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Flying Blind: India's Air Safety Crisis

It has been five harrowing days since the tragic plane crash in Ahmedabad, yet the nation is still reeling. Over 270 lives have been lost in an accident that has shaken public confidence in Indian aviation. Despite 242 passengers officially listed on the manifest, the gruesome aftermath, involving bodies burnt beyond recognition, has forced authorities to rely on DNA testing for identification. As of Wednesday morning, only 159 bodies had been returned to grieving families.

A high-level committee is investigating the cause of the crash. But the time for routine probes and technical jargon has long passed. The crash has raised deeply disturbing questions that go far beyond one flight. It lays bare the precarious state of air travel safety in India—at a time when millions more Indians are taking to the skies.

Globally, aviation is statistically the safest mode of transportation. The odds of dying in an air crash are one in ten million. But numbers do little to comfort the families of those lost in Ahmedabad. Nor do they silence the growing fears among Indian flyers who now must question: Is the safety of passengers truly a priority in Indian skies?

Boeing, the manufacturer of the ill-fated aircraft, has been embroiled in controversy over safety standards. Whistleblowers within Boeing have repeatedly raised alarms. Veteran engineer Sam Salehpour alleged that shortcuts in the construction of Boeing's Dreamliner and other models compromised safety. Though the company denies these claims, the public has little reason for faith. Boeing has seen worker strikes, production slowdowns, and internal unrest

India ranks third globally in domestic air traffic, with over 165 million passengers recorded in the financial year ending March 2025. This number is expected to grow significantly in the coming years, as new airports open across Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities. But this booming growth hides a dangerous truth: India ranks a dismal 48th in global aviation safety.

Why this gap? Why does one of the world's busiest aviation markets lag so far behind in ensuring basic passenger safety?

Passenger complaints after the crash paint a troubling picture: frequent technical glitches, rough landings, and

onboard discomforts that are treated as routine. Despite high traffic, no Indian airport features among the world's top 25. Even the much-touted Indira Gandhi International Airport, ninth globally in congestion, is ranked only 32nd in quality. Infrastructure may be expanding, but safety and service standards are not keeping pace.

This is not a new concern. Between 2006 and 2012, ten Indian airlines shut down—victims of poor regulation, weak safety standards, and unsustainable practices. Yet lessons remain unlearned.

The Ahmedabad crash, now under scrutiny by national and international bodies including the DGCA, the Tata Group, and Boeing, has also reignited serious concerns about aircraft manufacturing and maintenance. News of aircraft groundings, emergency landings, and minor technical failures are becoming disturbingly frequent—not just in India, but across airlines globally.

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In India, the situation is compounded by regulatory complacency. After the Tata Group's takeover of Air India, expectations soared. It was hoped the airline would restore global standards in safety and service. Instead, the Ahmedabad crash has exposed gaps in preparedness, maintenance, and accountability. Regulatory bodies have issued fines, but token penalties cannot replace lives.

Air travel in modern India is no longer a luxury. It is a necessity. For business travelers, students, tourists, and millions from middle-income households, flying is the default option. But if this growth is not matched with stringent safety protocols, transparent accountability, and a zero-tolerance approach to negligence, then each flight risks becoming a gamble with human life.

This moment demands urgent reform. The Ministry of Civil Aviation, DGCA, airline companies, airport operators, and aircraft manufacturers must work in concert to reimagine safety as non-negotiable. Every crash, every glitch, every whistleblower warning must be treated as a wake-up call, and not a public relations challenge. Lives are being lost. Confidence is eroding. India's aviation sector cannot afford to fly blind any longer.

comment



PETER FERNANDES

History tells us that peace is lost in translation. And the reason is, the fear of the other is the cause of human woes. And as long as we fear the other, there can never be peace



The whole world is gripped in fear and terror as mighty wars are raging on. Those in power hold this axiom, "Peace through strength." Does it really work? Holding on to this theory, India purchased expensive and explosive Rafale jets to instill awe and fear in their enemy. Sadly, and ironically, India lost twenty-six innocent lives to terrorists, and in retaliation, India is also rumoured to have lost some Rafale jets to our enemy. The nation wants to know what the terms and conditions are under which this ceasefire was called into effect. In retrospect, did India lose peace in translation? Those in power are now hiding under the shadow of false propaganda with the help of

