

Course correction – **For honour's sake: on the Bharat Ratna awards**

In an ideal world, the Bharat Ratna awards would be free from political considerations

It is in the nature of our polity to use any opportunity possible for political signalling, and the Bharat Ratna, the nation's highest civilian honour, has not been spared from this propensity. Over the years, ideological considerations have influenced the choices. While the Narendra Modi government's decision to confer the Bharat Ratna on the late Assamese singer Bhupen Hazarika (who contested on the BJP ticket in the 2004 Lok Sabha election) and the late Nanaji Deshmukh (a Bharatiya Jan Sangh leader and social activist) evoked little surprise, the choice of former President Pranab Mukherjee seemed to have caught everyone off guard and triggered fevered speculation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi described him as "an outstanding statesman of our times". While Mr. Mukherjee's seniority and contribution to the polity are not in doubt, the fact that he agreed to speak at an RSS event last year to the bemused disapproval of the Congress party was held out as a reason. And more unsympathetically, could the award have been a part of the BJP's strategy of embracing old Congress leaders such as Vallabhbhai Patel to highlight that its real opposition is to the Nehru-Gandhi family? It is no secret that Mr. Mukherjee's political ambitions were thwarted at one point by his inability to break the hold of dynastic politics in the Congress.

Whether or not someone deserves a particular honour is not an easy question to resolve. Idolised leaders are integral to the imagination of a community, and arguably, for nation-building. Such secular rites of veneration set an ideal that the community celebrates and strives for. This is of course different from the pursuit of partisan political interests. Unfortunately, competitive **politics** has overshadowed the majesty of the Bharat Ratna. The honour to M.G. Ramachandran in 1988 was widely seen as a cynical political move ahead of an election in Tamil Nadu. A promise to confer the Bharat Ratna to Madan Mohan Malaviya was made by Mr. Modi during the 2014 campaign, and he fulfilled it soon after coming to power. Claims and counterclaims for the honour have become part of assertions of power by various groups. The emergence of new political elites is often accompanied by a clamour for greater acceptance for their leaders in the national roll of honour. A democratic, plural community must resolve these demands with respect and sensitivity. But this must not lead to a devaluation of the honour. Transparency is not easy to achieve, and fairness is difficult to establish, given the contradictory demands of representation and majesty. But a good place to start is to discontinue posthumous awards. It is a slippery slope of arbitrariness. Idols and ideals unite diversities in a community, and Bharat Ratnas must be selected with this in mind. On this count at least, the Modi government's list will be contested.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Honour** - the respect that people have for someone who achieves something great, is very powerful, or behaves in a way that is morally right
- **For the sake of** - for the benefit or good of someone or something
- **Ideal** - as good as you can imagine, and probably too good to be real
- **Polity** - a society that is organized in a political way and that has its own form of government

- **Propensity** - a natural tendency to behave in a particular way
- **Ideological** - based on, or relating to, an ideology
- **Confer** - to give something such as authority, a legal right, or an honour to someone
- **Late** - used for talking about someone who has died, especially recently
- **Evoke** - to bring a particular emotion, idea, or memory into your mind
- **Former** - used for describing someone or something that had a particular job, title, status etc in the past, but not now
- **Off guard** - surprised by something unexpected
- **Trigger** - to cause someone to have a particular feeling or memory
- **Fevered** - extremely excited or nervous
- **Speculation** - ideas or discussion about why something has happened or what might happen
- **Outstanding** - extremely good or impressive
- **Statesman** - an experienced political leader that many people respect
- **Bemused** - confused
- **Strategy** - a plan or method for achieving something, especially over a long period of time
- **It is no secret that** - used for saying that something is a well-known fact
- **Ambition** - something that you very much want to do, usually something that is difficult to achieve
- **Thwart** - to prevent someone from doing something that they want to do
- **Dynasty** - a family whose members rule a country or region for a long period of time
- **Deserve** - if you deserve something, it is right that you get it, for example because of the way you have behaved
- **Idolise** - to think that someone is perfect
- **Arguably** - used for stating your opinion or belief, especially when you think other people may disagree
- **Secular** - not religious, or not connected with religion
- **Veneration** - to respect or worship someone or something
- **Strive** - to make a lot of effort to achieve something
- **Pursuit** - the process of trying to achieve something
- **Partisan** - showing strong and usually unfair support for one particular person, group, or idea
- **Overshadow** - to be a negative feature or influence that spoils something
- **Cynical** - someone who is cynical believes that people care only about themselves and are not sincere or honest
- **Campaign** - a series of actions intended to produce political or social change
- **Counterclaim** - a statement that you make against someone who has made a statement against you
- **Assertion** - a definite statement or claim that something is true
- **Emergence** - the process of appearing or becoming recognized
- **Elite** - a small group of people who have a lot of advantages and keep the most power and influence
- **Clamour** - an urgent request for something by a lot of people
- **Democratic** - based on the principle that all people are equal and should be able to share in making decisions
- **Plural** - consisting of different types of people or things
- **Transparency** - the quality of being done in an open way without secrets
- **Contradictory** - contradictory statements, information, ideas, or beliefs disagree with each other and cannot both or all be true

