

Course correction – Lapse and collapse: on Mumbai's pedestrian bridge accident

Mumbai's creaking public infrastructure must be urgently upgraded

The pedestrian bridge that collapsed at Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus, leaving six people dead and several injured, underscores the irony of India's race to development on creaking urban infrastructure. It was only in September 2017 that there was a stampede at Mumbai's Elphinstone bridge that left at least 23 people dead, an incident that officials blamed on heavy rain and overcrowding on the rickety structure. Beyond such acute disasters, there is the chronic toll of eight people, on average, dying every day on the city's railway tracks. This is a dismal image for a metropolis that generates so much wealth, but cannot guarantee the safety of its public infrastructure. In the first response to the CST incident, the Maharashtra government and the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) have launched action on the contractor who carried out repairs on the bridge five years ago, the structural safety auditor who had certified the bridge to be in 'good' condition among a total of 39 bridges, and some civic body officials. Such steps may serve to mollify public anger, and no one would argue against efforts to fix accountability for lapses. However, far-reaching administrative reform is necessary to raise public confidence in the way government works. It is extraordinary that the BMC is wiser after the fact, and has determined that the quality of repairs performed on the CST bridge was not 'up to the mark,' since it collapsed within six years. It has also closed several busy footbridges, virtually confirming prolonged neglect of maintenance.

In a city where eight million passenger trips are made daily on an overburdened railway system, besides other modes of **transport**, the highest policy priority should be to raise levels of safety. In the wake of the bridge disaster, the municipal corporation must explain how much of its annual budget of Rs. 30,692 crore for the coming year will go towards improving facilities and safety for the majority of its citizens who ride trains and buses or walk. Mumbaikars badly need a new deal in the form of a modernised bus system, with expansion of services that can be funded through a levy on private vehicles or on fuel. The move to privatise BEST bus services may result in greater pressure on other systems, reducing access and adding to the stress faced by citizens. Mumbai's experience should serve as a warning to all fast-expanding Indian cities governed by municipal systems that have low capacity and capability to create people-friendly infrastructure. Distortions in urban policymaking in recent years are all too evident, marked by support for loosely defined smart cities and personal vehicles, at the cost of basic interventions that will make the commons more accessible — roads, pavements, pedestrian facilities and public transport. The safe mobility of people must be prioritised.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Lapse** - a period of time between two events
- **Collapse** - if a building or other structure collapses, it suddenly falls down
- **Pedestrian** - someone who is walking, especially in a town or city, instead of driving or riding
- **Creak** - a high sound that something, especially something wooden, makes when it moves or when you put weight on it

- **Infrastructure** - the set of systems within a place or organization that affect how well it operates, for example the telephone and transport systems in a country
- **Upgrade** - to improve the quality of a service or product
- **Terminus** - the end of a bus or train line
- **Underscore** - to emphasize something, or to show that it is important
- **Irony** - a strange, funny, or sad situation in which things happen in the opposite way to what you would expect
- **Stampede** - if a group of animals or people stampede, they all start to run in a very fast uncontrolled way because they are
- **Overcrowding** - unpleasant conditions caused by too many people or things being in the same place
- **Rickety** - a rickety structure or piece of furniture is likely to break if you put any weight on it, often because it is old
- **Acute** - very serious or severe
- **Disaster** - something very bad that happens and causes a lot of damage or kills a lot of people
- **Chronic** - a chronic problem is always happening or returning and is very difficult to solve
- **Toll** - the total number of people who have been killed or hurt
- **Dismal** - very bad
- **Metropolis** - a big city, especially considered as somewhere that is very busy and exciting
- **Auditor** - someone whose job is to officially examine the financial records of a company, organization, or person to see that they are accurate
- **Civic** - relating to a town or city, especially to its government and public activities
- **Mollify** - to make someone feel less angry or upset
- **Accountability** - a situation in which people know who is responsible for something and can ask them to explain its state or quality
- **Lapse** - a gradual or temporary change to a worse or more unusual type of behaviour or activity
- **Far-reaching** - affecting a lot of people or things in an important way
- **Reform** - a change that is intended to correct a situation that is wrong or unfair, or make a system work more effectively
- **Extraordinary** - very unusual and surprising
- **Determine** - to officially decide something
- **Virtually** - used for emphasizing that a statement is almost completely true
- **Prolonged** - continuing for a long time
- **Overburden** - to give someone more work or problems than they can deal with
- **In the wake of** - happening after an event or as a result of it
- **Expansion** - the process of increasing in size and filling more space
- **Levy** - an amount of money that you have to pay, for example as a tax
- **Distortion** - a change that makes something no longer true or accurate
- **Evident** - easy to see, notice, or understand

- **Intervention** - a situation in which someone becomes involved in a particular issue, problem etc in order to influence what happens
- **Mobility** - the ability to travel from one place to another
- **Prioritise** - to treat a particular job or issue as being more important than any others

