that the first incumbent is given a term of three years so as to be able to carry the ambitious vision laid out in the cabinet note through to its conclusion. The job is strategic, requires personal supervision, and cannot be left unfinished for the successor to finish. Given the challenges and the limited time-frame within which to accomplish it, allowances will have to be made for attendant hiccups.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **decisive** (adjective) – resolute, firm, determined.
 - **unison** (noun) – simultaneous performance, simultaneous utterance of action/speech; simultaneously, at the same time, together.
 - **alacrity** (noun) – eagerness, willingness, readiness.
 - **stress** (verb) – emphasize, draw attention to, underscore.
 - **to be fair** (phrase) – used when adding something after someone has been criticized, which helps to explain or excuse what they did.
 - **curtail** (verb) – reduce, diminish, decrease.
 - **inflate** (verb) – exaggerate, magnify, overstate.
 - **parallel** (adjective) – similar, related, resembling.
 - **bureaucracy** (noun) – administration, government, the establishment.
 - **install** (verb) – establish, position, settle, seat (someone in a place).
 - **exceedingly** (adverb) – extremely, immensely, especially.
 - **be easier set than done** (phrase) – used to say that something sounds like a good idea in theory, but it would be very difficult to do.
 - **call for** (phrasal verb) – require, need, necessitate/demand.
 - **transformation** (noun) – change, alteration, modification.
 - **prerequisite** (noun) – essential, necessary condition, requirement.
 - **jointness** (noun) – a term that envisions the various arms of the armed forces working in unison towards a goal.
 - **envision** (verb) – imagine, visualize, envisage.
 - **a tall order** (phrase) – difficult, unreasonable, exacting (demand).
 - **restiveness** (noun) – restlessness, disorderliness, out of control.
 - **consequent** (adjective) – associated, related, connected, linked with.
 - **dilution** (noun) – reduction in value/power/force of something.
 - **incumbent** (noun) – the holder of an office.
 - **so as to** (phrase) – in order to.
 - **ambitious** (adjective) – difficult, exacting, formidable/challenging.
 - **lay out** (phrasal verb) – formulate, explain, detail (clearly & carefully).
 - **successor** (noun) – heir, next-in-line, descendant.
 - **accomplish** (verb) – achieve, complete, fulfil.
 - **attendant** (adjective) – connected, associated, related.
 - **hiccup** (noun) – (temporary) difficulty, issue, trouble.
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The mask of anarchy: On JNU violence

The JNU attack couldn't have been carried out without the connivance of those in power

Chilling and brutal, the visuals of the rampage of the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in New Delhi on Sunday night by a mob of masked criminals will torment the country's conscience for a long time to come. The mob ransacked hostels and grievously wounded students, professors and staff, going about it all in methodical madness for several hours. Not a single attacker was detained by the Delhi police, deployed in large numbers outside the campus. The street lights were turned off and the police personnel appeared to have given cover for the mob that leisurely walked away with abusive slogans. This evil will outlive its perpetrators and facilitators; and the night will continue to haunt India's dreams

to mature itself as a democracy and as a society that treasures its institutions. The masks notwithstanding, it is not difficult to see the faces behind this outrageous assault on one of India's premier institutions where access is not limited by pedigree or purse. The Hindutva dispensation's extreme intolerance towards intellectualism in general, and institutions in particular, has been on naked display since 2014. JNU has been a special target, and that itself is telling. JNU recruits from India's vast diversity, and offers its students the best opportunity to develop critical thinking and excel in their chosen paths of life.

