

A royal mess : on the turmoil in telecom industry

Only pragmatism and prudence can lift the telecom industry from its current troubles

It cannot possibly get messier than this. The telecom industry is in turmoil unable to pay up its dues as per the Supreme Court verdict on adjusted gross revenues delivered in October last; the Court is aghast that its order is not being complied with; and then there is the government torn between revenue considerations, the need to uphold sanctity of contracts, and ensuring that one of the players does not go under in the process of honouring the verdict. **Faced with the wrath of the Court**, Bharti **Airtel paid Rs. 10,000 crore** on Monday with the promise of paying the rest before mid-March when the court will hear the case next. Vodafone Idea, the one hit the most by the judgment, on Monday sought more time to pay up but the Court was in no mood to humour the company and refused to hear the plea. The company eventually paid Rs. 2,500 crore by the evening. The two companies, as indeed the others in the industry, have only themselves to blame for the predicament that they find themselves in now. They could have paid up their annual dues over the years — which were not material in relation to their respective turnovers — under protest even as they litigated the case in the top court. That would have obviated the need to pay interest and penalties now which are higher than the actual dues. At the very least, they ought to have provided for the liability in their balance sheets as a contingency, which they failed to do.

While they have to pay the price for this now, what can be done to ensure that the blow is not fatal? If Vodafone shuts shop, not only will the industry be reduced to a duopoly, with all the attendant consequences for customers but it will also lead to loss of about 15,000 direct jobs and several thousand more indirect ones. Worse, the cascading effect will be felt across the economy as lenders face the consequences of the company going bankrupt — non-performing assets will rise. Telecom equipment suppliers may also go down as their dues will not be paid. And what happens to the 212 million Vodafone subscribers? It is doubtful whether the other two players can absorb them all. The industry is critical to the **government's plans** for a digital economy not to mention its revenues, including from the upcoming 5G spectrum auctions. The government has to, therefore, examine what it can do to save the situation without disrespecting the Court's verdict. Legislation to offer a staggered payment schedule that ensures that the net present value of future payments is equal to the dues is one option experts are suggesting. There could be other options that can be considered in conjunction with the industry, including reducing the adjusted gross revenue-based licence fees and spectrum usage charges. Whatever route it chooses to soften the blow, the government will have to get the Court on its side at the next hearing on March 17. The need of the hour is pragmatism laced with prudence on all sides to clean up this royal mess.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **royal** (adjective) – big, huge, total/utter.
- **turmoil** (noun) – trouble, chaos, disorder, disruption.
- **pragmatism** (noun) – expediency, realism, taking advantage/common sense.
- **prudence** (noun) – cautiousness, carefulness, good judgement/management.
- **messier** (comparative adjective) of **messy** (adjective) – (of a situation/condition) chaotic, confused, disorganized, difficult to deal with.
- **pay up** (phrasal verb) – make payment in full, pay in full, settle up, meet one's obligations.
- **aghast** (adjective) – horrified, stunned, shocked, dismayed/concerned/upset.

