

## Course correction – Shielding witnesses: on protection scheme

### A robust witness protection scheme will strengthen the criminal justice system

The witness protection programme is at last in place. Pending legislation by Parliament, the Supreme Court has asked States to implement a scheme framed by the Centre to protect witnesses in criminal trials from threat, intimidation and undue influence. Given the abysmal rate of convictions in the country, it is inexcusable that it took so long. The need to protect witnesses has been emphasised by Law Commission reports and court judgments for years. Witnesses turning hostile is a major reason for most acquittals. In the current system, there is little incentive for witnesses to turn up in court and testify against criminals. Besides threats to their lives, they experience hostility and harassment while attending courts. The tardy judicial process seldom takes into account the distance they have travelled or the time they have lost in attending court, only to be told they have to return another day. As Justice A.K. Sikri points out, the condition of witnesses in the Indian legal system is "pathetic", as it takes them for granted. It is gratifying that the court has played a proactive role in getting the Centre and the States to come up with a concrete proposal. The Centre deserves credit for coming forward to suggest that its draft witness protection scheme be introduced by judicial mandate instead of waiting for formal legislation.

In its minutiae the scheme appears workable, but its efficacy will be confirmed only with the passage of time. It broadly classifies witnesses in need of protection into three types based on the threat assessment. A witness protection order will be passed by a competent authority. The scheme is to be funded by budgetary support from State governments and donations. This is at variance with the Law Commission's recommendation in 2006 that the Centre and the States share the cost equally. Basic features such as in camera trial, proximate physical protection and anonymising of testimony and references to witnesses in the records are not difficult to implement. The real test will be the advanced forms of identity protection: giving witnesses a new identity, address and even 'parentage', with matching documents. All this needs to be done without undermining their professional and property rights and educational qualifications. The introduction of the scheme marks a leap forward. Until now, there have been *ad hoc* steps such as those outlined for concealing the identity of witnesses in anti-terrorism and child-centric laws. A few dedicated courtrooms for vulnerable witnesses, mostly child victims, are also functional. However, expanding such facilities and implementing a comprehensive and credible witness protection programme will pose logistical and financial challenges. It will be well worth the effort, as the scheme could help strengthen India's tottering criminal justice system.

#### **Meanings of Difficult Words :**

- **Shielding** - to protect something
- **Witness** - someone who sees a crime, accident, or other event happen
- **Robust** - strong and successful
- **In place** - in the correct position
- **Legislation** - a law, or a set of laws
- **Trial** - the process of examining a case in a court of law and deciding whether someone is guilty or innocent
- **Threat** - a situation or an activity that could cause harm or danger
- **Intimidation** - the action of frightening or threatening someone, usually in order to persuade them to do something that you want them to do
- **Undue** - not necessary or reasonable
- **Abysmal** - very bad
- **Conviction** - a decision by a court of law that someone is guilty of a crime

- **Inexcusable** - nexcusable behaviour is so bad or rude that you cannot forgive the person who behaved like that
- **Emphasise** - to give particular importance or attention to something
- **Hostile** - behaving in a very unfriendly or threatening way towards someone
- **Acquittal** - an official judgment in a court of law that someone is not guilty of the crime they were accused of
- **Incentive** - something that makes you want to do something or to work harder, because you know that you will benefit by doing this
- **Turn up** - to come somewhere
- **Testify** - to make a statement about something that you saw, know, or experienced, usually in a court of law
- **Harassment** - annoying or unpleasant behaviour towards someone that takes place regularly
- **Tardy** - slow to do something
- **Seldom** - not often
- **Pathetic** - useless or not effective in an annoying way
- **Take someone for granted** - to expect someone to always be there and do things for you even when you do not show that you are grateful
- **Gratifying** - making you feel pleased and satisfied
- **Proactive** - taking action and making changes before they need to be made, rather than waiting until problems develop
- **Concrete** - practical
- **Minutiae** - very small or unimportant details
- **Efficacy** - effectiveness in producing the result that you intended
- **Assessment** - the process of making a judgment or forming an opinion, after considering something or someone carefully
- **At variance with** - if one thing is at variance with another, they are completely different and seem to oppose each other
- **Proximate** - closest or most direct
- **Anonymising** - to remove any information that shows which particular person something relates to
- **Testimony** - a formal statement about something that you saw, know, or experienced, usually given in a court of law
- **Parentage** - your parents considered as belonging to a particular country, religion, or social class
- **Undermine** - to make something or someone become gradually less effective, confident, or successful
- **Ad hoc** - done only when needed for a specific purpose, without planning or preparation
- **Conceal** - to hide something so that it cannot be found
- **Vulnerable** - someone who is vulnerable is weak or easy to hurt physically or mentally
- **Comprehensive** - including many details or aspects of something
- **Credible** - able to be believed or trusted
- **Pose** - to cause something, especially a problem or difficulty
- **Tottering** - if a system or process totters, it becomes weak and looks as if it will soon stop or be destroyed