- **Posthumous** - given to someone after their death, or happening after their death
- **Slippery slope** - a problem or situation that is getting worse and will become extremely bad unless it is stopped
- **Arbitrariness** - the fact of being arbitrary (not based on any particular plan, or not done for any particular reason)

Course correction – **Shutdown surrender**

Donald Trump is forced to retreat by accepting a temporary end to the shutdown

The partial shutdown of the U.S. government was the first major showdown between President Donald Trump and the Democrats after the latter took control of the House of Representatives in the mid-term Congressional elections in November 2018. Mr. Trump had threatened to keep the government shut down indefinitely unless Congress authorised \$5.7 billion to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, one of his key campaign promises. He finally agreed to reopen the federal departments, on the 35th day, without getting anything in return. The Democrats, on their part, had insisted from the beginning that they first wanted the shutdown to end before discussing border security. The President had stormed out of a meeting with the Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi that was called to discuss the shutdown. But now he has agreed to hold talks, after reopening the government. There were a host of factors that influenced the turnaround. If the Trump team had hoped a prolonged government shutdown would break the Democratic Party's rank and file, it didn't happen. Instead, the longest government shutdown in America's history created fissures within Congressional Republicans. The FBI Director, a Trump appointee, was among the senior functionaries who decried the governmental dysfunction. The President's approval ratings fell and polls suggested that most Americans held him responsible for the crisis.

For Speaker Pelosi, who stuck to her demand despite the administration's posturing, it was a victory of sorts in the game of chicken played between Mr. Trump and her. But the key issue remains unaddressed. For now, the spending bills will allow the government to run till February 15. President Trump has said he would not back off from his demand for funding for the wall, which he believes is necessary to stop illegal immigration and cut crime — a claim that is contested widely as border-crossing apprehensions hit a 46-year low in 2017. But Mr. Trump has threatened to shut down the government again in February unless the Democrats agree to fund the wall, or he would declare a national emergency using his executive powers and redirect public funds to build the barrier. Neither option will be easy. The shutdown tactic has failed. Pushing the U.S. into another government closure would be catastrophic for millions of Americans. The national emergency idea lacks support even among the Republicans. Mr. Trump will be better off if he realises that holding the government to ransom to extract compromises from Congress is not a sound tactic for a President. He could adopt a less confrontational approach towards Democrats and hold talks with them with an open mind on immigration and border security. He may just get a deal.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Retreat** - to avoid a dangerous, unpleasant, or embarrassing situation, especially by moving away from it
- **Showdown** - a big meeting, argument, or fight that finally settles a disagreement between people or proves who is the best
- **Democrat** - someone who supports democracy as a political system
- **Latter** - used for referring to the second of two people, things, or groups that have just been mentioned
- **House of Representatives** - the larger and less powerful part of the US Congress
- **Mid-term** - happening in the middle part of a government's time in power, or in the middle part of a university or school term
- **Threaten** - to tell someone that you might or you will cause them harm, especially in order to make them do something
- **Indefinitely** - for a period of time that has no fixed end
- **Insist** - to say very firmly that something must happen or must be done
- **Storm out** - to leave a place in a way that shows that you are angry
- **Host of** - a lot of people or things
- **Turnaround** - an important change in a situation that causes it to improve
- **Fissure** - a long deep crack in something, especially the ground
- **Appointee** - someone who has been chosen to do a particular job
- **Functionary** - an official who works for a government or a political party, especially one with unimportant or boring office duties
- **Dysfunction** - a failure to work well
- **Crisis** - an urgent, difficult, or dangerous situation
- **Despite** - used for saying that something happens even though something else might have prevented it
- **Posturing** - to do things only because you want people to notice you, admire you, or be afraid of you
- **Unaddressed** - not considered or dealt with
- **Back off** - to move backwards in order to get further away from something
- **Immigration** - the process in which people enter a country in order to live there permanently
- **Apprehension** - a feeling of worry or fear that something bad might happen
- **Tactic** - a particular method or plan for achieving something
- **Catastrophic** - causing a lot of damage, or making a lot of people suffer
- **Better off** - in a better situation
- **Hold someone to ransom** - to try to make someone do what you want, especially by using threats
- **Confrontational** - behaving in a way that shows you want to have an argument or fight with someone