- **comply with** (verb) – abide by, adhere to, conform to.
- **be torn between** (verb) – be in a state of confusion between two contrasting options.
- **uphold** (verb) – confirm, endorse/approve, vindicate/validate.
- **sanctity** (noun) – ultimate importance, inviolability; righteousness, goodness.
- **go under** (phrasal verb) – be closed, go bankrupt, become insolvent.
- **honour** (verb) – fulfil, follow, obey; implement, perform, execute.
- **face** (verb) – encounter, experience, confront.
- **wrath** (noun) – anger/fury, indignation, discontentment.
- **seek** (verb) – ask for, request, appeal for.
- **in no mood to** (phrase) – not willing to do something.
- **humour** (verb) – adapt, accommodate, go along with, comply with.
- **plea** (noun) – appeal, petition, request.
- **indeed** (adverb) – in fact, actually, undeniably.
- **predicament** (noun) – difficulty, issue, problematic situation.
- **material** (adjective) – significant, major, important.
- **litigate** (verb) – dispute, take issue with, take a stand against (in a lawsuit).
- **obviate** (verb) – avoid, prevent, eliminate.
- **at the very least** (phrase) – to put it mildly, without any exaggeration, taking pessimistic view.
- **ought to** (modal verb) – must, should.
- **liability** (noun) – (financial) obligation, debt, arrears/dues; accountability, responsibility.
- **balance sheet** (noun) – a statement that shows the financial condition of a company at a particular point in time.
- **contingency** (noun) – planning, prearrangement, precautionary measures/steps (for a possible event or circumstance).
- **pay the price** (phrase) – experience bad/unpleasant result of something that you have done.
- **blow** (noun) – setback, upset, misfortune.
- **fatal** (noun) – destructive, disastrous, crippling, catastrophic.
- **shut shop** (phrase) – stop doing business permanently.
- **duopoly** (noun) – it is used to describe any market where two firms dominate.
- **attendant** (adjective) – connected, associated, related.
- **consequence** (noun) – outcome, ramification, repercussion.
- **cascading reaction/effect** (noun) – an inevitable and sometimes unforeseen chain of events due to an act affecting a system.
- **bankrupt** (adjective) – relating to an individual or organisation who is declared as bankrupt by the court when the party (individual/organisation) can no longer meet debt payments to creditors.
- **non-performing assets** (NPAs) (noun) – bad loans, troubled accounts, stressed loans; an account where principal and/or interest remains overdue for a period of time.
- **spectrum** (noun) – range, gamut; it here refers to a range of radio-waves that are used for communication purposes.
- **disrespect** (verb) – disregard, neglect, ignore.
- **staggered** (adjective) – spaced out, spread out, timed at intervals (of payments/dues as they don't happen at the same time).
- **in conjunction** (phrase) – cooperatively, together, jointly.
- **get/have someone on your side** (phrase) – used to say that you have an advantage that increases your chances of success.
- **need of the hour** (phrase) – some need/requirement/demand at a particular point of time.
- **lace (with)** (verb) – give a quality/feature; fortify, strengthen.
- **clean up** (phrasal verb) – restore, fix, overhaul/revamp.

Perverse zeal: On Kafeel Khan arrest

The NSA's misuse to suppress political dissent is a blot on India's democratic credentials

The detention of Dr. Kafeel Khan under the National Security Act (NSA), within days of his being granted bail, betrays the perverse zeal with which the Uttar Pradesh government is hounding the suspended government doctor. His arrest, at Mumbai airport, was in connection with an allegedly inflammatory speech he had made on the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Act at Aligarh Muslim University in December 2019. The Special Task Force of the U.P. police accused him of promoting enmity through his speech. It was obvious that the flawed approach that treats criticism of government policy as though it is some anti-national activity was at work. Although he was granted bail, he was not immediately released. A few days later, the NSA was invoked against him, ostensibly to prevent him from acting in a manner prejudicial to public order. The paediatrician from Gorakhpur was sought to be blamed when oxygen shortage in the BRD Medical College Hospital led to nearly 60 children dying in 2017. After he had spent months in jail, an internal inquiry absolved him of the charges of negligence and corruption. However, the State government said he had not been given a clean chit. A fresh departmental inquiry was ordered against him for "spreading misinformation" about the probe report, and some alleged "anti-government" remarks during his suspension.

That the authorities invoked a stringent preventive detention law meant only for booking those whose activities constitute an imminent threat of violence shows that they are not content with prosecuting him. If they were under a bona fide belief that his speech was provocative, they could have filed a charge sheet and let the court decide if it attracted Section 153A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). The resort to preventive detention as soon as a person is granted bail, with the perverse purpose of continuing his imprisonment, is not uncommon in the country, but the practice is condemnable. It normally indicates mala fide targeting by the administration concerned, and one does not need to look beyond the case of Dr. Kafeel himself to conclude that the latest instance of the resort to the NSA is aimed at inflicting disproportionate punishment on him for expressing political dissent on a supposedly forbidden subject. It is regrettable that the police and the bureaucracy appear to act in wanton disregard for basic rights. The relentless hounding of Dr. Khan is a blot on the country's democratic credentials. Taking the cue from growing opinion, most recently articulated by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud of the Supreme Court, that protest and criticism directed at government policy do not amount to being anti-national, officials should pause before they are seen as enablers of the excesses of an authoritarian dispensation. To invoke the NSA in cases where sections of the IPC would suffice is to undermine its efficacy as a tool to protect national security.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **perverse** (adjective) – illogical, irrational, unreasonable; wrong, incorrect.
- **zeal** (noun) – passion, fervour, eagerness, interest.
- **suppress** (verb) – control, restrain, stifle; crack down on, clamp down on.
- **dissent** (noun) – disagreement, disapproval, opposition.
- **blot** (noun) – flaw/fault, defect; stigma/shame.
- **credentials** (noun) – identity, history, quality.
- **detention** (noun) – confinement/incarceration, captivity, custody.
- **betray** (verb) – reveal, exhibit, disclose, communicate.
- **hound** (verb) – harass, pressurize, pursue (continuously & harshly).
- **allegedly** (adverb) – supposedly, purportedly, reportedly.