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## Course correction – Quick retreat: on French protests

### The French government rolls back a planned fuel tax hike, but the protests are widening

French President Emmanuel Macron's reforms programme could be at risk of losing steam in the wake of weeks of violent countrywide protests triggered by a proposed increase in the fuel tax. Paradoxically, as head of the centrist La République En Marche party, he had swept to power on a pledge of modernising the economy and restoring popular trust in politicians. Public anger against the fuel tax has escalated into a broad-based opposition to the government's overall policies. Prime Minister Edouard Philippe initially said the duty hike would be deferred for six months. But on Wednesday the government cancelled the tax proposal altogether, arguing that a levy that was meant to induce motorists to go green was not worth the price if it undermined social cohesion. Mr. Philippe has also suggested that the introduction of additional safety checks on cars due to take effect next year could be delayed. The U-turn on measures to reduce CO2 emissions suggested that the government was on the back foot. The government has also said that it was open to reinstating the wealth tax, which was revised last year to narrow its scope. The measure was intended to improve the investment climate and boost growth and employment. But the accompanying flat tax rate on capital gains and dividends, besides limits on trade unions to negotiate wages, only served to reinforce Mr. Macron's image as a President of the rich.

The yellow-vest protests have shone the light on France's tax system, its rates said to be the highest in the European Union, and buttressed the demand for improvements in the standard of living. The government is committed to increasing the minimum wage from next year but could now face pressure for further concessions on social welfare. Conversely, Paris would also be constrained to demonstrate compliance with EU rules that set an annual fiscal deficit target of below 3% of GDP on member-states. Adherence to common norms would especially be on Brussels's radar after the recent stand-off involving the Italian government. A concern linked to the withdrawal of the tax increase is the rise in France's carbon emissions. The mass protests have, unwittingly, pitted the majority who would have been hit by the higher levy against the imperative to meet the Paris climate agreement targets. Mr. Macron, who has fashioned himself as a champion of the green cause, can realise the mission to combat global warming only by rallying his people. His ability to regain lost ground will determine the prospects of warding off the populist threat in the 2019 European Parliament elections. His handling of the challenges at home will crucially define his ambitions on the EU stage.

### **Meanings of Difficult Words :**

- **Retreat** - to avoid a dangerous, unpleasant, or embarrassing situation, especially by moving away from it
- **Protest** - as strong complaint or disagreement
- **Roll back** - to remove something, or to reduce the influence of something
- **Reform** - a change that is intended to correct a situation that is wrong or unfair, or make a system work more effectively
- **In the wake of** - happening after an event or as a result of it
- **Trigger** - to make something happen
- **Paradoxically** - used for saying that something is strange because it is the opposite of what you expect
- **Centrist** - not extreme in your political beliefs
- **Popular** - a popular belief, feeling, attitude etc is one that many people have
- **Escalate** - to become much worse or more serious, or to make something do this
- **Tax-deferred** - taxed at a later time
- **Altogether** - completely
- **Levy** - an amount of money that you have to pay, for example as a tax
- **Induce** - to cause something, especially a mental or physical change
- **Cohesion** - a situation in which people or things combine well to form a unit

