

## Course correction – Maldivian reprieve

### Ibrahim Solih must hit the ground running to stabilise the economy

After five years of rule by a government that strong-armed political dissent domestically, the Maldives has put a pro-people administration in power, swearing in Ibrahim Solih, representing the Maldivian Democratic Party, as President on November 17. He has announced a slew of populist policies, and vowed to end an era of "large-scale embezzlement and corruption". The last is an allusion to the untold millions allegedly paid to officials as kickbacks for various mega-construction projects. The Solih government came to power on the back of a coalition of unlikely bedfellows. The MDP, the party of former President Mohamed Nasheed, has joined hands with the Jumhooree Party of business tycoon Qasim Ibrahim, the Islamic-based Adhaalath Party, and the support base of former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. They will have to ensure that ideological differences do not cause the coalition to split at the seams, and unravel the consequences of previous President Abdulla Yameen flinging open the doors to Chinese investment, allowing a cascade of financing that caused the national debt to balloon to nearly a quarter of GDP. But a strategic return to India and its underlying democratic values could back-stop the economic pummelling that Male is sure to face if creditors in Beijing start calling in their dues.

The new government is being cautious, but professedly firm, in unravelling this web of debt. The leadership has promised that what is owed will be paid, and not a penny more; and that wherever opacity cloaked the grant of land, lease rights, construction projects and more, the honouring of debts would be linked to whether a transparent and fair process was followed in the first place. Yet, there is little doubt that China is there to stay in the Maldives, and a balancing agreement will have to emerge through the plethora of commercial contracts the new government would ideally like to renegotiate. In this mission, the renewed bonhomie with India, reflected in the respect accorded to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Indian delegation at the inaugural ceremony, will play a crucial role. Innumerable Indians work across the hospitality, education, and health-care sectors of the Maldives economy, and India contributes everything from helicopters to medical visas to Maldivians. The greatest threat to stability comes less from geo-strategic denouements than from within the fabric of its polity. Certain elements that backed the anti- democratic 2012 'coup' that unseated Mr. Nasheed and supported the dramatically centralised power of the previous presidency still abide within the ruling combine. There is only one option for the fledgling coalition government: to strengthen Maldivian institutions and, by extension, democracy.

### **Meanings of Difficult Words :**

- Reprieve - to stop or delay something bad that was going to happen
- Hit the ground running - to be successful from the start of an activity
- Stabilise - to reach a state where there are no longer any major changes or problems
- Strong-arm - to use force or threats to make someone do something
- Dissent - strong disagreement, especially with what people in authority think or with what the majority of people think
- Domestically - relating to the country being talked about, not other countries

- Pro - supporting or approving of something
- Swearing in - an official ceremony in which someone beginning an important job formally promises to do their duty
- Slew - a large amount or number
- Populist - representing the interests and opinions of ordinary people
- Large-scale - involving a large number of people or things, or happening over a large area
- Embezzle - to steal money that people trust you to look after as part of your work
- Allusion - a statement that refers to something in an indirect way
- Allegedly - if someone allegedly does something, another person says that they have done it, even though this has not been proved
- Kickback - money paid illegally to someone in exchange for something that they have done for you
- Mega - very big
- Coalition - a temporary union of different political parties that agree to form a government together
- Bedfellow - someone or something that is connected with another person or thing in some way, often unexpectedly
- Former - used for describing someone or something that had a particular job, title, status etc in the past, but not now
- Join hands - to work together with another organization, country etc in order to help and support each other
- Tycoon - a rich and powerful person who is involved in business or industry
- Ensure - to make certain that something happens or is done
- Unravel - if a process or project unravels, it begins to fail
- Fling - to throw something carelessly or with a lot of force
- Cascade - a series of things that come quickly one after the other
- Strategic - carefully planned in order to achieve a particular goal, especially in war, business, or politics
- Underlying - underlying causes, facts, ideas etc are the real or basic ones, although they are not obvious or directly stated
- Back-stop - something that can be used to solve problems after everything else has been tried
- Pummel - to cause a lot of damage to a place
- Creditor - a person or company that is owed money by another person or company
- Cautious - careful to avoid problems or danger
- Professed - used for describing something that you claim to be true but that is possibly false
- Firm - strong
- Owe - if you owe someone money, you have to give them a particular amount of money because you have bought something from them or have borrowed money from them
- Opacity - the quality that makes something such as a statement or problem difficult to understand
- Transparent - open and honest, without secrets
- Plethora - a greater amount than you need or want
- Bonhomie - a friendly happy feeling
- Delegation - a group of people who represent a country, government, or organization

