

Course correction – The Jharkhand way: On Congress-led alliance

The Opposition would do well to focus on State-level coherence in alliances

The Congress's alliance with three regional parties in Jharkhand, announced on Thursday, fits a template that could make it enduring. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, the Jharkhand Vikas Morcha (Prajanatrik) and the Rashtriya Janata Dal have joined hands with the Congress, which sends 14 MPs to the Lok Sabha. The seat-sharing agreement gives seven seats to the Congress, four to the JMM, two to the JVM and one to the RJD. In turn, the JMM gets a larger share of seats in the Assembly election, that will also take place in 2019. In the 2014 Assembly election, the BJP won the State with 31% of the vote. Collectively, constituents of the new alliance got 47% of the vote. Alliances don't only turn on arithmetic. What makes this alliance potent is the synergy among its partners, with ground reports indicating that workers of these parties have developed a certain comfort level with one another. Collectively, they have command over all the regions, and appeal to all social groups of the State. As much as a third of the State's population is tribal, and the alliance is expected to reach out to this section. These factors explain the sweep that the alliance of the Congress, the JMM, the RJD and the CPI had in 2004. That was the last time Jharkhand had a rainbow alliance — it won 13 of the 14 seats, while the BJP won only one seat, Koderma.

State-level alliances will hold the key in the election this year. A countrywide alliance involving vote transfer from one regional party to another is impractical. A national grand alliance against the BJP will be more optics than substance. In Uttar Pradesh, the alliance between the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party has unsettled the BJP, while the Congress's efforts to assert its own space by introducing Priyanka Gandhi Vadra as a front-line campaigner has opened up the field to further possibilities of political realignment. Regional parties function with their focus primarily on local power calculations, and an appreciation of that factor by regional leaders and the Congress can be the basis of stronger bonds. The confusion in the non-BJP camp in Uttar Pradesh is partly due to the lack of appreciation on this point, while the contrasting picture of synergy among them in Bihar and Jharkhand is driven by an acknowledgement of mutual interests. While chemistry and arithmetic are both important, potential participants in a non-BJP coalition must also be mindful of optics. Regional leaders hopping around to make a show of a nascent grand alliance may not add up to much, even as they render it vulnerable to attacks — of the sort lobbed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi when he termed it a Mahamilavat, or grand adulteration. They will do better by staying grand, and staying regional.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Alliance** - an arrangement between two or more people, groups, or countries by which they agree to work together to achieve something
- **Coherence** - the situation when the parts of something fit together in a natural or reasonable way
- **Template** - something that is used as a pattern or an example for something else
- **Enduring** - lasting for a long time

- **Constituent** - one of the parts that form something when they combine
- **Potent** - powerful, or effective
- **Synergy** - the extra energy or effectiveness that people or businesses create when they combine their efforts
- **Collectively** - together, as a group
- **Sweep** - to move or to carry something or someone away with a quick smooth movement
- **Impractical** - not sensible, or not likely to be effective or successful
- **Optics** - the way a situation looks to the general public
- **Substance** - the fact that something is based on accurate information
- **Unsettle** - to make someone feel nervous, confused, or upset
- **Assert** - to state firmly that something is true
- **Front-line** - the area where two armies face each other and fight during a war
- **Campaigner** - someone who tries to achieve political or social change by persuading other people or the government to do something
- **Contrasting** - different from each other in a noticeable or interesting way
- **Synergy** - the extra energy or effectiveness that people or businesses create when they combine their efforts
- **Potential** - someone's or something's ability to develop, achieve, or succeed
- **Coalition** - a temporary union of different political parties that agree to form a government together
- **Mindful** - careful about or conscious of something
- **Nascent** - beginning or formed recently
- **Render** - to express, show, or perform something in a particular way
- **Vulnerable** - a thing, person, or place that is vulnerable is easy to attack
- **Adulteration** - to make a substance less pure by adding something else to it

Course correction – Nigerian renewal: On presidential polls Muhammadu Buhari's mixed record in office makes the presidential contest an open race

As Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari seeks re-election, his mixed record on the economy and security fronts has made for a close contest. Nigeria, Africa's biggest oil-producer, has barely recovered from a recession following the 2014 global slump in crude prices. The government claims to have curbed inflation, though it is in the double digits. Unemployment, which has climbed to over 20% since Mr. Buhari took office in 2015, could hurt his prospects among a predominantly young population. The adverse sentiment from the current grim global climate for foreign investment may have been compounded by the negative signals emanating from the billion-dollar fines slapped on the region's telecom giant. Last year Lagos declined to join the African Continental Free Trade Area after steering negotiations among the 55 African Union states. The decision dealt a blow to the prospects of transforming Africa into an open and diverse economy, and strengthened the perception that Nigeria was not doing enough to move away from its dependence on oil wealth. In the prevailing

atmosphere of rampant institutional corruption dating back decades, Mr. Buhari's image as a morally incorruptible leader held sway with a disillusioned electorate during the 2015 polls. That reputation is still intact. But the former army general now seems politically vulnerable following electoral reverses in the provinces last year. More worrisome for him would be the defection of several members of the ruling All Progressives Congress party to the Opposition People's Democratic Party. The most prominent of them is Mr. Bukhari's main challenger in the presidential race, Atiku Abubakar, a two-term former vice president. The suspension of Nigeria's chief justice on corruption charges last month has raised apprehensions over respect for the popular will in Nigeria. Besides many Western governments, Mr. Abubakar has cautioned the President against electoral interference.

On the security front, Mr. Buhari has had moderate success in pushing back Boko Haram, the Islamist terror organisation that gained notoriety some years ago for the shocking disappearance of 200 children. But the group continues to resort to acts of kidnapping and massacre in its stronghold in the northeast. Meanwhile, even as the violent conflict between farmers and herdsmen festers, concerns have been raised about the lack of equipment for the security forces. A new law passed last year lowering the age to run for public office, could make for a more inclusive democracy. But until the financial entry threshold to the political arena is lowered significantly, such laws will have little impact on the ground. Nevertheless, for a country blighted by bloody dictatorships for many years since the end of colonial rule, the coming polls should inspire confidence in the gradual strengthening of its nascent institutions.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Renewal** - the process of starting something again after a pause
- **Recession** - a period when trade and industry are not successful and there is a lot of unemployment
- **Slump** - to be suddenly reduced to a much lower level
- **Crude** - oil that is still in its natural state and has not yet been refined for use by chemical processes
- **Curb** - to control or limit something that is harmful
- **Inflation** - an economic process in which prices increase so that money becomes less valuable
- **Prospect** - the possibility that something will happen, especially something good
- **Predominantly** - mainly, or mostly
- **Adverse** - negative, unpleasant, or harmful
- **Grim** - grim news, situations, or events are unpleasant and make you feel upset and worried
- **Emanate** - to come from a particular place
- **Giant** - a very large and successful company
- **Decline** - to say politely that you will not accept something or do something
- **Steer** - to influence the way that something happens or the way that people behave
- **Negotiation** - formal discussions in which people or groups try to reach an agreement, especially in a business or political situation
- **Perception** - a particular way of understanding or thinking about something
- **Prevailing** - existing at a particular time or in a particular place
- **Rampant** - existing, happening, or spreading in an uncontrolled way

