

To receive Daily news juice pdf on your WhatsApp, send name and city through WhatsApp on 75979-00000.

1. Drone attack on a chemical tanker off Gujarat coast



Figure 1The MV Chem Pluto, which was hit by a drone in the Indian Ocean

Chemical tanker MV Chem Pluto was hit by a drone strike on December 23, roughly 200 nautical miles (370 km) off the coast of Gujarat.

While a fire broke out on the ship, it was quickly extinguished. No casualties were reported. After the incident, the Indian Coast Guard Ship (ICGS) Vikram escorted Chem Pluto towards Mumbai.

What was the ship doing?

MV Chem Pluto is a Liberia-flagged, Japanese-owned, and Netherlands-operated chemical tanker. It had started its journey carrying crude from Al Jubail, Saudi Arabia, on December 19, and was expected to arrive in New Mangalore on December 25.

Why was it attacked?

A likely reason that the tanker was targeted is its Israeli affiliation. Its operator, Amsterdam-based Ace Quantum Chemical Tankers, is jointly owned by Israeli billionaire Idan Ofer, the eighth richest man in the world. Notably, Ofer recently resigned from the board of Harvard's Kennedy School of Management citing the board's weak response to anti-Israeli protests on the campus.

Who is behind the attack?

The Pentagon claimed that the ship was struck by "a one-way attack drone fired from Iran." Amidst the spate of recent maritime assaults, this is the first the US is directly blaming Iran.

However, Iran has vehemently dismissed these claims. If it is the Houthis (next section) who have carried out this attack (like all the previous ones), this would be the most distant ship targeted by the group till date.

What explains the recent attacks?

This spate of recent attacks on merchant vessels is a spillover of Israel's relentless assault on Gaza. Since last month, the Houthis from Yemen have constantly targeted Israel-linked ships, citing Israel's continued aggression in Gaza as the reason behind their actions.

Who are the Houthis?

The Houthis have been locked in a civil war with the official Yemen government for almost a decade. They are currently in control of much of northern and western Yemen, including the official capital Sanaa.

Experts believe that the Yemeni Civil War is a proxy war between Iran, backing the Houthis, and Saudi Arabia and the West, backing the official government. Thus, many have blamed Iran for the latest attacks, with the US saying that Iran was "deeply involved". Iran has, however, dismissed these claims.

Why are these attacks concerning?

Most of the attacks have taken place in the Red Sea area, and the Bab el-Mandeb straits off the Yemeni coast. The nearly 2,000-km Red Sea connects the Mediterranean Sea with the Indian Ocean via the narrow Suez Canal, accounting for around 12 per cent of global trade. Thus attacks on commercial shipping on this route can have a major impact on the global economy.

Companies such as shipping fleet operator AP Møller-Maersk and oil and gas giant British Petroleum paused their movements through this route in light of the attacks, and are taking a longer, more fuel-intensive and time-consuming route. Moreover, every ship plying on this route will attract a "war risk" surcharge.

How has the world responded?

US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin on December 19 announced the establishment of Operation Prosperity Guardian, a multinational security initiative to thwart Houthi attacks. This operation will see the joint participation of the UK, Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles, and Spain as well as several other countries, who thus far remain unnamed. It will see naval ships conducting joint patrols and providing an umbrella of protection to merchant vessels travelling on the route.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: The Indian Express

2. IMF's sovereign debt risk assessment for India has spurred a sharp reaction

What is sovereign risk?

Sovereign risk is the potential that a nation's government will default on its sovereign debt by failing to meet its interest or principal payments. Sovereign risk is typically low, but can cause losses for investors in bonds whose issuers are experiencing economic woes leading to a sovereign debt crisis.

Role of IMF

The Finance Ministry recently issued a statement titled 'Factual position vis-à-vis IMF's Article IV consultations with India'. For context, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), under its Articles of Agreement, holds bilateral discussions with members, usually every year. IMF staffers collect economic and financial information, and discuss policies with top officials, before preparing a report that is discussed by the Fund's executive board.

Ministry's response

The Ministry statement, four days after the IMF released its latest India consultation details, noted that "certain presumptions have been made taking into account possible scenarios that does not reflect factual position". In particular, the Ministry was referring to an IMF view that adverse shocks could lift India's general government debt to, or beyond 100% of GDP in the medium-term (by 2027-28). The Ministry asserted this was only a worst-case scenario and not a fait accompli, and emphasised that other IMF country reports show much higher extreme 'worst-case' scenarios, for instance, at 160%, 140% and 200% of GDP, for the U.S., the U.K. and China, respectively.

The combined debt of central and State governments stood at 81% of GDP in 2022-23, from 88% in 2020-21. Under favourable circumstances, the IMF reckons this could even go down to 70% by 2027-28. The shocks faced by India so far in this century were global, and affected the entire world economy, be it the 2008 financial crisis or the pandemic, the Ministry pointed out.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Organisations
Source: The Hindu

3. Punishment to doctors for death due to negligence

Punishment under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita

Union Home Minister's assurance on the floor of the Lok Sabha was at variance with the actual amendment on punishment for doctors in cases of death due to negligence. Amit Shah initially said: "If someone died due to medical negligence by doctors it was treated as culpable homicide not amounting to murder. I am bringing an amendment

today. Doctors have been exempted from punishment [under this section]. The Indian Medical Association [IMA] had requested us [for the exemption].”

The amended Bharatiya Nyaya (Second) Sanhita Bill, 2023, passed since, however did not provide that blanket exemption to doctors. Instead, the amended Section 106(1) specifies that a registered medical practitioner (RMP) shall be punished with imprisonment up to two years and a fine. In effect, the punishment for doctors as specified under Section 304(A) of the Indian Penal Code that the BNSS replaces, has been retained.

With the IMA still thanking the government despite the status quo situation, a deft look behind the scenes reveals that a draft Bill submitted to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the issue, actually suggested a seven-year imprisonment term for death due to negligence in case of an RMP. The IMA then submitted to the Standing Committee that there was no mens rea or criminal intent in the relationship between the patient and the doctor, and thus the increased punishment was not justified. The committee then reduced the imprisonment to five years, which finally rested at two years, as the law was passed.

SC guidelines

It is pertinent to look at the index case that defined guidelines relating to medical negligence — Jacob Mathew vs State of Punjab & Anr. (2005). The court held that the negligence should be ‘gross’, of a significantly high degree, and consequently, criminal liability would come up only if the physician’s act can be demonstrated to be negligent or reckless, causing death. Even during prosecution, at various levels, the weight is on the opinion of a similarly qualified expert on whether negligence on the part of the doctor led to death. While it may be argued that doctors thus enjoy adequate protection under the law in the execution of their duties, the reality is that the incidence of violence against medical professionals is indeed increasing. To offer doctors refuge from fear of assault while discharging their duty, and to ensure that any decision made is not clouded or impaired from such fear is important. No one is above the law, but any attempt to demonise doctors for deaths that occur may cause them to hold back from giving patients the best available care. That, under no circumstances, is acceptable.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu