

Crime and politics: on political candidates with criminal records

Successive judgments to bar criminal candidates from contesting have done little

The Supreme Court has taken a timely decision by agreeing to hear a plea from the Election Commission of India (ECI) to direct political parties to not field candidates with criminal antecedents. The immediate provocation is the finding that 46% of Members of Parliament have criminal records. While the number might be inflated as many politicians tend to be charged with relatively minor offences —“unlawful assembly” and “defamation” — the real worry is that the current cohort of Lok Sabha MPs has the highest (29%) proportion of those with serious declared criminal cases compared to its recent predecessors. Researchers have found that such candidates with serious records seem to do well despite their public image, largely due to their ability to finance their own elections and bring substantive resources to their respective parties. Some voters tend to view such candidates through a narrow prism: of being able to represent their interests by hook or by crook. Others do not seek to punish these candidates in instances where they are in contest with other candidates with similar records. Either way, these unhealthy tendencies in the democratic system reflect a poor image of the nature of India’s state institutions and the quality of its elected representatives.

The Supreme Court has come up with a series of landmark judgments on addressing this issue. It removed the statutory protection of convicted legislators from immediate disqualification in 2013, and in 2014, directed the completion of trials involving elected representatives within a year. In 2017, it asked the Centre to frame a scheme to appoint special courts to exclusively try cases against politicians, and for political parties to publicise pending criminal cases faced by their candidates in 2018. But these have not been a deterrent to legislators with dubious credentials. Perhaps what would do the trick is a rule that disallows candidates against whom charges have been framed in court for serious offences, but this is something for Parliament to consider as an amendment to the Representation of the People Act, 1951. This denouement, however, is still a pie in the sky given the composition of the Lower House with a number of representatives facing serious cases. Ultimately, this is a consequence of a structural problem in Indian democracy and the nature of the Indian state. While formally, the institutions of the state are present and subject to the electoral will of the people, substantively, they are still relatively weak and lackadaisical in governance and delivery of public goods, which has allowed cynical voters to elect candidates despite their dubious credentials and for their ability to work on a patronage system. While judicial pronouncements on making it difficult for criminal candidates to contest are necessary, only enhanced awareness and increased democratic participation could create the right conditions for the decriminalisation of politics.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **plea** (noun) – appeal, petition, entreaty.
- **antecedent** (noun) – a person’s social background.
- **provocation** (noun) – testing to bring out a particular response; stimulation, inducement, encouragement.

- **inflate** (verb) – escalate, exaggerate, magnify, overstate.
- **tend to** (verb) – be inclined, gravitate, be likely.
- **unlawful assembly** (noun) – a meeting of three or more people with the intention of carrying out an unlawful act to deliberately disturb the peace.
- **defamation** (noun) – character assassination, libel/misrepresentation.
- **cohort** (noun) – group, generation, category/section.
- **predecessor** (noun) – previous holder of the post; forerunner, precursor, antecedent.
- **substantive** (adjective) – important & meaningful.
- **prism** (noun) – a viewpoint which clarifies/distorts something.
- **by hook or by crook** (phrase) – by any means, in one way or another, by any possible means.
- **reflect** (verb) – indicate, show, display, represent.
- **come up with** (phrasal verb) – propose, put forward, suggest.
- **landmark** (noun as modifier) – historic, milestone, watershed.
- **address** (verb) – attend to, tackle, deal with.
- **statutory** (adjective) – legitimate, acceptable, permissible/admissible.
- **convicted** (adjective) – declared guilty of a crime.
- **deterrent** (noun) – restraint, discouragement, dissuasion.
- **dubious** (adjective) – suspicious, questionable, doubtful.
- **credentials** (noun) – identity, qualifications, quality of person’s background.
- **disallow** (verb) – refuse, reject, prohibit.
- **perhaps** (adverb) – maybe, possibly.
- **denouement** (noun) – last act, outcome, result.
- **pie in the sky** (phrase) – an unrealistic concept/idea; the imaginary promise of a desired outcome that is unlikely to happen.
- **composition** (noun) – formation, structure, organization.
- **consequence** (noun) – outcome, ramification, repercussion.
- **will** (noun) – desire/wish, preference, decision, intention.
- **lackadaisical** (adjective) – careless, casual, lazy.
- **public good** (noun) – well-being of the public, benefit of the public.
- **cynical** (adjective) – sceptical, doubtful, distrustful, disappointed.
- **patronage** (noun) – support, backing, protection.
- **decriminalisation** (noun) – the process of making something as a legal/legitimate one.

