DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

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SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH

Reprisal attacks will continue: Trump

U.S. launches airstrikes after a helicopter was brought down; Iran attacks U.S. bases

Aggression will be met with an immediate response, says Iranian Speaker Ghalibaf

'The Middle East Bully is dead! They took too long, now they will pay,' says Trump

Stanly Johny

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Wednesday that the U.S. would continue to "attack Iran very hard", after a tit-for-tat exchange in which Washington launched airstrikes following the downing of an American military helicopter over the Strait of Hormuz and Tehran retaliated with attacks on U.S. bases in the region.

"We are going to be attacking them, attacking them very hard," Mr. Trump told presspersons on Wednesday. "We hit them hard yesterday, and we are going to hit them again hard today." Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf, Iran's Parliament Speaker, said any attack on Iran would be met with "immediate and decisive response". In a message to commemorate the 12-day war of June 2025, Mr. Ghalibaf said: "The imposed wars, the first, second, and third, have shown the world that the path of victory and triumph passes through steadfastness and martyrdom."

'Pay the price'

Earlier in the day, Mr. Trump warned that Iran "will have to pay the price" for taking "too long" to negotiate a deal. The warning came after the U.S. launched air strikes.

"Iran's military is a complete and total mess. Much of it, like their Navy and Air Force, doesn't even exist any more – they have been completely defeated. Iran is all talk and no action," Mr. Trump wrote in a social media post. "The Bully of the Middle East is DEAD! They've taken too long to negotiate a deal that would have been great for them, now they will have to pay the price," he said.

Vehicles in flames after an Israeli air strike in Sidon, Lebanon on Wednesday. A ceasefire in effect since April 8 is under strain. AFP

The U.S. forces struck "Iranian air defense, ground control stations, and surveillance radar sites near the Strait of Hormuz with precision munitions", U.S. Central Command (Centcom) said in a statement.

"The operation was a proportional response to recent attacks on U.S. forces and international commercial ships transiting regional waters."

Iran's Tasnim news agency reported that U.S. strikes destroyed two reservoirs in Bamani Sirik. The attack affected drinking water supply for about 20,000 people, according to a report in Press TV.

Iran, which neither confirmed nor denied that it downed the helicopter, responded with missile and drone attacks at U.S. bases in Bahrain, Kuwait, and Jordan.

"In response to the military aggression and the violation of Iran's national sovereignty and territorial integrity, the country's 'powerful armed forces' struck U.S. bases and assets in the region that were the origin of these aggressions," Iran's Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

According to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the U.S. Navy's fifth fleet headquarters and the Sheikh Isa air base in Bahrain, Al-Azraq base in Jordan, and Ali al-Salem base in Kuwait were the sites targeted by Iranian missiles and drones.

'Drone downed'

The IRGC also claimed that it "intercepted and destroyed" an American MQ-9 Reaper drone over the city of Jam in Bushehr province.

The U.S.-Iran exchange of strikes followed a similar exchange of fire between Iran and Israel earlier this week. Iran launched missiles at Israel, the first direct attack on Israel since the April 8 ceasefire was announced, in retaliation for Israeli strikes on Beirut in Lebanon, and Israel responded with air strikes. Mr. Trump had then asked both sides to stop "shooting" at each other, and said the U.S. and Iran were still close to reaching an agreement.

Mr. Trump said on Tuesday that Iran had shot down "one of our highly sophisticated Apache Helicopters while patrolling over the Strait of Hormuz" and that the U.S. would respond to the attack.

Over the past two months, Mr. Trump had said several times that a deal was within reach. But tensions persist in the Strait of Hormuz, which remains under Iran's control. The U.S. had announced a blockade on Iran's ports on April 13, after direct negotiations in Islamabad failed to make any breakthrough.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The U.S. conducted airstrikes on Iranian military installations near the Strait of Hormuz after the alleged downing of a U.S. military helicopter.
- Iran retaliated by launching missile and drone attacks on U.S. military bases in Bahrain, Kuwait, and Jordan.
- The escalation follows tensions arising from failed negotiations and renewed Iran-Israel hostilities.
- The developments have revived concerns over maritime security, regional stability, and global energy supplies.

Why This News Matters for UPSC?

- Strait of Hormuz is a recurring Prelims hotspot.
- West Asian geopolitics is important for GS-II (International Relations).
- Energy security and maritime security are important for GS-III.
- Impact on India's crude oil imports and diaspora is frequently asked in Mains.

Key Exam-Relevant Points

Strait of Hormuz

- Connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea.
- Lies between Iran (north) and Oman (south).
- One of the world's most important oil transit chokepoints.
- Around one-fifth of global petroleum trade passes through it.
- Important for exports from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, and Iran.

Strategic Significance

- Critical Sea Line of Communication (SLOC).
- Any disruption directly impacts:
  - Global oil prices
  - Energy security
  - Maritime trade
  - Inflation worldwide

Impact on India

- India imports more than 80% of its crude oil requirements.
- West Asia remains India's major energy source.
- A large Indian diaspora resides in Gulf countries.
- Escalation can affect:
  - Oil import bill
  - Current Account Deficit (CAD)
  - Inflation
  - Remittances
  - Maritime trade routes

Military and Security Dimension

- Growing use of:
  - Drones
  - Precision-guided missiles
  - Hybrid warfare
  - Strategic deterrence
- Highlights importance of maritime domain awareness and naval power.

Static Linkages

- Freedom of navigation under UNCLOS.
- Strategic chokepoints influence global geopolitics.
- Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) are vital for trade-dependent economies.
- Energy security is a component of national security.
- Balance of Power and Deterrence Theory remain central concepts in international relations.
- Maritime security is a key pillar of India's SAGAR doctrine.
- Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) help mitigate supply disruptions.

Critical Analysis

Concerns

- Risk of wider regional conflict.
- Threat to global energy supplies.
- Rising shipping and insurance costs.
- Increased volatility in crude oil markets.
- Humanitarian consequences due to attacks on civilian infrastructure.

Implications for India

- Higher crude prices may worsen inflation.
- Increased fiscal pressure through higher import bills.
- Possible disruption of Indian trade through West Asia.
- Risks to Indian citizens working in Gulf countries.

Strategic Lessons

- Excessive dependence on a single region for energy creates vulnerabilities.
- Maritime chokepoints remain critical in global politics.
- Diplomacy remains essential alongside military deterrence.

Way Forward

- Strengthen diplomatic engagement with West Asian countries.
- Diversify crude oil import sources.
- Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserves.
- Promote renewable energy and green hydrogen.
- Enhance Indian Navy's maritime surveillance capabilities.
- Strengthen cooperation under SAGAR and IORA frameworks.