- **inflammatory** (adjective) – provocative, provoking, agitating, fomenting.
- **contentious** (adjective) – controversial, disputable, debatable.
- **enmity** (noun) – opposition, hatred/hate, bitterness.
- **flawed** (adjective) – defective, faulty, distorted, inaccurate.
- **at work** (phrase) – in action.
- **invoke** (verb) – cite, refer to, appeal to.
- **ostensibly** (adverb) – apparently, seemingly, allegedly, supposedly.
- **prejudicial** (adjective) – disadvantageous, unfavourable, detrimental.
- **paediatrician** (noun) – the doctor who is specialized in children health care and their diseases.
- **seek** (verb) – try, attempt, aim.
- **absolve** (verb) – discharge, acquit, vindicate.
- **negligence** (noun) – carelessness, irresponsibility, disregard; inattention/laxness.
- **clean chit** (noun) – In India, the expression is used to mean 'cleared of any wrongdoing'. Native speakers of English prefer to use '**clean sheet**', instead.
- **stringent** (adjective) – strict/stern, severe, tough/rigorous.
- **preventative detention** (noun) – it means to detain a person so that to prevent that person from commenting on any possible crime or in other words preventive detention is an action taken by the administration on the grounds of the suspicion that some wrong actions may be done by the person concerned which will be prejudicial to the state.
- **constitute** (verb) – be equivalent to, be regarded as, act as.
- **imminent** (adjective) – close, near, about to happen, fast approaching/impending.
- **content with** (verb) – be satisfied, satisfy.
- **prosecute** (verb) – charge with, accuse of, indict.
- **bona fide** (adjective) – genuine, real, authentic, true.
- **charge sheet** (noun) – an official document on which a police officer enters details of the charge against a person.
- **resort** (noun) – recourse to, turning to, the use of, utilizing.
- **condemnable** (adjective) – objectionable, unjustifiable, reprehensible.
- **mala fide** (adjective) – Latin phrase meaning "with or in bad faith"; dishonest, illegal.
- **look beyond** (verb) – anticipate, look forward, try to think, plan further than something.
- **inflict on** (verb) – impose, force, thrust.
- **disproportionate** (adjective) – inordinate, unreasonable, excessive.
- **forbidden** (adjective) – prohibited, not acceptable, banned, not allowed.
- **regrettable** (adjective) – undesirable, unfortunate, disappointing/distressing.
- **bureaucracy** (noun) – administration, government, the establishment.
- **wanton** (adjective) – deliberate, wilful, arbitrary.
- **relentless** (adjective) – persistent, continuing, steady/intense.
- **cue** (noun) – sign, indication, signal.
- **articulate** (verb) – express, point out, mention.
- **amount to** (verb) – be regarded as, be classified as, be equal to.
- **enabler** (noun) – a person who encourages negative behaviour.
- **excesses** (noun) – uncontrolled/unrestricted behaviour.
- **authoritarian** (adjective) – oppressive, dictatorial, totalitarian.
- **dispensation** (noun) – administration; system, government.
- **suffice** (adjective) – be enough, be sufficient, be adequate.
- **undermine** (verb) – reduce, spoil, damage.
- **efficacy** (noun) – effectiveness, efficiency, power/ability to give estimated results.

Choice and candidacy: On crime and politics

De-criminalisation of politics cannot be achieved by judicial fiat alone

The idea of removing the taint of criminality from electoral politics has been engaging the country for decades. Yet, whatever progress made in this regard has been through the **initiative of the Supreme Court** and the **Election Commission**. Political parties which ought to be cleansing the system with legislation and internal organisational reforms have done precious little, and their reluctance to avoid fielding those with criminal antecedents is quite obvious. The Court, in September 2018, sought to enforce greater disclosure norms about electoral candidates. On noting the "alarming increase" of those with a criminal background in the last four general elections, the top court has now come up with an additional requirement while hearing a contempt of court petition. Now, parties have been asked to explain candidate choice and why those with criminal cases pending against them were preferred over those with no such record. The Court has asked national and regional parties to disclose the reason for their selection "with reference to qualifications, achievements and merit of the candidates concerned", and barred them from merely citing "winnability" as a reason. In addition to full disclosure of the cases pending against them on their official websites and social media accounts, the parties are also required to publish these details in a local regional language paper and a national newspaper. This is a forward movement from the present situation in which the burden of disclosure is on candidates through mandatory affidavits filed along with their nomination papers.