This liberating potential and the questioning spirit of JNU has long been reviled by a political project that seeks to erase the distinction between myth and history; faith and fanaticism; and criticism and subversion. The charge that the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, the student outfit of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), led this violence is credible, unless the serious injuries suffered by the students and teachers were self-inflicted. The list is long of those who stood behind the masks, and some of the faces are recognisable. The JNU's administration and its Vice Chancellor M. Jagadesh Kumar have not merely failed in their duty as teachers and guardians; they have come across as desecrators of a place whose sanctity they were ordained to protect. The Delhi police, under its current Commissioner Amulya Patnaik, which had shown such alacrity in enforcing order recently that they stormed the library of Jamia Millia Islamia, stood by not as bystanders but as collaborators. Though they did not wear masks, they had their identities concealed by not wearing name badges. The Delhi administration apparently concluded that they had no responsibility whatsoever. There is little credence to the vague words of protest coming from some BJP functionaries and Ministers. The only way the Centre and Prime Minister Narendra Modi can prove that this mayhem was not sanctioned is to come down heavily on the police inaction and bring the mobsters to exemplary justice.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **anarchy** (noun) – lawlessness, absence of government, disorder.
- **connivance** (noun) – collusion; conspiracy, secret plan/understanding.
- **chilling** (adjective) – frightening, terrifying, disturbing/horrifying.
- **rampage** (noun) – wild/violent behaviour, running amok, berserk.
- **mob** (noun) – a large, disorganized, and often violent crowd of people.
- **torment** (verb) – afflict, distress, trouble.
- **conscience** (noun) – moral sense; morals, values/ethics, principles.
- **for a long time to come** (phrase) – it is typically used to mean that an event that occurred (in the past) will have lasting effects well into the future.
- **ransack** (verb) – hunt through, search (through), rake through.
- **grievously** (adjective) – severely, seriously.
- **go about** (phrasal verb) – begin, embark on, start.
- **methodical** (adjective) – planned, well organized, formal.
- **deploy** (verb) – employ.
- **personnel** (noun) – staff, employees, workforce.
- **outlive** (verb) – survive, outlast, withstand, live longer than.
- **perpetrator** (noun) – someone who does immoral, harmful and illegal activity; offender, criminal, wrongdoer/evil-doer, culprit.
- **facilitator** (noun) – a person who makes an action easier.
- **haunt** (verb) – disturb, trouble/worry, burden.
- **treasure** (verb) – preserve, value/rate greatly, esteem.
- **notwithstanding** (preposition) – in spite of, despite, regardless of that.
- **outrageous** (adjective) – shocking, disgraceful, appalling/disgusting.
- **premier** (adjective) – foremost, chief, principal.

- **pedigree** (noun) – descent, lineage, ancestry/family, background.
- **purse** (noun) – funds, resources, money/wealth.
- **dispensation** (noun) – administration; system, organization.
- **intolerance** (noun) – prejudice, bias, bigotry/partisanship.
- **intellectualism** (noun) – rationalism; intellectual pursuits.
- **naked** (adjective) – obvious, open, evident/palpable.
- **telling** (adjective) – revealing, significant, important.
- **critical thinking** (noun) – the analysis of facts to form a judgment.
- **excel** (verb) – shine, be very good, be proficient.
- **potential** (noun) – potentiality, capability/capacity, ability.
- **spirit** (noun) – attitude, frame of mind, ideas/nature.
- **revile** (verb) – criticize, censure, condemn.
- **distinction** (noun) – difference, dissimilarity, variance.
- **fanaticism** (noun) – extremism, fundamentalism, dogmatism.
- **subversion** (noun) – the act of undermining, worsening, reducing (power & authority gradually).
- **outfit** (noun) – organization, group, party.
- **credible** (adjective) – acceptable, dependable, convincing.
- **self-inflicted** (adjective) – cause suffering to oneself on his/her own.
- **merely** (adverb) – only, simply, just.
- **come across** (phrasal verb) – discover, encounter, find/unearth/uncover.
- **desecrator** (noun) – a person who profanes or violates the sacredness or sanctity of something; a person who is harming doing damage to something valued/respected.
- **sanctity** (noun) – holiness, righteousness, goodness.
- **ordain** (verb) – appoint, induct, install.
- **alacrity** (noun) – eagerness, willingness, readiness.
- **storm** (verb) – suddenly attack, attempt to capture, conduct an offensive on.
- **stand by** (phrasal verb) – be present when something bad is happening but fail to take any action to stop it.
- **bystander** (noun) – onlooker, passer-by, spectator.
- **collaborator** (noun) – conspirator, colluder/traitor, double agent.
- **apparently** (adjective) – seemingly, evidently, it appears that.
- **whatsoever** (adverb) – at all.
- **credence** (noun) – acceptance, belief/truth, confidence.
- **vague** (adjective) – imprecise, inexact, unclear, uncertain.
- **mayhem** (noun) – chaos, disorder, turmoil/unrest.
- **sanction** (verb) – authorize, approve, permit/allow.
- **come down on** (phrasal verb) – punish, reprimand, rebuke, castigate harshly.
- **inaction** (noun) – inactivity, negligence, disregard.
- **exemplary** (adjective) – serving as a warning, cautionary, deterrent.

☞ “SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE NEVER WORRY ABOUT WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING” ☜