

Hard landing:**Airlines must take stock of their collective plight and sell seats at the real cost**

To the long line of private airline carcasses dotting the bleak landscape of Indian aviation, one more may soon be added. Jet Airways announced a temporary halt of its operations from Wednesday night as funds to keep the airline going dried up. Despite intense lobbying by the bankrupt airline, banks stood firm on their decision to not release emergency funds to sustain operations until a white knight is found. With operations halted and the half a dozen or so planes that were flying till Wednesday grounded, the airline is staring down the barrel, especially because most of its prized departure slots at major airports across the country have either already been or will soon be allocated to other airlines. Jet will be able to regain these slots only if it bounces back before the end of the summer schedule in October. Whether that will happen is now in the hands of prospective buyers, who are said to have evinced interest in buying the airline during the Expression of Interest (EOI) process called by banks last week. The fact that the banks refused to extend emergency support is probably an indicator of the quantity and quality of the EOIs received by them. It is hard to believe that they would not have temporarily supported Jet if the EOIs had been serious. In sum, it does appear at this point that a miracle will be needed for Jet to take wing again.

The collapse of Jet has caused turbulence in the market and also raised some serious questions over why the domestic airline industry is proving to be so perilous for enterprises. There have been more than half-a-dozen private airline companies that have fallen by the wayside in the last decade and more, and it is well-known how Air India is propped up with government support. While it is true that fuel costs, which account for about half of the expenses of running an airline, have been difficult to manage, the fact is that reckless competition is responsible for the sorry plight of the industry. Margins in the airline industry are wafer-thin in the best of times and the combined effect of rising fuel prices and the inability to pass them on to consumers due to competition has proved to be a deadly cocktail. In the race to the bottom, it was Kingfisher seven years ago, Air Deccan and Air Sahara before that, it is Jet now, and who knows which airline could be next. It is notable that airfares have largely stayed stable over several years, benefiting passengers but biting airlines. It is time that airlines took stock of their collective plight and stopped undercutting each other on fares. The Centre can help too by reviewing fuel taxes and surcharges apart from airport levies, which the airlines complain are too high. After all, a healthy airline industry can only be good for government revenues over the long term.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Plight		difficult, situation, predicament, straits
Carcass		dead body, remains, dregs.
Dotting	Verb	Marking, spotting-/ doting (adjective) loving.
Dry up		dwindle, subside, peter out/ stop speaking
Sustain		Support/ help/ continue/ nourish/ undergo/ uphold.
White knight		backer, financier, supporter
Stare down		Peer, look closely (–ve sense)
Prized		Treasured, precious, valuable
Slots		Time period/ hole, opening, aperture.
Evince		Reveal, display, show, manifest, bespeak
Turbulence		Storm, chaos, violence, anarchy
Perilous		Dangerous, precarious, noxious, vicious
Prop up		hold up, support, buttress, bolster, truss
Wafer –thin		very thin, skinny, bony, skeletal
Cocktail		mixture, combination,
Bleak		Unfavourable, unpromising, unpropitious, depressing, gloomy
		Open, desert, desolate, empty

Editorial - Sunday, Bloody Sunday:**Preventing further attacks and keeping the peace are vital in Sri Lanka**

The serial blasts on Easter Sunday rank as the worst bloodbath Sri Lanka has seen since the end of the civil war in 2009. It is a monumental tragedy for a country that is trying to live down the strife that lasted more than a quarter century. In what could be the handiwork of a local Islamist radical group, as many as 290 people are dead, and nearly 500 wounded in multiple blasts, a few of them involving suicide bombers. The targets chosen as well as the occasion suggest that the bombings were aimed at gaining maximum global attention. The coordinated blasts took place while guests were having breakfast in three luxury hotels frequented by foreign tourists close to the seafront in the capital, and worshippers had gathered for Easter in a church each in Colombo, Negombo on the western coast and the eastern town of Batticaloa. The most immediate impact will be on the economy, to which the well-run tourism industry is a huge contributor. Already the economy is going through a rough patch, as the country grapples with the aftermath of the political instability that prevailed a few months ago. The spectre of ethnic relations between various communities deteriorating also looms. The small Muslim minority, caught in the crosshairs of the conflict in the past, and Christians, an even smaller minority, have faced violent attacks by hard-line Sinhala Buddhist groups. However, nothing in such incidents suggested any acrimony that could have led up to the sort of savagery seen on Easter day.

Reports that specific overseas intelligence inputs were not taken seriously are disturbing. The inquiry ordered by President Maithripala Sirisena will, it is hoped, address the concern voiced by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, that he and his ministers were kept in the dark about these inputs. However, the administration responded admirably to the situation, especially in preventing the spread of rumours and any backlash against sections of society. Possibly following the New Zealand example, the government and the security establishment sought to deny the group any immediate ideological mileage and any claim to putative martyrdom by not identifying the group involved. It has now been named as the 'National Thowheed Jamaat'. However, intriguingly, no group has owned responsibility for the blasts, something extremist outfits are wont to do to attract recruits and strike terror on a global scale. Given the scale and sophistication of the operation, which would have involved reconnoitring targets, assembling and transporting explosives and detonators, it does not seem likely that a solely indigenous group would have the wherewithal to carry it out. The neighbourhood will closely watch the investigation, as it may reveal the extent to which the shadow of the Islamic State is falling on the South Asian region.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Strife	Noun	Conflict, Friction, discord, disagreement, dispute, dissension
Grapple	Verb	struggle, wrestle, seize/tackle.
Aftermath	Noun	Repercussions, consequences, results.
Spectre	Noun	Threat, menace, peril, ghost, apparition.
Ethnic	Adjective	Racial, ethnological, ancestral
Deteriorate	Verb	Worsen, decline, degenerate, degrade
Loom	Verb	Emerge, appear, soar, rise
Crosshairs	Noun	
Acrimony	Noun	Bitterness, anger, rancour, resentment, antagonism.
Savagery	Noun	Barbarian, brute, monster
Backlash	Verb	Adverse reaction, adverse response.
Putative	Adjective	Supposed, assumed, recognized, presumed
Mileage	Noun	Benefit, advantage, welfare
Intriguing	Adjective	Interesting, Fascinating, reverting
Indigenous	Adjective	Native, autochthonous
Wherewithal	Noun	Ability, Capability, Money, Cash.