

Course correction – **Bring in the experts: on Jayalalithaa's death** **Jayalalithaa's death does not deserve to be clouded by murky conspiracy theories**

The philosopher Karl Popper argued that conspiracy theories are often premised on the notion that events are manipulated by sinister groups, shaped by a distrust of the notion of randomness and a yearning to explain phenomena in terms of an underlying or intentional order. From the birth of history, the death of famous people has provided a breeding ground for conspiracy theories. Clearly, the unfortunate and untimely passing away of Jayalalithaa has become a playing ground for such 'theorists'. Astonishingly, more than a year after she died, two Tamil Nadu Ministers have called for a probe into her death by a special investigation team. Meanwhile, the Commission of Inquiry headed by Justice (retired) A. Arumughaswamy, constituted in September 2017 to probe her illness and death, is well into a third extension of its tenure. If it sometimes appears as if the Commission is shooting blindfolded in a dark room with blanks, that is because it is unclear if its principal focus is the issue of the "circumstances and situation leading to her hospitalisation", "subsequent treatment" and "unfortunate demise" or a larger conspiracy into her death. Both issues could be related, in theory. But if the main task is to determine whether the former Chief Minister received adequate medical attention before she was admitted in hospital and during her 75-day stay there, then this can only be settled by independent medical experts.

The corporate hospital she was treated in has filed a petition before the Commission seeking the constitution of a medical board comprising experts in a range of specialities to examine the case records and the interventions made by its doctors. This is an eminently sensible suggestion, given the complex and debilitating matrix of conditions that Jayalalithaa suffered from. Only a complete understanding of her overall medical condition can result in a fair conclusion about the treatment she got. The importance of doing this is all the greater, given reports of critical errors in the recording of depositions of doctors before the Commission. One of them has gone as far as to say his application to correct errors has failed. The conspiracy angle has been given a new and perplexing lease of life with the Commission's counsel accusing the hospital and the State's Health Secretary of "conspiracy" and "collusion" in providing "inappropriate treatment". It would be improper to suggest that the Arumughaswamy panel is conducting the probe in anything but a fair manner, but it is essential that it also gives the impression that it is doing just that. After all, there is no getting away from the fact that the setting up of an inquiry commission had a clear political motive — it was a condition that needed to be satisfied to unite the warring AIADMK factions. Chasing elusive conspiracies will not enhance the Commission's image; taking the help of competent experts will.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Bring in** - to use the skills of a particular group or person
- **Deserve** - to have earned something or be given something because of your actions or qualities
- **Cloud** - to spoil an activity, event, or situation
- **Murky** - involving activities that are not clearly known and that people think are dishonest or morally wrong
- **Conspiracy theory** - the idea that a group of people secretly worked together to cause a particular event

- **Premise** - a principle or statement that you consider to be true, that you base other ideas and actions on
- **Notion** - knowledge or understanding of something
- **Manipulate** - to influence someone, or to control something, in a clever or dishonest way
- **Sinister** - threatening to do harm or to do something evil
- **Distrust** - to not trust someone or something
- **Yearning** - a strong feeling that you get when you want something very much, especially something that you know you may not be able to have
- **Phenomena** - an event or situation that can be seen to happen or exist
- **Underlying** - underlying causes, facts, ideas etc are the real or basic ones, although they are not obvious or directly stated
- **Breeding ground** - a situation or place in which bad things can easily begin to develop
- **Untimely** - happening at a time that is not suitable, for example because it causes additional problems
- **Astonishing** - very surprising
- **Probe** - an attempt to find out the truth about an issue, problem, or accident, made by an official group or by a newspaper, television programme etc
- **Meanwhile** - at the same time
- **Constitute** - if several people or things constitute something, they combine to form it
- **Tenure** - the period of time during which someone has an important job or is an elected official
- **Blindfolded** - to cover someone's eyes with a strip of cloth
- **Principal** - main
- **Circumstance** - a fact or condition that affects a situation
- **Subsequent** - happening or coming after something else
- **Demise** - the death of a person
- **Former** - used for describing someone or something that had a particular job, title, status etc in the past, but not now
- **Adequate** - good enough or large enough for a particular purpose
- **Intervention** - a situation in which someone becomes involved in a particular issue, problem etc in order to influence what happens
- **Eminently** - very or very much
- **Sensible** - reasonable and practical
- **Debilitating** - making someone physically or mentally weak
- **Matrix** - an arrangement of connected things
- **Deposition** - a formal written statement by a witness that is read out in a court because the witness cannot be present at the court
- **Perplexing** - confusing
- **Accuse** - to say that someone has done something wrong or committed a crime
- **Collusion** - the secret activities of people who work together to do something dishonest
- **Get away** - to escape from a person or place
- **Motive** - used in a negative way for showing that someone's real reasons for doing something are not the ones that they tell other people
- **Warring** - arguing or fighting with each other
- **Faction** - a small group within a larger group, consisting of people with different opinions from the rest
- **Elusive** - an elusive person or animal is difficult or impossible to find or catch
- **Enhance** - to improve something, or to make it more attractive or more valuable
- **Competent** - capable of doing something in a satisfactory or effective way

