

O HERALDO

The Voice of Goa - since 1900

Why can't we live and let live?

Easily distinguished by their olive-green carapace, Olive Ridley sea turtles have made Goa one of their favourite nesting places over the years. Also known as the Pacific Sea turtle, the species (Lepidochelys olivacea) is believed to be the world's second smallest turtle species and is usually found in warm waters in the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean. It is no wonder then, that they are attracted to India's coastline to nest, with the females arriving as they do in thousands on to the country's beaches to complete their distinctive 'arribadas', or synchronised mass nestings.

How each generation of Olive Ridley turtles is able to return to the same beaches to lay their own clutch of eggs is something of a biological marvel. And lucky for Goa, they've picked select beaches for this annual phenomenon: Agonda, Galgibaga, Morjim and Mandrem. This species may love our state, but it doesn't necessarily imply that the love is reciprocated.

The most recent instance of disturbance to the turtle's nesting site at Agonda beach by a single shack is evidence enough. In fact, although the forest department lodged a police complaint in this regard on January 11, the Canacona police did not act until the range forest officer wrote to the police inspector three days later. The PI, in response, merely said the police were "yet to ascertain the shack owner's identity", even as the forest department complained that sand was being stolen from around the turtle nesting site and the shack was draped with a cloth to hide it from view while workers laid tiles within the structure. Then came the proverbial red tape.

The Canacona PI shot back to say that he failed to understand why the police were approached at all when forest guards are well within their rights to make an arrest if there is, in fact, an illegality. He even went to the extent of denying any transgression on one hand and saying on the other that he would need to "study" under which Act a case would need to be booked in a matter like this. From the common man's point of view, two enforcement agencies taking opposing stands in what should ideally have been an open-and-shut case is not only disappointing but alarming.

Notified turtle nesting sites must be protected at all costs and punishments for upsetting these areas, must be swift and strong. As it is, the existence of sea turtles around the world is greatly threatened by bright lights and loud sounds along coastlines. Flashlights, fireworks and pulsating music, all aimed at attracting tourists do just the opposite for the turtles - they drive them back into the sea and leave them floundering for another more suitable nesting site. It is also common knowledge that any form of illumination other than moonlight tend to make hatchlings disoriented, tricking them to waddle further inland instead of towards the ocean.

Noises, on the other hand, are believed to disturb the nesting cycle due to the vibrations caused by sound waves on land and at sea. Clearly, the mere earmarking of particular beach stretches as dedicated turtle nesting sites is not the only thing the government should be doing. It should also be ensuring that its law enforcement agencies are on the same page to deal with violations if and when they occur. Adequate support to the forest department - which has been doing a commendable job over the years to protect the Olive Ridleys and boost their nesting numbers - is paramount.

If generations of Goans to come are to witness this annual natural phenomenon, it is binding on the government to provide the Olive Ridleys with not only sufficient space and safety but with iron-clad rules to ensure that they can nest in peace. Passing the buck and treating illegalities with a pinch of salt won't help anyone, and certainly not this docile marine species that swims thousands of miles in the hope of finding a safe haven on our beaches to nest if only to ensure that its kind survives for centuries to come.

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BY INVITATION VIVEK MENEZES

Replaying an ugly racist history from almost exactly 100 years ago, anti-Indian bigotry has emerged an integral factor in the latest "white nationalist" surge in American politics, which returns the highly erratic convicted felon Donald Trump to the White House tomorrow. Back in 1924, after much hate-filled propaganda targeting Chinese, Japanese and Indians, the Johnson-Reed Act effectively banned immigration from all three countries for "posing a growing threat to American society and culture" alongside similarly undesirable Jews and Southern Europeans (whose numbers were cut 80%). Now the USA seems on the verge of something similar once again, with nasty prejudices about desis and others paraded in the open, and "large scale deportations" against the undocumented (including around a million Indians) potentially set to kick off next week itself.

In the wake of Kamala Harris's failed attempt to succeed Joe Biden, in which the Vice President's Tamil roots (via her late mother) featured prominently, and seemingly non-controversially, it is notable Trump's "base" - an unwieldy coalition of racists joined with huge numbers of America's working poor; that was catapulted to victory by an unscrupulous cabal of tech oligarchs led by Elon Musk - has already cleaved apart on the issue of Indians. This new politics of xenophobia has been accompanied by most fascinating fall-outs: in the past few days alone, ultra-liberal senator Bernie Sanders and far-right extremist Steve Bannon have both attacked Musk over the H-1B visa programme (now basically a euphemism for "Indians") which the rogue "richest man in the world" has declared he will "go to war" to defend. And, even more startlingly, despite his now-halting and humiliated mien, President Biden delivered an astonishing farewell indictment of where his country is heading (along with so many others, including ours), also transparently targeting Musk: "Today, an oligarchy is taking shape in America of extreme wealth, power, and influence that literally threatens our entire democracy, our basic rights and freedoms, and a fair shot for everyone to get ahead. We see the consequences all across America. [We] are being buried under an avalanche of misinformation and disinformation enabling the abuse of power. The truth is smothered by lies told for power and for profit."