- **U-turn** - a sudden and complete change of policy by a government or by someone in authority
  - **Emission** - a substance, especially a gas, that goes into the air
  - **On the back foot** - in a worse situation than other people or groups
  - **Reinstate** - to start using or having something such as a law or benefit again
  - **Boost** - to help something to increase, improve, or become more successful
  - **Dividend** - a share of the profits of a company, paid once or twice a year to the people who own the company's shares
  - **Negotiate** - to try to reach an agreement by discussing something in a formal way, especially in a business or political situation
  - **Reinforce** - to make an idea, belief, or feeling stronger
  - **Buttress** - to make someone or something stronger by supporting them in some way
  - **Concession** - something you give or allow to someone in order to reach an agreement
  - **Social welfare** - services provided by the government or private organizations to help poor, ill, or old people
  - **Conversely** - used for introducing a sentence, or part of a sentence, which says something that is the opposite of the other part
  - **Constrain** - to force someone to do something that they do not want to do
  - **Compliance** - the practice of obeying a law, rule, or request
  - **Adherence** - the action of continuing to obey a rule, law, agreement etc
  - **Stand-off** - a disagreement or fight in which neither opponent can do anything to win or achieve their aim
  - **Concern** - a feeling of worry about something, especially one that a lot of people have about an important issue
  - **Unwittingly** - in a way that is not conscious or deliberate
  - **Imperative** - extremely important and urgent
  - **Combat** - fighting
  - **Rally** - a public meeting that a lot of people go to in order to support someone or something or to protest against someone or something
  - **Regain lost ground** - to become successful again after having been delayed or having had problems
  - **Determine** - to control what something will be
  - **Prospect** - the possibility that something will happen, especially something good
  - **Ward off** - to prevent someone or something unpleasant from harming or coming close to you
  - **Ambition** - something that you very much want to do, usually something that is difficult to achieve
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## Course correction – REFORM WITH CAUTION

### The Centre must act on the Malimath report on criminal law revamp, but with due care

It is not a bad idea to **revisit** old committee reports with a view to considering their possible implementation. However, such an exercise must be **pursued** with care and caution. The Centre's decision to revisit the 2003 report of the Justice V.S. Malimath Committee on reforming the criminal justice system needs to be examined through the **prism** of civil rights. It includes controversial recommendations such as making confessions to a senior police officer **admissible** as evidence, and diluting the standard of proof required for a criminal **conviction**. It also contains valuable suggestions to **revamp** the administration of criminal law, covering the entire **gamut** of the justice system from investigation to sentencing, from matters of policy to the **nuances** of criminal procedure and the law of evidence. The committee made 158 recommendations, and since then some of these have become law.

Its suggestion on permitting videography of statements has been implemented. The definition of rape has been expanded and new offences against women have been added. Its **advocacy** of **substantial** witness protection has been realised, but victim **compensation** is now part of law. The Centre would do well to ignore the recommendations relating to making confessions to high ranking officers admissible, and increasing the period of police custody from 15 to 30 days. These provisions were available only in anti-terrorism laws that are now no more in force. There is no need to bring them into general criminal laws.

The Malimath report suggests a standard of proof lower than the current 'beyond reasonable doubt' standard. It **moots** a 'clear and convincing' standard, that is, it is enough if the court is convinced that something is true. Such a measure would have adverse implications for suspects and requires considerable **deliberation**. There is some understandable **disquiet** about the state of criminal justice administration in the country and there is a crying need for a wide range of reforms. As the Madhava Menon Committee's Draft National Policy on Criminal Justice' (2007) noted, such popular dissatisfaction arises from the low rate of conviction, the apparent role of money and influence in the outcome of cases, delayed and denied justice, lack of protection to witnesses and inadequate attention to crime victims. The **widespread** perception that there is corruption on the one hand and a deep **nexus** between crime **syndicates** and politicians on the other, has added to the erosion of public confidence in the justice delivery system. Despite all these considerations, any move to make substantive changes in the way criminal justice is administered will have to be done with great **circumspection**, lest vital constitutional **safeguards** against abuse of police and judicial powers are violated in the process. In the name of **revamping** the law, investigation and trial should not be altered in a way that undermines the principles on which the justice system was founded.

