

LAST LAP: ON JOE BIDEN

Biden and Harris have to show they can lift the U.S. out of the virus-induced crisis

Former U.S. Vice-President Joe Biden has become the Democratic Party's official nominee for the 2020 presidential election after a glitzy four-day extravaganza at the Democratic National Convention. Alongside his running mate Kamala Harris, he will seek to oust incumbent Donald Trump from the White House. If he does so, an array of remedial policy actions will be required from an early stage to lift the U.S. up from the economic destruction caused by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Besides, he will need to urgently attend to a series of controversies and setbacks, some with international repercussions, that the Trump administration has become enmeshed in. Does Mr. Biden possess the political heft, personal charisma, and party mandate to do so? The party answered with a resounding 'yes' to all three questions at the Convention, which featured eloquent speeches by former Presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton and First Ladies Michelle Obama and Hillary Clinton, as well as party heavyweights including Bernie Sanders, Nancy Pelosi, and Elizabeth Warren. While a few younger Democratic leaders were featured too, the Convention left little doubt that the old guard was still running the show, even if it was seeking to woo the next generation of voters within the framework of an altered political reality.

At the heart of that reality stands Mr. Trump, wobbling as he scores lower than Mr. Biden in the opinion polls, mostly for his bungling response to the pandemic, yet relentlessly throwing punches on mail-in voting and appealing to the 'silent majority' that Mr. Biden, if elected, would "hike taxes on Americans by \$4 trillion, eviscerate the Second Amendment, expand sanctuary cities, and end fossil fuels". To effectively counter these arguments, and avoid another debacle of the sort that Ms. Clinton faced in 2016, Mr. Biden and Ms. Harris need show only one thing — that they can save the U.S. economy and repair the country's standing with the rest of the world, especially by reclaiming a pivotal role in the multilateral governance of global public health, climate change and trade. Whether the Democrats, basking in the self-congratulatory afterglow of the Convention and reaffirming their commitment to liberal values, play their hand carefully through this endgame scenario, or whether the Trump vision of an inward-looking U.S. still carries the day, remains to be seen. What is clear is that the electoral outcome will be both a referendum expressing how much a broadly inclusive paradigm of the American Dream still resonates with the people, and a signal of the degree of openness that it will tolerate toward the peoples of other nations. Mr. Biden will have to bring his A-game to this final lap.

Meanings of Difficult Words:

- ❖ **lap** (noun) – round, stage, phase, leg, circuit.
- ❖ **lift out** (phrasal verb) – improve, boost, enhance, make better.
- ❖ **virus-induced** (adjective) – produced/effected by a virus.
- ❖ **nominee** (noun) – candidate.
- ❖ **glitzy** (adjective) – showy/busy, adorned, decorated, embellished.
- ❖ **extravaganza** (noun) – display, spectacle, show, presentation, performance.
- ❖ **convention** (noun) – conference, meeting, assembly, gathering, summit, forum.
- ❖ **running mate** (noun) – the person who runs with someone in an election (such as an election to choose a new president) and who is given the less important position (such as vice president) if they are elected (Courtesy: VOA Learning English).
- ❖ **alongside** (preposition) – together with.
- ❖ **oust** (verb) – remove, dislodge, overthrow.
- ❖ **incumbent** (adjective) – current, present, existing (holder/occupant of an office).
- ❖ **array** (noun) – list, line-up.
- ❖ **remedial** (adjective) – corrective, restorative, reparative.
- ❖ **lift up** (phrasal verb) – raise, elevate, boost, encourage, uplift, revive, restore.
- ❖ **pandemic** (noun) – the worldwide spread of a new disease; The illness spreads around the world and typically affects a large number of people across a wide area.
- ❖ **besides** (preposition) – apart from, in addition to.
- ❖ **setback** (noun) – problem, difficulty, issue, complication.
- ❖ **repercussions** (noun) – consequence, result, effect, outcome.
- ❖ **be enmeshed in** (verb) – entangle, involve, mix up, mire, bog down.
- ❖ **possess** (verb) – have, be blessed with (a characteristic/quality/trait).
- ❖ **heft** (noun) – influence, ability; weight/strength.