Two Indians dead and one missing after U.S. fighter hits ship off Oman: FSUI

Debayan Tewari
CHENNAI/NEW DELHI

A videograb shows the tanker *Settebello* after it was struck by U.S. aircraft off the Oman coast on Wednesday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Two Indian seafarers were killed and one was reported missing after U.S. forces attacked an oil tanker, *Settebello*, off the coast of Oman on Wednesday, Manoj Yadav, general secretary of Forward Seamen's Union of India (FSUI), said.

The Centre had earlier said the three were missing. Mr. Yadav has identified the dead as Aditya Sharma, deck cadet, and Shivanand Chaurasiya, engine fitter. Chief engineer Patnala Suresh is missing, he said.

Twenty-one Indian seafarers were rescued from the vessel hit by U.S. "precision munitions".

The U.S. Central Command (Centcom) said the ship "violated the ongoing blockade [of Iranian ports] by attempting to transport oil from Iran". The Centcom "disabled Palau-flagged *M/T Settebello* as it transited the Gulf of Oman. A U.S. aircraft fired precision munitions into the ship's engine room after the crew repeatedly failed to comply with directions from American forces," it posted on X, adding a video of the strike.

India summoned the U.S. Embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission, Jason Meeks, and lodged a 'strong protest' after the hit

'Strong protest'

India summoned the U.S. Embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission, Jason Meeks, and lodged a "strong protest" after the attack.

The Ministry of External Affairs said: "Our Embassy in Oman is closely monitoring the situation and proactively coordinating with the Omani authorities in the ongoing Search and Rescue operation."

The attack comes two days after U.S. forces hit oil tanker *Marivex*, off Oman, from which 24 Indian sailors were rescued.

Earlier, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations sent out an alert: "UKMTO has received a report of an incident 20NM northeast of Sohar, Oman. Local authorities have reported a tanker has experienced a fire in their engine room and are on the scene assisting with the evacuation of the crew. The vessel is reporting one casualty and two crew members missing. No environment impact reported. Authorities continue investigating."

Maritime intelligence website Lloyd's List said the "tanker was one of many vessels waiting off Duqm (Oman) recently, reportedly held by the U.S. Navy."

Reports quoted British maritime security company Vanguard Tech as saying that the ship had "transmitted a distress call stating that its engine room had been struck by a missile".

The Ministry's statement flagged the "continuing incidents of attacks on shipping in the region" as "deeply worrisome and a direct result of the ongoing conflict in the region."

"The targeting of commercial shipping and civilian infrastructure in the region must end, and free and unimpeded navigation and commerce through the international waterways in the region in keeping with international law must be restored at the earliest," it said.

Ship had been to China

Settebello is a sanctioned vessel, according to the blacklist of TankerTrackers.com. Tracker websites showed that the ship had been to China twice, in March and April. It had discharged cargo at Lianyungang port from April 27 to May 3 and had set sail from Singapore on May 12.

(With inputs from Kallol Bhattacherjee)

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Two Indian seafarers were killed and one Indian crew member went missing after the oil tanker Settebello was attacked by U.S. forces in the Gulf of Oman.
- The vessel was reportedly carrying Iranian-origin oil and was accused by the U.S. of violating its blockade on Iranian oil exports.
- According to the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), the tanker failed to comply with directions issued by American forces, following which precision munitions were used to disable the vessel.
- India lodged a strong diplomatic protest with the United States and summoned the U.S. Deputy Chief of Mission.
- The incident occurred amid escalating U.S.-Iran tensions and repeated attacks on commercial shipping in the Persian Gulf–Gulf of Oman region.
- Earlier, another tanker (Marivex) carrying Indian crew members was similarly targeted, highlighting growing risks to Indian seafarers and maritime trade.

Key Points

- Location: Gulf of Oman, near Sohar (Oman).
- Affected Vessel: Settebello (Palau-flagged oil tanker).
- Indian Casualties: Two dead, one missing, 21 rescued.
- U.S. Justification: Enforcement of sanctions and blockade against Iranian oil exports.
    - India's Response:Strong diplomatic protest.
    - Monitoring through the Indian Embassy in Oman.
    - Coordination with Omani authorities for rescue operations.
- Strategic Concern: Increasing militarization of critical sea lanes in West Asia.
- Economic Concern: Threat to global energy supply chains and maritime commerce.

Static Linkages

- India depends on maritime routes for nearly 95% of its trade volume and about 70% of its trade value.
- The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), 1982 guarantees freedom of navigation on the high seas.
- The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea and is among the world's most critical energy chokepoints.
- India is a signatory to UNCLOS and advocates a rules-based maritime order.
- The Indian Navy's Mission-based Deployments ensure maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region.
- The SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) doctrine emphasizes maritime cooperation and secure sea lanes.
- Energy security remains a critical component of India's strategic autonomy and foreign policy.

Mains Enrichment Points

Challenges

- Escalating U.S.-Iran tensions.
- Threats to freedom of navigation.
- Increased risks to Indian citizens abroad.
- Volatility in global oil markets.
- Growing militarization of international waterways.

Opportunities for India

- Strengthen maritime diplomacy.
- Enhance naval capabilities.
- Expand strategic petroleum reserves.
- Promote peaceful dispute resolution through international forums.
- Deepen engagement with Gulf countries.

Way Forward

- Ensure safety and welfare of Indian seafarers.
- Strengthen maritime domain awareness.
- Diversify energy import sources.
- Support adherence to UNCLOS and international law.
- Enhance naval cooperation with Gulf and Indo-Pacific partners.
- Promote diplomatic de-escalation in West Asia.

The forgotten copilot of Air India flight 171

A year since the tragic crash of Air India flight AI 171 that cost 260 lives on June 12, 2025, the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA), Government of India, and its Air Accident Investigation Bureau, have strayed from their promised "transparent and factual" path. The only piece of information that is available to us is the Preliminary Report that was published in July 2025. The cryptic report has hidden pointers that are worth highlighting, in the absence of any final report.

The flood of false narratives spread by some sections of mainstream media and social media compel this writer to highlight issues. The usual tendency of the MoCA and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) to conceal the truth and place the blame on the pilot has, in this case, taken a different turn. Instead, there is a defence of the captain and playing possum in the face of claims by some pilots' associations and "aviation illiterates" – as a former National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigator has described them in a YouTube video – that the crash resulted from failures on the part of the airline and the aircraft manufacturer.

Media narratives versus facts

The first clear indication appears on pages 12-13 of the preliminary report which says: "The forward EAFR [Enhanced Airborne Flight Recorder] was located on 16 June 2025 from the wreckage debris beside the Building F." The forward EAFR records both the digital flight data and voice data from cockpit area mike. It is therefore evident that the AAIB has listened to the cockpit voice recorder (CVR) recording and alerted the MoCA, which in turn informed the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). On the same day, June 16, citing intelligence inputs and a perceived threat, the MHA reportedly ordered X-category commando protection for the head of the AAIB. He continues to enjoy this protection at taxpayers' expense, even as the travelling public and the families of the crash victims remain in the dark.

