

Camel in the tent: On shortage of doctors

Allowing district hospitals to be attached to private medical colleges is problematic

As the Centre pushes to attach medical colleges to existing district hospitals in the public-private partnership (PPP) mode, to ostensibly address the shortage of doctors in the country, the question is: does it understand the nature of the camel that it is planning to allow into the tent? Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in the Union Budget speech, introduced the proposal and stated that those States that fully allow the facilities of the hospital to the medical college and wish to provide land at a concession would be eligible for viability gap funding. Several details are already available in the public domain, as part of the plan, first proposed by NITI Aayog. It argues that it is practically not possible for Central and State governments to bridge the gaps in medical education with their limited resources and finances, necessitating the formation of a PPP model, "combining the strengths of both sectors". This would augment the number of medical seats available and moderate the costs of medical education. Experts have argued that the NITI Aayog has not given sufficient play to the role of the district hospital as the pivot of primary health care in every State. Allowing private parties to "operate and maintain the district hospital and provide healthcare services" could seriously dent public health services. It is problematic that the NITI Aayog envisages the creation of "free" patients versus others, because this will create a new category of have-nots. A working draft of the concessionaire agreement indicates that the private firm "can demand, collect and appropriate hospital charges from patients". There is understandable opposition to the scheme in States such as Tamil Nadu that have a robust public health-care system, and a medical college in nearly every district. These States are naturally loath to turning over a key unit in their health-care network, which is running reasonably efficiently, to the private sector motivated by profit rather than public interest.

Ultimately, eternal vigil will be the price of going for this new mode. While creating quality medical professionals for the country should definitely be on any government's to-do list, destabilising people's access to affordable public health services, will be disastrous. Viability gap funding is provided for projects that the government does not find commercially viable because of long gestation periods, and relatively minor revenue flows, and involves PPP, but this instant situation calls for pause: health fits square in the State's welfare role. The government must consider raising health-care spending beyond the usual under 2% of GDP, and ensure more resources are available to provide free, quality health care to all. If it does stay on its path of giving the private sector some control over district hospitals, it will do well to be wary of the camel in the tent.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **camel's (nose) in the tent** (phrase) – a situation where the allowing of some small act will lead to a larger undesirable act or circumstances. (It is an Arab proverb that if a camel is allowed to get its nose inside of a tent, then, you will not be able to prevent the camel itself from entering inside the tent).
- **public-private partnership** (PPP) (noun) – partnership between an agency of the government and the private sector in the delivery of goods or services to the public.
- **ostensibly** (adverb) – apparently, seemingly, allegedly, supposedly.
- **address** (verb) – tackle, deal with, try to sort out.
- **concession** (noun) – grant of privilege; favour, allowance, exception.

- **Viability Gap Funding** (noun) – a capital grant from the government that bridges the gap between project cost and the price quoted by the developer.
- **bridge the gap** (phrase) – to have qualities of two different things and to link/connect/unite them together.
- **necessitate** (verb) – require, need, demand.
- **augment** (verb) – increase, raise, make larger, supplement.
- **moderate** (verb) – decrease, control, reduce.
- **play** (noun) – scope, freedom, leeway (to act).
- **pivot** (noun) – focus/focal point, foundation, cornerstone.
- **primary health care** (noun) – it is a whole-of-society approach to health and well-being centred on the needs and preferences of individuals, families and communities. It addresses the broader determinants of health and focuses on the comprehensive and interrelated aspects of physical, mental and social health and well being (Courtesy: **WHO**)
- **dent** (verb) – diminish, reduce, undermine.
- **envisage** (verb) – foresee, predict, forecast.
- **have-nots** (noun) – the poor or underprivileged people whereas “the haves” mean the people who are rich or powerful.
- **concessionaire** (noun) – one who holds a concession or a right granted (for example, by the government) to conduct a certain business.
- **appropriate** (verb) – secure, acquire, wrest/claim.
- **robust** (adjective) – strong, powerful.
- **loath** (adjective) – reluctant, unwilling, disinclined.
- **turn over** (phrasal verb) – change/alter the function of something.
- **eternal** (adjective) – everlasting, continuous, permanent.
- **vigil** (noun) – surveillance, close watch, monitoring.
- **price** (noun) – consequence/result, disadvantage, burden.
- **destabilise** (verb) – undermine, weaken, impair/subvert.
- **viable** (adjective) – manageable, feasible, effective.
- **gestation** (period) (noun) – development, drafting, formation (period).
- **call for** (phrasal verb) – require, ask for, necessitate/demand.
- **pause** (noun) – break/interval, temporary stoppage, suspension.
- **square** (adjective) – in good order; compatible, in agreement; right and proper.
- **stay on** (phrasal verb) – continue (to work).
- **wary** (adjective) – cautious, careful, circumspect.