- ❖ **charisma** (noun) – strength of character, individuality, personality.
- ❖ **resounding** (adjective) – huge/massive/loud, emphatic, decisive, conclusive.
- ❖ **eloquent** (adjective) – expressive, revealing, significant, indicative.
- ❖ **as well as** (phrase) – and in addition; and also.
- ❖ **heavyweight** (noun) – very important person, leader.
- ❖ **old guard** (noun) – older or senior members of an organization/group who don't like any change in it.
- ❖ **run the show** (phrase) – be in charge, be in control, be the boss, be at the helm.
- ❖ **seek** (verb) – try, attempt, aim.
- ❖ **woo** (verb) – seek the support of, try to win, try to attract, pursue, persuade, coax.
- ❖ **at the heart of** (phrase) – at the most important part of.
- ❖ **wobble** (verb) – be undecided, be uncertain, be indecisive, be unable to make up one's mind,
- ❖ **bungling** (adjective) – mismanaging, mishandling, messing up, incompetent.
- ❖ **relentlessly** (adverb) – continuously, persistently, firmly/determinedly, continuously in an intense way.
- ❖ **mail-in voting** (noun) – postal voting; a type of voting in an election where ballot papers/voter slips are distributed to voters to their addresses before Election Day and mailed back by the voters or deposited at a voting location or secure dropbox by a certain time on Election Day.
- ❖ **absentee voting** (noun) – a type of voting in an election where voters cast their vote by post, because they can't physically be present at a voting center on Election Day due to various reasons ranging from being out of country (for study/job), having disability or illness, serving as an election worker & etc.,
- ❖ **in-person voting** (noun) – a type of voting in an election where voters cast their votes/ballots in person in a polling booth on Election Day.
- ❖ **silent majority** (noun) – an unspecified large group of people in a country or group who do not express their opinions publicly.
- ❖ **eviscerate** (verb) – remove (essential or important elements/contents).
- ❖ **Second Amendment** (noun) – The Second Amendment (Amendment II) to the United States Constitution protects the individual right to keep and bear firearms (guns) for traditionally lawful purposes such as self-defense.
- ❖ **sanctuary city** (noun) – safe city; It's a city (or a county, or a state) that limits its cooperation with federal immigration enforcement agents in order to protect low-priority immigrants from deportation, while still turning over those who have committed serious crimes.
- ❖ **fossil fuel** (noun) – non renewable resources (or fossil fuels such as coal, oil and natural gas are formed from the buried/deposited organic materials).
- ❖ **effectively** (adverb) – practically, virtually.
- ❖ **standing** (noun) – status, reputation, social position.
- ❖ **pivotal** (adjective) – central, vital, significant/important, crucial/critical.
- ❖ **multilateral** (adjective) – involving many different organisations.
- ❖ **public health** (noun) – the branch of medicine handling public health; public health is also the science of protecting and improving the health of people and their communities through education, policy making and research for disease and injury prevention.
- ❖ **climate change** (noun) – a long-term change in the Earth's climate, or of a region on Earth (Courtesy: NASA).
- ❖ **bask (in)** (phrasal verb) – take pleasure, revel, enjoy, relax (in/from something that feels so good); it also means to lie exposed to light warmth (moderate heat) of sunrise/sunset.
- ❖ **self-congratulatory** (adjective) – self-satisfied, self-admired, excessively proud, overly complacent.
- ❖ **afterglow** (noun) – a happy feeling (after a pleasant/successful experience).
- ❖ **reaffirm** (verb) – assert, state, assure again strongly.
- ❖ **commitment** (noun) – duty, task, responsibility, burden.
- ❖ **liberal** (noun) – supporter of a political and moral philosophy based on liberty, consent of the governed and equality before the law.