Course correction – Christchurch massacre: a wake-up call

The attack on mosques is a wake-up call on the anti-immigration, white supremacist cult

New Zealand was shaken to its core on Friday when at least 49 people were killed by a gunman in two mosques in Christchurch. Brenton Harrison Tarrant, the suspect, livestreamed the massacre on social media after releasing a white supremacist manifesto that called for removing the “invaders” and “retaking” Europe. The 27-year-old Australian, who the authorities said was not on any intelligence watch list, apparently travelled to New Zealand to carry out the attack. His targets were clearly Muslims, who make up less than 1% of New Zealand’s population. The manifesto and the symbols he carried suggest that he was influenced by far-right terrorists and their anti-Muslim, anti-immigration and anti-Semitic ideology. He came in military fatigues, wore neo-Nazi emblems and was listening in his car to a song devoted to Bosnian war criminal Radovan Karadžić. The manifesto lauds Anders Breivik, the Norwegian far-right terrorist who killed 77 people in 2011 and released a 1,518-page racist manifesto. He saw President Donald Trump as a “symbol of renewed white identity and common purpose”.

Right-wing racist terror, which has largely been on the fringes in the post-War world, is emerging as a major political and security threat, especially in white-majority societies. In recent years, mosques in Germany and France have been targeted; in Britain an MP was stabbed to death; and in the U.S. a synagogue was attacked, leaving 11 people dead. In most cases, the attackers were obsessed with immigration and the far-right ideas of Euro-Christian white racial purity, which is fundamentally not different from the ideology of the Nazis. The language these attackers use resembles that of mainstream anti-immigrant politicians in Western countries, such as Mr. Trump, who wanted to ban Muslims from entering the U.S.; Viktor Orbán, the Prime Minister of Hungary, who wants to defend “Christian Europe”; or Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, known for his hardline views on migrants. Besides, a number of far-right parties known for their Islamophobic, white nationalist views are either in power in Europe or are on the rise, be it the Freedom Party of Austria, the AfD of Germany or the National Front of France. While they and their leaders set the broad contours of anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic politics as part of their nationalist narrative, neo-Nazis such as Breivik and the Christchurch shooter are killing common people. Societies worldwide should wake up to the growing danger right-wing racist terrorism poses, and not view it as mere isolated, irrational responses to Islamist terror. It has to be fought politically, by driving a counter-narrative to white supremacy, and by using the security apparatus, through allocation of enough resources to tackle all threats of violence.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Massacre** - an act of killing a lot of people
- **Wake-up call** - a bad experience that warns someone to change something, usually the way that they behave
- **Immigration** - the process in which people enter a country in order to live there permanently

- **Supremacist** - someone who believes their own race is much better than others, and believes they should have power and control
- **Cult** - extreme admiration for someone or something
- **Suspect** - to believe that someone has done something, usually something bad
- **Livestream** - to broadcast video and sound of an event over the internet as it happens, or to be broadcast in this way
- **Manifesto** - a formal statement expressing the aims and plans of a group or organization
- **Invader** - a country, army etc that uses force to enter another country
- **Intelligence** - information collected about the secret plans and activities of a foreign government, enemy etc
- **Apparently** - based only on what you have heard, not on what you are certain is true
- **Carry out** - to do a particular piece of work, research etc
- **Semite** - someone who belongs to any of several groups of people who originally came from the Middle East, including Jews and Arabs
- **Ideology** - a system of ideas and principles on which a political or economic theory is based
- **Fatigues** - simple loose clothes worn by soldiers
- **Laud** - to praise someone or something
- **Racist** - someone who does not like or respect people who belong to races that are different from their own and who believes their race is better than others
- **On the fringes** - people or activities that are considered strange or extreme
- **Emerging** - just beginning to exist or be noticed
- **Stabbed to death** - to someone by pushing a knife or other sharp object into their body
- **Synagogue** - a building used by Jewish people for worship and religious study
- **Obsessed** - considering someone or something as so important that you are always thinking about them, in a way that seems extreme to other people
- **Resemble** - to be similar to someone or something, especially in appearance
- **Mainstream** - considered ordinary or normal and accepted or used by most people
- **Hardline** - strict or extreme in your beliefs or opinions, and not willing to change them
- **Migrant** - someone who travels to another place or country in order to find work
- **Islamophobic** - feeling or connected with unreasonable dislike or fear of Muslims or Islam
- **Contour** - the shape of the outside edge of something
- **Semitic** - someone who is Semitic belongs to the group of people originally from the Middle East that includes Jews and Arabs
- **Isolated** - feeling alone and unhappy, with no friends to support you
- **Irrational** - done or happening without clear or sensible reasons
- **Supremacism** - to believe your own race is much better than others, and believe you should have power and control
- **Apparatus** - the machines, tools, and equipment needed for doing something, especially something technical or scientific