Cognisant of constraints: On 15th Finance

Commission’s interim report

The 15th Finance Commission tries not to rock devolution boat given GST’s ongoing troubles

The interim report of the 15th Finance Commission, tabled in Parliament on Saturday, has largely preserved the devolution mathematics of its predecessor, belying concerns of a sizeable cut in States’ share. The commission has recommended a one percentage point reduction in the vertical

split of the divisible pool of tax revenues accruing to States to 41%. This follows the reorganisation of the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir into the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. While the former State's notional share based on the parameters for horizontal devolution would have been about 0.85%, the commission has cited the security and other special needs of the two territories to enhance their aggregate share to 1%, which would be met by the Centre. As part of an effort to balance the principles of fiscal needs, equity and performance as well as the need to ensure stability and predictability in transfers, the criteria for the horizontal sharing of taxes among States have been rejigged. A crucial new parameter, demographic performance, has been added to the mix. Having been mandated to adopt the population data from the 2011 Census, the commission has incorporated the additional criterion to ensure that States that have done well on demographic management are not unfairly disadvantaged. And since the norm also indirectly evaluates performance on the human capital outcomes of education and health, it has been assigned a weight of 12.5%. This should address the concerns voiced by several States over the switch to the 2011 Census from the 1971 data.

Among the States, with the exception of Tamil Nadu, all the other four southern States see a reduction in the recommended share of taxes for the year 2020-21. Notably, the suggested devolution to Odisha and Uttar Pradesh have also shrunk in percentage terms. Crucially, the commission has flagged the issues dogging the GST, especially as indirect taxes constitute almost half the total tax revenues of the Union. From the sizeable shortfalls and volatility in collections, to serious cases of fraud, the new tax has yet to stabilise leaving a majority of the States dependent on compensation from the Centre. The commission's effort to improve the granularity in devolution to local bodies has generated some interesting results. Urban local bodies, especially municipalities in cities with populations of more than one million, are set to get a larger share of the pie. However, the increase in the percentage of outcome-tied funds to 50%, from 10%, could prove vexing to the last mile providers of basic services in India's federal and highly fragmented structure of governance. The commission has also been justifiably critical of the Union and State governments' tendency to finance spending through off-budget borrowings and via parastatals. It has done well to ask that such extra-budgetary liabilities be clearly earmarked and eliminated in a time-bound manner.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **cognisant** (adjective) – aware, well informed about, familiar with.
- **constraint** (noun) – restriction, limitation, restraint.
- **interim** (adjective) – provisional, transitional, temporary.
- **rock (the) boat** (phrase) – do something to disturb (the present/stable condition).
- **devolution** (noun) – distribution, transfer, decentralization, delegation.
- **table** (verb) – present, propose, submit, put forward.
- **preserve** (verb) – uphold, maintain, protect.
- **predecessor** (noun) – previous holder of the post; forerunner, precursor, antecedent.
- **belying** present participle of **belie** (verb) – misrepresent, falsify, distort.
- **sizeable** (adjective) – substantial, considerable, significant.
- **vertical** (adjective) – upright, perpendicular, straight.
- **divisible pool** (noun) – the taxes of the central government that it should share with the state governments in accordance with the recommendations of the Finance Commission.
- **accrue** (verb) – accumulate, collect, gather.
- **erstwhile** (adjective) – old, previous, former, then.
- **notional** (adjective) – ideal, supposed, assumed.