The **latest order** is in line with a series of judgments aimed at preserving the purity of the election process: directions to ensure the asset disclosure and criminal records of candidates, the incorporation of the 'none of the above' option in the voting machine, and the invalidation of a clause that protected sitting legislators from immediate disqualification after conviction. In addition, the Court has directed the establishment of special courts in all States for the quick disposal of cases involving elected representatives. However, it must be underscored that de-criminalisation of politics cannot be achieved by judicial fiat alone. The political class has to respond to the challenge. Parties would probably justify their choice of candidates by pointing out that the law now bars only those convicted and not those facing charges, however serious they may be. Besides, they are apt to dismiss all pending cases as "politically motivated". A legislative option is to amend the law to bar from contest those against whom charges have been framed. A more meaningful option would be for parties to refrain from giving ticket to such candidates. Beyond this debate, a larger question looms: what good will more information on the background of candidates do, if voters back a particular leader or party without reference to the record of the candidates fielded?

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **candidacy** (noun) – the state/condition/fact of being a candidate, particularly in an election; candidate-ship.
- **de-criminalisation** (noun) – the process of making something as a legal/legitimate one.
- **fiat** (noun) – order, decree, command, diktat.
- **taint** (noun) – trace, hint, tinge (of a bad quality).
- **criminality** (noun) – the state/condition of being criminal.
- **in this regard** (phrase) – in connection with the aspect/consideration/point referred earlier.
- **ought to** (modal verb) – must, should.
- **cleanse** (verb) – rid, clear, free, purify, purge (something unpleasant/bad).
- **precious little** (phrase) – very little (to emphasis something).
- **reluctance** (noun) – unwillingness, disinclination, hesitation.

- **antecedent** (noun) – past, background, record, history.
- **sought** past and past participle of **seek** (verb) – try, attempt, aim.
- **alarming** (adjective) – worrying, disturbing, shocking/distressing.
- **come up with** (phrasal verb) – submit/suggest, propose, put forward.
- **contempt of court** (noun) – the offense of being disobedient to or disrespectful toward a court of law and its officers in the form of behavior that opposes or defies the authority, justice and dignity of the court.
- **with reference to** (phrase) – in relation to, as regards, with respect to, on the subject of.
- **merit** (noun) – quality, level, worthiness/goodness.
- **bar** (verb) – block, ban, exclude.
- **merely** (adverb) – only, simply, just.
- **winnability** (noun) – a capacity/ability for winning.
- **affidavit** (noun) – sworn statement, self attestation, self declaration (of a person).
- **in line with** (phrase) – in alignment with, in accordance with.
- **clause** (noun) – term, condition, provision, requirement.
- **conviction** (noun) – sentence, judgement, verdict.
- **disposal** (noun) – getting rid of, discarding/jettisoning, scrapping.
- **underscore** (verb) – underline, emphasize, highlight.
- **point out** (phrasal verb) – identify, recognize, draw attention to, mention.
- **convicted** (adjective) – declared guilty of a crime.
- **apt** (adjective) – smart, intelligent, clever.
- **refrain from** (verb) – stop oneself, abstain, desist from, hold back.
- **loom** (verb) – emerge, appear, become visible.
- **back** (verb) – support, endorse, uphold.

Trump cards: On U.S. President's India visit

Even if the Trump visit yields no big deal, some agreement on trade will be made

Ahead of **U.S. President Donald Trump's visit to India**, some of the **key deliverables from the trip**, as well as the outcomes that may not be delivered after his meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday, are coming into view. The larger question remains as to whether the **bonhomie between the two**, who will be meeting for the fifth time in eight months, will also spur the bilateral relationship towards broader outcomes, with expectations centred at bilateral strategic ties, trade and energy relations as well as cooperation on India's regional environment. On the strategic front, India and the U.S. are expected to take forward military cooperation and **defence purchases** totalling about \$3 billion. Mr. Trump has cast a cloud over the possibility of a trade deal being announced, but is expected to bring U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer to give a last push towards the trade package being discussed for nearly two years. **Both sides have lowered expectations** of any major deal coming through, given that differences remain over a range of tariffs from both sides; market access for U.S. products; and **India's demand that the U.S. restore its GSP** (Generalised System of Preferences) status. However, it would be a setback if some sort of announcement on trade is not made. A failure to do so would denote the second missed opportunity since Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal's U.S. visit last September. Finally, much of the attention will be taken by India's regional fault-lines: the Indo-Pacific strategy to the east and Afghanistan's future to the west. India and the U.S. are expected to upgrade their 2015 joint vision statement on the Indo-Pacific to increase their cooperation on freedom of navigation, particularly with a view to containing China. Meanwhile, the U.S.-Taliban deal is expected to

be finalised next week, and the two leaders will discuss India's role in Afghanistan, given Pakistan's influence over any future dispensation that includes the Taliban.