Certain narratives in the media and social media have been on the report of the fuel control switches (FCS) having transitioned from run to cutoff and then cut-off to run after several seconds delay.

The use of the word "transitioning" in the report is being bandied about as evidence of American influence on the report. What is being forgotten is the fact that the FCS is a spring loaded switch that has to be lifted off the run slot, moved over the gate and dropped into the cut-off slot.

The same action is required for moving the switch from cutoff to run. These switches cannot be moved by a software error or a power failure. The only CVR statement in the report mentions this: "one of the pilots is heard asking the other why did he cutoff. The other pilot responded that he did not do so." The rest of the CVR recordings were apparently shared with the MoCA and the MHA for the threat perception.

The Government of India knew the facts on June 16, 2025 and is still dragging its feet to provide closure to the affected families who are experiencing mental agony.

A red herring

The latest angle that is occupying centre stage is the Ram Air Turbine (RAT). Calculations about when the RAT deployed in flight and how this was due to a major wiring fault are being used by interested parties to digress from the key issue of who moved the FCS to cut off the engines. Page 14 of the report says that the "RAT hydraulic pump began supplying hydraulic pressure at about 08:08:47 UTC", which is a clear indication the RAT was deployed five seconds earlier, around 08:08:42 UTC.

The report mentions that once the aircraft achieved the maximum recorded airspeed of 180 knots at about 08:08:42 UTC, immediately thereafter, the Engine 1 and Engine 2 FCS moved from run to cutoff position one after another with a time gap of one second.

When both engines were cut off, two things would have happened immediately. The entire instrument panel in front of the copilot would have gone blank and the power supply to the rear EAFR shut. The rear EAFR becomes a lame duck and whatever data the investigators retrieve will only be what is recorded prior to that time. The actual backup of critical data would have been lost had the forward EAFR data not been recovered.

The Boeing 787 Manual lists four conditions that result in the automatic deployment of RAT to provide backup. It also mentions that the RAT can be deployed manually by pressing the RAM Air Turbine switch on the hydraulic panel. This will be recorded both on the EAFR as well as the sound recorded on the CVR. The clear reason why RAT deployed before the engines were cut off will be evident on both the EAFR and CVR recordings.

Under normal circumstances, when a major emergency takes place on take-off, the Captain must take over the controls and the copilot reverts to pilot monitoring duty even if he was the Pilot flying. The CVR will clearly indicate if that action took place. The EAFR apparently records the flight controls of the copilot side moving during the entire event. In the case of flight AI-171, the delay in moving the FCS for the no. 1 and no. 2 engines, at 08:08:52 and 08:08:56, respectively, can be explained by the circumstances confronting the poor co-pilot: a blank screen, no guidance, both engines without power, and the task of controlling the aircraft with his right hand while attempting to restart the engines with his left hand.

For his low experience on the aircraft type and performing a manoeuvre which is never given for copilots during training, First Officer Clive Kunder did a remarkable job in steering the crippled aircraft away from crowded areas where more lives would have been lost on ground.

Closure requires the truth

There were two pilots on board. The FCS were deliberately moved to cut off the engines. Only one of them could have done it and not a software error or a power system error. If the AAIB could have deciphered the CVR data to alert the MoCA and the MHA as early as June 16, 2025, fishing for excuses to deviate from the facts will only damage the credibility of the Indian aviation system.

The United States NTSB and the Air Accidents Investigation Branch of the United Kingdom have far more experience in deciphering the EAFR/Digital Flight Data Recorder and CVR data than the Indian AAIB or the DGCA. One hopes that the authorities in India do not drag their feet and face the humiliation of the NTSB releasing its own findings, as it did in the SilkAir (1997) and China Eastern (2022) fatal crashes, which ultimately established "Deliberate Human Intervention".

The families of First Officer Kunder and all those who perished in the crash on June 12, 2025, deserve closure to their mental agony.

Captain A. (Mohan) Ranganathan

Former airline instructor pilot, aviation safety adviser and also a former member of the Civil Aviation Safety Advisory Council (CASAC), India

One year on, the AI 171 investigation demands answers, accountability, and closure

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- On 12 June 2025, Air India Flight AI-171 (Boeing 787 Dreamliner) crashed shortly after take-off, killing 260 people.
- The Air Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) released a Preliminary Report (July 2025); the final report is awaited.
- Debate centres on:
  - Movement of Fuel Control Switches (FCS) from RUN to CUTOFF.
  - Deployment of the Ram Air Turbine (RAT).
  - Possible role of pilots, airline systems, aircraft manufacturer, and regulators.
- The issue raises concerns regarding aviation safety governance, investigation transparency, and institutional accountability.

Key Points

- AAIB is India's aircraft accident investigation authority under the Ministry of Civil Aviation.
- Enhanced Airborne Flight Recorder (EAFR) combines:
  - Flight Data Recorder (FDR)
  - Cockpit Voice Recorder (CVR)
- Preliminary findings indicate:
  - Both engines' FCS reportedly moved from RUN to CUTOFF shortly after take-off.
  - FCS are mechanically protected and generally require deliberate movement.
  - RAT deployed during the emergency.
- RAT provides emergency hydraulic and electrical backup power.
- The accident involved a Boeing 787 Dreamliner.
- International agencies such as the National Transportation Safety Board (USA) and Air Accidents Investigation Branch (UK) may assist investigations.
- Global investigation standards are governed by the Chicago Convention (Annex 13).

Static Linkages

- India is a signatory to the Chicago Convention, 1944.
- International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) sets global aviation safety standards.
- Accident investigations aim to:
  - Determine causes.
  - Prevent recurrence.
  - Improve aviation safety.
  - Not assign criminal liability.
- Aircraft Act, 1934 and Aircraft Rules, 1937 provide the legal framework.
- DGCA is responsible for safety oversight, licensing, and airworthiness regulation.
- Separation of regulator and investigator is a global best practice.
- Safety Management Systems (SMS), human factors, and cockpit resource management are key safety pillars.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Preliminary report released relatively quickly.
- EAFR recovery enables detailed technical analysis.
- International participation improves credibility.
- Opportunity to strengthen aviation safety systems.

Concerns

- Delay in release of final findings.
- Limited disclosure has fuelled speculation.
- Victims' families still await closure.
- Potential impact on confidence in aviation governance.

Stakeholder Perspectives

Victims' Families

- Seek transparency, accountability, and closure.

Government

- Must balance transparency with investigative integrity.

Airlines

- Need clarity for safety improvements.

Pilots

- Advocate evidence-based conclusions, avoiding premature blame.

International Community

- Expects adherence to ICAO norms.

Ethical Dimensions

- Transparency versus premature disclosure.
- Accountability to victims and society.