Black and grey: On terror funding and Pakistan

India must be conscious of the geopolitics behind Pakistan’s relative success at the FATF

The deliberations, in Beijing, of the Asia-Pacific joint group of the global watchdog on terror financing and money laundering, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), gave Pakistan some encouraging news: that it had progressed in its efforts to avoid a blacklisting. A final decision will be taken at a plenary meeting of the body, expected in Paris next month: in keeping Pakistan on the current “grey list”, downgrading it to a “black list”, or letting it off altogether for the moment. The 39-member body had determined that Pakistan was to be placed on the grey list in 2018, and presented it a 27-point list of actions. These included freezing the funds of UN Security Council entities such as 26/11 mastermind Hafiz Saeed and the LeT, the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and other Taliban-affiliated groups. The actions

entailed a sustained effort to bring legal action against these groups, and also called for changes to Pakistani law in line with global standards for measures against money laundering and financing terrorism. Unlike in October 2019, when Pakistan had completed five points, the Beijing meeting has cleared it on 14 points. While Pakistan's progress will come as a disappointment to India — it wants more scrutiny of Pakistan's support to terror groups lest Islamabad feels it has been let off the hook — there are a few points to consider. First, the grey listing is not new. Pakistan was placed on it in 2012, and was removed in 2015 after it passed a National Action Plan to deal with terrorism following the 2014 Peshawar School massacre. It was also placed under severe restrictions in the years 2008-2012, after the Mumbai attack. Second, this last grey list period has already seen some Indian demands met, including the chargesheeting of Hafiz Saeed for terror financing, and the addition of JeM chief Masood Azhar to the UNSC 1267 list. Finally, although the FATF is a technical organisation, there is no doubting that geopolitics and bilateral deals play a part in deciding outcomes.

As a result, New Delhi must study the politics behind Pakistan's FATF "progress". Officials have suggested that Pakistan's role in ensuring Taliban talks are brought to a successful conclusion soon may have weighed with the U.S. and its allies in the grouping. Other countries may have determined that with China in the president's chair, and the backing of Turkey and Malaysia, Pakistan could escape being blacklisted in any case, and dropped the effort. India's recent troubles on the international stage, including the UNSC where China has been allowed to raise the Kashmir issue twice in five months, after nearly five decades, may also be a reason its objections at the Beijing discussions were not considered as carefully as in the past.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **geopolitics** (noun) – geographical politics; international politics & relations effected by geographical reasons.
- **relative** (adjective) – reasonable, a fair degree of, considerable.
- **deliberation** (noun) – careful thought, thinking, consideration, discussion.
- **watchdog** (noun) – inspector/supervisor, observer, ombudsman.
- **money laundering** (noun) – a secret act of moving illegally acquired funds into legal bank accounts or investments.
- **plenary** (adjective) – relating to a meeting attended by all participants of a group at a conference.
- **blacklist** (noun) – a list of countries which the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) judges to be non-cooperative in the global fight against money laundering and terrorist financing.
- **grey/watch list** (noun) – a list of countries on observation due to their "strategic deficiencies" in countering terror-financing and money-laundering. The countries put on grey/watch list by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) will be subjected to direct monitoring and intense scrutiny by the International Co-operation Review Group (ICRG) on terror financing.
- **downgrade** (verb) – lower in status, reduce in rank, demote.
- **let off** (phrasal verb) – pardon, forgive; excuse, relieve/exempt.
- **freeze** (verb) – stop, prevent, ban (funds to be used for a particular period of time).
- **entail** (verb) – cause, result in, produce.
- **sustained** (adjective) – continuous, constant, steady.
- **in line with** (phrase) – in accordance with.
- **scrutiny** (noun) – observation, inspection, examination.
- **lest** (conjunction) – just in case, for fear that, in order to avoid the risk of.
- **let someone off the hook** (phrase) – out of trouble, free, found not guilty.
- **massacre** (noun) – carnage, mass murder, mass killing.

- **charge sheet** (noun) – an official document on which a police officer enters details of the charge against a person.
- **bilateral** (adjective) – involving two groups or countries.
- **play a part** (phrase) – contribute to, be a factor in, be instrumental in.
- **weigh** (verb) – have influence with, be important to, mean something to.
- **backing** (noun) – support, help, assistance.