- **Date back to** - to be made or begun at a particular time in the past
- **Hold sway** - to be the main influence on people's opinions or behaviour
- **Disillusioned** - disappointed because you have discovered that someone or something is not as good as you had believed
- **Intact** - not harmed, damaged, or lacking any parts as a result of something that has happened
- **Former** - used for describing someone or something that had a particular job, title, status etc in the past, but not now
- **Vulnerable** - someone who is vulnerable is weak or easy to hurt physically or mentally
- **Province** - one of many areas into which some countries are divided
- **Defection** - to leave a country, political party, or organization and go to another one
- **Prominent** - important and well known
- **Apprehension** - a feeling of worry or fear that something bad might happen
- **Caution** - to tell someone about a danger or problem that they need to know about or avoid. In ordinary speech, it is more usual to say that you warn someone
- **Moderate** - neither very great nor very small in amount, size, strength, or degree
- **Notoriety** - a situation in which someone or something is famous for something bad
- **Massacre** - the action of killing of a lot of people
- **Stronghold** - a place where the majority of people have the same political or religious beliefs
- **Meanwhile** - from now until a time or event in the future
- **Herdsmen** - someone who herds and looks after a group of animals as their job
- **Fester** - if a problem or unpleasant feeling festers, it becomes worse because no one has dealt with it
- **Concern** - a feeling of worry about something, especially one that a lot of people have about an important issue
- **Inclusive** - deliberately aiming to involve all types of people
- **Threshold** - a limit at which an arrangement changes
- **Arena** - the people and activities involved with a particular subject or activity
- **Significantly** - by a large amount, or in a way that is easily noticeable
- **Impact** - an effect, or an influence
- **On the ground** - in the place being discussed, especially a place where there is a war or another serious situation
- **Nevertheless** - despite a fact or idea that you have just mentioned: used as a way of showing how a sentence, phrase, or word is related to what has already been said
- **Blight** - to cause serious damage or harm to something
- **Bloody** - covered with or full of blood
- **Dictatorship** - government by someone who takes power by force and does not allow elections
- **Colonial** - relating to a system or period in which one country rules another
- **Gradual** - gradual processes and changes happen slowly and by small amounts
- **Nascent** - beginning or formed recently

Course correction – **Terrible Thursday: on Pulwama terror attack**

As investigations into the Pulwama attack begin, Pakistan must act against the Jaish

As India mourns the death of 40 CRPF personnel in Thursday's terrorist strike in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama district, it is clear that the attack was meant to provoke. The Jaish-e-Mohammed, the Pakistan-based terrorist organisation which has orchestrated numerous strikes in the Kashmir Valley, has taken responsibility for what is now the highest toll of security forces in any attack in the State. Investigations should yield a better picture, but it is a matter of extreme concern that a suicide bomber could time his attack to hit a security convoy. There is no question that Pakistan bears the onus to explain why Masood Azhar, the leader of the Jaish-e-Mohammed, enjoys such freedoms on its territory, if not outright support from the establishment. Certainly, diplomatic backing by Pakistan and China has been crucial in defeating efforts at the United Nations to put Azhar on the list of banned terrorists. Early details indicate that a sports utility vehicle laden with a huge quantity of explosives targeted the convoy of 78 buses carrying about 2,500 soldiers from Jammu to Kashmir. The video of the presumed suicide bomber too hints at an altered standard operating procedure meant to provoke and escalate tensions. Forensics teams have already begun work and answers to the disturbing questions the attack has raised on intelligence gathering, dissemination and coordination in the Valley must be pieced together.

However, if the terrorists have acted from an updated playbook, New Delhi's response must not play into their plans with reflexive and precipitate official action. India has withdrawn the Most Favoured Nation status to Pakistan in a signal that it will not wait for preliminaries in the effort to isolate Pakistan. Coercive diplomacy is likely to continue, but to be effective the effort needs a wider net, especially at a time when the U.S. is seeking Pakistan's help in firming up a deal with the Afghan Taliban. Beijing too must not, and cannot, evade questions about its previous blocking of action at the UN, specifically against Azhar. Post-Uri, after terrorist attacks the air is always thick with calls for retributive cross-border strikes. The past history of limited, if any, returns from such precipitate action must serve as a cautionary check. Instead, the effort must be to isolate Pakistan for its support to the Jaish and seek substantive action, to effectively upgrade intelligence and plug security gaps, and to win the confidence of the local population in the Valley. Thursday's attack was meant to provoke and polarise the country. New Delhi's response must, instead, be to isolate the perpetrators and keep the peace on Indian territory.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Terrible** - making you feel very upset or afraid
- **Mourn** - to feel extremely sad because someone has died, and to express this in public
- **Personnel** - the people who work for a company or organization, or who are members of a military force
- **Provoke** - to deliberately try to make someone angry
- **Orchestrate** - to plan and organize a complicated event or course of action, especially without being noticed, so that it achieves the result you want