Course correction – Removing fear: on literary freedom

The private member's Bill aimed at protecting literary freedom from threats is welcome

Literary freedom is taken for granted in democracies, but forces that threaten or undermine it are always at work. Each age has to fight the battle afresh. In recent times, several attempts to get books withdrawn, pulped or sanitised of offending content have achieved full or partial success in India. Wendy Doniger's *The Hindus: An Alternative History* was withdrawn from circulation, and A.K. Ramanujan's essay 'Three Hundred Ramayanas' was dropped from a Delhi University syllabus. Tamil writer Perumal Murugan's *Madhorubagan* (One Part Woman) was withdrawn by the author under mob pressure but resurrected by a Madras High Court verdict. Public order, national unity and social or religious harmony are the principles commonly invoked against the practice of literary freedom. Threats to free expression, especially artistic freedom, in our times mainly come from those claiming to espouse the interests of a particular religion or social group. It is in this context that Shashi Tharoor, Congress MP and writer, has introduced a private member's Bill in the Lok Sabha seeking to protect freedom of literature. Its objective — that "authors must be guaranteed the freedom to express their work without fear of punitive action by the State or by sections of society" — commends itself to any society that upholds liberal values. It seeks the omission of three IPC sections, including 295A, in effect a non-denominational blasphemy law, as it targets deliberate or malicious acts to outrage religious feelings.

Section 295A is a grossly misused section, often invoked in trivial ways to hound individuals, harass writers and curtail free expression. It deserves to be scrapped. Sections that relate to the sale of obscene books and uttering words that hurt religious feelings are also sought to be omitted. However, it is unclear why Section 153A, which punishes those who promote enmity between groups on grounds of religion, race or language, and Section 153B, which criminalises words and imputations prejudicial to national integration, do not draw Mr. Tharoor's attention. In the process of proscribing a book, he proposes a tweak in the form of a 15-day prohibition. Thereafter, the onus should be on the State government to approach the High Court to seek a permanent ban. It favours the scrapping of the provision in the Customs Act to ban the import of books, but makes a public order exception. It wants to limit the bar on obscenity in the Information Technology Act to child pornography. Private Bills rarely become law, but they are useful in highlighting gaps in the body of law. Seen in this light, Mr. Tharoor's initiative is most welcome as a step towards removing or diluting penal provisions that inhibit literary freedom.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Taken for granted** - to expect something always to happen or exist in a particular way, and to not think about any possible problems or difficulties
- **Threaten** - to be likely to cause harm or damage to something or someone
- **Undermine** - to make something or someone become gradually less effective, confident, or successful
- **Afresh** - in a new or different way
- **Pulp** - books and magazines that are of low quality in the way they are produced and the stories and articles they contain