- **horizontal distribution/devolution** (noun) – the allocation between the States of the respective shares of (proceeds) earnings. whereas, vertical distribution/devolution means the distribution of the net earnings (proceeds) of taxes of the Union between the Union and the States.
- **aggregate** (adjective) – total, combined, whole.
- **criterion** (noun) – basis, standard, norm. (criteria is the plural form of criterion).
- **rejig** (verb) – reorganize, rearrange, alter.
- **human capital** (noun) – the economic value of the abilities and qualities of labour that influence productivity.
- **weight** (noun) – importance, significance, value/power.
- **switch** (noun) – change, move, shift.
- **address** (verb) – attend to, tackle, deal with.
- **voice** (verb) – express, communicate, mention, state.
- **switch** (noun) – change, move, shift, transition.
- **with the exception of** (phrase) – except, excluding, not including, omitting.
- **notably** (adverb) – especially, particularly, primarily.
- **shrink** (verb) – lessen, reduce, decrease.
- **flag** (verb) – indicate, identify, point out.
- **dog** (verb) – trouble, disturb, worry.
- **shortfall** (noun) – deficit, inadequacy/deficiency; shortcoming/defect.
- **volatility** (noun) – fluctuation, inconsistency, unpredictability.
- **granularity** (noun) – the state/quality of including a lot of small details.
- **a share of the pie** (phrase) – a slice of the pie, a piece of the pie; a portion of something available can be distributed.
- **vex** (verb) – upset, trouble, disturb.
- **last-mile** (noun) – a phrase widely used in the telecommunications, cable television and internet industries to refer to the final leg of the telecommunications networks that deliver telecommunication services to retail end-users (customers).
- **fragmented** (adjective) – separated, isolated, disintegrated/collapsed/divided.
- **off-budget** (adjective) – not provided for or included in the regular government budget.
- **parastatal** (noun) – a company/organisation that is controlled wholly or partly by the government.
- **liabilities** (noun) – financial obligation.
- **earmark** (verb) – designate, reserve, set aside.
- **time-bound** (adjective) – related to a certain moment or era in time.

Winning formula: on AAP's victory

AAP won on its governance record, but its tactics do not undermine the BJP's politics

The spectacular victory of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in the Delhi Assembly election is matched in its intensity by the resounding defeat of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Having been in power for the last five years, AAP's second consecutive victory is not an electoral enchantment of a start-up, but an endorsement of its track record. Along the way, its founder and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has perfected a political cocktail that turned out to be the most potent counter to the toxic religious polarisation that the BJP has come to champion. His governance brought succour to Delhi's poorest and the most vulnerable in the form of better and accessible education, health care and water in particular. It is clear that they voted with their feet, and reinvested their faith in the maverick politician. On a strong footing on the administrative front, Mr. Kejriwal deployed his characteristic dexterity to sidestep the BJP's landmines with their aim of communal polarisation. In

the process, he narrowed politics to an efficient delivery of public services and either skirted around all contemporary issues of wider import, or tacitly sided with the majoritarian sentiments on them. Devoid of a governance story, the BJP dragged electioneering to a new low to marginally improve from its 2015 tally. To that extent, the Delhi outcome exposes the limits of divisive politics and incentivises sensitive governance.

To read the Delhi result as a setback to Hindutva politics and a celebration of good governance emptied of all politics, however, will be a misleading exaggeration. True, Delhi is the latest in a series of blows against the BJP since its 2019 parliamentary victory, but it must be flattered by the manner in which its strongest opponent did not directly take it on. AAP did not contest the BJP on questions it framed. AAP's success has not been in defeating the politics of the BJP, but in skirting it altogether. Nevertheless, the lesson that the BJP is likely to learn from Delhi is that hyperventilating on nationalist causes is not a sufficient condition for victory, particularly in State elections, and governance does count. Repeated electoral upsets might spur some voices of dissent in the BJP, hitherto muffled. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah may have to rework their political idiom in order to hold sway. They might even borrow from the AAP playbook, but it will be the non-BJP parties including the Congress that drew a blank for the second time in Delhi, that will be dissecting the results for clues to a winnable non-BJP plank. But it would be a mistake to conclude that taking on majoritarianism by the horns is a poor strategy. The lesson is that any effective opposition to the BJP will have to develop an alternative politics that centrestages people's everyday concerns, and their hopes and expectations about life and livelihood.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **undermine** (verb) – reduce, spoil, damage.
- **resounding** (adjective) – emphatic, colossal, very great, huge, massive.
- **enchantment** (noun) – magic, attraction, enticement, delight.
- **endorsement** (noun) – support, backing, approval.
- **track record** (noun) – previous performance/conduct.
- **along the way** (phrase) – during the course of a particular event.
- **perfect** (verb) – improve, make perfect, make something as good as possible, consummate, achieve/accomplish.
- **cocktail** (noun) – mixture of different substances.
- **turn out** (phrasal verb) – transpire, emerge, appear.
- **potent** (adjective) – strong, powerful, influential.
- **counter** (noun) – something which is opposing or preventing something else.
- **toxic** (adjective) – dangerous, destructive, harmful.
- **polarisation** (noun) – separation of two contrasting groups (based on different opinions/beliefs).
- **champion** (verb) – advocate, promote, support.
- **succour** (noun) – aid/help/support, assistance, relief.
- **vulnerable** (adjective) – relating to a weak/neglected person who is in need of special care/support.
- **vote with their feet** (phrase) – indicate one's approval by staying in (or indicate one's disapproval by walking out).
- **maverick** (adjective) – unusual, distinctive, different/atypical.
- **footing** (noun) – basis/base; status, position.
- **deploy** (verb) – employ (resources).
- **dexterity** (noun) – capability, ability, efficiency.