- Inaugural - an inaugural event is the first of a series, or the first one to be held by members of a new organization
- Innumerable - too many to be counted: used for emphasizing a large amount or number
- Hospitality - friendly and generous behaviour towards visitors and guests, intended to make them feel welcome
- Threat - a situation or an activity that could cause harm or danger
- Denouement - end result of a situation
- Fabric of - the basic structure of
- Coup - an occasion when a group of people takes control of a country, usually by means of military force
- Dramatically - in a sudden and surprising way that is easy to notice
- Abide - to follow a rule, decision, or instruction
- Fledgling - new and without experience

### **Course correction – Quota math: on Maharashtra's Maratha reservation proposal**

#### **Maharashtra's proposal on reservation for Marathas is bound to invite judicial scrutiny**

After months of protests, the Maratha community has secured yet another promise of reservation in government jobs and educational institutions. The proposal has been cleared by the Maharashtra Cabinet, but is yet to be passed in the State Assembly. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis defended this saying it is in line with the recommendations of a State Backward Class Commission (SBCC) report, yet to be made public, mandating reservations for Marathas under a new, separate Socially and Educationally Backward Class category. Mr. Fadnavis said it was the report's assessment that Marathas are socially and educationally backward, with minuscule representation in government services, and the State is liable to take action considering the "extraordinary and exceptional conditions". As any move to include Marathas among Other Backward Classes will cause a backlash, the BJP-Shiv Sena government has sought to provide the reservations under a separate category. But when the previous Maharashtra government, of the Congress-Nationalist Congress Party coalition, in 2014 moved to reserve 16% of seats in government jobs and educational institutions, it was stayed by the Bombay High Court. Creating a separate category now would increase the overall quota beyond the 50% limit the Supreme Court has set.

The Cabinet's nod is in any case born of political exigency, not socio-economic reasons. The SBCC's reported findings that a significant proportion of Marathas constitute a socially and educationally backward class do not square with available data. As with Jats in Rajasthan and Patels in Gujarat, they enjoy a socio-economic status closer to that of the forward classes (and castes) in Maharashtra. Three previous SBCC assessments have indicated as much. Besides, there is no reason to argue that Marathas face any social stigma that calls for affirmative action. The demand for reservations in this case is therefore less an acknowledgement of social backwardness from a politically powerful community and more a call for the accrual of welfare benefits to less well-off sections among the community. The assertions of backwardness by sections of dominant communities such as Marathas, Patels and Jats have largely been due to perceptions about the relative inability to move up the economic ladder, and

the lack of adequate employment opportunities amid a sluggish agrarian economy. Faced with violent protests, the Fadnavis government had to accept this demand, especially after the SBCC gave its stamp of approval, but there is little to suggest any substantial change since 2014 to justify it. As judicial scrutiny is bound to be brought to bear on the government's decision, it will be well-advised to look at measures to alleviate the State's prolonged agrarian distress and the lack of adequate jobs, problems that affect all sections of society.

### **Meanings of Difficult Words :**

- Scrutiny - careful examination of someone or something
- Protest - a strong complaint or disagreement
- Proposal - a plan or suggestion, especially a formal one that a group has to consider
- Defend - to say things to support someone or something that is being criticized
- In line with - similar to someone or something
- Mandating - to order someone to do something
- Assessment - the process of making a judgment or forming an opinion, after considering something or someone carefully
- Minuscule - extremely small in size or amount
- Exceptional - extremely good or impressive in a way that is unusual
- Backlash - a strong, negative, and often angry reaction to something that has happened, especially a political or social change
- Coalition - a temporary union of different political parties that agree to form a government together
- Nod - approval
- Exigency - something difficult that you must deal with as part of a situation or job
- Significant - very large or noticeable
- Square with - if one idea, opinion, explanation etc squares with another, they both seem good or reasonable
- Socio-economic - involving a combination of social and economic matters
- Besides - in addition to someone or something else that is being mentioned
- Stigma - a feeling that something is wrong or embarrassing in some way
- Affirmative - relating to a statement that shows agreement or says "yes"
- Acknowledgement - something that you say or do in order to show that you accept that something exists or is true
- Backwardness - the state of not being developed, modern, or advanced
- Accrual - a gradual increase
- Welfare - the health and happiness of people
- Well-off - rich, or having enough money to live well
- Assertion - a definite statement or claim that something is true
- Dominant - more important, powerful, or successful than the other people or things of the same type
- Perception - a particular way of understanding or thinking about something
- Relative - considered in comparison with other similar things

- Ladder - a system that has different levels through which you can progress
- Adequate - good enough or large enough for a particular purpose
- Amid - if something happens amid particular feelings or events, it happens while people have these feelings or while these events are happening
- Sluggish - not performing or reacting as well as usual
- Agrarian - relating to or involving farming or farmers
- Violent - using force to hurt or attack
- Substantial - large in amount or degree
- Alleviate - to make something bad such as pain or problems less severe
- Distress - a feeling that you have when you are very unhappy, worried, or upset
- Adequate - good enough or large enough for a particular purpose

