

O HERALDO

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Gaza's fragile ceasefire is a pause, not a solution

The ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, which took effect after 15 months of devastating conflict, is a pivotal moment in the ongoing tragedy of Gaza. The agreement, brokered by Egypt, Qatar, and the United States, comes after months of difficult diplomacy aimed at halting the bloodshed and beginning a complex exchange of hostages and prisoners. But while the ceasefire offers a brief respite, it raises crucial questions about the future of Gaza, the prospects for lasting peace, and the broader implications for the region.

The ceasefire officially began at 9:15 GMT on Sunday, though delayed by several hours as Hamas initially withheld the names of three female hostages it planned to release. This delay underscored the fragile nature of the truce and the tense atmosphere that surrounds the negotiations. Despite the late start, the terms of the ceasefire include the staged release of hostages—33 of the 98 remaining, mostly women and children, over the course of the next six weeks—in exchange for the release of nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. This process, while significant, is just the beginning of what promises to be a long and difficult path toward de-escalation.

The hostage exchange is a central element of the agreement. For many families, the return of loved ones is the most immediate and tangible result of the ceasefire. Three hostages, including women held by Hamas since the surprise attack on Israeli towns in October 2023, were released, marking the first step in this complicated deal. But the exchange is fraught with political challenges. In Israel, public opinion is sharply divided on whether to prioritize the return of hostages or the release of Palestinian militants. For many, the prospect of freeing prisoners convicted of attacks on Israelis, including teenage boys and members of militant groups, remains a highly contentious issue.

While both sides have agreed to a pause in hostilities, the future of Gaza is precarious. The humanitarian toll of the war has been staggering. Over 47,000 Palestinians have lost their lives, the majority of them civilians, as Gaza's infrastructure has been obliterated. Reconstruction will require years and billions of dollars, but it is unclear how or when this will happen, especially given the region's unstable political environment.

The ceasefire, while a much-needed break, does little to address the underlying causes of the conflict. Hamas, despite suffering significant losses, remains entrenched in Gaza. Its leadership continues to call for resistance to Israeli occupation, while Israel, having cleared significant parts of the territory, has made it clear it will not allow Hamas to reassert control. The situation is now at a dangerous impasse, with both sides locked in a cycle of retaliation that has only exacerbated the suffering of the civilian population.

The broader political ramifications of the ceasefire are also significant. In Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's leadership has been severely undermined by the conflict. The intelligence and security failure that led to Hamas's surprise attack in October 2023 has eroded public confidence in Netanyahu's government. However, the ceasefire presents him with a political conundrum: while there is international pressure to maintain truce, hardliners within his coalition are demanding a return to military operations. Netanyahu's political survival may hinge on his ability to balance these competing pressures.

Beyond Gaza, the war has reverberated across the Middle East, with Israel drawn into confrontations with Hezbollah in Lebanon and Iran. Despite significant military victories, Israel's international standing has been damaged by the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Accusations of war crimes and genocide, along with mounting pressure from global actors, pose a significant challenge for Israel as it seeks to rebuild its diplomatic relationships. The ceasefire, however, may offer a temporary reprieve from international scrutiny, though the long-term impact remains to be seen.

The United States, under both Joe Biden and Donald Trump, played an instrumental role in brokering the ceasefire. The agreement came after months of delicate negotiations, with both administrations putting aside their differences to reach a deal. This cooperation, while unprecedented, reflects the urgency of ending the war and securing the release of hostages. Both leaders now claim credit for the deal, although the reality is that the agreement's success is due to the collective efforts of a range of diplomatic actors.

As the ceasefire takes hold, the world holds its breath, hoping that this fragile truce might pave the way for a longer-lasting peace. But as the history of Israel and Gaza has shown, ceasefires often lead to more violence rather than lasting resolution. The challenges facing Gaza and the broader Middle East remain as daunting as ever. The ceasefire is a step forward, but it is far from a solution.

comment



JASON KEITH FERNANDES

Of Political Theology

Of the many homilies I heard during the recently concluded Exposition of the Sacred Relics of St Francis Xavier, there was one which particularly stood out for reasons of expounding a very political theology. This homily was that of the Apostolic Nuncio to India, Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli, delivered on the fourth of December, the fourteenth day of the exposition.