Any high-level visit, particularly that of a U.S. President to India, is as much about the optics as it is about the outcomes. It is clear that both sides see the joint public rally at Ahmedabad's Motera Stadium as the centrepiece of the visit, where the **leaders hope to attract** about 1.25 lakh people in the audience. Despite the Foreign Ministry's statement to the contrary, the **narrative will be political**. Mr. Trump will pitch the Motera event as part of his election campaign back home. By choosing Gujarat as the venue, Mr. Modi too is scoring some political points with his home State. As they stand together, the two leaders, who have both been criticised in the last few months for not following democratic norms domestically, will hope to answer their critics with the message that they represent the world's oldest democracy and the world's largest one, respectively.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **trump card** (noun) – valuable resource used as a surprise in order to gain an advantage.
- **yield** (verb) – give, provide, produce.
- **outcome** (noun) – result, consequence, aftermath, development.
- **come into view** (phrase) – become visible.
- **bonhomie** (noun) – friendliness, warmth, geniality/affability.
- **spur** (verb) – stimulate, encourage, motivate.
- **bilateral** (adjective) – involving two groups or countries.
- **centre** (verb) – focus, concentrate, pivot, be based.
- **take forward** (phrasal verb) – deal with/handle, address, take responsibility for.
- **cast a (dark) cloud over** (phrase) – to make someone to feel less happy/hopeful; to cause people to stop believing something.
- **give one last push** (phrase) – the final effort in a difficult/challenging endeavor.
- **come through** (phrasal verb) – be processed; to do what is expected/needed.
- **market access** (noun) – it means the conditions, tariff and non-tariff measures, agreed by (WTA) members for the entry of specific goods into their markets.
- **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.
- **setback** (noun) – problem, difficulty, issue.
- **sort of** (phrase) – to some extent, somewhat, somehow.
- **fault-line** (noun) – a divisive issue; a difference of opinion.
- **contain** (verb) – control, limit, restrain.
- **influence** (verb) – domination, control, sway, power, authority.
- **dispensation** (noun) – administration; system, government.
- **optics** (noun) – (typically in a political situation) the way in which an event is recognized by the public.
- **rally** (noun) – gathering, assembly, meeting.
- **centrepiece** (noun) – central component, focal point, best part.
- **to the contrary** (phrase) – in opposite to.
- **narrative** (noun) – a representation of a particular situation; portrayal/account.
- **pitch** (verb) – set up, position, place.
- **back home** (phrase) – in one's country/hometown.
- **score** (verb) – get, gain, achieve, attain.
- **norm** (noun) – standard, convention, regulation.

➤ **critic** (noun) – fault-finder, detractor, censurer.

Phrasal Verb	Meaning	Example
Be fed up	Be bored, upset or sick of something.	I AM FED UP of his complaints.
Be in	Be at home or at work.	They ARE never IN; I always get their answer phone.
Be in	Be submitted, arrive.	The application form must BE IN by 3pm on Friday.
Be in on	Be involved in.	Susan was the only one who WASN'T IN ON the plan.
Be not on	Be unacceptable.	The way he's behaving IS just NOT ON.
Be off	Be bad (of food).	This yoghurt must BE OFF; it smells foul.
Be off	Depart, leave.	I'm OFF home; it's five o'clock.
Be on	Be functioning (of machines).	The computer IS ON.
Be on	Take place.	The show IS ON for the next three months.
Be on	Take medication or drugs, especially when they affect the person badly.	He IS ON anti-depressants and has become very difficult to please.
Be on	Be at the top of one's game, performing very well.	He IS really ON right now- three goals in five minutes!
Be on about	Mean, try to say.	I couldn't understand what he WAS ON ABOUT- it made no sense.

☞ **“Remember That Life’s Greatest Lessons Are Usually Learned At The Worst Times And From The Worst Mistakes..”** ☞