- ❖ **play one's hand** (phrase) – Like in playing cards, when you have a hand dealt to you, you can either play it or pass.
- ❖ **scenario** (noun) – situation.
- ❖ **inward-looking** (adjective) – narrow-minded, insular, myopic, introverted, illiberal self-seeking, ultra-conservative.
- ❖ **carry the day** (phrase) – be victorious, be successful, win.
- ❖ **referendum** (noun) – public vote; a direct vote in which people cast ballots to decide on a specific issue or policy.
- ❖ **inclusive** (adjective) – all-embracing, overall; all-inclusive, comprehensive.
- ❖ **paradigm** (noun) – model, pattern, example.
- ❖ **resonate** (verb) – resound, reverberate; evoke some feelings/emotions.
- ❖ **openness** (noun) – acceptance, tolerance, impartiality.
- ❖ **tolerate** (verb) – accept, agree, allow/permit, approve (opposite/conflicting opinions/ideas).
- ❖ **A-game** (noun) – highest/very best level of performance.

REPEAL AND REFORM: ON SRI LANKAN CONSTITUTION

Sri Lanka should not undo democratic gains or roll back devolution in the Constitution

A two-thirds majority in the legislature is indeed a mandate for constitutional change, but the winner ought to decide whether the proposed change would bring about reform or impairment; whether it would strengthen democratic institutions or weaken them. In his first address to the newly elected Parliament, Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has predictably declared his intention to repeal the landmark 19th Amendment to the Constitution, and, thereafter, to work towards a new Constitution. The party he belongs to, the SLPP, has just garnered a historic two-thirds majority along with its allies in the parliamentary polls — unprecedented in an election based on proportional representation. Few would doubt that the party led by the President's elder brother and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa has the requisite mandate to overhaul the constitutional and electoral system. The abolition of the 19th Amendment was indeed the party's major poll plank. However, does it necessarily mean that the gains of the 19th Amendment should be thrown out lock, stock and barrel? The legislation that introduced it was also based on a popular mandate for change in the 2015 presidential election, and received more than the required two-thirds support in the previous Parliament. It not only curbed the executive President's vast powers, by restoring a two-term limit, and making it difficult for the legislature to be dissolved at the President's whim, but also sought to protect the independence of oversight institutions.

It would be a travesty of democratic principles if the independence of institutions such as the Election Commission is now curbed in the name of undoing the 19th Amendment. After all, it is now recognised that the largely peaceful and orderly polling was only because of the EC's autonomy. If not for nothing else, but as an acknowledgement of the free election that enabled it to get a massive mandate, the ruling party should seek to prove its detractors wrong by preserving the democratic gains of the amendment. Further, the plan to rewrite the Constitution under the rubric of a 'one country, one law' principle should not be at odds with the urgent need for a new inclusive Constitution that would put the country on the path of equality and reconciliation. The President's address was also notable for the absence of any reference to ethnic minorities. For long, Sri Lankan leaders have maintained that they can give little by way of constitutional concessions to the minorities without the consent of the majority Sinhalese. Given the dependence of the Rajapaksas on the majority, it is possible to look at the President's remarks on the proposed Constitution in the portentous sense of moving away from the concept of devolution. While the abolition of the executive presidency appears no more realistic, it will be retrograde if the idea of sharing more power with the provinces is abandoned altogether.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- ❖ **repeal** (noun) – cancellation, revocation, abolition, invalidation.
- ❖ **undo** (verb) – cancel, reverse, revoke, nullify, invalidate.
- ❖ **roll back** (phrasal verb) – reverse the progress of something.
- ❖ **devolution** (noun) – decentralization, delegation, distribution.
- ❖ **legislature** (noun) – parliament.
- ❖ **indeed** (adverb) – in fact, actually.
- ❖ **ought to** (modal verb) – must, should.
- ❖ **bring (about)** (verb) – cause, create, produce, result in, effect.