- Maintaining trust in public institutions.
- Fair treatment of crew members pending final findings.

Way Forward

- Publish the final report at the earliest.
- Strengthen AAIB's institutional independence.
- Ensure periodic public briefings.
- Improve coordination among AAIB, DGCA, airlines, and manufacturers.
- Adopt global best practices in investigations.
- Strengthen human-factor and cockpit resource management training.
- Expand predictive aviation safety analytics.
- Improve crisis communication and victim-support mechanisms.

Foreseeable accidents

Industrial mishaps are due to accumulated organisational weaknesses

Despite there having been a streak of industrial accidents in India of late, the notion that they are isolated and incidental persists. Within days of each other, four workers were killed in a 'mishap' in a septic tank in Surat while nine workers were killed by an explosion at a steel plant in Visakhapatnam. They appear to be different circumstances: one involved workers entering a confined space and succumbing to toxic gases; the other involved 150 tonnes of molten steel and a violent blast. Yet, industry has known of these risks and had developed preventive measures decades ago. In the Surat incident, four workers entered the tank and were overcome by toxic fumes. The circumstances resemble a well-known pattern in fatalities in confined spaces, where the first victims are often followed by would-be rescuers who enter without protection. There have been deaths in similar circumstances in Surat's industrial sector in recent years. The working area must be mechanically ventilated and have rescue personnel on standby while the workers must have breathing apparatuses, harnesses and retrieval lines, and clear lines of communication. Unprotected entry must be strictly prohibited. Septic tank deaths and deaths due to manual scavenging are in fact rarely accidents in the sense of unforeseeable events, but failures of basic safety management, and the recurrence of such incidents speaks to the persistence of that failure. Likewise, while steelmaking is intrinsically more dangerous because it combines extreme temperatures, pressurised gases, heavy equipment, and enormous stores of heat energy, industry still knows the hazards it poses, and further that even relatively small process failures can result in multiple casualties.

Both incidents, and the patterns they extend, are reminders of persistent safety failures in many parts of Indian industry. In Visakhapatnam, trade unions and former employees have alleged that the plant had reduced staffing, heavier workloads, ageing equipment, deferred maintenance, and an increasing dependence on contractual labour. Some also linked these trends to the difficulties the plant faced following the Centre's divestment plans and the resulting constraints on investments. However true any of these factors are, they confirm that a major industrial accident is almost always due to the accumulation of organisational weaknesses. In fact, contract labour is central to understanding both incidents. Occupational safety research has consistently found that contracted workers face higher risks because they may receive less training and operate within systems with fragmented accountability. The incidents have also occurred during the gradual and uneven implementation of India's new occupational safety framework – and highlight the invisible fact that the country's industries remain anchored by old problems of manpower shortage, caste- and class-based exposure to hazardous labour, and a 'cost over safety' mindset in financially stressed units.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Four workers died in a septic tank incident in Surat due to toxic gas exposure in a confined space.
- Nine workers were killed in an explosion at a steel plant in Visakhapatnam involving molten steel operations.
- The incidents occurred despite established industrial safety protocols.
- Concerns have resurfaced regarding workplace safety, contract labour, and implementation of occupational safety laws.
- Trade unions cited manpower shortages, ageing equipment, deferred maintenance, and increasing contractualisation.

Key Points

- Confined-space accidents are predictable industrial hazards.
- Essential safety measures:
  - Mechanical ventilation.
  - Gas detection systems.
  - Breathing apparatus.
  - Safety harnesses and retrieval lines.
  - Trained rescue personnel.
- Septic tank and manual scavenging deaths are largely failures of safety management.
- Steel plants involve risks from:
  - Extreme temperatures.
  - Molten metal.
  - Pressurised gases.
  - Heavy machinery.
- Contract workers often face:
  - Less training.
  - Inadequate safety equipment.
  - Weak accountability systems.
- Industrial disasters generally result from cumulative organisational failures.
- Incidents expose challenges in implementing the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSHWC) Code, 2020.

Static Linkages

- Article 21: Right to Life includes safe working conditions.
- Article 39(e): Protection of workers' health and strength.
- Article 42: Just and humane conditions of work.
- Article 43: Decent standard of life for workers.
- OSHWC Code, 2020 consolidates 13 labour laws.
- Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 prohibits hazardous sewer and septic tank cleaning.
- NHRC has repeatedly stressed accountability for sewer deaths.
- ILO recognizes a safe and healthy working environment as a fundamental right.
- Safai Karamchari Andolan v. Union of India (2014) mandated action against manual scavenging and sewer deaths.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Labour law consolidation through OSHWC Code, 2020.
- Greater awareness of workplace safety.
- Judicial activism against manual scavenging.
- Availability of technological alternatives for hazardous cleaning.

Concerns

- Continued sewer and septic tank deaths despite legal prohibition.
- Weak enforcement and inspections.
- High dependence on contract labour.
- Inadequate safety audits.
- Cost-cutting often compromises safety.
- Delayed implementation of labour codes.
- Social inequalities push vulnerable groups into hazardous jobs.
- Weak safety culture in industries.

Stakeholders

- Workers: Safety, training, compensation.
- Industry: Balancing productivity and compliance.
- Government: Enforcement and labour welfare.
- Trade Unions: Stronger protections and accountability.
- Society: Safe and humane industrial growth.

Ethical Issues

- Human life vs profit.
- Dignity of labour.
- Employer responsibility.
- Accountability for preventable deaths.

Way Forward

- Fully implement OSHWC Code, 2020.
- Strengthen inspections through technology-based monitoring.
- Mandate regular third-party safety audits.
- Impose strict liability for negligence causing worker deaths.
- Accelerate mechanisation of sewer cleaning.
- Improve training and certification for hazardous work.
- Build robust industrial safety-management systems.
- Enhance safeguards for contract workers.
- Promote a "Safety First" culture through compliance incentives.
- Improve reporting and transparency on occupational accidents.

India bond-tax step to up foreign debt inflow, bid for global index inclusion

India tax breaks, policy steps spark $1 billion in foreign bond inflows, lower yields; measures to improve India's debt appeal could lower borrowing costs over time; global asset managers say reforms boost India's case for inclusion in global bond indices; measures taken in response to oil shock

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters
MUMBAI

India's decision to exempt foreigners from taxes on government bonds and broaden access to the debt market is expected to make the country more attractive to overseas investors, catalyse fresh inflows and strengthen its case for inclusion in global indexes.

On Friday, policymakers unveiled a wide-ranging set of measures to draw in overseas capital while shoring up the currency and external balances, which have been strained by higher oil prices.

They scrapped withholding and capital gains taxes on foreign investments in government bonds, broadened the pool of securities that are available without investment limits and introduced incentives to encourage banks to raise foreign currency deposits from non-resident Indians and for companies to tap overseas borrowings.