- **Sanitise** - to take out from information, writing etc parts that might be offensive or unpleasant, usually in a way that makes them less interesting and less useful
- **Offending** - causing a problem, or breaking a rule
- **Mob** - a large crowd of people that is dangerous or difficult to control
- **Resurrect** - to make something exist again, or to start to use something again after it has disappeared, been forgotten, or stopped being used
- **Verdict** - an official judgment made in a court
- **Harmony** - a situation in which people live and work well with other people, or in a way that does not damage things around them
- **Invoke** - to use a law or rule in order to achieve something
- **Free expression** - the right to express your opinions
- **Espouse** - to give your support to an idea, principle, or belief
- **Punitive** - relating to or causing punishment or great difficulty
- **Commend** - to praise someone or something formally or publicly
- **Uphold** - to show that you support something such as an idea by what you say or do
- **Liberal** - accepting different opinions and ways of behaving and tending to be sympathetic to other people
- **Omission** - someone or something that has not been included, either deliberately or because someone forgot
- **Denominational** - relating to a particular religious group
- **Blasphemy** - something that is considered offensive to God or someone's religious beliefs
- **Deliberate** - intended, not done by chance or by accident
- **Malicious** - unkind and showing a strong feeling of wanting to hurt someone
- **Outrage** - a strong feeling of anger and shock at something that you feel is wrong or unfair
- **Grossly** - very, or extremely
- **Trivial** - not very important, serious, or valuable
- **Hound** - to follow someone in a determined way in order to get something from them
- **Harass** - to keep annoying or upsetting someone, for example by criticizing them, attacking them, or treating them in a way that is offensive to them
- **Curtail** - to reduce or limit something, especially something good
- **Obscene** - offensive in a sexual way
- **Omit** - to fail to include or do something
- **Enmity** - a feeling of strong dislike or opposition between people
- **Imputation** - the act of accusing someone of having a bad quality or of being guilty of something, or a statement that makes such an accusation
- **Integration** - the process of allowing people of all races to use a place, institution, or organization
- **Proscribe** - to order an end to the existence or use of something
- **Tweak** - to make small changes in order to improve something
- **Prohibition** - a law or rule that stops people from doing something
- **Onus** - if the onus is on someone to do something, it is their responsibility or duty to do it
- **Obscenity** - behaviour or language that is sexually offensive, especially in a film, book, or play
- **Initiative** - the ability to decide in an independent way what to do and when to do it
- **Penal** - relating to the punishment of criminals
- **Inhibit** - to make it difficult for a process to start or continue in a normal way

Course correction – **Death traps: on Meghalaya's illegal mines** **The Meghalaya government must urgently ensure that all illegal mines are shut down**

The tardy response of the Centre and the State of Meghalaya to the plight of at least 15 workers trapped in a rat-hole coal mine since mid-December has exposed the extraordinary indifference in government to labour welfare and the law. Two workers have been found dead in a second mine in the East Jaintia Hills district. The primary responsibility for the operation of illegal mines lies with the State government, and it should be called to account for ignoring the directions of the National Green Tribunal to close them and levy punitive royalties on those that extracted the coal. Several appeals are before the Supreme Court in connection with a ban ordered by the Tribunal on rat-hole mining and the transport of already mined coal. It should be possible at least now to put an end to it. The Meghalaya government has been evasive on the issue of the continued operation of the illegal mines, in spite of the adverse findings of the Justice B.P. Katoki committee appointed by the NGT. It avoided taking action even after a similar mine-flooding accident that claimed 15 lives in 2012 in South Garo Hills, and the subsequent ban. Although the NGT has ordered the State to deposit Rs. 100 crore with the Central Pollution Control Board for environmental restoration in the wake of the recent disaster at Ksan in East Jaintia Hills, the first-order priority is to close the rat-hole mines. It is the responsibility of the Centre and the State to rehabilitate the workers from impoverished communities, reportedly including some child labourers, who are ready to undertake the risky labour because of the higher-than-average wages paid. This should not be difficult, considering that the value of extracted coal stored in Meghalaya was officially estimated at over Rs. 3,078 crore four years ago, and mineral resources should be treated as state property.

