

THE HINDU EDITORIALS & WORDS

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HURDLE: हड़ल

A type of light fence that a person or a horse jumps over in a race

एक प्रकार की हलकी बाड़ जिसे व्यक्ति या घोड़े को दौड़-स्पर्धा में फाँदना होता है; फाँद, बाधा

To clear a hurdle [to jump over it successfully]

A race in which runners or horses have to jump over hurdles

बाधा दौड़ या घुड़दौड़

The 200-metres hurdles

INEFFICIENCY:

अक्षमता

Similar: ineffectiveness, ineffectuality, ineffectualness, inefficaciousness, inefficacy, impotence, inability

REASONABLE: रीज़नब्ल

Fair, practical and sensible

उचित व्यवहार और विवेकपूर्ण

I think it's reasonable to expect people to keep their promises.

I tried to be reasonable even though I was very angry.

Acceptable and appropriate in a particular situation

(स्थिति-विशेष में) स्वीकार्य और उपयुक्त

He made us a reasonable offer for the car.

Opposite: unreasonable

PUT TO REST

Put something to **rest**. and lay something to **rest**. Fig. to **put** an end to a rumour; to finish dealing with something and forget about it. I've heard enough about Ann and her illness. I'd like to **put** the whole matter to **rest**.

ALLAY: अले

To make something less strong

(पीड़ा, कष्ट, भय आदि की) तीव्रता या प्रबलता कम करना

Similar: reduce, diminish, decrease, lessen, assuage, alleviate, ease, relieve, soothe, soften, take the edge off, dull, cushion, mollify.

AADHAAR PAYMENT BRIDGE

(APB) System, one of the unique **payment** systems implemented by NPCI, uses **Aadhaar** number as a central key for electronically channelizing the Government benefits and subsidies in the **Aadhaar** Enabled Bank Accounts (AEBA) of the intended beneficiaries.

DISBURSAL

The act of spending or disbursing money. outlay, spending, disbursement. defrayal, defrayment, payment - the act of paying money. expending, expenditure - the act of spending money for goods or services.

OVERRIDE

To use your authority to reject somebody's decision, order, etc.

अपने अधिकार से किसी निर्णय, आदेश आदि को अस्वीकार कर देना

They overrode my protest and continued with the meeting.

To be more important than something

किसी अन्य की अपेक्षा अधिक महत्वपूर्ण होना

Similar: disallow, overrule, countermand, veto, set aside, quash, overturn, overthrow, cancel, reverse, rescind, rule against, revoke.

AADHAAR AS A HURDLE: ON AUTHENTICATION FAILURES AND WELFARE DELIVERY

Inefficiencies in the Aadhaar project should not come in the way of welfare delivery

The Supreme Court, on Wednesday, did the right thing by **terming as serious the allegation by a petitioner that three crore ration cards were cancelled** for not being linked with the Aadhaar database and that these were connected to reported **starvation deaths in some States**. The unique identification scheme has been in existence for more than a decade and recent data has estimated that nearly 90% of India's projected population has been assigned the Aadhaar number. Following the Court's judgment in 2018, **upholding the Aadhaar programme** as a reasonable restriction on individual privacy to fulfil welfare requirements and dignity — a 4-1 majority Bench had also **rejected a review petition in January 2021** — questions about the scheme's validity for public purposes have been put to rest. But that has not meant that concerns about the failures in the use of the identity verification project have been allayed. These include inefficiencies in biometric authentication and updating, linking of Aadhaar with bank accounts, and the use of the Aadhaar payment bridge. With benefits under the PDS, the NREGA and LPG subsidy, among other essentials, requiring individuals to have the Aadhaar number, inefficiencies and failures have led to inconvenience and suffering for the poor. There are reports that show failures in authentication having led to delays in the disbursement of benefits and, in many cases, in their denial due to cancellation of legitimate beneficiary names. The government had promised that exemption mechanisms that would allow for overriding such failures will help beneficiaries still avail subsidies and benefits despite system failures. That has been the response by the government to the recent petition as well, but reports from States such as Jharkhand from 2017, for example, suggest that there have been **starvation deaths** because of the denial of benefits and subsidies.

Biometric authentication failures are but expected of a large scale and technology-intensive project such as the UID. Despite being designed to store finger and iris scans of most users, doubts about the success rates of authentication and the generation of "false negatives" have always persisted, more so for labourers and tribal people. Those engaged in manual and hard labour, for example, are susceptible to fingerprint changes over time. In practice, beneficiaries have tended to use Aadhaar cards as identity markers but there have been instances of people losing cards and being denied benefits. Given the scale of the problem, the central and State governments would do well to allow alternative identification so that genuine beneficiaries are not denied due subsidies. The question of fraud can still be addressed by the use of other verification cards and by decentralised disbursement of services at the panchayat level.