The slew of measures, rolled out in response to the oil shock that has hit Indian assets, is beginning to lure foreign investors back into an overlooked market against a backdrop of rising global rate volatility.

"We believe that these changes are a game-changer for debt flows," said Jennifer Taylor, the head of emerging market debt and systematic fixed income at State Street Investment Management, which manages about $5.6 trillion in assets.

Money swings: Outlook for foreign inflows will be closely tied to rupee's trajectory. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

The pace of foreign inflows has quickened since the measures were introduced, with more than $1 billion worth of government debt bought in just three sessions. Before the announcement in the year-to-date period, $1.6 billion had been purchased.

Yields on government bonds have fallen 10 to 30 basis points across the curve, with shorter maturities seeing the biggest declines.

The removal of taxes makes Indian government bonds more attractive on a relative basis, Taylor said, adding that the measures should boost foreign participation across the yield curve and lower borrowing costs over time.

> The rupee is down 5.86% so far this year, trailing only Indonesian rupiah as Asia's worst performing currency though it experienced modest relief since the bond tax moves

More consequential

Some investors said the reforms could prove more consequential over the longer term by paving the way for India's inclusion in broader global debt benchmarks, which would bring more durable and predictable inflows.

Niel Clement, portfolio manager for emerging market fixed income at BNP Paribas Asset Management, which manages more than €1.6 trillion ($1.85 trillion) of assets, said the steps would broaden opportunities for overseas investors, redirect flows to the onshore market and provide a constructive boost to India's bid for inclusion in the Bloomberg Global Aggregate Index.

Bloomberg Index Services is expected to seek investor feedback later this month on whether Indian government bonds should be added to its flagship global bond index.

M&G Investments, which manages about £376 billion ($503.4 billion) of assets, said the tax exemptions have boosted the near-term appeal of Indian government securities.

Bigger inflow driver

It added that inclusion in the Bloomberg index would be a bigger driver of inflows, similar to India's entry into JPMorgan's emerging market debt index. In the weeks before tax cuts were rolled out, India's finance minister met with officials at the central bank to push for entry into the Bloomberg index, a government official said.

"We view the measures announced aimed at addressing pressures on the capital account as having effectively restored policy control," said Low Guan Yi, head of Asia fixed income at M&G Investments.

"With steps taken to support macroeconomic stability, we see investment opportunities as India continues to differentiate itself from other emerging bond markets with more limited policy flexibility." UBS Asset Management, which is neutral to underweight on Indian fixed income, said the Reserve Bank of India's moves signaled a constructive approach toward broadening market access and they will encourage more foreign inflows over time.

"India is an important part of EM local index so we are always reviewing it as an investment option," said Shamaila Khan, head of fixed income emerging markets and Asia-Pacific at UBS Asset Management.

Currency, energy risks

Investors cautioned that while the measures improved the appeal of Indian debt, the outlook for foreign inflows will remain closely tied to the rupee's trajectory.

"The bigger issue for offshore investors is still the currency," said Rong Ren Goh, head of macro and thematics forAsian fixed income at Eastspring Investments, which manages about $250 billion, adding that investors are likely to wait for clearer signs of rupee stability before raising allocations.

The recent pace of rupee depreciation has dented the carry appeal of Indian debt, while higher energy prices have added to the pressure, he said.

The rupee is down 5.86% so far this year, trailing only Indonesian rupiah as Asia's worst-performing currency though it experienced modest relief since the bond tax moves; it was last at 95.16 per dollar.

Economists at Citi sharply revised India's balance of payments forecast for the current fiscal year, a shift they says should underpin the rupee. They now expect a $5 billion surplus versus an earlier projected deficit of $60 billion.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Government of India and RBI announced measures to attract foreign capital amid high oil prices and currency volatility.
- Measures include:
  - Exemption of withholding tax and capital gains tax on eligible Government Securities (G-Secs).
  - Expansion of securities under the Fully Accessible Route (FAR).
  - Incentives for NRI foreign currency deposits.
  - Encouragement for companies to raise External Commercial Borrowings (ECBs).
- Objectives: strengthen external balances, stabilize the rupee, deepen debt markets, and improve prospects for inclusion in global bond indices such as the Bloomberg Global Aggregate Index.
- Following the announcement, foreign investors purchased over $1 billion of Indian government bonds within three trading sessions.

Key Points

- Foreign investors are exempt from:
  - Withholding tax on interest from eligible government bonds.
  - Capital gains tax on eligible securities.
- Government bond yields declined by 10–30 basis points.
- India's inclusion in:
  - JPMorgan GBI-EM has already boosted investor interest.
  - Bloomberg Global Aggregate Index could attract significant passive inflows.
- India has one of the largest emerging-market bond markets.
- The rupee has depreciated by nearly 5.9% this year, making currency stability crucial.
- Citi revised India's BoP forecast from a $60 billion deficit to a $5 billion surplus.
- Expected outcomes:
  - Higher foreign portfolio investment (FPI) in debt.
  - Lower borrowing costs.
  - Better market liquidity.
  - Stronger foreign exchange reserves.

Static Linkages

- G-Secs are sovereign debt instruments issued under the Public Debt Act, 1944.
- FPI is regulated by RBI and SEBI.
- Balance of Payments (BoP) consists of Current, Capital and Financial Accounts.
- ECBs are governed under FEMA regulations.
- Bond prices and yields move inversely.
- Capital inflows support forex reserves and currency stability.
- Fiscal deficits are partly financed through G-Secs.
- FAR (2020) allows non-residents to invest in specified G-Secs without investment caps.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Enhances attractiveness of Indian debt instruments.
- Removes tax barriers and reduces investment costs.
- Encourages stable foreign capital inflows.
- Improves liquidity and depth of bond markets.
- Supports rupee stability and forex reserves.
- Reduces sovereign borrowing costs.
- Strengthens India's case for global bond index inclusion.

Challenges

- Greater dependence on foreign capital may increase vulnerability to global shocks.
- Sudden outflows can destabilize exchange rates.
- Currency depreciation may reduce investor returns.
- High crude oil prices continue to pressure the current account.
- Global financial volatility may transmit to domestic markets.

Stakeholders

- Government: Lower borrowing costs and stronger external sector.
- RBI: Macroeconomic stability and orderly capital flows.
- Foreign Investors: Benefit from tax relief but remain cautious about currency risks.
- Domestic Borrowers: Gain from lower interest rates and better liquidity.

Way Forward

- Maintain fiscal and macroeconomic stability.
- Continue calibrated debt-market liberalization.
- Strengthen forex reserves.
- Expand currency-risk hedging mechanisms.
- Improve regulatory predictability and market infrastructure.
- Diversify sources of foreign capital.
- Facilitate smooth inclusion in global bond indices.