- **sidestep** (verb) – avoid, evade, dodge, escape.
- **landmine** (noun) – used figuratively to mean an explosive device/mine hidden under or on the ground.
- **narrow** (verb) – diminish, decrease, reduce.
- **skirt around** (verb) – go along something, go around something.
- **contemporary** (adjective) – modern, present-day, current, present-time.
- **tacitly** (adverb) – implicitly, unexpressedly, silently.
- **side with** (verb) – support, favour, prefer, stand by.
- **majoritarian** (adjective) – relating to 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.
- **devoid of** (adjective) – lacking, without, free of/free from.
- **electioneering** (noun) – campaign, canvass, doorstep.
- **divisive** (adjective) – alienating/isolating, disharmonious, discordant.
- **incentivise** (verb) – encourage, motivate, galvanize.
- **read** (verb) – interpret, understand, comprehend.
- **empty** (verb) – remove, vacate, void, clear.
- **exaggeration** (noun) – overstatement, dramatization, hyperbole.
- **blow** (noun) – setback, upset, misfortune.
- **flatter** (verb) – compliment, praise, commend/admire.
- **take on** (phrasal verb) – oppose, challenge, confront/fight, compete against.
- **nevertheless** (adverb) – in spite of that, even so, however.
- **hyperventilate** (verb) – become overexcited.
- **count** (verb) – matter, enter into consideration, be significant, mean a lot.
- **spur** (verb) – stimulate, encourage, motivate.
- **dissent** (noun) – disagreement, disapproval, opposition.
- **hitherto** (adverb) – previously, earlier, so/thus far.
- **muffle** (verb) – quieten/suppress, silence, tone down.
- **idiom** (noun) – expression, way of speaking, set phrase.
- **hold sway** (phrase) – hold power, rule, be most powerful.
- **playbook** (noun) – strategies.
- **draw a blank** (phrase) – fail.
- **dissect** (verb) – analyse, examine, inspect.
- **plank** (noun) – a fundamental & important point/principle on which something (political program, policy, etc) is based on.
- **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.
- **take (the bull) by the horns** (phrase) – to deal with a difficult situation with determination and courage.
- **alternative politics** (noun) – a determination to work with the bottom-up approach rather than top-down and a commitment to politics as peoples' work. It opposes the idea of governance that is limited to the bureaucratized and professional activity restricted to a paid class of persons set apart from the common people of the country. It makes strong pitch for decentralization

decision making apparatus in the governance. It aims at overhauling the politics and political structures of the country.

- **centrestage** (verb) – prioritize, highlight, treat something as a prominent one.
- **livelihood** (noun) – source of income, means of support, living, subsistence.

Reservation as right: on Supreme Court judgment

Ensuring adequate representation to disadvantaged sections is a state obligation

It is quite understandable that a recent Supreme Court judgment, that there is no fundamental right to claim reservation in promotions, has caused some political alarm. The received wisdom in affirmative action jurisprudence is that a series of Constitution amendments and judgments have created a sound legal framework for reservation in public employment, subject to the fulfillment of certain constitutional requirements. And that it has solidified into an entitlement for the backward classes, including the SCs and STs. However, the latest judgment is a reminder that affirmative action programmes allowed in the Constitution flow from “enabling provisions” and are not rights as such. This legal position is not new. Major judgments — these include those by Constitution Benches — note that Article 16(4), on reservation in posts, is enabling in nature. In other words, the state is not bound to provide reservations, but if it does so, it must be in favour of sections that are backward and inadequately represented in the services based on quantifiable data. Thus, the Court is not wrong in setting aside an Uttarakhand High Court order directing data collection on the adequacy or inadequacy of representation of SC/ST candidates in the State’s services. Its reasoning is that once there is a decision not to extend reservation — in this case, in promotions — to the section, the question whether its representation in the services is inadequate is irrelevant.