The scale is high: as interpreted from satellite images and reported by the Katoki panel, it could be of the order of 24,000 mines, many of them illegal. If illegal mines continue to operate in flagrant violation of rules under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, the responsibility lies with the State government. Chief Minister Conrad Sangma has said a ban on coal mining is not the solution, given the economic conditions in the region. Yet, the State government has done little to implement reforms and diversify **employment** away from dirty mining under primitive conditions over the years, in spite of judicial orders. In fact, authorities in Shillong continue to ignore such directions, as the accident at the Lumthari mine in East Jaintia Hills shows. As recently as in December, Parliament was informed that 22 States had constituted a task force to review illegal mining and act on it, but Meghalaya does not figure in that list. A clean-up is overdue.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Death trap** - a place, building, or vehicle that is in such bad condition that it could be dangerous to people
- **Mine** - a hole or system of holes in the ground where substances such as coal, metal, and salt are removed
- **Ensure** - to make certain that something happens or is done
- **Tardy** - slow to do something
- **Plight** - a sad, serious, or difficult situation
- **Expose** - to allow something that is usually covered or hidden to be seen

- **Labour** - the workers in a particular country, industry, or company considered as a group
- **Welfare** - the health and happiness of people
- **Call someone to account (for something)** - to say that someone is responsible for something that has gone wrong and expect them to explain it, deal with it, or be punished for it
- **Levy** - an amount of money that you have to pay, for example as a tax
- **Punitive** - relating to or causing punishment or great difficulty
- **Royalty** - an amount of money paid to land owners when oil, coal, etc. is taken from their land
- **Extract** - to remove something from a particular place
- **Evasive** - not talking or answering questions in an honest way
- **In spite of something** - used for referring to a fact that makes something else surprising
- **Adverse** - negative, unpleasant, or harmful
- **Claim** - if a storm, crime, or other violence claims someone's life, the person was killed suddenly as a result of that event
- **Subsequent** - happening or coming after something else
- **In the wake of** - happening after an event or as a result of it
- **Disaster** - something very bad that happens and causes a lot of damage or kills a lot of people
- **Rehabilitate** - to return someone to a good, healthy, or normal life or condition
- **Impoverished** - an impoverished person or place is very poor
- **Interpret** - to understand an action, situation etc in a particular way
- **Flagrant** - done in an obvious way that shows you do not care if you break rules or offend people
- **Violation** - an action that is in opposition to a law, agreement, principle etc
- **Reform** - a change that is intended to correct a situation that is wrong or unfair, or make a system work more effectively
- **Diversify** - to develop new products or activities in addition to the ones that you already provide or do
- **Primitive** - at a very simple stage of development, before modern technology
- **Constitute** - if several people or things constitute something, they combine to form it
- **Overdue** - if something is overdue, it should have been done before now

Course correction – **The wizards in Oz: India's series win in Australia** **Pujara, Pant and a spirited bowling attack cast a fine spell over** **Australia**

Dark clouds hung over the Sydney Cricket Ground on Monday, holding off India's bid to win the Test series against Australia in greater style. Yet, the final 2-1 result is historic, with India for the first time defeating Australia in Australia in a Test series. Having flourished at Adelaide and Melbourne, the two victories split by the solitary loss at Perth, Virat Kohli's men were in good spirits when they reached Sydney. Their soaring confidence found validation through a first innings total of 622 for seven (declared), a challenge to Australia that built upon Cheteshwar Pujara's 193 and Rishabh Pant's unbeaten 159. Australia scored 300 and suffered the ignominy of following on before bad light and wet weather rescued the hosts. But India had done enough to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. The triumph is doubly delicious as it was seized within Australia, an achievement that eluded previous Indian squads. Since its maiden Test at Lord's in 1932, India gained strength as a powerhouse at home but remained diffident overseas. England, West Indies and Pakistan were humbled on their home turf but Australia, until now, never wilted. It remained unconquerable, unleashing fiery fast bowlers and marauding batsmen. Lala Amarnath's men were the first to tour

Australia for the 1947-48 series and they returned after losing 0-4. Later Indian teams were either defeated or ended up forcing a stalemate.