Course correction – **Shot in the arm: on SC upholding Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code**

The Supreme Court's ruling eases the implementation of the IBC in knotty cases

Last week's Supreme Court judgment upholding the validity of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016 (IBC) in its "entirety" could have a major impact on the country's economic landscape. The fledgling IBC has been severely tested in the two years since its enactment, with the Centre being forced to amend a couple of its provisions in order to plug some loopholes that enabled defaulting borrowers to challenge the legislation. Any law of this nature that takes over businesses and assets from defaulters and empowers lenders to change the management is bound to face legal challenges. Borrowers were never going to take the IBC lying down, and that is exactly what happened; over the last two years, they have challenged various aspects of the law in tribunals and courts. In the event, the apex court's stamp of approval on the entire Code is a strong signal to borrowers and banks even as it brings a sense of relief to the Centre, which has been watching one of its better economic initiatives being stifled by vested interests.

One of the major challenges mounted against the IBC was by operational creditors, who are owed money by the company in the normal course of operations for supply of goods and services. In the payment waterfall prescribed under Section 53 of the IBC in the event of liquidation of the company or its sale to another entity, their dues rank below those of financial creditors, workmen and employees. This was challenged by the operational creditors, who wanted equal treatment with financial creditors in the waterfall mechanism. Several landmark cases that were referred to the National Company Law Tribunal under the IBC remain stuck there, including that of the high-profile Essar Steel, as a result of its operational creditors seeking equal treatment. With the Supreme Court now ruling that there are "intelligible differentia" between operational and financial creditors, an avenue that defaulters used to stymie proceedings has been closed. Repayment of financial debt by borrowers infuses capital into the economy as lenders can on-lend the money that has been repaid to other entrepreneurs, thus aiding economic activity, the judges observed. The apex court has also clarified that a mere relationship with an ineligible person cannot disqualify someone from becoming a bidder for a troubled asset. It has to be proved that such a person is "connected" with the business activity of the resolution applicant. The court used strong words: "...[T]he experiment conducted in enacting the Code is proving to be largely successful. The defaulter's paradise is lost." This constitutes a clear signal of its backing for the IBC which, despite all the challenges that it has faced, has been successful in sending a message to recalcitrant defaulters that there can be no more business-as-usual when they default.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Shot in the arm** - something that quickly makes a bad situation much better
- **Uphold** - if a court of law upholds something such as a claim, it says that it is correct
- **Insolvency** - (especially of a company) the condition of not having enough money to pay debts, buy goods, etc., or an occasion when this happens
- **Bankruptcy** - a situation in which a person or business becomes bankrupt
- **Bankrupt** - a person or business that is bankrupt has officially admitted that they have no money and cannot pay what they owe
- **Ruling** - a decision
- **Ease** - to make a problem, bad situation, or pain less severe
- **Knotty** - difficult to solve or understand

- **In it's entirety** - with all or everything included
- **Major**- important, serious, large, or great
- **Impact** - an effect, or an influence
- **Landscape** - the main features of a situation or activity
- **Fledgling** - new and without experience
- **Severely** - very seriously
- **Enactment** - to make a proposal into a law
- **Amend** - to make changes to a document, law, agreement etc, especially in order to improve it
- **Provision** - a part of an agreement or law that deals with a particular problem
- **Loophole** - something that has been left out of a law or legal document that people can use to avoid obeying it
- **Default** - to fail to pay money that you owe
- **Asset** - something such as money or property that a person or company owns
- **Defaulter** - someone who does not pay interest or other money that they owe, or who fails to do something that they should do by law
- **Empower** - to give someone more control over their life or more power to do something
- **Aspect** - a particular part, feature, or quality of something
- **Tribunal** - a special law court organized to judge a particular case
- **Apex** - the top or highest part of something
- **Stifle** - to stop something from developing normally
- **Vested interest** - a special reason for wanting things to happen in a particular way, because you will benefit from this
- **Creditor** - a person or company that is owed money by another person or company
- **Liquidation** - a situation in which a business closes and sells everything it owns in order to pay money that it owes
- **Workman** - a man who does physical work, especially building or repairing things
- **Landmark** - a major event or achievement that marks an important stage in a process and makes progress possible
- **High-profile** - often seen in public, mentioned in newspapers, or appearing on television
- **Intelligible** -clear or simple enough to understand
- **Differentia** -the properties that differentiate between one person or thing and another
- **Avenue** - one of the methods you can use to achieve something
- **Stymie** - to stop someone from achieving an aim, or to stop some process from continuing
- **Proceedings** - the actions taken, usually in court, to settle a legal matter
- **Infuse** - to give someone or something a particular quality
- **Entrepreneur** - someone who uses money to start businesses and make business deals
- **Thus** - as a result of the fact that you have just mentioned
- **Mere** - used for emphasizing that something is small or unimportant
- **Ineligible** - prevented by official rules from doing something
- **Bidder** - someone who makes bids for something, for example at an auction (=an event where things are sold to the person who offers the most money)

