

The Hindu: 7th December 2018 Vocabulary

Editorial 1 - 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.

Difficult Words & Their Meaning

1. **Robust:** strong & healthy; vigorous; strong & rich in flavor or smell
2. **Intimidation:** to frighten or overawe (someone), especially in order to make them do what one wants
3. **Abysmal:** extremely bad; appalling
4. **Hostile:** unfriendly; showing or feeling opposition or dislike

5. **Acquittal:** a judgement or verdict that a person is not guilty of the crime with which they have been charged
6. **Tardy:** delaying or delayed beyond the right or expected time; late; slow in action or response; sluggish
7. **Minutiae:** the small, precise, or trivial details of something
8. **Proximate:** nearly accurate; approximate; closest in relationship; immediate
9. **Ad hoc:** created or done for a particular purpose as necessary
10. **Concealing:** not allowing to be seen; hiding
11. **Vulnerable:** exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally; (of a person) in need of special care, support, or protection because of age, disability, or risk of abuse or neglect
12. **Tottering:** moving in a feeble or unsteady way; be insecure or about to fail

Editorial 2 - 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.

Difficult Words & Their Meaning

1. **Escalate:** increase rapidly; make or become more intense or serious
2. **Deferred:** put off (an action or event) to a later time; postpone
3. **Cohesion:** the action or fact of forming a united whole
4. **Buttress:** increase the strength of or justification for; reinforce
5. **Constrain:** compel or force (someone) to follow a particular course of action
6. **Adherence:** attachment or commitment to a person, cause, or belief; the quality or process of sticking fast to an object or surface
7. **Unwittingly:** without being aware; unintentionally
8. **Pitted:** having a hollow or indentation on the surface
9. **Imperative:** of vital importance; crucial; giving an authoritative command; peremptory
10. **Rallying:** the action or process of coming together to support a person or cause; having the effect of calling people to action
11. **Warding off:** preventing some danger or illness from affecting you