Peace lost in translation

The deepest desire of the human soul is to dwell in peace. Therefore, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." Nonetheless, the million-dollar question is, why has peace eluded humankind ever since the dawn of reason? The first recorded strife between the brothers is found in the Bible, a holy book of peace. Cain dislikes his brother Abel for his success, and out of jealousy and filled with rage, he kills his own brother. Pride can lead to jealousy when a person feels threatened by the achievements or possessions of others, as they perceive it as a challenge to their own pride. Jealousy is the other side of pride, and both culminate in violence, injustice and destruction. Two thousand some years ago, the Jewish leaders, combined with Roman authorities, violently ended the life of a man from Galilee—a prince of peace.

History tells us that peace is lost in translation. And the reason is, the fear of the other is the cause of human woes. And as long as we fear the other, there can never be peace. The definition the dictionary provides, "Peace is a state of harmony in the absence of hostility and violence," is no answer to remedy the broken humanity and establish a lasting peaceful society. And so, peace continues to elude humankind as it is lost in translation.

The ongoing Ukraine war is based on the theory of "peace through strength." Both NATO and the United States want to subdue Russia to advance their agenda, "the American Imperialism," only to put the whole of the human race in a precarious situation. Post-Cold War, America enjoyed the status of lone superpower for a short period of time. The trouble started when they felt that they were losing their hegemony, which does not augur well for the pride of the United States. To hold on to their hegemony, the United States is willing to go to any extent to humiliate their rivals, not realizing the lesson of history. The mess in the Middle East post-September 11, 2001 and fuelling the so-called Arab Spring was for that very reason, to advance the influence of the United States in the name of peace and betterment of the suffering people, is one big fat lie. Now look at the tariff war; it is another form of that same principle to assert their hegemony around the world, unmindful of the plight of the poor nations. Sadly, most of the world is unaware that the people of Ukraine are used as a pawn to satisfy the wanton greed for power and wealth by their so-called friends in NATO and the big brother, the United States, at the cost of suffering and death to the millions of people for no gain and no purpose in sight for the country of Ukraine. Israel's preemptive attack on Iran is part of that same theory. The above suspects, with the assumption of "weapons of mass destruction," invaded Iraq and decimated the country, if that rings a bell. Hence, the hope for a peaceful world is shattered, for the prognosis of this preemptive attack is neither well-intended nor for peaceful resolve.

fake news through bought-out news channels. The glib masses are unaware of the danger lurking from the consequence of pride and jealousy that pushes peace to a distant reality.

Remember, no one wants to be subjugated, and when one is, retaliation is a natural response from that dark side of human nature, which history bespeaks loud and clear in all ages. If it is true that Pakistan brought down the mighty and fearful Rafale jets, then the theory "Peace through Strength" will continue to elude humankind from establishing a peaceful society. Remember, the rise and fall of kingdoms and empires have not taught a valuable lesson to humankind, or perhaps humans are not willing to learn a valuable lesson.

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The people of Europe are realizing the canniness of their leaders as they are increasing the defence budget to 5 percent of the GDP, that it has nothing to do with peace, and are voicing out in protest to stop the craziness that is leading towards World War III.

The nations of the world and the major religions entertain the thought of "peace through strength" or "an eye for an eye," or "Dharma-Yuddha," raising questions about the justification for violence and suffering caused by conflict. If we check out the peace treaties from the earliest time, they were all based on the above principles, which is why peace has eluded humankind. What was imperative for humankind all the while was to decipher the true nature of peace and how we lost the tack of it in order to regain it.

Peace is a divine bequest because it emanates from God and is perfect in God. St. Augustine defines peace as "the tranquility of order," meaning a state where all things are arranged in their proper place, and each can function according to its nature and purpose. Instead of understanding the tranquility of order, the spiteful humanity, filled with pride and jealousy, continues to defy the order established by the Creator: Nations, ever striving to build stronger armies and deadly weapons to subjugate the other in the name of peace. Jesus, on the other hand, taught humankind the true path to peace and happiness by humbling himself and offering mercy and forgiveness while upholding truth and justice. And while suffering and dying on the cross, Jesus offered forgiveness to those who were on the wrong side of history, who were promoting injustice and falsehood: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing," these divine words should resonate for all people for all times for peace to reign. With such unconditional love, Jesus was able to put all things in their proper order for the whole of creation to rejoice and dwell in peace. Therefore, the first greetings of the triumphant Lord were, "Peace be with you." Jesus was able to correct the false notion of the world as he said, "The peace I give you is not the kind of peace the world gives." In other words, in Jesus we have true and lasting peace: "Know Jesus, Know Peace; No Jesus, No Peace." But with the world, peace gets lost in translation.

