

O HERALDO

Malala's call for action against gender apartheid rings true

At a summit in Islamabad, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai, who herself became a symbol of resistance after surviving an assassination attempt by the Pakistani Taliban for advocating girls' education, issued a resounding plea to Muslim leaders. Urging them not to "legitimise" the Taliban government in Afghanistan, Yousafzai called for decisive action against the regime's oppressive policies, particularly its draconian restrictions on women and girls. Her call could mark a pivotal moment in the fight for gender equality within the Muslim world.

The Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in 2021 was marked by a swift and harsh imposition of what many experts have labeled "gender apartheid". Under the Taliban's rule, women have been systematically excluded from public life, stripped of their educational rights, and banned from holding many government jobs. Most alarmingly, Afghan girls have been denied secondary education and university access, and the repression has only intensified with the Taliban's prohibitions against women in fields such as midwifery and nursing.

Yousafzai's remarks at the summit were powerful and pointed. She called out the Taliban's justification for their actions, denouncing the regime for cloaking their oppressive measures with "cultural and religious justifications". Her words were direct: "Simply put, the Taliban do not see women as human beings." The Nobel laureate's challenge to Muslim leaders was equally stark. She urged them to take a stand against the Taliban's policies and "show true leadership" by opposing their actions, which, she argues, have no basis in Islamic teachings.

This is not merely an issue of politics or national governance but a humanitarian crisis that impacts the future of an entire generation. In Afghanistan, girls are denied an education beyond the sixth grade, the only country in the world where such a ban exists. This educational deprivation not only stunts individual growth but also condemns the country's development. Education is the key to lifting millions out of poverty and empowering women to contribute meaningfully to society. Denying it is a deliberate attempt to erase women from the public sphere and keep them dependent on patriarchal structures.

What Yousafzai highlights is the deeper cultural and religious distortion at play. The Taliban's interpretation of Islamic law does not represent the teachings of Islam, which, like all major world religions, stresses justice, compassion, and the upliftment of all individuals, regardless of gender. By framing their laws as divinely ordained, the Taliban seeks to create a narrative of inviolability and martyrdom, which continues to justify their policies both domestically and to the outside world.

However, the response from the international community and, more specifically, from Muslim-majority nations has been mixed. While no country has formally recognized the Taliban government, some have engaged with Kabul on trade and security matters. This pragmatic engagement, driven by geopolitical and economic concerns, risks giving tacit approval to the Taliban's treatment of women and girls. Yousafzai's call for action at the Islamabad summit was a timely reminder that such engagement should not come at the expense of human rights.

Her call is especially urgent for Muslim leaders, who possess the moral authority and influence to challenge the Taliban's actions from within the faith community. As the most prominent voice advocating for women's rights in the Muslim world, Yousafzai's appeal is not just about the Afghan women currently suffering under the Taliban; it's about affirming the rights of women and girls everywhere. Whether in Gaza, Yemen, Sudan, or Afghanistan, girls' education is under siege, and as Yousafzai pointed out, "the entire future of girls is stolen".

The summit, organised by the Muslim World League and supported by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, provided a unique opportunity for a broad coalition of Muslim leaders, scholars, and officials to come together and take a collective stand. But the effectiveness of such gatherings depends on the actions that follow. The words of leaders matter, but their deeds—whether in the form of diplomatic pressure, legal reforms, or direct engagement—will ultimately determine whether the status quo changes.

One crucial element that remains unaddressed is the international community's role in making gender apartheid a crime under international law. Yousafzai has been an outspoken advocate for this, urging Muslim nations to push for the recognition of gender apartheid as a crime against humanity. This could pave the way for legal mechanisms to hold perpetrators accountable, strengthening the international resolve to protect the rights of women and girls.

There is no easy solution to the crisis in Afghanistan, and diplomatic complexities complicate efforts to resolve the issue. However, Malala Yousafzai's call should not be dismissed as rhetoric; it is a critical call to action.



ROBIN ROY

The project, over 10 years in the making, has finally been completed at a cost of Rs 2,400 crore. In addition to being a two-lane, bi-directional structure, the tunnel also has a parallel escape tunnel, which can be used for emergencies as well as a railway tunnel



CM Omar reaction

Speaking earlier at the function, Abdullah pressed for restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir as promised by the Prime Minister before the assembly elections in September last year and said, "My heart believes that you will fulfil this promise soon". Without making a direct reference to the issue of statehood, Modi told the gathering, "You have to believe that this is Modi and he keeps his promises." "There is a right time for everything and right things will happen at the right time," he said. Abdullah, while welcoming

How Z Morh tunnel will empower military and boost tourism

January 13, 2025 will be auspicious in several ways. Even as crores of devotees took the auspicious dip at the Mahakumbh... overseen by the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL), Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday (January 13) inaugurated the Z-Morh tunnel, an engineering marvel and a strategically significant project of immense strategic importance located in Jammu and Kashmir's Ganderbal district.

The name Z-Morh actually derives from the Z-shaped road-way that was in place before the tunnel's construction, which was situated at an elevation of over 8,500 feet and was prey to avalanches all through the winter and this subsequently led to the closure of Sonamarg throughout the chilly months of the year.

Meanwhile, the construction of the Zoji-la Tunnel—linking Sonamarg in Kashmir to Drass in Ladakh—is in progress, with its completion slated for December 2026.

Significance and Location: Z-Morh Tunnel is strategically located to jack up connectivity in the region and will eventually play a crucial role in reducing travel time and help immensely to provide access between critical areas.

Future developments: When completed, the Z-Morh tunnel, alongside the Zoji-la Tunnel which is expected to be over by 2028, will shorten the travel route from 49 km to 43 km while increasing vehicle speed from 30 km/hr to 70 km/hr.

Modi, referred to his speech made on International Yoga Day last year and said, "You gave three very important points in your programme. You talked about 'dil ki duri' (distance between hearts) and 'Dilli se duri' (distance of people of Jammu and Kashmir with Delhi) and said you are trying to eliminate both these things."

He said it was an honour to have the PM inaugurating two important projects in Jammu and Kashmir within a span of 15 days. Last week, Modi virtually inaugurated the Jammu railway division.

CM Abdullah expressed optimism regarding the Z-Morh tunnel's impact on tourism, with his statement highlighting that the tunnel will facilitate the development of Sonamarg as a premier ski resort, allowing residents to remain in the region during winter and significantly decreasing travel time to Kargil and Leh from Srinagar.

The project, over 10 years in the making, has finally been completed at a cost of Rs 2,400 crore. In addition to being a two-lane, bi-directional structure, the tunnel also has a parallel escape tunnel, which can be used for emergencies as well as a railway tunnel.

The tunnel can handle up to 1,000 vehicles per hour at a maximum speed of 80 kmph. The New Austrian Tunnelling Method (NATM) has been used.

KEY DETAILS
*Name Origin: The Z-Morh Tunnel is named after the Z-shaped stretch of road it replaces, 'Z-Morh' translating to 'Z-turn' in Hindi.

*Connectivity: It links Gagangir to Sonamarg in Ganderbal district, spanning 6.5 km with an additional 6.05 km of approach roads.

*Altitude: Positioned at an elevation of 2,637 meters (8,652 feet) above sea level.

*Purpose: Provides all-weather access to Sonamarg, bypassing the previously dangerous, avalanche-prone Z-turn road.

*Specifications: A two-lane, bi-directional tunnel, 10 meters wide, with a parallel 7.5-meter-wide escape tunnel that doubles as a railway tunnel.

*Capacity: Designed to accommodate up to 1,000 vehicles per hour at speeds of up to 80 km/h.

*Significance: Part of the NH1 Srinagar-Leh Highway and approved at a cost of Rs 2,400 crore.

*Features: Equipped with a modern ventilation system and two portals, the tunnel is designed for safety and efficiency.

A tourism booster
The Z-Morh tunnel is expected to boost tourism in the region and will bring fortune to the area.

With the completion of the tunnel, the tourist town of Son-

amarg — which is also known as the 'Meadow of Gold' — will be accessible throughout the year enabling businesses which otherwise would have been shut.

The new tunnel will also reduce travel time between Gangeer and Sonamarg to just 20-25 minutes and mind it the travel will be an uninterrupted access throughout the year.

Hoteliers, traders and others are optimistic about the tunnel's potential to unlock immense tourism prospects. They are also hoping that it will open up new avenues for adventure sports and winter tourism.

The Z-Morh tunnel will also improve trade and transport between Kashmir and Ladakh. The farmers and traders will benefit as the tunnel will immensely reduce travel time and also improve driving experience and thereby road safety. Moreover, by providing year-round access, there is a possibility that more investments will flow into the region, boosting the local economy.