### **Course correction – Unlawful dissolution: On J&K Assembly**

#### **The J&K Governor's action controverts what has been laid down by the Supreme Court**

In dissolving the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly without giving any claimant an opportunity to form the government, Governor Satya Pal Malik has violated constitutional law and convention. Mr. Malik's stated reasons for his action — "extensive horse trading" and the possibility that a government formed by parties with "opposing political ideologies" would not be stable — are extraneous. The Governor ought to have known that the Supreme Court has deprecated such a line of reasoning. In Rameshwar Prasad (2006), the then Bihar Governor Buta Singh's recommendation for dissolving the Assembly the previous year was held to be illegal and mala fide. In both instances, the dissolution came just as parties opposed to the ruling dispensation at the Centre were close to staking a claim to form the government. In Bihar, the Assembly was then in suspended animation as no party or combination had the requisite majority; in J&K, the State has been under Governor's rule since June, when the BJP withdrew from the coalition and Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti, of the Peoples Democratic Party, resigned. It is true that the PDP and the National Conference had not initiated any move to form a popular government for months and favoured fresh elections. But that cannot be the reason for the Governor to dissolve the 87-member House just when they were about to come together to form a likely 56-member bloc with the help of the Congress.

With the BJP backing Peoples Conference leader Sajjad Lone, the PDP may have sensed a danger to the unity of its 29-member legislature party and agreed to an unusual alliance — with its political adversaries. Describing such an alliance as opportunistic is fine as far as it is political opinion; however, it cannot be the basis for constitutional action. As indicated in Rameshwar Prasad, a Governor cannot shut out post-poll alliances altogether as one of the ways in which a popular government may be formed. The court had also said unsubstantiated claims of horse-trading or corruption in efforts at government formation cannot be cited as reasons to dissolve the Assembly. Further, it said it was the Governor's duty to explore the possibility of forming a popular government, and that he could not dissolve the House solely to prevent a combination from staking its claim. Mr. Malik's remarks that the PDP and the NC did not show proof of majority or parade MLAs show shocking disregard for the primacy accorded to a floor

test. J&K's relationship with the Centre is rooted in constitutional safeguards as well as in the participation of its major parties in electoral politics and parliamentary democracy. Anyone interested in political stability in the sensitive State should ensure that democratic processes are strengthened. The potential for political instability in the future should not be cited as a reason to scuttle emerging alliances.

### **Meanings of Difficult Words :**

- Unlawful - something that is unlawful is illegal, especially something that would be considered legal in a different situation
- Dissolution - the process of officially ending the existence of a group or organization
- Controvert - to prove or say that something is not true
- Lay down - to state officially what someone must do or how they must do it
- Claimant - someone who brings a legal case against someone else in a court of law
- Violate - to do something that is in opposition to a law, agreement, principle etc
- Convention - a way of behaving that is generally accepted as being normal and right
- Extensive - very large in amount or degree
- Horse trading - difficult and sometimes dishonest discussions between people who are trying to reach an agreement
- Ideology - a system of ideas and principles on which a political or economic theory is based
- Extraneous - not relating to the subject or situation that you are dealing with
- Ought - used for saying what is the right or sensible thing to do, or the right way to behave
- Deprecate - to criticize something strongly
- Dissolve - if a group or organization dissolves, or if someone dissolves it, it stops existing
- Mala fide - illegal or dishonest
- Instance - an example of something happening
- Dispensation - official permission to do something that people are not normally allowed to do
- Stake a claim - to say or show clearly that you consider that something is or should be yours
- Requisite - necessary for a particular purpose
- Majority - the number of votes by which a person or party wins an election
- Coalition - a temporary union of different political parties that agree to form a government together
- Backing - supporting
- Adversary - an enemy or opponent
- Opportunistic - using a situation to get power or an advantage
- Unsubstantiated - an unsubstantiated argument, claim etc is one for which you have no evidence
- Disregard - the attitude of someone who does not respect something or consider it important
- Ensure - to make certain that something happens or is done
- Instability - a situation that keeps changing, so that you are worried about what might happen
- Scuttle - to make a plan, agreement, attempt etc fail or stop
- Alliance - an arrangement between two or more people, groups, or countries by which they agree to work together to achieve something