Polarised state of union: On U.S. politics driven by partisan hostility

There is more at stake in American politics for people world over than ever before

The politics of the United States has rarely, if ever, been as contentious, and driven by partisan hostility, as it is at the present juncture. U.S. President Donald Trump's State of the Union address exemplified the multiple fractures in the consciousness of the American collective psyche in this regard. His speech before both Houses of the U.S. Congress, minus some Democrat lawmakers who boycotted it, went on for more than an hour, yet there was no mention of arguably the most intensely polarising issue on Capitol Hill: impeachment. On the day before his likely acquittal by the Republican-majority Senate, the President showed restraint — possibly holding out for a victory lap after being cleared by the Upper House. This contrasted with his periodic Twitter outbursts attacking the impeachment process. However, there could be little doubt about how frosty cross-party relations are — he appeared to snub House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's attempt to shake his hand before the speech, and Ms. Pelosi ripped up a copy of the speech after it had ended, saying later that it was a "manifesto of mistruths". Nevertheless, substantively, Mr. Trump's annual address focused on claiming credit for a "great American comeback" on the back of a healthy economy — including historically low levels of unemployment, rising median income and unprecedented cuts in "job-killing" regulations — even though the economic recovery after the 2008 downturn began under his predecessor, Barack Obama.

However, that all is not well with the state of the American union is evident from the tenor of the ongoing Democratic nomination race. Democrats of several hues, from the more centrist, including former Vice-President Joe Biden, to the more leftist, such as Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders and Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren, have focused their political attacks on Mr. Trump and less so on internal differences within their camp. Presently, the Iowa caucus, the first of a season of caucuses and primaries that will decide the ultimate nominee to take on Mr. Trump in the November 2020 election, has given Democrats renewed purpose. Yet the microcosm of the Democratic campaign process mirrors their biggest handicap on the national stage — too many aspirants jockeying for power and visibility, leading inevitably to fragmentation of their overall prospects against Mr. Trump's incumbency advantage. Unless they quickly rally behind one tall leader — if such a person exists in their midst — they stand a slim chance of mounting a serious challenge to the 45th President. Yet, given the vastly divergent views across party lines on core issues such as the economy and climate change, there

could not be more at stake for Democrats, and indeed those who, despite residing beyond America's shores, are weary of trade wars and the relentless undermining of multilateralism.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **polarised** (adjective) – separated into opposing two.
- **rive** (verb) – split, tear apart, rip apart, rupture/break suddenly.
- **partisan** (adjective) – biased, prejudiced, one-sided.
- **hostility** (noun) – opposition, aversion, enmity, antipathy; unfriendliness, bitterness.
- **at stake** (phrase) – in question, at issue.
- **contentious** (adjective) – controversial, disputable, debatable.
- **juncture** (noun) – point in time, time/moment, stage.
- **address** (noun) – a formal speech/talk/discourse.
- **exemplify** (verb) – typify, epitomize, represent/illustrate.
- **fracture** (noun) – fragmentation, breaking, rupture, disintegration.
- **consciousness** (noun) – awareness, knowledge, attention/observation.
- **psyche** (noun) – soul/spirit, essential nature/persona, individuality.
- **boycott** (verb) – avoid, ignore, reject, snub/spurn.
- **arguably** (adverb) – possibly, probably, perhaps, maybe.
- **impeachment** (noun) – the act of charging or accusing (a public official) with a crime done while in office.
- **acquittal** (noun) – declaration of innocence, clearing/discharge/release, absolution.
- **restraint** (noun) – self-control, moderation, sobriety, unemotional behaviour.
- **hold out for** (phrasal verb) – continue to demand more (instead of accepting what has been given already).
- **lap** (noun) – part, portion, stage, phase.
- **periodic** (adjective) – regular, repeated, recurrent/cyclic.
- **outburst** (noun) – eruption, outflow/release, outbreak, flare up (of something like emotion).
- **frosty** (adjective) – unfriendly, inhospitable/unwelcoming, hostile.
- **cross-party** (adjective) – collaborative, collective, combined.
- **snub** (verb) – ignore, reject, spurn, insult, treat disrespectfully.
- **rip up** (phrasal verb) – tear something (paper) into (small) pieces.
- **manifesto** (noun) – (policy) statement, declaration, pronouncement of a political party issued before an election.
- **mistruth** (noun) – lie, false statement.
- **nevertheless** (adverb) – in spite of that, even so, however.
- **substantively** (adverb) – importantly, significantly, meaningfully.
- **credit** (noun) – praise, commendation, acclaim, acknowledgement.
- **on the back of** (phrase) – as a result of something (which has been successfully done already).
- **unprecedented** (adjective) – not done or experienced before.
- **downturn** (noun) – decline, setback, blow/upset (in economic activity).
- **predecessor** (noun) – previous holder of the post; forerunner, precursor, antecedent.
- **tenor** (noun) – the general content/meaning.
- **hue** (noun) – character, aspect, nature.
- **centrist** (noun) – a person whose political opinions are not extreme, falling between those of liberals and conservatives.
- **leftist** (noun) – left-wing politician.
- **caucus** (noun) – (in the US) a party-organized gathering of members to discuss their presidential preferences, elect local party leadership and discuss issues that make up the party's platform. A