FOR A RESET: ON U.S.-CHINA MEETING IN ALASKA

There is no hope of a sudden improvement in U.S.-China ties, but the Alaska meet is a start

As top diplomats from the U.S. and China begin their meeting in Alaska, there is no question that their conversation will be a difficult one. The meeting, between U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Yang Jiechi, CCP Politburo member and Director, Central Foreign Affairs Commission, accompanied by U.S. NSA Jake Sullivan and Chinese Foreign Minister and State Councillor Wang Yi, comes on the back of tensions that spiralled during the Trump administration around trade tariffs, 5G telecommunication, tech espionage, Chinese maritime actions and U.S. sanctions on China, and further exacerbated over the pandemic, which Mr. Trump called the "China virus". Biden administration officials have said that they will bring up China's crackdown in Xinjiang and Hong Kong, Chinese aggression against U.S. allies and partners, in particular pressure on Australia over trade bans, aggression against Japan in the Senkaku islands and even the PLA's incursions over the LAC, which China considers bilateral issues. Mr. Blinken prefaced the Alaska meet with visits to Seoul and Tokyo where he promised an American "pushback" to China, and he goes into the talks with the backing of the recent summit-level Quad conversations, with a commitment to ensuring a free Indo-Pacific. For its part, China is seeking a reversal of Trump-era policies, and structured dialogue to take forward

ties from the point they have reached, arguably their lowest since the Nixon era. In particular, China wants an end to the U.S.'s trade sanctions, restrictions on American firms manufacturing in China and visa bans, and a reopening of its consulate in Houston.

Clearly, the scene is set for an extended airing of grievances, and expectations are low of any breakthrough, but the fact that the meeting is happening at all sends the signal that both sides are prepared to engage each other. Mr. Blinken's formulation that the U.S. will be "competitive when it should be, collaborative when it can be and adversarial when it must be" with China, chalks up climate change, the COVID-19 challenge and global economic recovery as areas of possible discussion. Research quoted by the World Economic Forum predicted that the U.S.-China tariff war itself could cost the world \$600 billion. Afghanistan is another area where the U.S. and China have held three meetings last year as part of the "Troika" with Russia, and a common peace strategy could be another helpful conversation. The two sides are expected to discuss a possible summit meeting between U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping. While New Delhi has a litany of its own grievances with Beijing, it too would benefit if a "Cold War" between the U.S. and China is averted, much like the rest of the world that has found itself akin to the proverbial grass when two elephants fight.

COMPLIANCE DEFICIT

The rule book on corporate governance is getting fatter but the compliance is not getting any better

With the Securities Exchange Board of India (SEBI) and the Ministry of Corporate Affairs vying with each other to write newer corporate governance regulations for India Inc, the rulebook for the top listed companies is getting quite voluminous indeed. While writing new rules into the statute, regulators seldom stop to evaluate if companies are in compliance with existing ones. This is what makes the Excellence Enablers Survey on Corporate Governance, piloted by former SEBI Chairman M Damodaran, such a useful document. This comprehensive survey, which dives deep into the annual reports of the Nifty 50 companies, measures the degree of compliance achieved by these companies with governance provisions in the Companies Act, 2013 and SEBI's 2015 LODR Regulations. It also evaluates whether these companies are embracing the spirit of the law. Importantly, what it finds is a patchy record of compliance in letter and in spirit, even in this elite sample. To prevent promoters and professional managers from exercising undue influence on corporate decisions, the Companies Act and LODR specify minimum board strengths, quotas for non-executive/independent directors (IDs) and minimum meeting requirements. The survey shows that companies find it easy to meet such numerical requirements. About 42 of the 50 companies had over nine-member boards when only six are required. Against a 50 per cent quota for non-executive directors, most Nifty firms featured over 75 per cent. Against the Company Law rule of one-third IDs (the LODR requires 50 per cent in some cases), over 39 companies filled over half their boards with IDs. But it is when one drills down to more qualitative aspects that many gaps emerge. For instance, separate meetings of IDs are critical to their autonomy, but 17 Nifty companies flouted rules to hold no such meetings; 33 held only one. Attendance records of Nomination and Remuneration Committee and Audit Committee members were far from spotless, with many skipping meetings. Some directors even had nil attendance but inexplicably held on to their board seats. Boards also seemed to take their risk management functions rather lightly, with 22 FY20 annual reports not even flagging Covid as a risk. Companies seem loath to put official whistle-blower mechanisms in place and were casual about AGMs, preferring to hold them many months after the accounts, with IDs skipping them.

This compliance record at India's leading companies causes one to despair about the state of governance at the other 5,000-odd listed companies that face far less public and analyst scrutiny. Before framing their next set of governance rules, SEBI and the Corporate Affairs Ministry must investigate reasons for the current non-compliance and identify if it is owing to real hurdles or wilful default. Governance rules also need to be harmonised across the Companies Act and LODR, so that companies don't find it easy to exploit loopholes.