Argumentative Indian must also listen, spirit of samvad must not be lost

THAROORTHINK

BY SHASHI THAROOR

A RECENT social media post by Chinese scholar Keji Mao told an instructive story: "I gave two presentations on how China builds its industrial and technological ecosystem," he wrote, "one for an Indian audience and one for a Vietnamese audience. Although the content was largely the same... the feedback from the Vietnamese and Indian participants was strikingly different. When I discussed the gaps between Vietnam and China, my Vietnamese friends listened very attentively to my analysis of Vietnam's weaknesses. They even proactively acknowledged Vietnam's deficiencies and asked me to analyse more specific issues in greater detail. However, when I compared China and India, many Indian friends became quite argumentative. They tried to compete with or challenge the Chinese perspective on almost every point, to the point where I could barely develop my analysis. As a result, they might have won the debate, but missed a valuable opportunity to have a meaningful exchange. So," he added, "I came to know which country would be the real winner for 'China+1' many years beforehand."

This anecdote provides a jarring, yet necessary, mirror for a phenomenon frequently observed in intellectual and diplomatic circles. It echoes an observation of the late Canadian ambassador David Malone, who once noted that a great failing of Indian diplomacy is that its practitioners are "better at winning arguments than at winning friends". This is not merely a critique of our diplomats; it is a commentary on a broader cultural reflex.

Indian history is rich with the tradition of *samvad* — the art of dialectical discourse. Ancient Indian thinkers thrived on rigorous debate, where the goal was to dismantle an opponent's argument to reach a higher truth. In this context, argumentation was seen as a virtuous pursuit, a crucible for knowledge. However, in the modern era, this cultural predilection for debate has arguably morphed into a performative contest. When the goal shifts from synthesis (learning from the other) to victory (defeating the other), the spirit of *samvad* is lost. We often see engagement not as a bridge-building exercise, but as a zero-sum game, where conceding a point is interpreted as a surrender of intellectual or national standing.

Beyond the historical framing, there lies a more contemporary psychological driver: A profound, often subconscious, defensive insecurity. India is a nation that has spent centuries navigating the trauma of colonial imposition and the subsequent struggle to assert its agency on the global stage. This creates a pervasive need to validate our perspective and standing. For generations, Indian intellectuals had to defend our traditions, history, and economic potential against Western critiques that were often patronising or motivated. Consequently, there is a deep-seated suspicion that foreign insights are not objective observations, but rather strategic moves in a broader game of geopolitical or cultural dominance. When an outsider, especially one representing a competing power or a different developmental model, offers a critique, it is frequently reflexively internalised as an attack, rather than an objective analysis. The impulse is to deflect, counter, and dominate the narrative, to protect the image of the nation and the ego of the interlocutor. So a Chinese scholar like Mao offering a critique of India's industrial ecosystem is not received as a neutral teaching but as a data point in a comparative assessment between a "superior" China and us. To accept his insights is, in the minds of Indian interlocutors, to accept a position of inferiority. As India seeks to assert its place as a global power, there is an intense anxiety about wishing to be "seen" as we see ourselves and to "set the record straight" when we are judged negatively.

All this is understandable but self-defeating. As Mao rightly points out, the irony of this approach is that while Indians may "win" the argument, they lose the opportunity for a meaningful exchange. In the modern globalised landscape, where collaborative problem-solving is the currency of influence, being the loudest voice in the room often results in isolation rather than leadership. When we prioritise winning the argument, we effectively shut down the feedback loops necessary for growth. The Vietnamese took actionable insights from what they heard from Mao and benefitted. Defensive posturing, while emotionally satisfying in the moment, creates an intellectual echo chamber that stunts the capacity for strategic growth.

Learning to distinguish between a challenge to one's ego and a challenge to one's assumptions is the hallmark of a mature strategic culture

It is odd that a society that traditionally respects the wisdom of the Guru behaves this way; one would expect a culture that prizes the transmission of knowledge to be a sponge for global insight. But when an Indian engages with a foreigner — or even with an Indian peer they do not personally venerate — the traditional hierarchical framework of the Guru-Shishya *parampara* fails. Because the foreigner is not a "Guru" within the recognised tradition, he is not granted the automatic pass of respect. Instead, he is treated as an equal or a competitor in a secular marketplace of ideas, where the cultural reflex shifts from reverence to rejection.

Reforming this tendency does not require abandoning the Indian passion for debate. Instead, it requires a conscious shift in the intent of that debate, from defensive to strategic. True confidence is marked by the ability to accommodate uncomfortable critiques without feeling compelled to immediately refute them. Learning to distinguish between a challenge to one's ego and a challenge to one's assumptions is the hallmark of a mature strategic culture. Before launching a counter-argument, one might ask, "Does this response contribute to my understanding or solve the problem, or does it merely serve to assert my position?" The challenge is to privilege learning over dominance in our mental hierarchy of preferred outcomes.

If India is to successfully navigate the complex geopolitical and economic currents of the 21st century — particularly regarding initiatives like the "China+1" strategy — we must reconcile our vibrant tradition of discourse with a pragmatic openness. Ultimately, the ability to win friends and gain insights is far more valuable to our national trajectory than the fleeting satisfaction of winning an argument.

The writer is a fourth-term Congress MP from Thiruvananthapuram who chairs the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- A recent social media post by a Chinese industrial-policy commentator compared discussions with Indian and Vietnamese audiences on China's industrial and technological ecosystem.
- Vietnamese participants focused on identifying weaknesses and learning from China's experience, while many Indian participants reportedly concentrated on contesting comparative assessments.
- The episode has sparked debate on India's strategic culture, openness to criticism, policy learning, and readiness to benefit from the China+1 strategy.
- The issue is important as India seeks to emerge as a major manufacturing and investment destination amid global supply-chain diversification.

Key Points

- China+1 Strategy: Diversification of manufacturing and supply chains beyond China.
- Major beneficiaries include India, Vietnam, Indonesia, Mexico and Thailand.
- Policy learning and institutional adaptability are key drivers of industrial competitiveness.
- Constructive criticism and evidence-based policymaking support economic transformation.
- Countries that absorb best practices quickly often achieve faster industrial upgrading.
- Strategic culture influences governance, diplomacy, innovation and economic decisions.
- Effective global engagement requires balancing national confidence with openness to feedback.
- Industrial success depends on incentives, infrastructure, technology absorption and execution capacity.

Static Linkages

- Ancient Indian traditions such as Shastrartha emphasized rigorous debate for truth-seeking.
- Kautilya stressed pragmatism, learning, intelligence gathering and adaptation in statecraft.
- Article 51A(h) promotes scientific temper as a Fundamental Duty.
- Good governance requires transparency, accountability, responsiveness and evidence-based decision-making.
- Policy feedback mechanisms are essential for institutional learning and reform.
- Soft power and diplomacy rely on persuasion, credibility and relationship-building.
- Development theories highlight technology absorption and human capital as growth drivers.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Encourages self-assessment and continuous improvement.
- Supports evidence-based policymaking.
- Enables institutional learning from global best practices.
- Improves competitiveness under China+1.
- Strengthens diplomatic engagement through constructive dialogue.