- closed meeting of supporters or members of a specific political party or movement. It is also defined as hours-long voting meeting run by a political party.
- **Iowa caucus** (noun) – (in the US) the first-in-the-nation caucuses that kick off the start of the primary election season. When it comes to choosing a presidential candidate, Iowa (a Midwestern U.S. state) traditionally goes first.
 - **primary** (noun) – (in the US) an election in which members of the same political party run against each other for the chance to be in a larger and more important election, especially presidential election.
 - **take on** (phrasal verb) – compete against, oppose, challenge/confront.
 - **microcosm** (noun) – a small world.
 - **mirror** (verb) – reflect, reproduce, imitate.
 - **handicap** (noun) – impediment, hindrance, obstacle/difficulty.
 - **jockey** (verb) – compete, contend, vie, fight/struggle.
 - **inevitably** (adverb) – necessarily, unavoidably, definitely.
 - **prospect** (noun) – chance, possibility.
 - **incumbency** (noun) – rule, period in office, reign/occupancy.
 - **rally** (verb) – come together, join together, gather/assemble.
 - **in the midst of** (phrase) – in the middle of.
 - **stand a chance** (phrase) – have a chance (to win).
 - **mount** (verb) – increase, grow, escalate.
 - **divergent** (adjective) – differing, varying, dissimilar/contrasting.
 - **climate change** (noun) – a long-term change in the Earth's climate, or of a region on Earth (Courtesy: NASA).
 - **indeed** (adverb) – in fact, actually, undeniably.
 - **weary** (adjective) – tired of, fed up with, sick of/jaded by.
 - **trade war/dispute** (noun) – a condition in which a country increase tariffs on foreign goods and impose quota restrictions to restrict other countries' trade.
 - **relentless** (adjective) – persistent, continuing, steady/intense.
 - **undermine** (verb) – reduce, spoil, damage.
 - **multilateralism** (noun) – a method of coordinating relations between groups of three or more states (countries).

Need of the hour: On CAA protests

The Centre must stop privileging religious persecution over other forms

As protests continue to ripple in many parts of the country against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, or the CAA, the National Population Register (NPR) and allied issues, their nature, content and direction have drawn critical attention. The introduction of a religious test for Indian citizenship through the CAA evoked widespread public indignation. Right-thinking people from all walks of life mobilised in a manner befitting a vibrant democracy, and several State governments and Assemblies have expressed reservations. Students have been in the forefront of protests that marked an awakening from a defeatist slumber of the country in the face of creeping majoritarianism. As the protests linger on, however, they appear to be sliding into the control of vested interests that work for religious polarisation. The discriminatory CAA targets Muslims, but the protests were driven by the wider civil society at the

beginning. Incendiary speeches and slogans at anti-CAA protests, and even support for Islamist politics, have put non-sectarian opponents of the law in a difficult spot. Muslims have equal rights as all other citizens of India to assemble and protest, but reducing the CAA debate into a question of their rights alone is dishonour of the pluralist, inclusive Constitution of secular India. After the success in kindling a national debate on the issue which is now before the Supreme Court that will litigate its constitutionality, anti-CAA protesters must now hold their fire.

