

## O HERALDO

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## A generation's challenge

The Chief Minister's recent statement at the youth leaders' conference, urging college students to enter politics, has sparked an important conversation. While this call to action is commendable, its broader implications raise questions about the current state of politics and the role youth can play in reshaping it.

It would have been more impactful if the Chief Minister had emphasised the need for young people to cleanse the decayed and criminalised political system. Nevertheless, the statement highlights a truth: the future of any nation lies in the hands of its youth. However, the critical question remains, why should young people enter politics? Is there anything happening in the current politics that makes them want to enter politics? This is the basic question. Keeping in mind the ideals of which leaders, these students will enter politics? Which leader will they follow in their political footsteps? Do we have such a shining example? Which will inspire college students?

The present state of politics is far from inspiring for young aspirants. According to data from the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), 46% of the Members of Parliament elected in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections have criminal cases registered against them. Of these, a significant number involve serious charges, including murder, sexual crimes and hate speech.

Of the MPs elected in this year's Lok Sabha elections, 251 have criminal cases registered against them and 27 of them have been convicted. The number of MPs with declared criminal cases has increased by 55 per cent since 2009. Out of 251 winning candidates this year, 170 (31 per cent) candidates have serious criminal cases like rape, murder, attempt to murder, kidnapping and crimes against women. The analysis found that the chances of a candidate with criminal cases winning the 2024 Lok Sabha elections were 15.3 per cent, while those

with clean backgrounds were only 4.4 per cent. Such figures paint a grim picture, hardly one that motivates young minds to step into the political arena. However, this also presents a challenge—if the youth do not enter politics to bring about change, who will? Historically, youth movements have been instrumental in shaping political landscapes. During India's freedom struggle, student leaders like Bhagat Singh set a precedent for youth-driven transformation. Post-independence, organisations such as the Youth Congress and Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad emerged as platforms for students to participate in politics.

Yet today, these once-idealistic platforms have become extensions of political parties, riddled with malpractices and divisive ideologies. University elections, once a training ground for future leaders, have become battlegrounds for party control. Students are categorised along lines of religion, caste and ideology, stifling their intellectual independence.

In this context, the Chief Minister's call for youth to seize opportunities in politics could be interpreted as urging them to exploit a system rather than reform it. This distinction is crucial. Youth participation in politics should not be about individual advancement but about driving fundamental changes.

Examples from global history reinforce the power of youth in bringing about systemic reform. The student movements in France (1968) and Indonesia (1998) not only challenged their respective governments but also reshaped political discourse. These movements underscore the transformative potential of youth when driven by a commitment to democratic values and rationality.

For young leaders to effect meaningful change, they must transcend the allure of power and stay committed to principles of democracy, justice, and equality. The current political system offers ample opportunities for reform—from electoral processes to governance structures. However, this requires young leaders to remain steadfast in their ideals, even in the face of systemic pressures.

It is equally important to foster an environment that nurtures such leadership. Educational institutions must encourage critical thinking and civic engagement, allowing students to explore political ideas without fear of ideological suppression. Moreover, political parties must welcome young voices not as tokens but as genuine agents of change.

Young leaders should not merely seize opportunities but create them—shaping a political landscape that is transparent, inclusive, and value-driven. The challenge is daunting, but history has shown that when youth rise with conviction, they can transform societies. For India, the time for such a transformation is now.

## comment



AAKAR PATEL

This set of rights appears to be potent. But do we actually possess them? The answer is no. We are not entirely free. Let us look at how easily the State has trespassed on rights we thought had a high degree of protection from encroachment



pression; assemble peaceably and without arms; form associations or unions; move freely throughout the territory of India; reside and settle in any part of the territory of India; practice any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business."

The reality is that none of these rights actually exist in the form they are supposed to be. India's first constitutional amendment (legislated under Jawaharlal Nehru) restricts these Rights by qualifying them. Meaning that the State was given the authority to curb them through so-called 'reasonable restrictions'. Free speech, for instance, can be controlled by 'reasonable restrictions' ... in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence.

The Right to make any legislation it sees fit along the lines above, which are so broad as to fit anything into them. Let's see the multiple ways the government has infringed upon the rights within Article 19.

The Right of Indians to assemble peacefully has been blocked by both law and process. Citizens do not really have this right to peaceful assembly. They have the right to seek police permission to assemble peacefully. The police have the right to approve, deny or not reply (which is often the tactic used by the State in India, so that there is deniability). Assembly in the absence of written permission is treated as a violation of the law. Readers will be familiar with Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code which gives the State the right to arrest people engaged in 'unlawful assembly'.

The Right to form associations and unions is severely limited by the process of registration. The State can deny (or delay) registration of organisations it doesn't like. It can deregister those whose activities it does not like. It can ban those it has a problem with. Again overbroad laws that empower the State to define individuals as 'terrorists' without conviction or trial are used to hinder and restrict the Right to association.

The Right to move freely

across India doesn't exist for those visiting the North East. Rights which cannot be enforced by the rule of law do not exist. Try telling the residents of Manipur that they have the right to move freely.