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END TO THE INDIAN-AMERICAN DREAM?



1924 editorial cartoon courtesy The Asylumist

H1B is an actual triviality, affecting only 85,000 people each year (for perspective, 90,415 illegal Indian immigrants were arrested on the US borders in 2024 alone). What is more, all those "techies" are fully legal, and playing by the rules the "Make America Great Again" crowds allegedly support. But now their mask has slipped

2024 alone). What is more, all those "techies" are fully legal, and playing by the rules the "Make America Great Again" crowds allegedly support. But now their mask has slipped. "It is a dirty secret that for all the rhetoric about illegal immigrants, there are very prominent figures in the Trump camp who want to limit legal immigration as well," says Kishore Sharma, a senior economist based in New York, "Part of this is driven by economics. There is a view, even among skilled white-collar workers (including those of Indian descent) that they are being undercut in the labour market by equally skilled visa-seekers from India and China. This anxiety is understandable and should be viewed with some sympathy, since the US is driven by cut-throat capitalism, and corporate bosses who are ever eager for a stream of cheap skilled workers they can exploit. There however is another reason, based on race. The majority of legal immigrants are non-white, and there is a fear of demographic change, as espoused by Steve Bannon, who feels that

the sense of community, or you could say social capital, is eroded by lack of a common underpinning culture."

Sharma is an astute and balanced analyst of the world, who has lived in both the UK and USA for many years. Via email, he told me earlier this week that "I do not have a concern for my children as 'Indian Americans'. There are Indian Americans in Trump's cabinet and I do not see existing non-white citizens being targeted, there are too many of them and the power-holders in the Trump administration (Musk, Vance etc) do not have any specific ethnic axe to grind. However, I do have concerns for them as 'American citizens' especially given fears about a weakening of democratic institutions, lopsided and protectionist economic policies, increasing inequality/concentration of power in a wealthy few, and callous disregard for environmental and climate-related challenges."

As with so many in Goa, the emergent ethno-nationalism of Trump and his ilk is personal to me, with relatives and

friends scattered across the West, including my sole sibling Rohit Menezes, who lives in California atop an extensive career spanning corporate and non-profit sectors. When I reached out this week, he told me "I am surprised that it has taken this long for Indian Americans to be targeted by America's white nationalists. Over my four decades in the US, the Indian American diaspora's ascendance has been relentless and pervasive. Beyond corporate America and healthcare, Indian Americans have penetrated the highest echelons of many sectors ranging from entertainment to hospitality to politics (both sides of the aisle!) and civil society. It has been largely an unfettered romp. At the same time, since Indian Americans' achievements have been uncoordinated and diffuse - reflecting the diversity of Indians and their varied immigration journeys, among other things - we have been hard to attack in a concentrated way. I see the attack in H1-B's as one of the only tractable ways America's white nationalists can target the community."

My wise - albeit younger - brother concludes that "in the big picture, the model minority myth is a narrative subterfuge to suggest that achievement in America - social and economic mobility - is not determined by race. The empirical evidence suggests otherwise. Ironically, attacks on Indian Americans remind us that the myth is indeed a myth, and undermine the nativist argument for American exceptionalism when it comes to opportunity. From these attacks we are seeing that for some Americans, no matter how "successful" we Indian immigrants have been, or how much we contribute to America, we remain perpetually subordinate to a perceived white overclass.

To this subset of folks, we will never truly belong here. In this way, these attacks remind us that Indian-Americans are just like any other racial and ethnic minority in the US, and would do well to build solidarity with other similarly situated groups. When I read your question about the death of the Indian American dream, I hear "is this the end of Indian American's journey towards being considered white?"

In my reading, despite our Satya Nadellas and Kamala Harrises, our integration into Whiteness was never in the near-term cards. I fear that for many white Americans, we have been designated as "forever foreigners" whose achievements are useful to obscure the innumerable anti-Black systems and policies that riddle America."

Have Goans surrendered to their fate?

In spite of misgivings and total collapse of governance in the state, Goans seem to have just fallen prey to the political gimmicks of the BJP.

And it's with heavy heart to state that it looks like Goans have surrendered themselves to their fate to the present state of affairs. In case anyone had high hopes for Goa to be the 'Numero Uno' state of India, you are sadly mistaken. Instead, it has now gone from bad to worse with total collapse of administration which can be gauged with daily news items appearing on newspapers. Be it, Panjim Smart City fiasco, Kala Academy loot, filthy city bus stands, pot-holed roads, Road rage and accidents, the great land grabbing, hill cutting, jobs scandals, unresolved Sonsoddo garbage, etc...etc..just to name a few.