**Course correction – Cricket's final frontier: Can India win a test series in Australia ?**

**The sobering truth is that Kohli's men, like many of their predecessors, have been poor travellers beyond the subcontinent.**

cricketing reputations are sometimes made or shattered based on how a player performs against Australia. That's been something of a trend ever since the West Indies began its free fall after losing to Australia in the mid-1990s. And Australia, in its own backyard, is considered the ultimate opposition. Sachin Tendulkar has scored 100 international centuries, but even today his splendid 114 at Perth during the 1992 tour of Australia is regarded as one of his finest. For Virat Kohli's men, who have just set foot in Australia and narrowly lost their first Twenty20 encounter, the long tour presents an opportunity for India to reiterate its credentials. The International Cricket Council has ranked India as number one in Tests and placed it at the second spot in both ODIs and Twenty20 Internationals. Incidentally, in all three lists, Kohli's men are ranked above Australia. The hosts remain a powerful force at home, but having been weakened by the ban-induced absence of Steve Smith and David Warner following the ball-tampering incident earlier this year in South Africa, they are shorn of their usual domineering aura. Australia is placed fifth, sixth and fourth in Tests, ODIs and Twenty20s, respectively. The dip in performance has been matched by intense self-analysis about the manner in which Australia plays its sport. The 'result-justifies-the-unsavoury-methods' philosophy has been put through a wringer ever since Cameron Bancroft was caught rubbing a sandpaper on the ball.

It is in this theatre of tumult that the Indian team has landed. But the sobering truth is that Kohli's men, like many of their predecessors, have been poor travellers beyond the subcontinent. There has been the odd upset but largely it has been a tale of debilitating defeats. In the previous tour of England, India lost the Tests 1-4 while honours were shared between the ODIs and Twenty20s. Cut to the present, the three Twenty20s are a prelude to four Tests and three ODIs. Batsman Kohli reigns supreme but his captaincy has come under scrutiny. The constant shuffling of the playing XI has triggered churn and the Indian skipper has to work on getting his nucleus right. There are some fine batsmen, a bunch of incisive fast bowlers and spinners with guile. The ingredients are there and there is some confidence in dealing with what may be viewed as a somewhat enfeebled Australia. But a potent pace attack led by Mitchell Starc offers a clear and present danger, especially in Tests. India has to exorcise the ghosts of the past, having never won a Test series in Australia. The circumstances are promising for it to correct that record.

**Meanings of Difficult Words :**

- Frontier - border
- Sobering - making you think about things in a serious way
- Predecessor - the person who had a job or official position before someone else
- Subcontinent - a large area of land that forms part of a continent, especially the part of Asia that contains the countries of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh
- Reputation - the opinion that people have about how good or how bad someone or something is
- Free fall - an occasion when a price or value suddenly becomes much lower
- In its own backyard - in a place close to you, or in a situation that you are directly involved in
- Ultimate - happening at the end of a process or activity

- Splendid - very impressive, or very good
- Set foot in - to go to a place
- Narrowly - by a very small amount
- Encounter - a meeting between opponents in a sports competition
- Reiterate - to repeat something in order to emphasize it or make it very clear to people
- Credentials - personal qualities, achievements, or experiences that make someone suitable for something
- Incidentally - used for adding related but less important information to what has just been said, or for suddenly introducing a new subject
- Tampering - to touch something that you should not touch, and to change it in some way, often because you want to spoil it
- Shorn - to remove a part of something by cutting or breaking it, or to be removed in this way
- Domineering - trying to control other people and make them obey you
- Aura - a quality that seems to surround or come from a person, place, or situation
- Respectively - used for saying that something happens separately to each of the people or things mentioned in the order in which they were mentioned
- Dip - to become less
- Intense - very great or extreme
- Unsavoury - involving unpleasant, dishonest, or immoral things that you do not want to think or talk about
- Put through a wringer - if you say that someone has been put through the wringer or has gone through the wringer, you mean that they have suffered a very difficult or unpleasant experience
- Tumult - a confused and excited situation or mental state
- Debilitating - making someone physically or mentally weak
- Prelude - an event that happens before and introduces a more important event
- Scrutiny - careful examination of someone or something
- Shuffling - to move similar things from one position or place to another
- Trigger - to make something happen
- Skipper - someone who is in charge of a team (captain)
- Nucleus - the central or basic part of something
- A bunch of - a large number or amount
- Incisive - expressed in a clear and direct manner
- Guile - the skilful use of dishonest means to trick people or to make them do what you want
- Ingredient - one of the substances that are combined to make something
- Enfeebled - no longer strong or effective
- Potent - powerful, or effective
- Exorcise - to do something that helps you to stop thinking about a bad experience or memory
- Circumstance - a fact or condition that affects a situation
- Promising - likely to be successful or very good

☞ “Don't say you don't have enough time. You have exactly the same number of hours per day that were given to Helen Keller, Pasteur, Michelangelo, Mother Teresa, Leonardo da Vinci, Thomas Jefferson, and Albert Einstein. ”

**H. Jackson Brown Jr.”** ☞