### **Meaning Of Difficult Words**

- **Revisit** : (visit again)  
Synonym : call, frequent, return, stay visit often.
- **Pursue** : (chase, follow)  
Synonym: go after, seek, accompany, attend, badger, bait, bug, harry, haunt, hunt, oppress
- **Prism** : (crystal)  
Synonym: cylinder, figure, gem, spectrum, stone
- **Admissible** : (able or deserving of consideration, allowable)  
Synonym: allowed, justifiable, permissible, pertinent, relevant, acceptable, applicable, appropriate, fair, fitting, lawful, legal, legitimate, logical, rational
- **Conviction** : (belief, opinion)  
Synonym: confidence, faith, feeling, principle, sentiment, view, creed, doctrine, dogma, persuasion, slant, tenet
- **Revamp** : (Renovate)  
Synonym: clean, overhaul, refurbish, rehabilitate, remake, remodel, repair, restore, revitalize, revive, update, refresh, renew.
- **Gamut** : (range)  
Synonym: spectrum, area, catalogue, compass, diapason, extent, field, panorama, scale.
- **Nuance** : (slight difference, shading)  
Synonym: distinction, gradation, hint, implication, nicety, refinement, subtlety, degree, shade, shadow, suggestion, suspicion
- **Advocacy** : (support for an idea or cause)  
Synonym: advancement, assistance, backing, aid, defense, encouragement, justification, promotion, promulgation, propagation, proposal, recommendation, urging

- **Substantial** : (ample, important)  
 Synonym: big, consequential, considerable, extraordinary, generous, hefty, large, massive, meaningful, serious, significant, sizable, solid, steady, strong, valuable, vast.
- **Compensation** : (repayment; rectification)  
 Synonym: allowance, benefit, bonus, coverage, earnings, fee, indemnity, pay, profit, redress, reimbursement, remittance, remuneration, reparation, restitution, reward, settlement, stipend, wage
- **Moots** : (as in bring up, broach, debate, discuss)  
 (initiate, mention in conversation)  
 Synonym: allude to, broach, discuss, introduce, propose, raise, refer, submit, touch on, advance, advert, moot, move.
- **Deliberation** : (serious thought, discussion)  
 Synonym: conference, consideration, consultation, debate, speculation, application, attention, calculation, care, cerebration.
- **Disquiet** : (worry, mental upset)  
 Synonym: angst, anxiety, ferment, foreboding, nervousness, restlessness, uneasiness, ailment, disquietude, distress, restiveness.
- **Widespread** : (extensive)  
 Synonym: across the board, all over the place, boundless, broad, common, comprehensive current, diffuse, epidemic, far-flung, outspread, overall, pandemic, pervasive, prevalent.
- **Syndicate** : (group of business entities)  
 Synonym: association, cartel, conglomerate, ganga, mob, organization, ring, union, board, cabinet, committee, company, council
- **Nexus** : (middle)  
 Synonym: center, connection, core, link, network, tie
- **Circumspection** : (caution)  
 Synonym: carefulness, cautiousness, discretion, foresight, precaution, forethought, prudence, vigilance, watchful.
- **Safeguard** : (protection, protect)  
 Synonym : security, shield, aegis, armament, armour, convoy, defence, escort, guard, screen.

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## Course correction – A risky recovery

### Countries will need to move beyond monetary stimulus to boost their economies

Abroad based recovery in **global** growth may be gathering steam, but the price the world will have to pay for it is still unknown. According to the IMF's January update of the World Economic Outlook, the global economy is all set to clock its best growth rate in seven years in 2018 following a pick up since mid-2016. The IMF estimated that the global economy could **accelerate** of 3.9% in both 2018 and 2019, an **upward** revision of 0.2 percentage point over its previous estimates in October for both years, **boosted** by a **cyclical** recovery in global growth and the historic tax cuts in the U. S. India's economy is projected to grow at 7.4% during the financial year 2019, and at an even faster pace of 7.85% the following year. If the IMF's **prediction** come true, India will be the fastest growing major economy next

year as China's growth is expected to slow from 6.6% this year to 6.4% in 2019. What comes as a further surprise is the upward revision in growth forecasts for many countries in Europe, thanks to stronger demand. The IMF, however, was not oblivious to the threats that could severely **derail** the broad based economic recovery. In particular, it warned about the "troubling" rise in **debt** levels across countries, including the U.S., which could **pose** a huge risk to financial stability and **drag** down economic growth.

It is no secret that since the 2008 financial crisis the global economy has been **propped** up mainly by the **unprecedented** easy money policies adopted by global central banks. In fact, the absence of substantial structural reforms to complement central bank **stimulus** measures has been another feature of the present global economic recovery. Such a recovery comes with the **inherent** risk of being derailed whenever easy monetary conditions that fuelled it **cease** to exist. While central banks until now have been careful not to **spook** markets with the **prospect** of higher interest rates, it is unlikely that they can keep markets calm forever. As the IMF has pointed out, the possible end to the era of **abundant liquidity** and debt fuelled economic activity is likely to cause **disruption** by affecting **asset** prices. As interest rates reach higher levels, it is likely to also expose the various real economic **distortions** created by a low interest rate policy, particularly across borders. While it is hard to predict the next **downturn**, it seems the day of **reckoning** may not be too far as consumer price inflation begins to push central banks to rethink their **dovish stance**. The IMF is right to urge countries to make use of the current **rosy** conditions to enact useful structural reforms. It is time countries recognise that monetary policy alone won't solve all growth problems.