Z-Morh tunnel's strategic importance

Apart from providing all-year connectivity and boosting trade and tourism, the Z-Morh tunnel is expected to provide a strategic edge.

Part of the broader Zoji-la Tunnel project, the Z-Morh tunnel will connect Sonamarg to the rest of Kashmir. Meanwhile, the Zoji-la Tunnel, which is expected to be completed by 2028, will connect Sonamarg to Drass in Ladakh. Thus, both the tunnels will provide all-weather access to Ladakh's strategic border regions, including Kargil and Leh.

This is significant as Ladakh borders Pakistan and China. With the tunnel, India's dependence on air transport to move personnel as well as equipment to forward areas will be reduced now significantly.

Currently, the Indian Army has to depend heavily on air transport to move supplies. However, with this tunnel, it will be cost-effective for the military. It will also extend the life of military aircraft, which currently bear the burden of year-round supply missions to Ladakh's remote locations.

Tunnel network in Jammu-Kashmir

The Z-Morh tunnel is a part of the network of 31 tunnels being built in the region. Twenty tunnels are being built in Jammu-Kashmir and 11 in Ladakh — at a combined investment of Rs 2,680 crore.

(Writer is Senior Journalist and former senior Associate Editor, O Herald, Goa)

people's *edit*

GOA CHANGING FROM PEACE TO PERIL

JOSEPH LEWIS D'SILVA

Ancestral Goa was once peaceful and clean. Those were the days of 'boil gaddis' (bullock carts) and 'voddins' (boats). At night we moved around with 'chull' (coconut fire-torches) and 'ponnttis' (small oil lamps). In those good old days, Goa did not have electricity but had honesty. Goa had beautiful cottages and no real estate developers who now swallow the dilapidated and even well-maintained bungalows.

Gone are the days of drudgery; of drawing water from the village well; and attending the gatherings that shaped the folk life. Gone are the shouts of the shepherds, guiding their herds along dirt tracks and hill slopes. Goa was pristine, palm fringed and very peaceful.

Goa is a great melting pot of cultures and faiths; where Hindus, Christians, Muslims, Sikhs and others live sharing lives and festivals; a symbol of unity in its rich diversity. Goa is known as a land of fish, 'feni' (country grog) and football. Goa is also referred as a Garden of Eden and as Rome of the East, because of its greenery and hillocks; and for its majestic churches, chapels, temples and mosques that became center of attraction for people of various faiths to pray and to please the Gods for their abundant blessings showered on this beautiful land.

Tourists come from far and near as they are pulled by its wonderful charm. They romance with nature, among the sun, sand and sea. They enjoy the spell-binding solitude of a hill top. They relax on the golden sands of the surf-lapped virgin beaches in spite of the busy atmosphere; where everyone seems to refresh and find new energy.

Goa is blessed with natural beauty. It looks like a picture postcard with its flora and fauna, swaying palm trees, winding rivers, fast-moving streams and waterfalls that gives a magnetic feeling to this beautiful land of Goa. Yes, Goa is indeed, 'God's own abode'. We are not the owners of this land given to us by the Almighty; but we are mere caretakers entrusted with it; to preserve its beauty and heritage.

In modern times, Goan scenic beauty is fading; its forests are spoilt its hills are razed into flat surfaces; its flowing rivers are contaminated and polluted with garbage and sewage release; its plains are increasingly covered by countless shanties and plastic bags all over the roadsides; its paddy fields have been disappearing to give place to concrete jungles; its sand dunes, protecting our coastlines on our virgin beaches, have been razed to make way for rich hotels.

Many Goans have left for Dubai, America and Canada for better prospects. On their way out, and in order to show sufficient funds, ancestral homes were being sold and farm lands were abandoned, without an inch of guilt. Therefore, many houses stand empty; homes that were built with the sweat and blood of our ancestors; and barren fields that were once painstakingly cultivated, and which provided our parents and grandparents, a square meal. But now, all that has been a forgotten dream. Now, it seems, politicians are all out to sell Goa for 'kolso' (coal); putting profit before future.

We do not want our children to grow up in Goa that has been ruined and looted in the name of development. We do not want Goa which is witnessing violence which is turning into a paradise for drug peddlers and prostitution. We do not want a Smart City where there is non-stop digging; many say, a smart way of plundering public money.

It is necessary to reflect on the soul of Goa which was once a beacon of peace, unity and natural beauty. It is time to shift from mindless development to balanced progress.

meditation, positive thinking and behavioral modification.

