

SHINE A LIGHT : ON RETRACTION OF A RESEARCH PAPER

The scientific process must be protected from those seeking power and riches

Two weeks ago, a study in *The Lancet*, perhaps the most influential medical journal in the world, found no benefit from the use of hydroxychloroquine (HCQ), a well-known antimalarial, to treat sick COVID-19 patients. Today, that study stands retracted. As it had relied on a huge dataset of about 96,000 patients sourced from 671 hospitals in six continents, the World Health Organization, citing a 'do no harm' principle, suspended drug trials pending a safety review. This led to some countries in Europe withdrawing the drug from their own trials. Another study involving some of the same authors and relying on the same data published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, which sought to answer questions on the associations between cardiovascular disease, COVID-19 and drugs that target the enzymes that play a role in facilitating the virus in attacking a host, has also been retracted. The *Lancet* study triggered a backlash from scientists who found problems with the methodology and, more importantly, the dataset. It emerged that mortality attributed to the disease in Australia did not match with the country's own estimates; there was no way to tally patient records and the hospitals they were sourced from; and there were problems with the statistics deployed and the conclusions about the potential risk from the drug.

The bigger concern was that the data was supplied by Surgisphere Corporation, which had a handful of employees with limited scientific expertise, and claimed to have aggregated its numbers by compiling electronic health records in less than two months. Experienced clinical trial specialists said this was a labour-intensive process. Moreover, when aspersions about the data started to swirl, the company, citing client confidentiality, said it was unable to share its data sources for independent assessment. In their retractions, the journals have blamed Surgisphere for being opaque with its primary data. So far, neither journal has introspected on the peer-review process that led to these studies being published in the first place. In hindsight it seems obvious that a disinterested analysis would have raised eyebrows regarding data sourcing, but the post-COVID world is a panic-driven one that has left no institution or appraisal process untouched. The average peer-review takes weeks and the clinical trial process months, but now the expectation is that science delivers its results like magic. For years now, questions have been raised on the effectiveness of the traditional, time-consuming peer-review process and this has launched a welcome culture of papers being uploaded as preprints for review. In the present instance of the HCQ imbroglio, it is the independent effort by external scientists that brought the blight to light. The key lesson is that it is a mistake to assume the scientific process as one divorced from the influence of power, privilege, finance and politics. The means and methods to a scientific result matter more than results — only achieved through global scrutiny. Openness, more than blame game, is what the post-COVID world needs now.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- ❖ **shine a light** (phrase) – to examine something more precisely in order to make it more clear.
- ❖ **retraction** (noun) – a withdrawal of a statement.
- ❖ **perhaps** (adverb) – maybe, possibly.
- ❖ **influential** (adjective) – powerful, authoritative, strong.
- ❖ **rely on** (phrasal verb) – depend on; resort to, have recourse to.
- ❖ **retract** (verb) – take back, withdraw, reverse.
- ❖ **do no harm** principle (phrase) – it means taking every precaution to ensure people will not be adversely impacted by the programme, including inadvertently.
- ❖ **seek** (verb) – try, attempt, work towards.
- ❖ **cardiovascular** (adjective) – relating to the heart and blood vessels.
- ❖ **enzyme** (noun) – a substance that acts as a catalyst in living organisms.
- ❖ **play a part/role** (phrase) – contribute to, be instrumental in, be a factor in.
- ❖ **facilitate** (verb) – make easier, make possible; assist, help, aid.
- ❖ **host** (noun) – host cell (in which a virus multiplies).
- ❖ **trigger** (verb) – give rise to, cause, invoke, bring about.
- ❖ **backlash** (noun) – a strong negative reaction; adverse response, counteraction.
- ❖ **mortality** (noun) – (in a particular time/for a cause) the rate/number of death.
- ❖ **attribute** (verb) – regard/consider as a reason; connect with, associate with.
- ❖ **deploy** (verb) – employ (resources into effective action).
- ❖ **potential** (adjective) – possible, likely, probable.
- ❖ **handful** (adjective) – few, one or two, a small number.
- ❖ **aggregate** (verb) – combine, group, collect.
- ❖ **expertise** (noun) – skill, mastery, proficiency, knowledge.
- ❖ **compile** (verb) – organize, put together, make up, systemize.
- ❖ **intensive** (adjective/usually in combination) – (in business) concentrating on a particular thing.