Concerns

- Comparisons may overlook India's unique developmental context.
- National confidence should not become defensive nationalism.
- Foreign assessments may carry geopolitical biases.
- Blind imitation of external models can create policy mismatches.

Stakeholder Perspectives

- Government: Needs realistic assessment to improve competitiveness.
- Industry: Benefits from global benchmarking and regulatory stability.
- Academia: Should promote evidence-based comparative research.
- Citizens: Gain from informed discussion rather than emotional responses.

Ethical Dimensions

- Intellectual humility vs. arrogance.
- Learning vs. defensiveness.
- National interest vs. national ego.
- Truth-seeking vs. argument-winning.

Challenges

- Confirmation bias and polarization.
- Weak policy feedback loops.
- Resistance to institutional reforms.
- Implementation deficits.

Way Forward

- Promote evidence-based public discourse.
- Benchmark regularly against global best practices.
- Strengthen independent policy evaluation systems.
- Foster scientific temper and critical thinking.
- Encourage learning-oriented diplomacy.
- Improve state capacity and policy adaptability.
- Expand industry–academia–government collaboration.

Pandemic preparedness is deeper, must become broader

Shahid Jameel

THE MONTHS of April and May in England, where I now live, herald spring after a long, dark and wet winter. Back home in India, they signal the onset of summer. Yet, despite the colours of spring, these months revive painful memories of 2021, when Covid brought death and despair to India. Everyone lost someone. I did, too. Five years later, the world is confronting two very different infectious disease outbreaks. Hantavirus infections emerged aboard MV *Hondius* in early April, with 11 suspected cases and three deaths. Ebola resurfaced in Central Africa and continues to spread. These offer important benchmarks for assessing our preparedness five years after Covid.

Let us first consider early detection, surveillance and public-health infrastructure. In the case of Ebola, authorities did relatively well in early detection and surveillance, largely because the world has spent decades preparing for its recurrence. In contrast, the Hantavirus exposed surveillance gaps during unusual, low-frequency zoonotic outbreaks in complex international settings like cruise ships, especially when the pathogen is unexpected and symptoms initially resemble common respiratory illnesses.

Clinical-response capacity is the second requirement. This includes hospitals equipped to manage surges in cases, PPE and medical supply chains, clinicians, and access to intensive care and supportive treatment. With Ebola, authorities demonstrated a comparatively mature and specialised clinical-response system, largely a result of years of investment and experience. The Hantavirus outbreak revealed strong downstream hospital care but weaker front-end preparedness, particularly in recognising and managing an unexpected pathogen in an unusual setting.

Risk communication and the building of public trust were more effective in the case of Ebola because global public-health systems have spent years developing communication frameworks around it. The Hantavirus outbreak demonstrated how rapidly uncertainty and novelty can destabilise public understanding. At the same time, misinformation has not been completely absent from the Ebola response, underlining the need for strategies to sustain public trust.

The Ebola response illustrates how previous crises can create enduring scientific infrastructure. The Hantavirus, in contrast, has highlighted the difficulties of rapidly organising research around a relatively rare and less continuously funded pathogen. Coordination becomes more difficult when the contagion, its transmission setting and the governance structures involved are unfamiliar. However, even the experience of dealing with Ebola has not eliminated persistent challenges. Reports continue to emerge of shortages of PPE and disinfection materials. The Hantavirus, meanwhile, exposed vulnerabilities associated with international travel environments. Ebola governance systems continue to face political tensions and resource constraints.

The Hantavirus outbreak also revealed how many zoonotic pathogens still lack deeply developed preparedness ecosystems, particularly for unusual scenarios. It was managed largely through broader infectious-disease capacity rather than through dedicated long-term systems. Containing a disease requires a systemic approach. Success depends less on any single intervention and more on how rapidly surveillance, science, healthcare delivery, governance and public communication can function together. Covid triggered a surge in global health funding, much of it emergency-driven and insufficiently institutionalised. Since 2024-25, however, this support has declined sharply, driven in large part by cuts in US aid and the weakening of global institutions such as the WHO.

Global preparedness remains strongest against crises the world has repeatedly confronted — Ebola — and weakest against novel events such as the Hantavirus. Over time, preparedness has become deeper. It must now become broader. Yet developments since 2025 do not inspire confidence. Since Covid, awareness of pandemic risk has increased. Yet political willingness to finance preparedness has weakened. The world is scientifically more capable but financially and politically less stable in sustaining preparedness systems. If not addressed, the next outbreak involving an unusual pathogen could unfold very differently from what happened aboard MV *Hondius*.

> Global preparedness remains strongest against crises the world has repeatedly confronted — Ebola — and weakest against novel events such as the Hantavirus

The writer is a virologist and chair of Ignite Life Science Foundation (India)

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Five years after COVID-19, the world faces new infectious disease outbreaks, testing global preparedness.
- In April 2026, a Hantavirus outbreak aboard MV Hondius caused suspected cases and deaths, exposing surveillance gaps.
- Simultaneously, Ebola resurfaced in Central Africa, where established response systems enabled quicker detection and containment.
- The contrasting responses highlight strengths and weaknesses in post-COVID health systems.
- Global health funding has declined since 2024–25 due to cuts in U.S. aid and weakening support for institutions such as the World Health Organization.

Key Points

Hantavirus Outbreak

- Zoonotic disease transmitted mainly through infected rodents and their excreta.
- Exposed weaknesses in detecting rare and unexpected pathogens.
- Highlighted challenges in managing outbreaks in international travel settings such as cruise ships.
- Revealed strong hospital care but weaker early-warning preparedness.

Ebola Resurgence

- Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) is a severe hemorrhagic fever with high fatality rates.
- Benefited from decades of investment in surveillance, diagnostics, vaccines, and community engagement.
- Early detection and coordinated response limited wider transmission.
- Persistent challenges include PPE shortages and resource constraints.

Broader Lessons

- Effective preparedness requires:
  - Disease surveillance
  - Scientific research
  - Healthcare infrastructure
  - Governance mechanisms
  - Public communication
- Preparedness is stronger for familiar diseases than for novel pathogens.
- Sustained financing and political commitment remain weak links.

Static Linkages

- Health is a State Subject (Entry 6, State List).
- Article 21 includes the Right to Health through judicial interpretation.
- Legal framework:
  - Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897
  - Disaster Management Act, 2005
- Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) is India's disease-monitoring mechanism.
- One Health Approach integrates human, animal, and environmental health.
- Most emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic.
- International Health Regulations (IHR 2005) guide global disease reporting and response.
- Public health expenditure and community participation are critical for resilience.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Greater awareness of pandemic risks post-COVID.
- Improved diagnostics and genomic surveillance.
- Stronger institutional capacity against recurrent diseases like Ebola.
- Better international cooperation and risk communication.