When Kohli's men set foot Down Under, there was the weight of past losses to contend with, besides a need to prove that their No. 1 Test ranking could stand scrutiny when they travelled beyond the subcontinent. It didn't help that an enfeebled Australia, following the ball-tampering crisis of 2018, was expected to collapse. The expectation this time around was direct and strident: India had to win. Kohli's men did that gloriously against Tim Paine's men, who fought for large stretches before discarding their spirit towards the business end. It wasn't easy and India did have its headaches. Midway, it had to jettison the malfunctioning opening pair of Murali Vijay and K.L. Rahul. Lead spinner R. Ashwin, after choking the Aussies at Adelaide, picked up a side-strain, and the ambiguity over his fitness level before the concluding Test triggered some conspiracy theories. The squad missed two regulars, who were tending to injuries: wicket-keeper Wriddhiman Saha and opener Prithvi Shaw. Still, India found the right men for different occasions. Kohli scored a ton, Pujara did even better, delivering three centuries, amassing 521 and averaging 74.43. The fast bowling unit was incisive and Jasprit Bumrah sizzled with 21 wickets. Pant caught well and provided valuable runs lower down the order. The latest achievement in Australia has to be savoured. Now South Africa remains the "final frontier", as it were — India is yet to win a Test series there.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Wizard** - someone who is very good at something
- **Oz** - Australia
- **Cast a spell over someone** - to use magic to make something happen to someone
- **Hold off** - to deliberately delay doing something
- **Flourish** - to be very successful
- **Solitary** - in a place or situation where there are no other people
- **Soaring** - to quickly increase to a high level
- **Validation** - to prove that something is correct
- **Ignominy** - a situation where you feel embarrassed and lose other people's respect
- **Rescue** - to save someone from a dangerous or unpleasant situation
- **Retain** - to keep someone or something
- **Triumph** - a great victory or success
- **Elude** - if something such as success eludes you, you do not manage to achieve it
- **Squad** - a sports team
- **Maiden** - being the first of its type
- **Powerhouse** - a person or thing that has a lot of strength or energy
- **Overseas** - happening or existing in a country across the sea from your country
- **Humble** - to completely defeat someone who seemed better or stronger than you
- **Turf** - an area that one person or group considers to be their own
- **Wilt** - if a person wilts, they have less energy, confidence, or enthusiasm
- **Unconquerable** - not able to be defeated, or not able to be successfully controlled or dealt with
- **Unleash** - to do or to cause something that has a very powerful or harmful effect
- **Fiery** - becoming angry very easily and quickly
- **Marauding** - going from place to place in order to find people to attack or things to steal or destroy
- **Stalemate** - a situation in which progress is impossible because the people or groups involved cannot agree

- **Down under** - to or in Australia or New Zealand
- **Contend with** - to have to deal with problems or difficulties, especially in order to achieve something
- **Scrutiny** - careful examination of someone or something
- **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
- **Enfeebled** - no longer strong or effective
- **Tampering** - to touch something that you should not touch, and to change it in some way, often because you want to spoil it
- **Crisis** - an urgent, difficult, or dangerous situation
- **Strident** - holding firm opinions or beliefs and tending to express them frequently, in a way that offends some people
- **Jettison** - to get rid of something that is not useful or successful
- **Malfunction** - to fail to work or operate correctly
- **Choke** - to stop someone or something from developing or being successful
- **Ambiguity** - a confusing mixture of feelings or ideas that makes something hard to understand
- **Trigger** - to make something happen
- **Conspiracy theory** - the idea that a group of people secretly worked together to cause a particular event
- **Injury** - physical damage done to a person or a part of their body
- **Amassing** - to collect a lot of something such as money or information over a period of time
- **Incisive** - expressed in a clear and direct manner
- **Savour** - to enjoy an experience, activity, or feeling as much as you can and for as long as you can
- **Frontier** - a border between two countries

☞ " **If you are not willing to learn, No one can help you!**
If you are determined to learn, No one can stop you!

" " ☞