- **Troubled asset** - an asset on the balance sheets of financial institutions that has experienced a significant drop in value
- **Constitute** - if something constitutes something else, it is considered to be that thing
- **Despite** - used for saying that something happens even though something else might have prevented it
- **Recalcitrant** - refusing to obey orders

Course correction – **Effortless brilliance: on Djokovic's win at Australian Open**

Djokovic beats an error-prone Nadal for a record-breaking seventh Australian Open title

In ovak Djokovic, at his absolute best, can make even the most fiercely competitive of draws appear enervated. From the start of 2015 to mid-2016, when he won five of the six Grand Slam events, he arguably played at a level unmatched in tennis history. With his merciless demolition of Rafael Nadal in Melbourne on Sunday, which gave the World No. 1 a men's-record seventh Australian Open singles trophy, and his 15th Major overall taking him past American great Pete Sampras, he is on the cusp of repeating that golden run spread across 2015 and 2016. The Serb's transformation, in just over six months, from a physically compromised and mentally withdrawn state to having a shot at sporting immortality, has been staggering. Against Nadal, he did not quite have to hit his peak; the World No.2, despite having looked the better player leading up to the final, never truly arrived, with his rhythm, timing and tactics all over the place. The 17-time Grand Slam champion seemed smitten by anxiety, a far cry from the 2018 Wimbledon semifinal when he fearlessly matched Djokovic shot for shot over five epic sets. But that is probably what the mask of invincibility does to opponents, something that Djokovic wears so effortlessly.

To be sure, Djokovic had lost in each of the three tournaments before the Australian Open — to rising youngsters in Karen Khachanov and Alexander Zverev, and the gritty Roberto Bautista Agut — suggesting a few cracks. But the manner of victory over Nadal, where he conceded a mere eight games and did not drop a set, a first in 25 finals for the Spaniard, proved that the 31-year-old had lost none of his astonishing powers of recovery. Nadal was on the path to recovery as well, playing only his first tournament since his injury-forced retirement in the U.S. Open semifinal last September. Following Roger Federer's loss to Stefanos Tsitsipas, the 20-year-old sensation from Greece, the tournament seemed open to further upsets, but the business end demonstrated that the elite can never be written off. As Nadal said after dismantling Tsitsipas in the semifinal, what fans can instead look forward to is an irresistible battle of the generations. On the women's side, this clash has seemed heightened in recent years, and Naomi Osaka, with her gallant three-set win over Petra Kvitova in the final, firmly established herself as the next big thing. For the 21-year-old to back up her maiden title at the U.S. Open with a win in the very next slam is character-revealing. She is now the World No.1 and also the first Asian to get there. She has the temperament and the poise to go much further.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Prone** - likely to do something or be affected by something, especially something bad
- **Absolute** - very great, or complete: used for emphasizing an opinion, feeling, or statement
- **Fiercely** - used for emphasizing what you are saying, especially how strong or severe something is
- **Enervated**- enervated
- **Grand Slam** - a set of important competitions held in a sport during one year, especially in tennis, rugby or golf
- **Arguably** - used for stating your opinion or belief, especially when you think other people may disagree
- **Unmatched** - better than all others
- **Demolition** - an easy defeat in a game or competition
- **Cusp** - a time when one situation or stage ends and another begins
- **Serb** - someone from Serbia
- **Transformation** - a change into someone or something completely different, or the process by which this happens
- **Staggering** - extremely surprising
- **Despite** - used for saying that something happens even though something else might have prevented it
- **Tactic** - a particular method or plan for achieving something
- **Smitten** - seriously affected by something such as an illness or emotion
- **Anxiety** - a worried feeling you have because you think something bad might happen
- **Be a far cry from** - to be very different from someone or something
- **Invincible** - too strong to be defeated
- **Concede** - to admit that something is true
- **Astonishing** - very surprising
- **Elite** - a small group of people who have a lot of advantages and keep the most power and influence
- **Write off** - to decide that someone or something will not succeed and so to stop giving them your attention and energy
- **Look forward to** - to feel happy and excited about something that is going to happen
- **Irresistible** - strong or powerful and impossible to control or defeat
- **Gallant** - brave
- **Maiden** - being the first of its type
- **Temperament** - someone's temperament is their basic character, for example their tendency to be happy, angry etc
- **Poise** - a controlled and relaxed way of behaving, even in difficult situations

☞ “ “If God Brings You To It He Will Bring You Through It.” ” ☞