In his homily, the Nuncio referred to the rather impertinent demands made to test the DNA of St Francis Xavier. Responding to this suggestion, Archbishop Girelli said; "Actually, the DNA [of St Francis Xavier] resides in his faith in Christ; and whoever is interested to know it can find it in every Catholic in Goa, since every Catholic Goa is intimately united to St Francis Xavier and receives from him his imprint, his Christian legacy. We are all Francis Xaviers in Goa. He is the model of our lives."

Now some readers may dismiss these words as mere rhetoric. However, it is not mere words but fact, since it was on this rhetoric that history has been built, and this history has

By virtue of our veneration of St Francis Xavier, by our kissing of his relic, by making him the model of our lives, and indeed, by virtue of our praying to him that he be the model of our lives, we are indeed imprinted with the DNA of St Francis Xavier



had very real implications for the lives of thousands of contemporary Goans — both Catholic and otherwise.

The fact that I refer to is the fact of baptism, which the pre-liberal Portuguese state in India took very seriously. Once a person

was baptised, they became Catholic, and in principle were entitled to all the rights that other Catholics were entitled to. To this early Portuguese state in India, to be Catholic was to be synonymous with being Portuguese. As a result, those who were baptised, were now considered for all practical purposes, Portuguese. Given that these Portuguese did not live in a liberal world, with its rhetoric of equality, it did not mean that all Portuguese would be treated equally. However, they were all treated as Portuguese in the graded society that they lived in. And the long legacy of this Catholic politics resulted in the fact that even today the Portuguese-ness of the Goan (both Catholic and non-Catholic) is an undeniable fact of law!

Francis Xavier, as he was then, may have been born Basque, but when he passed through the port of Lisbon and headed to Goa, and indeed as he moved through the territories of the Portuguese crown in Asia, he would have operated as Portuguese. But Portuguese or otherwise, both he and the Portuguese crown were equally interested in that most noble of projects, the winning souls for Christ. Once these souls submitted to Christ in baptism, then as Archbishop Girelli pointed out, they were all equally imprinted with Christ.

Any argument in political theology must take theological truths as its point of departure. In this case, Archbishop Girelli is pointing to the fact that those who are baptised in Christ partake in His Spirit; and those who commune of His body, partake of His flesh. Having eaten of Him, He becomes an integral part of them, and they in Him. They are all one in Christ, just as St Francis Xavier was one with Christ. Ergo, at the spiritual level, which any political theologian must take seriously, Christ is very much part of

the DNA of every Catholic in India. By virtue of our veneration of St Francis Xavier, by our kissing of his relic, by making him the model of our lives, and indeed, by virtue of our praying to him that he be the model of our lives, we are indeed imprinted with the DNA of St Francis Xavier. At the end of the day, it was his total commitment to Christ which marked his DNA, to the extent that it did not corrupt!

It is unfortunate that there is no substantial amount of political theology, of the kind Archbishop Girelli articulated, being expounded in contemporary Goa, or indeed India. The theology that tends to be presented as political theology is dated, and cannot respond to the current situation in our country. Above all, it does not begin from spiritual premises, being silent on the fact that the transcendental, or supernatural, world has a very real impact on our lives. Rather, this theology remains almost entirely within an immanent frame, ignoring, if not denying (implicitly, though not explicitly) the transcendental, and sticking within the material, or natural, world. Where it attempts a political theology, it seems to remain at the level of the moral, be good to the poor, etc. etc. which while undeniably important and critical parts of the Christian project, gain importance only when they spring from a transcendental belief and truth. Indeed, what a shame, that it took a foreign diplomat to say what ought to have been on the lips of most Goans, especially the Catholic. But no matter! It is not too late for us to think more seriously about the way in which the Catholic faith physically imprints on the lives of Goans, both Catholic and non-Catholic.