- **Numerous** - existing in large numbers
- **Toll** - the total number of people who have been killed or hurt
- **Yield** - to produce something useful such as information or evidence
- **Concern** - a feeling of worry about something, especially one that a lot of people have about an important issue
- **Convoy** - a group of vehicles or ships travelling together, often with other vehicles or ships providing protection for them
- **Onus** - if the onus is on someone to do something, it is their responsibility or duty to do it
- **Outright** - used for emphasizing that something happens or is done completely at one time or in a single process
- **Diplomatic** - relating to the profession or skill of preserving or creating friendly relationships between countries
- **Backing** - support
- **Explosive** - a substance or an object that can cause an explosion
- **Presume** - to think that something is true because it is likely, although you cannot be certain
- **Escalate** - to become much worse or more serious, or to make something do this
- **Forensics** - scientific methods used to solve crimes and find out who committed them
- **Dissemination** - to make something such as information or knowledge available to a lot of people
- **Pieced together** - to learn the truth about something by considering all the separate bits of information you have
- **Playbook** - any set of strategies to achieve a goal
- **Reflexive** - a reflexive movement or action is one that you do without thinking
- **Precipitate** - to make something happen or begin to exist suddenly and quickly, especially something bad
- **Isolate** - to keep someone in a place away from other people
- **Coercive** - using force or threats to make someone do something
- **Evade** - to avoid accepting or dealing with something that you should do
- **Retribution** - punishment that someone deserves because they have done something very bad
- **Precipitate** - to make something happen or begin to exist suddenly and quickly, especially something bad
- **Substantive** - important or serious, or referring to the most important or serious issues
- **Provoke** - to deliberately try to make someone angry
- **Perpetrator** - someone who has committed a crime or a violent or harmful act

Course correction – **Forever president: on Egypt's draft constitutional changes**

Sisi stands to extend his reign if Egypt's draft constitutional changes go through

Egypt's proposed constitutional changes to extend presidential terms are a huge setback to the country's democratic progress. Re-elected last year, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the military leader who seized power in 2013, would be allowed to begin afresh a six-year term in 2022 under the new amendments.

Another provision envisages a political role for the military as a guardian of the Constitution. Thursday's parliamentary vote initiating these changes will have to be ratified in a popular referendum, but few doubt the establishment's capacity to secure it. The 2018 general elections were held without a serious challenger to Mr. Sisi, whose rival was in effect handpicked by the regime after other contenders were forced to quit the race. The economy has returned to a growth trajectory following an International Monetary Fund loan in 2016, in exchange for cuts in public subsidies. But soaring prices and double-digit unemployment have dimmed the government's overall appeal. In the past five years, the popular upsurge that began with the overthrow of the three-decade-long autocratic rule of Hosni Mubarak in 2011 has subsided. The military crackdown has vengefully targeted Islamists from the Muslim Brotherhood government of former President Mohamed Morsi, who has since been convicted. The media and political activists anxious to consolidate the gains from the 2011 Tahrir Square mass protests have not been spared the authorities' wrath either.