If one does not manage the stress levels, chronic inflammation can lead to development and progression of many diseases of the immune system.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Untouchability akin to silent terrorism

Parakala Prabhakar has said, "In today's India, it becomes easy for someone who tolerates the majoritarian polity to be tolerant of economic inequality." It happens because the ground for this has been prepared by casteism.

Casteism is based on inequality. It blurs the vision of seeing anything wrong in the celebration of becoming the third highest country in number of billionaires amid rising unemployment, inflation, inequality, and poor performance in human development and hunger alleviation.

As per the India Human Development Survey (IHDS-2) in 2011-12, 27 per cent of the respondents across India said that they had been following the practice of untouchability.

Untouchability is like silent terrorism and the worst form of "othering". It makes fun of India's eternal message of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (the world is one family).

Sujit De, Kolkata

Historic Goa Opinion Poll

As 16th January is round the corner, let us unfold the events that led to the memorable Opinion Poll also known as Asmitai Dis (identity day), for the sake of those uninitiated who may not be aware of the trials and tribulations the populace underwent for achieving this defining moment in history.

Reflecting on the legacy of the historic Goa Opinion Poll held on January 26, 1967, it's clear that this event was a pivotal moment in the state's history. The poll was a response to the strong opposition from Goans to the proposal of merging with Maharashtra, which was perceived as a threat to their unique identity and culture. With 80 percent voter turnout, the result was a decisive victory for the anti-merger camp, with 54.20 percent of the votes cast in favour of retaining Goa's separate status.

This decision underscored the strong sense of identity and pride among Goans who were determined to preserve their distinctive culture and heritage. The opinion poll is often seen as a defining moment, allowing Goa to chart its own course and eventually become a full-fledged state within the Indian Union in 1987. It also highlighted the importance of democratic process-

es and the power of the people to shape their own destiny.

Dr Jack de Sequeira, often referred to as the "Father of the Opinion Poll" played a pivotal role in this historic event. His leadership and determination were crucial in ensuring that Goa retained its unique identity. The Poll was a significant victory for the people of South Goa, who were passionate about preserving their Asmitai and Goenkarponn. Despite the first Chief Minister of Goa, Dayanand Bhandarkar, favouring the merger, the strong opposition led by Dr Sequeira ensured that Goa remained a separate identity. This decision had a lasting impact on the political and landscape of the state. It is unfortunate that the contribution and legacy of Dr Sequeira has not been fully recognised. The current ruling dispensation's ideology of "Sabha Saath, Sabaka Vikas, Sabha Prayas" does not align well with the objectives of the opinion poll.

Everette Assis Telles, Margao

Select Kholi and Rohit

In a couple of days, there will be selection of Indian Cricket

letterstotheeditor

For letters to the editor contact us at editor@herald-goa.com.

All letters must contain correct postal address and telephone number. Letters are liable to be edited for brevity.

Team for the ICC Champions Trophy. And India will eye to send a best combination.

A lot had happened in the past days for Indian Cricket players especially to Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma as far as their batting is concerned. No doubt they were really woefully in bad form as far as the last 2 test series are concerned. But that does not mean they have to be dumped as they say form is temporary but class is permanent.

It is our humble plea to the Selectors that to please select them as lot of Cricket is left in both the players as both are having vast experience and had served Indian Cricket with flying colours in the past. Their record speaks volumes.

Jerry Fernandes, Vanxim

Stress can affect immune system

Amid growing concerns over detection of Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) cases in India, health experts have reportedly emphasized that the virus is not new and advised people to stay calm and take basic precautions. HMPV that causes upper respiratory infection, recently gained attention

following an outbreak in China. It is not a new virus and was reportedly identified in 2001.

Though it is an emerging health concern according to experts there is no reason for panic. The probable reason for panic among citizens is that the catastrophe that unfolded during the Covid-19 pandemic is still fresh in the mind of Indians.

However, panic which results in intense feelings of anxiety, can cause physical symptoms and stress. Stress can induce symptoms of anxiety. It can suppress the immune system by increasing hormones and resulting in reduction in the number of White Blood Cells (WBCs) that fight infection.

The immune system plays a vital role in defending the body against disease by fighting off invading pathogens. Increased stress has a direct impact on how our body reacts to invasion by pathogens. Stress can be personal. The longer the stress, the more the effect on the immune system. Traumatic experiences from the past can continue to affect the immune system. Some ways to reduce stress and increase immunity include getting enough sleep, practicing Yoga,

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