Course correction – Lokpal, at last

The establishment of the anti-graft body is a welcome development

The selection of Justice P.C. Ghose as the first Lokpal has come after an unjustified delay of five years. Nevertheless, it ought to be welcomed as a milestone in the cause of fighting corruption in high places. The concept of an institutional mechanism, or an anti-corruption ombudsman, has been around for over 50 years. It was finally enacted as a law in 2013, and came into effect on January 16, 2014. Some of the credit for driving this legislation must be given to Anna Hazare's movement against what many saw as unreasonable levels of corruption under the previous UPA regime. However, since then, barring a report by the Standing Committee of Parliament and a couple of amendments passed in 2016 on the declaration of assets by public servants, there has been very little progress. At one point, the government's lack of political will to establish a Lokpal became obvious, leading to the Supreme Court repeatedly asking it to show progress in its efforts. Ultimately, it was the court's stern ultimatum to appoint a Lokpal within a timeframe that worked. The appointment system is quite long, a two-stage process. A search committee has to be formed. It recommends a panel of names to the high-power selection committee, which comprises the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, the Leader of the Opposition, the Chief Justice of India (or his nominee) and an eminent jurist. The selection panel has to choose from a short-list consisting of names for the posts of Lokpal chairperson, and judicial and non-judicial members.

The government had initially taken the position that it was awaiting the passage of amendments based on the parliamentary committee report. One amendment pertained to including the leader of the largest party in the Opposition in the selection committee, in the absence of a recognised Leader of the Opposition. In a verdict in April 2017, the Supreme Court rejected the excuse and said there was no legal bar on the selection committee moving ahead even if there was a vacancy. It is not clear why this simple amendment, carried out in respect of selection committees for the posts of CBI Director and Chief Information Commissioner, was not made in the Lokpal Act. The Congress leader in the Lok Sabha, Mallikarjun Kharge, did not want to attend selection committee meetings as a 'special invitee' and wanted full membership. Now that the Lokpal has been chosen, victims of corruption have a viable avenue of redress. The Lokpal will take over the work of sanctioning prosecution, besides exercising its power to order preliminary inquiries and full-fledged investigations by any agency, including the CBI. It may be unrealistic to expect any dramatic impact on the lives of the common people, but the Lokpal and other members have a historic responsibility to live up to popular expectations.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Graft** - dishonest or illegal activities in politics or business that involve giving people money or advantages in exchange for their help or support
- **Unjustified** - not fair, or not based on any good reason
- **Nevertheless** - despite a fact or idea that you have just mentioned
- **Ought to** - used for saying what is the right or sensible thing to do, or the right way to behave
- **Milestone** - an event or achievement that marks an important stage in a process
- **Ombudsman** - someone whose job is to deal with complaints that people make about an organization or particular type of business
- **Enact** - to make a proposal into a law

- **Unreasonable** - not fair
- **Regime** - a system or form of government
- **Amendment** - a change made to a law or agreement
- **Asset** - something valuable belonging to a person or organization that can be used for the payment of debts
- **Obvious** - clear to almost anyone
- **Ultimately** - after a process or activity has ended
- **Stern** - a stern action is so firm that you cannot oppose it
- **Ultimatum** - a statement that orders someone to do something and threatens to punish or attack them if they do not
- **Nominee** - someone who has been officially suggested for a job or a prize
- **Eminent** - important, respected, and admired
- **Jurist** - a legal expert, usually a judge
- **Short-list** - a list of the people or things that you think could be suitable for a job, prize, team etc, chosen from a larger number of people or things
- **Pertain to** - to be directly related to something
- **Verdict** - an official judgment made in a court
- **Viable** - able to be done, or worth doing
- **Avenue** - one of the methods you can use to achieve something
- **Redress** - something that you do for someone or money that you give to them as a way of improving a bad situation that you are responsible for
- **Agency** - a government department, or an organization connected with a government, that deals with a particular subject
- **Dramatic** - sudden and surprising or easy to notice
- **Impact** - an effect, or an influence
- **Live up to** - to be as good as what was expected or promised
- **Popular** - used about something that many people want or like to have

Course correction – **Papering over: tough balancing act for BJP in the Northeast**

The BJP's alliances in the Northeast are underpinned by political contradictions

The BJP is acutely aware that its presence has been patchy across regions and social groups, historically. Its storied victory in 2014, with 282 seats in the Lok Sabha, came primarily from the States in the north and the west. Barring Karnataka, the BJP has yet to have any notable presence in the southern States. However, in 2014 the BJP did make inroads into Assam by winning seven of its 14 seats, and it sensed an opportunity to expand its foothold in the State and further into the Northeast. The party has been roping in regional partners and expanding its individual strength in the region with remarkable aggression since then. It led an alliance to victory in 2016 in Assam, and

in 2018 in Tripura it defeated the Left Front, which had been in power for five terms. As of today, four of the eight Chief Ministers in the region are from the BJP and it is a partner in ruling coalitions in three. The BJP has labelled its partnerships in the Northeast as a distinct entity, the North East Democratic Alliance, under the NDA umbrella.