The opportunity that the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) sniffed in the protests is not to reach out and reconcile, but to confront and polarise, particularly in the campaign for the Delhi Assembly election. The chilling effect of the party's brazen vilification and dehumanisation of the protesters is no longer an abstract fear. Three separate incidents of firing at protesters, two clearly inspired by Hindutva politics, have been reported in Delhi. Far from condemning these incidents in the strongest terms and ensuring swift and strict police action, the BJP leadership has continued with divisive rhetoric. A Union Minister led slogans calling for the "shooting of traitors". The BJP must immediately adopt a path of reconciliation and resolution. One way is by making a further amendment to the CAA that will not prioritise religious persecution over other forms of persecution. No protester is against welcoming the persecuted from three neighbouring countries listed in the CAA. By amending the law to remove the arbitrary selection of countries and religious groups, the current turmoil can be easily calmed. A small step of reason and vision will serve India well.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **need of the hour** (phrase) – some (urgent) need/requirement/demand at a particular point of time.
- **privilege** (verb) – give a special advantage.
- **persecution** (noun) – oppression, victimization, ill treatment/abuse.
- **ripple** in (verb) – stir, oscillate, swing, move (like waves).
- **draw one's attention** (phrase) – to make someone notice something.
- **evoke** (verb) – kindle, arouse, induce/awaken.
- **indignation** (noun) – resentment, distress, anger.
- **right-thinking** (adjective) – honest, principled, law-abiding, lawful.
- **walk of life** (phrase) – a person's class/status/rank within society.
- **mobilise** (verb) – organize, call up, bring into play/generate.
- **befit** (verb) – suitable for, proper to, suited to, apt for.
- **vibrant** (adjective) – lively, full of life, energetic, dynamic.
- **reservation** (noun) – doubt, misgivings, scepticism.
- **forefront** (noun) – fore, front, front line.
- **defeatist** (adjective) – discouraged, fatalistic, negative.
- **slumber** (noun) – rest, nap, sleep.
- **in the face of** (phrase) – despite, notwithstanding, regardless of; when confronted with.
- **creeping** (adjective) – (of a negative manner) occurring, developing gradually.
- **majoritarianism** (noun) – a philosophy that states that a majority (sometimes categorized by religion, language, social class, or some other identifying factor) of the population is entitled to a certain degree of primacy (priority) in society, and has the right to make decisions that affect the society.
- **linger on** (verb) – persist, continue, stay.
- **slide** (verb) – fall, drop, plunge/descend (to a lower level).
- **vested interest** (noun) – a personal interest in something to get benefit.
- **polarisation** (noun) – separation of two contrasting groups (based on different opinions/beliefs).

- **discriminatory** (adjective) – prejudicial, biased, unfair, inequitable.
- **incendiary** (adjective) – provocative, agitational, rabble-rousing.
- **non-sectarian** (adjective) – universal, all-embracing, all-inclusive.
- **put someone on the spot** (phrase) – cause difficulties, trouble, bother.
- **dishonour** (noun) – discredit, disfavour, disgrace.
- **the pluralist** (noun) – the people co-exist in harmony irrespective of various differences.
- **secular** (adjective) – non-religious, worldly, earthly.
- **litigate** (verb) – be disputed/claimed/involved in a lawsuit.
- **hold someone's fire** (phrase) – delay, hold back, stop (making a decision), wait, be quiet (before criticizing something /reacting to something). Hold one's fire generally means not to not discharge a weapon/firearm.
- **sniff** (verb) – find, detect, discover.
- **reach out** (phrasal verb) – contact someone to obtain/offer help/assistance/cooperation.
- **reconcile** (verb) – settle, resolve, patch up, accept.
- **confront** (verb) – trouble, bother, distress.
- **chilling** (adjective) – frightening, terrifying, disturbing/horrifying.
- **brazen** (adjective) – bold and shameless; unashamed, unabashed.
- **vilification** (noun) – condemnation, criticism, censure.
- **dehumanisation** (noun) – an act of preventing a person of human qualities.
- **abstract** (adjective) – conceptual, notional, theoretical; speculative/non-realistic/symbolic.
- **far from** (phrase) – not, not at all, nowhere near.
- **swift** (adjective) – rapid, quick, speedy.
- **divisive** (adjective) – alienating/isolating, disharmonious, discordant.
- **rhetoric** (noun) – bombast, loftiness, hyperbole/extravagant language.
- **traitor** (noun) – betrayer, double-dealer, defector.
- **reconciliation** (noun) – restoration of harmony, resolution, compromise.
- **arbitrary** (adjective) – random/capricious, casual, unreasonable, irrational/illogical, groundless.
- **turmoil** (noun) – confusion, disorder, agitation/disruption.

Phrasal Verb	Meaning	Example
Be cut out for	Be suitable, have the necessary qualities.	She's not CUT OUT FOR this kind of work.
Be cut up	Be upset.	She was very CUT UP about coming second as she thought she deserved to win.
Be down	Be depressed.	He's BEEN DOWN since his partner left him.
Be down	Be reduced or less.	The firm's profits ARE DOWN by ten percent this quarter.
Be down on	Have negative feelings toward someone.	After the argument, James is DOWN ON his boss.
Be down with	Be ill.	Gul is DOWN WITH some bug and is off work today.

❧ “TO IMPROVE IS TO CHANGE. TO BE PERFECT IS TO CHANGE OFTEN.” ❧