- ❖ **moreover** (adverb) – besides, furthermore, in addition.
- ❖ **aspersions** (noun) – condemnation, criticism, castigation.
- ❖ **swirl** (verb) – circulate, revolve, spiral/spin.
- ❖ **assessment** (noun) – evaluation, appraisal, analysis.
- ❖ **opaque** (adjective) – unclear, uncertain, unexplained, confusing, unfathomable, incomprehensible.
- ❖ **so far** (phrase) – until now, up to the present, up to this point.
- ❖ **introspect** (verb) – self-examine, self analyse.
- ❖ **peer-review** (noun) – a process by which something research or publication is evaluated by a group of experts in the appropriate field.
- ❖ **hindsight** (noun) – recognizing something (a situation/event/decision) after it has occurred; on re-examination, in retrospect.
- ❖ **disinterested** (adjective) – indifferent, unconcerned, uncaring.
- ❖ **raise eyebrows** (phrase) – show surprise.
- ❖ **panic-driven** (adjective) – controlled/moved by panic.
- ❖ **untouched** (adjective) – unaffected, unchanged, uninfluenced.
- ❖ **time-consuming** (adjective) – arduous, demanding, challenging.
- ❖ **instance** (noun) – example, case in point.
- ❖ **imbroglio** (noun) – confused/complicated situation; difficulty/predicament.
- ❖ **bring (something) to light** (phrase) – reveal, disclose, expose, show up.
- ❖ **blight** (noun) – affliction, trouble, scourge, plague.
- ❖ **assume** (verb) – acquire, take on, adopt, come to have.
- ❖ **divorce from** (verb) – separate, disconnect, isolate.
- ❖ **influence** (noun) – control, sway, hold/power.
- ❖ **privilege** (noun) – (special) advantage, entitlement, right, honour.
- ❖ **means and methods** (phrase) – techniques or tactics/procedures.
- ❖ **scrutiny** (noun) – observation, inspection, examination.
- ❖ **openness** (noun) – transparency, straightforwardness, clearness, candidness.

WINNING FORMULA: ON REVIVAL OF FORMULA ONE

The best way to revive sport activities is to make a cautious, slow, low-key start

Just as the various global sporting leagues slowly revive, Formula One will do so too following the announcement of an eight-race revised calendar starting with a double-header in Austria during July. Earlier, the season-opening Australian Grand Prix in March was cancelled at the eleventh hour after the whole contingent gathered at Melbourne when a member of the McLaren Formula One team tested positive for COVID-19. Since then, the sport has witnessed its first 10 rounds of the 22-race calendar either being cancelled or postponed. Recently the German football league, Bundesliga, restarted its season, while the Premier League is scheduled to commence later this month. However, unlike football or other domestic leagues that are localised and can be played in a controlled environment, F1 faces unique challenges due to its global footprint that hops across five continents through the year. It also requires a huge amount of personnel and cargo movements to run an event. With travel curbs across the world, the sport has restricted the initial eight races to its spiritual home of Europe, with Austria and Britain hosting multiple events. F1 has now adopted a set of operating procedures to get the show back on track, with every participant to be tested before and during the race weekend. Apart from there being no spectators, only 80 members per team will be allowed at the race track while the broadcast crew will be a mere 60.

The reworked F1 will have 1,200 essential staff, previously close to 5,000. More importantly, with even a small-sized team employing nearly 300 to 400, from engineers to mechanics, the sport needs a start to keep the teams afloat not just this year but beyond as well. The F1 Group has already pledged to pay 100% of prize money to the teams, and for that it needs the show to go on. A minimum of eight races is needed to constitute a world championship and it is understood 15-18 races are required in a year to maximise the TV rights revenues especially at a time when the race-hosting fees, a major component of the F1 group's revenue, is unlikely to be paid by the various countries. With jobs at stake, Formula One has made the right call to make its best attempt at starting the season. At the same time, the sport needs to be nimble to make quick decisions in case of unexpected scenarios, and the lessons learnt from Australia should hold the organisers in good stead. If F1 can demonstrate a good restart, it will inspire the rest of the sporting industry to get back on its feet.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- ❖ **revival** (noun) – reintroduction, restoration, re-establishment.
- ❖ **revive** (verb) – reintroduce, restore, re-establish, bring/get back.