Last week, the BJP managed to woo back the Asom Gana Parishad that had quit the alliance in January over differences on the Citizenship Amendment Bill. Besides reviving ties with the AGP, the BJP sealed agreements for the Lok Sabha elections with the Bodoland People's Front, Indigenous People's Front of Tripura, National People's Party, Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party and Sikkim Krantikari Morcha. These cover Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Sikkim, respectively. The BJP says it aims to win 22 of the 25 Lok Sabha seats in the region. The Hindutva party's foray into the Northeast in the past often involved legal sophistry and manoeuvring. With its strength saturated in its strongholds, the BJP has compulsions to look for fresh terrains to grow but its efforts in the Northeast are significant for more long-term reasons. The region has remained on the periphery of India's geographical and cultural imagination. The BJP is considered, for good reason, a party of Hindu-Hindi nationalism with scant regard for the aspirations of people and issues of the region. In its efforts to woo the Northeast, here the party has soft-pedalled its strident cow protection agenda that has a sharp anti-minority edge. On amending the law to make the route to Indian citizenship easier for non-Muslims from neighbouring countries — a deeply divisive issue in the Northeast — the party has agreed to not talk about it during the election campaign. That does not mean the BJP is softening its stand on the issue. The fundamental contradiction between the ethnicity-oriented politics of the region and the BJP's religion-inspired politics is visible in the debate on the Bill. But these alliances can also be the vehicle for negotiation and accommodation. Either way, it will be a tough balancing act.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Paper over** - to try to hide a problem or disagreement instead of finding a satisfactory solution to it
- **Balancing act** - a situation in which someone has to do several different things at the same time
- **Alliance** - an arrangement between two or more people, groups, or countries by which they agree to work together to achieve something
- **Underpin** - to be an important basic part of something, allowing it to succeed or continue to exist
- **Contradiction** - a difference in two or more statements, ideas, stories etc that makes it impossible for both or all of them to be true
- **Acute** - used for emphasizing that a feeling, often an unpleasant one, is very strong
- **Patchy** - happening or existing in some places but not in other places
- **Historically** - used for saying that something has existed or happened for a long time
- **Foothold** - a position from which you can improve your status or become more successful in an organization, profession, or market
- **Rope in** - to persuade someone to do something that they do not really want to do
- **Remarkable** - unusual in a way that surprises or impresses you
- **Aggression** - an angry feeling that makes you want to attack or defeat someone else
- **Coalition** - a temporary union of different political parties that agree to form a government together

- **Distinct** - separate and different in a way that is clear
- **Amendment** - a change made to a law or agreement
- **Revive** - to make someone become conscious or alive again
- **Indigenous** - indigenous people lived in a place for a very long time before other people came to live there
- **Progressive** - supporting social and political change that aims to make a system fairer
- **Respectively** - used for saying that something happens separately to each of the people or things mentioned in the order in which they were mentioned
- **Foray** - an attempt at doing something new or something that you do not usually do
- **Sophistry** - arguments or explanations that seem clever and correct but are really false and used for tricking people
- **Manoeuvring** - clever or dishonest behaviour that allows you to get something that you want
- **Saturate** - to fill something completely with a large number of things or with a large amount of something
- **Stronghold** - a place where the majority of people have the same political or religious beliefs
- **Compulsion** - a very strong feeling of wanting to do something, especially a feeling that you cannot control
- **Terrain** - an area of land, usually one that has a particular physical feature
- **Significant** - very large or noticeable
- **On the periphery** - only slightly involved with something, and not a very important part of it
- **Scant** - very little, or not enough
- **Aspiration** - something that you want to achieve, or the wish to achieve something
- **Soft-pedal** - to make something seem less important or less unpleasant than it really is
- **Strident** - holding firm opinions or beliefs and tending to express them frequently, in a way that offends some people
- **Agenda** - all the things that need to be done or that need to be thought about or solved
- **Amend** - to make changes to a document, law, agreement etc, especially in order to improve it
- **Divisive** - likely to cause arguments between people
- **Contradiction** - a difference in two or more statements, ideas, stories etc that makes it impossible for both or all of them to be true
- **Ethnicity** - the fact that someone belongs to a particular ethnic group
- **Debate** - a discussion in which people or groups state different opinions about a subject
- **Negotiation** - formal discussions in which people or groups try to reach an agreement, especially in a business or political situation

☞ "PERSONALITY BEGINS WHERE COMPARISON ENDS." ☞