- ❖ **impairment** (noun) – damage, detriment, destruction, deterioration.
- ❖ **strengthen** (verb) – make stronger, buttress, reinforce, fortify, bolster.
- ❖ **address** (noun) – speak, talk, discourse.
- ❖ **predictably** (adverb) – as expected, as anticipated.
- ❖ **landmark** (noun modifier) – major (achievement), watershed (moment), historic (event/victory), milestone (event).
- ❖ **thereafter** (adverb) – after that, subsequently.
- ❖ **belong to** (verb) – be a member of, be affiliated to, be associated with.
- ❖ **garner** (verb) – receive, get, gain, obtain, acquire.
- ❖ **ally** (noun) – associate, confederate, partner, supporter.
- ❖ **unprecedented** (adjective) – not done or experienced before.
- ❖ **proportional representation** (noun) – an electoral system in which parties gain seats in Parliament in proportion to the number of votes it received in an election.
- ❖ **requisite** (adjective) – necessary, required, essential.
- ❖ **overhaul** (verb) – rebuild, remodel, rework, restructure, revamp.
- ❖ **plank** (noun) – a fundamental point.
- ❖ **necessarily** (adverb) – inevitably, certainly, surely, undoubtedly.
- ❖ **throw out** (phrasal verb) – reject, dismiss, veto/refuse.
- ❖ **lock, stock, and barrel** (phrase) – completely; everything, the whole thing.
- ❖ **legislation** (noun) – law, rules, regulations, statutes.
- ❖ **executive president** (noun) – the head of state who exercises authority over the governance of that state. The Present of a country in whom the chief executive power is vested.
- ❖ **vast** (adjective) – huge, extensive, massive.
- ❖ **dissolve** (verb) – dismiss, disestablish, disband, abolish.
- ❖ **whim** (noun) – wish, desire, impulse, urge.
- ❖ **seek** (verb) – try, attempt, work towards.
- ❖ **oversight** (noun) – supervision, surveillance, administration, management.
- ❖ **travesty** (noun) – misrepresentation, distortion/perversion, poor imitation.
- ❖ **in the name of** (phrase) – for the sake of, at the behest of.
- ❖ **after all** (phrase) – most importantly, above all, ultimately, essentially.
- ❖ **autonomy** (noun) – independence, freedom; self rule, self-determination.
- ❖ **not for nothing** (phrase) – for a specific reason.
- ❖ **acknowledgement** (noun) – acceptance, admission, realization.
- ❖ **detractor** (noun) – critic, fault-finder, censurer.
- ❖ **prove someone wrong** (phrase) – refute, rebut, disprove, prove false, discredit.
- ❖ **rubric** (adjective) – an evaluation tool; a set of guidelines/instructions.
- ❖ **at odds with** (phrase) – inconsistent, in conflict, in opposition, contrary to.
- ❖ **inclusive** (adjective) – all-embracing, overall; all-inclusive, comprehensive.
- ❖ **reconciliation** (noun) – restoration of harmony, resolution, compromise.
- ❖ **ethnic** (adjective) – relating to a population subgroup (cultural, national, traditional/folk) with a common national or cultural tradition.
- ❖ **by way of** (phrase) – via, by means of, as a form of.
- ❖ **concession** (noun) – right, privilege, favour/benefit.
- ❖ **consent** (noun) – agreement, assent, permission/approval.
- ❖ **given** (preposition) – considering, taking into account, bearing in mind.
- ❖ **dependence** (noun) – reliance on, seeking support from, leaning/clinging to.
- ❖ **look at** (phrasal verb) – regard, consider; analyse, scrutinize.
- ❖ **portentous** (adjective) – threatening, unfavourable, warning.
- ❖ **move away from** (phrasal verb) – change/alter one's ideas/beliefs and so.
- ❖ **executive presidency** (noun) – a certain system of government (in some countries) in which, the president exercises active executive power. Executive presidents are active in day-to-day governance of a nation, and are usually popularly elected.
- ❖ **retrograde** (adjective) – unprogressive, negative, reverse/regressive.