Egypt had begun nominal attempts at ushering in a multi-party system in 2005, when Mr. Mubarak got himself elected for a fifth term. But within a few months, he declared himself President for life. Attempts to switch to popular representative government in the latter part of his tenure were merely cosmetic. Within years, in 2011, followed the mass protests that demanded the overthrow of the Mubarak regime and formed the epicentre of the 'Arab Spring'. Today, events have turned a full circle under Mr. Sisi's firm grip on the levers of power. The military has been never so powerful since the rule of Gamal Abdel Nasser. As with several autocrats today, the Egyptian leader has leveraged the American and the Russian governments effectively, while they seem indifferent to the military's excesses. Egypt similarly benefits from the strategic partnership it signed with China, bringing trade flows and investment. But above all, China's politically hands-off approach is a win-win for both regimes. While such diversification may be smart diplomacy, it begs the question about Cairo's long-standing position as the leader of the Arab world. There is a simmering anger among sections of the youth contending with unemployment and the absence of avenues for dissent. The Arab Spring is nearly a decade behind, but the conditions that brought the multitudes to Tahrir Square still prevail.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Reign** - the period of time when a king or queen rules a country
- **Setback** - a problem that delays or that stops progress or makes a situation worse
- **Democratic** - involving elections in which people vote for their political representatives
- **Afresh** - in a new or different way
- **Amendment** - a change made to a law or agreement
- **Provision** - the act of providing something that someone needs
- **Envisage** - to have something as a plan or an intention
- **Ratify** - to make an agreement official by signing it or formally accepting it
- **Referendum** - an occasion when everyone in a country can vote to make a decision about one particular subject
- **Rival** - a person, team, or business that competes with another
- **Regime** - a system or form of government
- **Contender** - someone who competes with other people for a prize or job
- **Trajectory** - the way in which a process or event develops over a period of time
- **Subsidy** - an amount of money that the government or another organization pays to help to reduce the cost of a product or service

- **Soaring** - to quickly increase to a high level
- **Upsurge** - a sudden increase in something
- **Overthrow** - to force a leader or government out of their position of power
- **Autocratic** - ruling with complete power
- **Crackdown** - strong action that someone in authority takes to stop a particular activity
- **Vengeful** - wanting or trying to harm someone because they have done something bad to you
- **Former** - used for describing someone or something that had a particular job, title, status etc in the past, but not now
- **Convicted** - proved to be guilty of a crime by a court of law
- **Consolidate** - to make the power, position, or achievements you already have stronger or more effective so that they are likely to continue
- **Protest** - a strong complaint or disagreement
- **Wrath** - very great anger
- **Nominal** - very small
- **Usher in** - to make an activity or process begin
- **Tenure** - the period of time during which someone has an important job or is an elected official
- **Merely** - only / just
- **Cosmetic** - cosmetic changes only affect the appearance of something instead of its basic structure
- **Overthrow** - to force a leader or government out of their position of power
- **Epicentre** - the area of land directly over the centre of an earthquake
- **Autocrat** - someone who has complete power in a country or organization
- **Leverage** - the power to make someone do what you want
- **Strategic** - carefully planned in order to achieve a particular goal, especially in war, business, or politics
- **Above all** - used for referring to something that is more important than any of the other things you could mention
- **Hands-off** - used for telling someone not to touch or take someone or something
- **Win-win** - a win-win situation is one in which everyone benefits
- **Diversification** - the process of developing new products or business activities
- **Long-standing** - having existed for a long time
- **Simmering** - something that is simmering is controlled but may burst out at any time, often violently
- **Contend with** - to have to deal with problems or difficulties, especially in order to achieve something
- **Avenues** - one of the methods you can use to achieve something
- **Dissent** - strong disagreement, especially with what people in authority think or with what the majority of people think
- **Multitude** - the ordinary people who have no power or influence
- **Prevail** - to exist at a particular time or in a particular situation

☞ " " **YOU'LL NEVER CHANGE YOUR LIFE UNTIL YOU CHANGE
 SOMETHING YOU DO DAILY. THE SECRET OF YOUR
 SUCCESS IS FOUND IN YOUR DAILY ROUTINE.** " " ☞