Concerns

- Preparedness remains disease-specific rather than system-wide.
- Declining global health funding threatens resilience.
- Emerging zoonotic diseases lack dedicated preparedness frameworks.
- Persistent inequalities in healthcare capacity.
- Misinformation undermines public trust.
- Global travel accelerates disease spread.

Stakeholders

- Governments seek cost-effective preparedness.
- Public health agencies demand sustained investments.
- International organizations advocate stronger cooperation.
- Scientists emphasize continuous surveillance.
- Communities expect transparency and timely communication.

Way Forward

- Strengthen the One Health framework.
- Expand IDSP and real-time surveillance systems.
- Institutionalize long-term pandemic preparedness funding.
- Enhance genomic surveillance and pathogen discovery.
- Build surge capacity in hospitals and laboratories.
- Strengthen compliance with IHR mechanisms.
- Improve risk communication and misinformation management.
- Invest in research on neglected zoonotic diseases.
- Conduct regular pandemic simulation exercises.
- Ensure resilient supply chains for PPE, vaccines, and medicines.

A dignified demise for a broken marriage

Samrat Pasriccha and Rohini Narayanan

FEW LEGAL disputes carry as much collateral damage as matrimonial litigation. Families are drawn into conflict, allegations proliferate, and parallel proceedings ensue. By the time many couples find themselves before a divorce court, the marriage has often already ended. It was against this backdrop that the editorial, 'In law, we need to write a new marriage story' (*IE*, June 9), argued for recognising irretrievable breakdown of marriage. The question has long engaged courts and law reform bodies. The Justice H R Khanna-chaired 71st Law Commission Report made much the same recommendation in 1978. In *Shilpa Sailesh v. Varun Sreenivasan* (2023), the Supreme Court affirmed its power under Article 142 to dissolve marriages irretrievably broken down. Relief from a dead marriage, however, still depends on reaching the SC.

The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 and the Special Marriage Act, 1954 recognise divorce largely through two routes: Mutual consent or fault. Where consent is unavailable, parties must establish, if not invent, a matrimonial wrong. In the process, ordinary discord acquires criminal colour and relationships that have simply become unworkable are recast as adversarial contests over fault. A mature matrimonial regime must provide for three realities: Blame, consent, and breakdown. The first justifies fault-based divorce. The second finds expression in divorce by mutual consent under Section 13B of the Hindu Marriage Act. The third remains inadequately addressed. The editorial correctly identifies the lacuna in the law and rightly cautions against reforms that leave women vulnerable. The analysis falls short, however, by treating irretrievable breakdown as a singular phenomenon. A marriage that has broken down by mutual acceptance presents fundamentally different concerns from one where only a single spouse seeks release from the relationship. The safeguards appropriate to one may be wholly inadequate for the other.

Where both parties accept that the marriage has broken down and what remains is a battle only over money and children, the law must provide an easy exit. The court's role should be confined to questions of alimony and custody.

The harder case arises where one spouse seeks an exit while the other does not accept that the marriage has broken down. It was this that led the law to adopt its conservative approach, limiting divorce to fault or consent. But the right to exit a marriage is a matter of personal liberty, and to bind a party to a dead marriage only to secure the financial security of the other serves neither spouse. The answer lies in economic restitution. Unlike ordinary alimony, which looks to the wife's needs and wants, courts in cases of unilateral no-fault divorce must provide restitution for emotional abandonment, recognising that the injury is not financial alone but the unilateral rupture of a shared life.

Relief from a dead marriage should not turn upon the fortuitous circumstance of reaching the Supreme Court. A dignified demise to the marriage must be available closer to home. That is what the law owes us. The editorial recognised the problem in the context of a judgment of the Supreme Court, where the parties were separated for 15 years. Reform must follow.

The writers are Delhi-based lawyers

DEAR EDITOR

I disagree

A fortnightly column in which we invite readers to tell us why, when they differ with the editorial positions or news coverage of 'The Indian Express'

A marriage that has broken down by mutual acceptance presents fundamentally different concerns from one where only a single spouse seeks release from the relationship

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Debate has resurfaced on recognizing Irretrievable Breakdown of Marriage (IBM) as an independent ground for divorce.
- In Shilpa Sailesh v. Varun Sreenivasan (2023), the Supreme Court held that it can dissolve marriages under Article 142 where the marriage has irretrievably broken down.
- Relief presently depends largely on reaching the Supreme Court, while lower courts remain bound by statutory grounds.
- The issue highlights the need for legislative reform to reduce prolonged matrimonial litigation.

Key Points

- Divorce in India is mainly available through:
  - Mutual Consent Divorce
  - Fault-based Divorce (cruelty, desertion, adultery, etc.)
- Relevant laws:
  - Hindu Marriage Act, 1955
  - Special Marriage Act, 1954
- Fault-based divorce often leads to:
  - Lengthy litigation
  - Criminalization of marital disputes
  - Emotional and financial hardship
- 71st Law Commission Report (1978) recommended IBM as a divorce ground.
- Concerns include:
  - Financial security of dependent spouses
  - Child welfare
  - Possible misuse of unilateral divorce

Static Linkages

- Article 14 – Equality before law.
- Article 15(3) – Special provisions for women and children.
- Article 21 – Dignity, autonomy, privacy and personal liberty.
- Article 39 – Protection of livelihood and social justice.
- Article 142 – Supreme Court's power to do complete justice.
- Rule of Law and access to justice.
- Role of Law Commission in legal reforms.

Critical Analysis

Merits

- Recognizes reality of permanently failed marriages.
- Reduces unnecessary litigation.
- Prevents misuse of fault-based provisions.
- Upholds dignity and autonomy under Article 21.
- Reduces emotional trauma for spouses and children.
- Improves judicial efficiency.

Concerns

- Risk of economic abandonment of dependent spouses.
- Possible disadvantage to women with limited income.
- Difficulty in defining "irretrievable breakdown".
- Need to safeguard children's interests.
- Concerns regarding stability of marriage as a social institution.

Stakeholder Views

- Women's groups: Support easier exit but seek strong financial safeguards.
- Judiciary: Favors legislative clarity instead of relying on Article 142.
- Law Commission: Supports statutory recognition of IBM.
- Family welfare advocates: Stress balancing liberty with family stability.

Way Forward

- Introduce IBM as a statutory ground for divorce.
- Define objective criteria such as long separation and failed reconciliation.
- Ensure fair financial settlements and maintenance.
- Prioritize the best interests of children in custody matters.
- Strengthen mediation and family counseling.
- Establish fast-track family courts.
- Adopt gender-sensitive safeguards.
- Reduce dependence on Article 142 through legislative reform.