The Right to reside and settle in any part of the territory of India doesn't apply to Gujarat's Muslims because of a law particular to that State, called the Disturbed Areas Act. It is a law that is old but has become broader with time, tightening the rules under which Muslims can rent and buy property.

The Right to practice any profession doesn't apply to butchers who have been told by the State that they cannot slaughter livestock, explicitly denying them their Fundamental Right. Article 19 gives freedom in its text only to entirely remove this freedom through its footnotes.

All governments by all parties that have governed India and its provinces since 1950 are okay with these restrictions. No party is different really in that sense. What is 'reasonable' is for the State to decide and the State always takes up a position against the individual.

The general assumption is that the citizens and rights are a nuisance that get in the way of the proper administration of the State ('good governance'). Promises made in manifestos for instance that by the Jana Sangh to remove preventive detention, which is the basis for such laws as UAPA, are promptly reversed when the party takes power.

On Republic Day, it is worth going back to the constitution to read it and in particular read part 3, the section concerned with fundamental rights. This is only about a dozen pages or so, but is the heart of the constitution so far as the individual is concerned. Reverence for our constitution and celebrating it with guns and tanks and planes and VIPs may be a good thing. Reading it and understanding it is even better.

(Aakar Patel is a writer and columnist)

## Los Angeles fires

The massive fires currently engulfing Los Angeles serve as a glaring indictment of global politics and its neglectful attitude toward climate change.

Climate change has undeniably played a role in aggravating wildfire intensity and frequency. The areas destroyed by fires include some of the richest and swankiest in the world. Nature's fury has reduced the areas to rubble and ashes in a matter of hours or days. The Los Angeles wildfire disaster has cast a shadow over preparations for the 2028 Olympics, raising questions over whether the city can deliver safe and successful Games.

The fires are extreme climate events like cyclones, typhoons, floods, droughts and other natural disasters that have hit the world more frequently in recent years, causing loss of lives and displacement of people. The cloudbursts and landslides take a heavy toll on lives and properties as the 2024 Wayanad landslides have proved. In fact, India's vulnerabilities are massive due to its vastness and huge population. The fire incidents are a stark warning that the cost of inaction, whether on climate change and infrastructure is far greater than the investments required to mitigate future disasters. It is high time to act now.

Gregory Fernandes, Mumbai

## Dry grass &amp; garbage: Fiery combination

A private bus at Cunchelim, Mapusa, was reportedly completely gutted in a fire on Monday.

Preliminary investigations suggest that the fire might have sparked when dry grass in the vicinity caught fire which quickly spread to the parked vehicle. The flames spread rapidly due to windy conditions.

In another incident a Material

## Recovery Facility (MRF) shed at Honda in Sattari was destroyed in fire on Sunday burning all the material stored inside. This is the second such incident in the taluka in less than ten days. According to locals, garbage was not collected from the shed over the past six months leaving it full of waste. It must be said that garbage and dry grass can be a deadly combination as it can ignite a fire that, aided by the wind, can spread quickly.

In the past, fire erupted at the Somsoddo garbage dump multiple times. Methane gas in garbage can cause fires because methane is highly flammable. Landfill generates methane gas when the microorganism in the ground decomposes the waste. Extreme heat can kill grass and low soil moisture levels makes grass easier to ignite. This can ignite nearby trees and vegetation leading to forest fires.

Common causes of grass blazes include carelessly discarded cigarettes or matches as well as rubbish left lying around. Broken glass bottles can start fires by magnifying the sun's rays. The planet is warming to record-breaking levels. California has not seen significant rainfall for months.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

## Restore police force image

This has reference to the report 'Harassed by senior, ignored by dept, constable found on the brink' published in O Herald edition dated January 14, 2025).

This incident is certainly cause for concern and alarm bells must start ringing. It is distressing to note that the head constable has been driven to breaking point on account of alleged harassment and no avenues to have his con-

## letterstotheeditor

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cerns addressed.

The police force in general in the country does not seem to have a friendly and good image before the general public. The police are also human and it's time the authorities understand the situation and take remedial measures. Certainly, there are honest, sincere, efficient personnel in the police force in the country. All steps must be taken to restore the image of the police force.

A happy and efficient police force would ensure a better society.

Melville X D'Souza, Mumbai

## Trump's preference

There was high speculation about a possible invitation for Prime Minister Narendra Modi to attend the swearing-in ceremony of Donald Trump as the 47th President of the United States of America.

Trump has preferred not to invite Modi, but extend a special invitation to S Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister. It is a riddle why Trump has done so. This is more so, when he has extended invitations to other world leaders like the Chinese President Xi Jinping, Italy's Georgia Meloni, Argentina's Javier Milei and Hungary's Viktor Orban and many others. Does it mean that, for Trump, Jaishankar is more important than Modi?

Tharcus S Fernando, Chennai

## Indian women work selflessly

No salary, no increment, no annual bonus (in most of the cases no appreciation for hard/good work) still the women folk start their work at 5 am (in some cases earlier also) and end not

earlier than 10 pm. In the case of working women, their work schedules are longer. Responsibilities at home are multifarious and practically everything concerns the family.