The slogan of 'Na Khaoonga, Na Khane Doonga' still echoes throughout the country....

Today, the virus of corruption has taken deep roots at every administrative block and more so ever since the BJP made inroads into the corridors of power. That doesn't mean the Congress was innocent here. They may have mastered the art, but today the BJP has outsmarted them in every aspect. A visit to any government department will help you to understand the callousness and a sad tale of functioning. On a visit, check if anyone in any department is helping you to

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sort out your problem or extending help to alleviate your hardships. I bet you won't find any soul who will reach out to you but instead explore the ways and means of extracting a pound of flesh and take you for a ride. And the monsters in the making are mostly found in the TCP, transport, revenue department to name a few. Even hospital schemes are not spared from this menace. And that's the sad part of the Goan story.

In Goa, we should be grateful to some of the NGOs and most of the activists who have been spearheading their movement and actively exposing the malpractices of the government. No doubt they are constantly on agencies' radar as well. The Goa government is hell bent on changing the State's landscape as well as demography. The way things are going on, it looks like there is a mole planted in every department by the builders' lobby which is in connivance with top government servants who are disgracefully selling Goa to the highest bidders. Whatever is left now is definitely due to the activists and NGOs who are sacrificing their valuable time and energy. All they need is our support and encouragement and not brickbats from those who have their own agenda to promote at the cost of development. So, let's bow our

UPFRONT

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head to those activists and NGOs and whistleblowers that are doing their yeoman service to Goans so that the future generations are left with some inheritance; whether it is land, rivers and fields or other resources which are in dwindling mode at present.

How much do we know about the land grabber's that were arrested? Will the government ever release the investigation report to the public? A few arrests here and there make a headline but ultimately no final judgement will ever be known? This tall talk of arresting land grabbers is just for public consumption but in reality they go scot free because the powerful and mighty have their own way to tame and tweak every rule of law. Haven't we heard and read enough about the latest jail break of Colvale jail by one of the land grabbers? Don't we see jokers having a field day?

Our memory is always short lived. So every trickster takes advantage and takes Goans for a ride.

Today, nature is definitely having a close look at Goa's ecology. With recent global warming showing its wrath in most of the countries, the Goa government is far from learning any lessons from it. Who knows when Goa's rivers and hills and mountains may feel the heat of nature's fury?

The greed of rich, bold and beautiful people is insurmountable, and so too the greed of our politicians.

It would have been so wonderful had the government only taken its people into its confidence and accordingly went for the development. But instead the government's hand in glove with the builders' lobby of non-Goans has been exposed. And this is the crux of a problem which is destroying our Goa.

If the Government for the last two decades or so cannot solve the problem of Sonsoddo garbage, what more can one expect? As of today, every town or city is crying for attention. The quality of works undertaken shows the leth-

argy and ignorance of the contractors. Goa has now turned into a contractors' paradise, of course with the blessings of our government.

Our once beautiful Margao town in the South which is now turned into a ghost city with city fathers busy on looting spree instead of taking care of the health and wealth of the city. Dirty politics has become so filthy today that the descent or right thinking candidates from the society find no place in the decision making. Every decision has been challenged or arrogantly side-lined to selfish interest. The city today is crying for attention on every front be it beautification, cleanliness or discipline of the traders. Illegalities have mushroomed at every corner from small traders to the unlicensed businesses. And the end result is the public who is facing the wrath for want of discipline and breathing space of their once beloved city. A visit to Margao Municipality building, have a look at the road divider, a corner just beside the municipality! It lay in shambles for some years with migrant labourers making merry at this place. Is it wilfully left unattended or the councillors just turning their blind eye to this once beautiful sight to behold?

With the capital city being constantly on a bombing spree, we cannot expect anything better to be completed in near future. And instead of all these messes, the government is making

tall claims of good governance. And of course we, the people, are blind to this. Imagine, had any other party's government been in power; that government would have been brought down to its knees. Unfortunately, Goans have too big a heart to bear and forget all the government's failures.

At the moment, Goa has become politically a 'sinkhole' for every opposition member as well as for the people who are kept on tenterhooks. Raise neither voice nor do any untoward that will hurt the ruling party. And all politicians have been following the 'silence is golden' mantra. But, mind you. Come the next assembly elections and we shall witness yet once again those who will keep jumping the fences or get drowned in the political whirlpool.

But one thing is certain that Goans will have to undergo yet another exercise of voting to bring the morons back to power. Because, unless and until the present political weeds are uprooted for good, no one will ever have the spine to fight back and reclaim our past glory. Because the saviour of Goa is yet to be born. Till then, it's the ED, CB and CBI that will rule the roost. It has been clear now that our very 'Göykarponn' is at stake and may just remain in the history book. Goa is now slowly experiencing cultural death. Hence Goans will have no choice but to choose between the devil and the deep sea and remain 'sussegad' for the rest of their life."