(The author is a Priest based at Pilar, Goa)

people's edit

INSULT, APOLOGY AND THE 'CHAIR'

RAGHAV GADGIL

The drama of the 'insult' and 'apology' at GMC reminded me of the movie 'Garv-Pride and Honour' released in 2004. The protagonist is a pride-filled chest-thumping police officer who does not bow to any politician, except once. He clarifies for his actions that he saluted the 'chair', and not the person! It was as if the scene at GMC was a recreation from the movie! The emotion attached to the position/designation/office in any office has been underlined with this event. In a demanding situation, we have always been told to respect the position, even if we despise the person holding the position. Today, the chair has become the object of reverence, outrage, and perhaps more respect than most human beings.

In the video, judgmental verbal assaults are thrown at the doctor, and no chance is given to listen to his side of the story. I could barely believe what was being unfolded in the video. There was a thunder of suspension and dismissal for not sticking to the duty. I was cold.

Not happy with the minister's apology on TV, doctors demanded that he visit and apologise at the very place of humiliation. In a turn of events, CM intervened, and the script took a surreal twist. Realising the delicacies of bureaucratic pride, the doctors artfully redirected the insult toward the "Chair" rather than the person. And, the symbolic power of the chair emerged as an absurd yet convenient metaphor for dignity and accountability.

Consider this: The Minister never conversed with the chair, never berated the chair directly, nor demanded the suspension of the chair. Yet suddenly, it became clear the insult was directed solely at this silent, inanimate piece of furniture, which never once sought an apology. Ironically, the CM himself publicly placated the aggrieved chair. The chair achieved divine status for a moment.

This bizarre elevation of the chair is deeply reflective of humanity's reliance on imaginary realities—shared illusions that help simplify complex interpersonal tensions. The chair, incapable of reacting or expressing offence, conveniently absorbs blame without any resistance or complications. By shifting the onus onto an inanimate object, the situation is miraculously resolved: No hurt feelings linger, no ongoing arguments persist, and no accountability is genuinely demanded. In essence, repainting the chair as the offending party practically ends all debate and diffuses tension, letting everyone involved comfortably retreat behind this convenient fiction.

Critics argued that doctors, being educated members of society, should show magnanimity and forgive the minister for his social media apology. Indeed, the minister did tender an apology, indicating some accountability. However, a troubling question arises—why should only doctors step back? Is this an implicit division between government employees and elected politicians? Why does accountability not equally apply to both? The rules, it seems, are selectively flexible depending upon who stands on which side of the divide.

Yuval Noah Harari, the modern philosopher and author of the celebrated book Sapiens, has highlighted the ability of humans to tell stories and attach them to inanimate objects; here, it's the chair. When the insult gets shifted to the abstraction of a chair, institutional symbolism rises to farcical heights. Suddenly, dignity and humiliation ceased to be a matter involving real people. Instead, they were safely deflected onto metaphysical furniture, allowing the involved humans, both accuser and accused, to escape personal responsibility.

What lessons emerge from this drama? Perhaps none more important than our collective vulnerability to symbolic distraction. A chair, suddenly more precious than the doctor occupying it, highlights the absurdity of bureaucratic theatre. It underscores our society's reluctance to confront uncomfortable realities directly, preferring instead the comfort of symbolic gestures and imaginary constructs.

Ultimately, Goa's medical fraternity inadvertently crafted a lasting lesson in political satire. Chairs get insulted, hence they demand apologies. It should have been a chair-to-chair apology. Yet, in our feverish obsession with symbols, it seems chairs now hold more dignity and respect than the doctors who sit upon them. Perhaps next time, the chair itself should speak—after all, it now commands more respect than most humans do.