(Jason Keith Fernandes is a theologian and socio-legal scholar)

people's edit

CAUSE OF HUMAN SUFFERING

IBONIO D'SOUZA

Man is stuck in the dualities of life - in the dichotomy of the pleasant and the unpleasant. The mind gets agitated if one is unable to achieve the desirable. But when a particular desire is fulfilled, another one raises its head and the vicious cycle goes on and on. No one wants to come out of one's comfort zone to embrace the tough, the unseen or the unpleasant.

We have often believed that if a particular desire was fulfilled, we would be happy and satisfied. But were we really contented then? If yes, for how long? Soon, new desires overtook us without even our realizing it and we found ourselves in the same situation all over again, chasing a new desire!

We learn from our ancient spiritual wisdom that our happiness depends upon the number of desires reduced by us. Our happiness quotient is equivalent to the gap between the number of desires fulfilled, divided by the number of desires entertained. The gap between them decides our happiness. The smaller the gap, the more will be our happiness quotient. This means that entertaining less number of desires or by maintaining a state of no desire automatically takes care of our happiness quotient and ensures peace of mind, where as the absence of this leads to frustration, depression, and even destructive elements in society.

Our era is such that every hand seems to hold a stone to attack the other's head. One wonders when God is omnipresent and omniscient, why do these meaningless religious conflicts occur ceaselessly? Again, when man knows his fate only too well, why does he nurture his great ego for status and power? No doubt, it is due to lack of our enlightenment, oblivious to the true values of life.

The dualities of life - joy versus sorrow, will cease to affect us only when we learn to hold on to nothing and resist nothing. So, live like the lotus - unaffected by the muddy surroundings in which it grows. Be like the lotus leaf which is unaffected and unwetted by the drop of water on it!

Man seldom lives in the present moment, but wanders in the labyrinths of the past that has gone and the future that has not yet come - in a medley of regrets, despair, anger, worry, fear, etc. Haunted by past failures, he is filled with apprehensions about the future. He thus views and spends his whole life negatively.

You need to have your mind like a calm lake. Enjoy peace by quietening the mind's ever chattering and desire-driven nature. Be aware of your true divine nature by stilling your mind. You can certainly do this looking inwards without being distracted by outer trivialities.

Happiness is the product of realisation of truth. Happiness according to the Vedantic view, does not lie outside a person but is within that person. It is the very nature of man. It is the ignorance of that essentially happy nature which is the cause of all dissatisfaction and unease. Real happiness cannot be found externally, it has to be realised within. It is a state of mind. Vedanta emphasises that linking happiness to external objects will always be a failed exercise.

The mystic Indian poet saint Kabir has explained this so appropriately: "Just as the fragrance of a flower lies within so also is the essence of human happiness inside the man, yet he acts like the musk deer searching for the musk in the grass where the aroma from the musk within it has spread". The search for happiness outside will never lead to contentment. Real happiness can only come from within.

Conserve essence of village life

Residents in the ecologically fragile twin-islands of Chorao and Divar have reportedly opposed the government's proposal to designate Divar as a tourism village. The villagers have unanimously rejected the idea, along with plans for large housing projects, particularly those with more than 12 flats, including those with swimming pools. It is learnt that there are no ongoing mega and commercial projects in the village.

The villagers are against developments that will change the essence of the peaceful community. The villagers were worried that mega housing projects would increase the island's population density, straining resources and changing the village character and cause harm to the environment. Tourism will cause potential damage to the lifestyle and natural beauty of the village.

Villagers have also disapproved of building a jetty for luxury yacht operations. In multiple resolutions the Goltim-Navelim gram sabha reportedly opposed all the major tourism related and mega housing projects for which the residents must be complemented. The villagers however reiterated that theirs was not a blanket opposition to tourism but objected to declaring the whole island a 'tourism village'. Be that as it may, we need to conserve the essence of village life which is slowly but surely losing its peace.