The root of the current issue lies in the then Congress government’s decision to give up SC/ST quotas in promotions in Uttarakhand. The present BJP regime also shares responsibility as it argued in the Court that there is neither a basic right to reservations nor a duty by the State government to provide it. The idea that reservation is not a right may be in consonance with the Constitution allowing it as an option, but a larger question looms: Is there no government obligation to continue with affirmative action if the social situation that keeps some sections backward and at the receiving end of discrimination persists? Reservation is no more seen by the Supreme Court as an exception to the equality rule; rather, it is a facet of equality. The terms “proportionate equality” and “substantive equality” have been used to show that the equality norm acquires completion only when the marginalised are given a legal leg-up. Some may even read into this an inescapable state obligation to extend reservation to those who need it, lest its absence render the entire system unequal. For instance, if no quotas are implemented and no study on backwardness and extent of representation is done, it may result in a perceptible imbalance in social representation in public services. Will the courts still say a direction cannot be given to gather data and provide quotas to those with inadequate representation?

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **disadvantaged** (adjective) – underprivileged, depressed, deprived (people).
- **obligation** (noun) – necessary condition/necessity, requirement; duty/responsibility.
- **received wisdom** (phrase) – conventional wisdom, common knowledge, accepted ideas (as true), popular belief (which may be questionable).
- **affirmative action** (noun) – it means positive steps taken to increase the representation of (women and) minorities in areas of employment, education, and culture from which they have been historically excluded.

- **jurisprudence** (noun) – body of laws/rules; legal system.
- **sound** (noun) – substantial, strong; reasonable, logical.
- **framework** (noun) – structure, scheme, system.
- **subject to** (adjective) – conditional on, contingent on, dependent on, depending on.
- **solidify** (verb) – make stronger, reinforce, consolidate.
- **entitlement** (noun) – allowance, allocation, ration/grant.
- **provision** (noun) – term, clause, requirement.
- **as such** (phrase) – in itself, intrinsically, by itself.
- **bound to** (adjective) – certain/sure, very likely, guaranteed; under obligation, compelled.
- **quantifiable** (adjective) – able to be measured as a quantity.
- **quantifiable data** (noun) – all data that is quantifiable, verifiable, and amenable to statistical manipulation classifies as quantitative data.
- **set aside** (phrasal verb) – overrule, overturn, cancel/dismiss.
- **adequacy** (noun) – sufficiency, effectiveness, acceptability.
- **irrelevant** (adjective) – immaterial, unrelated, not germane.
- **root** (noun) – source, origin, reason.
- **lie in** (phrasal verb) – be present, be contained, exist.
- **give up** (phrasal verb) – abandon, forgo, renounce.
- **consonance** (noun) – agreement, concord, accordance.
- **loom** (verb) – emerge, appear, become visible.
- **(be) at the receiving end of** (phrase) – be subjected to something.
- **discrimination** (noun) – prejudice, bias/bigotry, intolerance/inequity.
- **persist** (verb) – continue, carry on, keep going.
- **no more** (phrase) – neither.
- **exception** (noun) – special case, anomaly, peculiarity.
- **facet** (noun) – aspect, feature, characteristic/nuance.
- **proportionate equality** (noun) – the treatment of relevant persons/groups according to their due. This means that distribution will not be numerically equal but will be governed in relation to persons' deemed rightful needs.
- **substantive equality** (noun) – a fundamental aspect of human rights law that is concerned with equitable outcomes and equal opportunities for disadvantaged and marginalized people and groups in society.
- **the marginalised** (noun) – people who are treated as insignificant, treated as unimportant, neglected.
- **leg-up** (noun) – support provided to improve one's situation; contribution, allowance, benefaction.
- **read into** (phrasal verb) – assume from, attribute to, infer from.
- **inescapable** (adjective) – unavoidable, sure, required.
- **lest** (conjunction) – in case, just in case, in order to avoid.
- **render** (verb) – make, cause to be, cause to become.
- **backwardness** (noun) – the condition/state of not developed.
- **perceptible** (adjective) – noticeable, perceivable, visible.
- **imbalance** (noun) – disparity, variation, disproportion, unevenness.

“COINS ALWAYS MAKE SOUNDS BUT PAPER MONEYS ARE ALWAYS SILENT SO,
WHEN YOUR VALUE INCREASES, KEEP YOURSELF SILENT AND HUMBLE.”