- ❖ **double-header** (noun) – a pair of games played one after another (consecutively).
- ❖ **Grand Prix** (noun) – any of several international races in which participants compete for a world championship & major prize, (especially one of a series for Formula One racing cars).
- ❖ **contingent** (noun) – unit, crew, group (of people).
- ❖ **localize** (verb) – limit or restrict to a particular place.
- ❖ **footprint** (noun) – impression, mark, trace, impact.
- ❖ **hop** (verb) – move, jump, pass from one place to another (quickly).
- ❖ **personnel** (noun) – staff, employees, workforce.
- ❖ **cargo** (noun) – goods, consignment, baggage.
- ❖ **curb** (noun) – restraint, control/check, restriction, limitation.
- ❖ **one's spiritual home** (phrase) – the place where you feel as a member or part of it.
- ❖ **standard operating procedure/ protocol** (SOP) (noun) – a detailed, written document consisting of step-by-step information on routine activities necessary to complete tasks in accordance with specific regulations or standards.
- ❖ **on track** (phrase) – on course, on target, on schedule, on time.
- ❖ **spectator** (noun) – onlooker, viewer, observer.
- ❖ **mere** (adjective) – just, only, minimal.
- ❖ **afloat** (adjective) – out of burden, out of difficulty, out of debt.
- ❖ **pledge** (verb) – promise, swear, vow.
- ❖ **go on** (phrasal verb) – continue, carry on, proceed.
- ❖ **constitute** (verb) – comprise, make up, compose; function as, serve as.
- ❖ **unlikely** (adjective) – not likely, improbable, doubtful.
- ❖ **at stake** (phrase) – at risk, at issue, in question.
- ❖ **make the right call** (phrase) – make the best decision possible given the situation.
- ❖ **nimble** (adjective) – active, quick, skillful; quick-thinking, clever.
- ❖ **scenario** (noun) – situation.
- ❖ **stand/hold someone in good stead** (phrase) – benefit/help, be advantageous to, be of use to.
- ❖ **(get) back on one's feet** (phrase) – to be successful again after having problems.

UPPER HAND: ON BJP'S PUSH TO CONTROL RAJYA SABHA

The battle for Rajya Sabha control is crucial for the BJP to push its agenda without resistance

The BJP won two consecutive majorities in the Lok Sabha but still stands short of one in the Rajya Sabha. But it is, along with its partners, making a gradual upward climb, though the halfway mark is still some distance away. A string of losses in State elections in recent years slowed down its pursuit and there are more State polls in the near future that will influence its fortunes. The BJP is currently the single largest party in the Rajya Sabha with 75 members. Together with its allies, including the nominated and independent members, the tally hovers around 102 in a house of 245. The Congress is perhaps at its lowest tally, with 39 members. The Congress and its friendly parties count to 73, which includes Left parties (6), TMC (13), SP (8), NCP (4) and one each of JD (S), IUML and Kerala Congress (Mani). These numbers are fluid as parties have hopped sides depending on issues. Another cohort of parties that largely favour the ruling dispensation include the Biju Janata Dal, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), TDP and TRS. On June 19, elections will take place for 24 Rajya Sabha seats — only part of existing vacancies — across 10 States, and the ruling party appears to be on an overdrive to maximise its numbers.