No casual leave or sick leave or even retirement or retirement benefits. The only promotions she is eligible for are change in the designation viz., from wife to mother to mother-in-law, to grandmother, etc, with added responsibilities and work with no additional benefit except satisfaction of serving the daughter/son's family.

Most Indian women do not have time to enjoy the stare/s or look/s of their husbands as pointed out by L&T boss.

Our Indian women work selflessly through the day (except the night sleep hours) and all the 365 days which is over 70/90 hours a week as urged by industry bosses Narayana Murthy and Subramaniam!

Gopalaswamy J Chennai

## Being creative is imperative

Nothing can infuse a feel good factor better in a person than the "I am my own boss" realisation. To convert dreams into reality, honing one's skills is essential. Youth is a talent, but a perishable one.

Power of youth is insurmountable; in addition to the obvious livelihood advantage, plugging the glaring unemployment rate is the power of self-empowerment.

Despite possessing abundant skills, a lot of young brains find themselves unemployed for reasons not too difficult to fathom. Learning and earning supplement each other well. One's content can be copied; not one's creativity. However,

## people'sedit

## WHEN I WAS A KID

CHANDER GUPTA

When I was a kid, a primary school student, 'Dalima' brand of glucose biscuits were very much in vogue. 'Dalima' biscuits were particularly consumed with tea in middle-class households like ours. Both elders and youngsters dipped the biscuits into the cup of hot tea before taking a soaked bite. The biscuit packet was small-sized, wrapped in signature style. One day I was sent to the corner grocery store to buy packets of 'Dalima'. The shopkeeper handed me the biscuits with familiar packaging in exchange for its price in cash. Triumphant I returned home having run an errand as a kid.

At home, the tea was ready with all the family members huddled together in the hall. Picking up the biscuit packet to open the wrapper, an elder noticed that it was not 'Dalima' but 'Dadima' (Hindi word for grandmother). The wrapper deceptively displayed the similar design with 'Dadima' printed in the same signature style as on the original 'Dalima' packaging. Only one letter 'L' had been replaced with the letter 'D'. Anybody would have been tricked by such clever copying, but for the keen eye of the elder in our household.

When I was a kid, the deliveries of babies used to take place at home only. Nowadays, expecting mothers are taken to maternity nursing homes for delivery of babies. The deliveries of all of us four siblings took place at home. A 'Dai' (indigenous nurse) did the honours.

Being a kid, I used to wonder as to where did the babies emerge from. The expectant mother in labour pains was confined to a room where only other ladies of the house and the 'dai' were allowed in. After the baby was born, the members of the family were told about the gender of the new-born. As a child, I was curious as to where the baby came from. I naively presumed that the baby came out from the mouth of the lady in labour pains. Obviously, it was much later in life that I came to learn the reality as to which part of female anatomy did the baby flush out.

As I was about to turn 10 years old in the year 1969, an epochal event left an indelible imprint on my impressionable mind. The first manned flight, Apollo 11, landed on the moon on July 20, 1969. I turned 10 on September 18, 1969. Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin became the first humans to walk on the lunar surface. We did not have a television set at our home in 1969, as TVs had not yet caught on in India. We heard the news on radios and transistors. As the radio relayed the news about the landing of man on the moon, members of our household were overawed. Kids were also told about the event in wonderment. Though I was barely 10, I absorbed the news with keen interest. I felt an emotion of pride that a member of the human race had set foot on the moon. Intriguingly it has now been more than 50 years since the last crewed mission landed on the moon.

it is important for the youth to learn and earn at their behest. Education empowers youngsters by helping them make informed choices.

A United Nations (UN) study has revealed that one in five youngsters are "Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)", and many are women.

The UN has said that over 400 million new jobs need to be created to absorb nearly 70 million unemployed and another 40 million new entrants into the job market.

Significance of making supply meet demand should not be lost on government departments.

Ganapathi Bhat, Akola

## 10 years of St Jose Vaz's canonisation

On January 14, 2015, the canonisation of Padre Jose Vaz in Colombo, Sri Lanka, was attended by several Goan pilgrims. It has also to be remembered that St Jose Vaz died on January 16, which coincidentally was the Opinion Poll Day, the only referendum held in independent India, that probably through the blessings of St Jose Vaz, Goa became a separate entity and thus a separate state.

We are celebrating the 58th anniversary of the Opinion Poll this year. It should also be brought to mind that a resident of Sao Tome, Cipriano Jose Ciriaco da Rosa Monteiro, who with true devotion travelled to Sri Lanka to partake in the canonisation ceremony, passed away on January 13, 2015, an event that should be remembered.

This year too, 116 devout pilgrims have embarked on a spiritual journey to attend the 10th anniversary of the canonization of St Jose Vaz, a tour conducted by Zion Tours and Travels, Goa. They will represent Goa at a solemn ceremony on the feast day.

Elvidio Miranda, Panjim