### Meaning Of Difficult Words

- **Global** : (worldwide, all encompassing)  
Synonym: comprehensive, international, overall, universal, all round, all inclusive, all out, catholic, cosmic.
- **Accelerate** : (increase speed, timing)  
Synonym: advance, expedite, further, hasten, open up, quicken, spur, step up, stimulate.
- **Upward** : (from a lower to higher position)  
Synonym: higher, uphill, skyward, above, ascending
- **Boost** : (further, improve)  
Synonym: advance, encourage, promote, push, support, sustain, advertise, assist, foster
- **Cyclical** : (happening at regular intervals)  
Synonym: periodic, repetitive, seasonal, circular, patterned, recurrent
- **Prediction** : (declaration made in advance)  
Synonym: forecast, forecasting, guess, indicator, prognosis, prophecy, cast, foretelling
- **Derail** : (go off the rails)  
Synonym: crash, hinder, thwart, wreck, deflect
- **Debt** : (money owed to others)  
Synonym: arrears, bill, capital, commitment, credit, damage, deficit, due, indebtedness, liability, mortgage
- **Pose** : (artificial position), (sit, stand in place; pretend, fake)  
Synonym: mannerism, mien, posture, act, affectation, attitude, masquerade, pretension
- **Drag** : (bad situation)  
Synonym: burden, impediment, annoyance, bore, encumbrance, hindrance, nuisance.
- **Prop** : (hold up or lean against)  
Synonym: brace, bolster, buoy, buttress, carry, maintain, rest, set
- **Unprecedented** : (exceptional original)  
Synonym: bizarre, extraordinary, fantastic, miraculous, new, remarkable, singular, uncommon, unique, unparalleled, unrivalled, unusual

- **Stimulus** : (Provocation)  
Synonym: Catalyst, encouragement, fillip, impetus, incentive, motivation, stimulant, stimulation
- **Inherent** : (basic, hereditary)  
Synonym: built-in, constitutional, deep-rooted, deep-seated, essential, fundamental, genetic, implicit, ingrained, innate, instinctive, internal, intrinsic, latent, natural
- **Cease** : (stop, conclude)  
Synonym: break off, desist, discontinue, fail, halt, quit, refrain, terminate, close, culminate
- **Spook** : (frighten, scare)  
Synonym: discomfort, alarm, horrify, panic, petrify, startle, terrify, unnerve
- **Prospect** : (outlook for future)  
Synonym: anticipation, chance, expectation, future, hope, likelihood, plan, possibility, probability, promise, proposal, thought
- **Abundant** : (plentiful, large in number)  
Synonym: ample, bountiful, copious, generous, heavy, rich, sufficient
- **Liquidity** : (finance)
  - The availability of liquid assets to a market or company
  - Liquid assets; cash
 Example : "a firm may be unable to pay unless it has spare liquidity".
- **Disruption** : (division, turmoil)  
Synonym: interruption, break, separation, severance, splitting
- **Asset** : (advantage)  
Synonym: aid, benefit, credit, resource, service, distinction.
- **Distortion** : (deformity, falsification)  
Synonym: bias, exaggeration, lie, misinterpretation, misrepresentation, misstatement, misuse, baloney
- **Downturn** : (drop)  
Synonym: decline, deterioration, dip, plunge, slide, slump
- **Reckoning** : (computation, account)  
Synonym: calculation, estimation, addition, estimate, counting
- **Dovish** : (supporting discussion or other peaceful solutions in political relationships rather than the use of force)  
Example : He is a dovish politician who was one of the singers of a model peace treaty.
- **Stance** : (position, posture)  
Synonym: attitude, stand, viewpoint, bearing
- **Rosy** : (pink, reddish in colour) (cheerful, hopeful)  
Synonym: glowing, aflush, blooming, blushing, incarnadine.

☞ "Don't wish it were easier: wish you were better– Jim Rohn " "☞