Fruits artificially ripened in a scientific manner

The Food and Drugs Administration recently intensified raids on artificially ripening of fruits across Goa, conducting approximately 80 inspections covering over 350 establishments. It is learnt that several tons of fruits which were ripened using dangerous chemicals were destroyed. Interestingly the Agriculture Department has reportedly initiated construction of fruit ripening chambers of 60-ton daily capacity at the Mapusa market yard. This was necessary as fruits were not ripened scientifically and in a most unhygienic way in the city. The question that arises is if consumption of artificially ripened fruits can be harmful to health, why are the authorities indulging in it? It all depends on the chemical that is being used to carry out ripening of the fruits. It is learnt that Ethylene gas of a certain concentration can be used for artificial ripening. Ethylene plays a vital role in natural ripening of fruits. Being a natural hormone, Ethylene does not pose any health hazard to consumers.

In scientific artificial ripening,

ethylene gas can be introduced into a chamber containing unripe fruits. However Calcium carbide, though banned in many places due to health concerns, is being used for ripening of fruits by unscrupulous vendors. Calcium Carbide releases acetylene, which also hastens ripening but has health risks. Fruits that have been scientifically ripened in the ripening chambers need to have a small sticker on it so that the consumer is aware of it, just like fruits coming from other states have a little sticker on it.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco
Unequal rewards for heroism?

The Uttarakhand government increased the cash incentives to sportspersons in September 2022. For example, an Olympic gold medalist from the state is to get Rs 2 crore, a silver medalist Rs 1.5 crore, a bronze medalist Rs 1 crore and an Olympic participant Rs 50 lakh. Cut to December 2023, the same government awarded Rs 50,000 to each of the

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twelve rat-hole miners, who rescued 41 trapped labourers from the tunnel in Uttarakashi, risking their own lives! Really? Is the value of a single participation in the Olympics 100 times more than saving 41 human lives?

Sujit De, Kolkata

Can't PM's trips during tragedies be postponed?

When families await updates on the 279 victims of the Air India crash in Ahmedabad, and the cries of those who perished in the flames remain agonisingly vivid, it is distressing to see the Prime Minister embark on foreign visits. The families of 26 tourists killed in the Pahalgam terrorist attack are still grieving, the fate of thousands of Indians in Iran hangs in the balance after bombings, and seven lives were recently lost in a Kedarnath chopper crash, the second such incident this season.

In these moments of national mourning, it is expected that our leaders would stand by the be-

reaved families, offering solace and assuring support. Instead, PM Modi is visiting Cyprus, Croatia, and Canada, accepting civilian awards and attending a summit in which India is only a guest invitee. Could these visits not have been postponed?

This is not an isolated incident. When the Pahalgam tragedy struck, PM Modi cut short a Saudi Arabia trip but chose to campaign in Bihar instead of attending an all-party meeting or visiting grieving families. Similarly, after the Ahmedabad plane crash, his brief visit to meet survivors and the family of a party leader seemed more perfunctory than empathetic.

Is it too much to ask that the Prime Minister prioritise the nation's pain over international accolades during such tragic times? The country needs its leader at home, standing with its people.

Tharcisus S Fernando, Chennai
Orwellian times indeed!

What an Orwellian world we are living in. Israel launches an ille-

gal and unprovoked attack on Iran—clearly in violation of the UN Charter—yet its Western allies rush to reaffirm Israel's right to self-defence, not Iran's. In this narrative, the aggressor is defended, while the victim of the assault is denied even a symbolic right to retaliate.

There is no evidence of a nuclear threat or weapons of mass destruction from Iran, yet the diplomatic language adopted by the West seems scripted to suit a double standard. This blatant hypocrisy exposes the hollowness of the so-called "rules-based international order" championed by the West. Whose rules? And who gets to break them with impunity?

With the Israel-Iran conflict threatening to spiral and the Russia-Ukraine war dragging on like a night without end, the world teeters dangerously close to catastrophe. There appears to be no genuine effort toward de-escalation or peace.

One can only hope that good sense will eventually prevail, that hostilities will cease, and that the global community can begin to repair and rebuild. But hope, in these times, feels more fragile than ever.

Rekha Sarin Trehan, Benaulim