The lack of a majority in the Rajya Sabha was considered a hindrance for the BJP in the first term, particularly for economic reforms. The party devised a dubious route to bypass the Upper House in lawmaking by arbitrarily labelling bills as money bills that need approval only by the Lok Sabha. The constitutional validity of this blatant approach was challenged in the Supreme Court, where the case is now lingering. The BJP has managed to muster the numbers in the Rajya Sabha for controversial laws that advance its social and political agenda in its second term. Last July, the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill was passed despite opposition to some of the provisions from NDA allies, the JD(U) and AIADMK. The Triple Talaq Bill as it is popularly known, sailed through as parties such as the BSP conveniently went missing during the vote. The government could also get the numbers to pass the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill. The BJP has been relentlessly chiselling away at the Opposition ranks, meanwhile. On August 5 last year, as the Centre moved the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, Congress chief whip Bhubaneswar Kalita was nowhere to be seen. He resigned and has since found his way back to the Rajya Sabha on the BJP ticket. The TDP lost four of its six members and Samajwadi Party, three over the last year. The BJP also has a younger bench in the house of the elders compared to the Congress. It is not that the lack of a majority has stopped the BJP from doing what it was determined to. Still, the party is leaving no stone unturned to win a majority for itself and partners.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- ❖ **upper hand** (noun) – a dominating position.
- ❖ **push** (noun) – thrust, drive, effort, campaign.
- ❖ **resistance** (noun) – opposition, struggle, defiance, confrontation.
- ❖ **consecutive** (adjective) – successive, continuous, back-to-back.
- ❖ **short of** (phrase) – less than.
- ❖ **climb** (noun) – rise, growth.
- ❖ **string** (noun) – series, succession, chain, sequence.
- ❖ **slow down** (phrasal verb) – reduce, lessen decrease (one's activity).
- ❖ **pursuit** (noun) – aspiration, objective, quest; activity.
- ❖ **influence** (verb) – affect, have an effect on.
- ❖ **fortunes** (noun) – circumstances (the success or failure of someone), state of affairs, conditions.
- ❖ **ally** (noun) – partner, supporter, friendly associate, confederate.
- ❖ **hover** (verb) – remain at a level.
- ❖ **perhaps** (adverb) – maybe, possibly.
- ❖ **tally** (noun) – total, count.
- ❖ **fluid** (adjective) – subject to change; changeable, variable, uncertain, undecided, unstable.
- ❖ **hop** (verb) – move, jump, pass from one place to another (quickly).
- ❖ **cohort** (noun) – group; a group/division of people.
- ❖ **largely** (adverb) – mostly, mainly, substantially, primarily.
- ❖ **favour** (verb) – support, back, endorse, advocate, espouse.
- ❖ **dispensation** (noun) – (a political) system, organization, party.
- ❖ **overdrive** (noun) – a state of excessive activity.
- ❖ **lack of** (noun) – absence, deficiency, unavailability, fall short of.
- ❖ **hindrance** (noun) – obstacle, impediment, block.
- ❖ **devise** (verb) – formulate, come up with, create, develop.
- ❖ **dubious** (adjective) – suspicious, questionable, doubtful.
- ❖ **bypass** (verb) – avoid, keep out of, dodge, circumvent, get round.
- ❖ **arbitrarily** (adverb) – randomly/casually, irrationally, unreasonably, illogically; autocratically.
- ❖ **label** (verb) – classify, categorize, describe.
- ❖ **money bill** (noun) – The Bill deals with issues such as receipt and spending of money, such as tax laws, laws governing borrowing and expenditure of the government, prevention of black money etc. Under India's constitutional design, money bill requires only the Lok Sabha's affirmation/approval (bypassing Rajya Sabha's affirmation/approval) only for it to turn into law.
- ❖ **blatant** (adjective) – evident, flagrant/glaring, obvious, overt.
- ❖ **linger** (verb) – stay, remain, continue/persist, stay put, wait.
- ❖ **muster** (verb) – gather, collect, summon up, bring together.
- ❖ **advance** (verb) – support, improve, promote, further.
- ❖ **provision** (noun) – term, clause, requirement/condition.
- ❖ **sail through** (phrasal verb) – succeed easily at, gain success in easily, pass easily.
- ❖ **conveniently** (adverb) – suitably, favourably, advantageously.
- ❖ **relentlessly** (adverb) – continuously, persistently, firmly/determinedly, continuously in an intense way.
- ❖ **chisel away at** (phrasal verb) – cut, chip away at; gradually make someone weaker or less effective; cheat, mislead, deceive, trick (to make someone weaker/less effective).
- ❖ **ranks** (noun) – the people belonging to a group.
- ❖ **meanwhile** (adverb) – for now, for the present, meantime.
- ❖ **whip** (noun) – a member of a political party who is in charge of written notice provide to their members in Parliament to vote (for/against the act/policy). The Whip of a particular political party will provide a written notice (whip) to their members in in Parliament/Legislative Assembly to vote for/against the act/policy.
- ❖ **find one's way** (phrase) – come to a particular place (in a roundabout way).
- ❖ **determined** (adjective) – insistent on, fixed on, firm about, committed to.
- ❖ **still** (adverb) – nevertheless, however, in spite of that.
- ❖ **leave no stone unturned** (phrase) – to do every (single) thing possible in order to achieve something; not give up, be persistent, be determined.