Several villages in the state have now become like towns. If mega projects like the proposed Bhutani project in Sancoale are allowed, the demography of our villages will change forever. Villagers need to come together to save their respective villages from land sharks.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Bollywood stars are being targeted

The attack on actor Saif Ali Khan at his Mumbai home has reignited concern about the threats faced by Indian Bolly-

wood stars. This attack follows the murder of his close aide, politician Baba Siddiqui, by the Bishnoi gang in Mumbai. These incidents have sent shockwaves across the nation, prompting calls for stricter laws to ensure the safety of all. Famous people are being targeted. Some of Bollywood's leading actors' lives are in danger for various reasons including their nationality, the controversial films.

Bollywood superstars are constantly in the spotlight, and because of their prominence, popularity, and beliefs, they frequently encounter security threats. While most of the big names in the entertainment industry often have their own security and personal bodyguards, sometimes that's not enough and the government has to intervene by offering various security categories.

It is the responsibility of the government to provide an environment free from fear for artists. Some renowned individuals prefer to employ their own personal security, whereas others depend on the safety offered by the government. Celebrities are increasingly facing security threats, so it is essential that the government take the required steps to guarantee their protection and shield them from harm.

K G Vilop, Chorao

Auto driver turns Good Samaritan

We learn with a sense of great relief and satisfaction that the compassion and kindness and the timely help of Bhajan Singh, an auto driver has saved the life of Actor Saif Ali Khan who was attacked by an intruder in his apartment. When at the wee hours of the dawn, Bhajan Singh saw Saif's domestic aid Hari signalling him to stop his auto and he saw a man with him profusely bleeding, he didn't go away, fear-

ing unnecessary problems but stopped the vehicle and helped the injured into his vehicle and rushed him to the hospital.

He himself confirmed later that, at that point in time his only thought was to take a short-cut road and reach hospital at the earliest so that the life of the injured person whose identity was unknown to him, could be saved. His kindness has been at the top when he has not asked for his auto fare as well after dropping them in the hospital.

Much later only, to his great surprise, he has come to know that the one whose life he has saved is none but Saif Ali Khan, the celebrated Bollywood actor.

It is heartening to note from the adorable gesture of the poor auto man that humanism has not been totally lost in our society which is sadly becoming self-centred and non-sensitive to such head going issues. What a difference it would make to the entire world if only people start emulating Bhajan Singh! May his tribe increase!

Tharcis S Fernando, Chennai

Judiciary is our only hope!

To get the law to be followed in Goa or to address corruption, the only option for citizens seems to be to run to courts! The Goa government vigilance functions seem to have totally collapsed allegedly to help the violators and criminals!

When Goans ask for Special Status to preserve Goa's identity or some sort of jobs guarantee for Goans, politicians will quickly use the unconstitutional tactic to negate the request!

But when the government wants to introduce policies which could be in violation of the existing laws; there is no hesitation for it to proceed even when there are chances that these can be struck down by the law!

There are numerous examples which include legalisation of illegal settlements, TCP's controversial Section 39/A or 17/2 which allows mass conversions of Goa's land and encroachment by Railways on private land!

Looks like some politicians want to just tire the citizens from opposing its destructive policies.

Arwin Mesquita, Colva

FDA should visit Mapusa fruit market

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) should visit the Mapusa wholesale fruit market and see to the alleged illegalities taking place here almost everyday.

Tonnes of green bananas and papayas turn yellow overnight after they are sprayed with chemicals. The fruits are then carted off to the market where consumers buy them. The yellow fruits are neither sweet nor sour but insipid. Why do the authorities allow these dealers to play with health? It is time the FDA clamps down on the wholesale vendors here and penalise them.

Marceline Albuquerque, Siolim

Ceasefire marks new chapter for peace

The ceasefire between Israel and Hamas raises hopes for a possible end to a devastating 15-month conflict. The ceasefire, agreed after a year of intensive mediation by the United States, Qatar and Egypt, is the first step in a long and fragile process aimed at winding down the 15-month war. Interestingly, Qatar, punching above its weight, has set itself up as the world's leading mediator, which is probably because the West-Asian nation wants to establish its own security in an unstable region, analysts say.

Global relationships are key, and Qatar is known for its wide and varied network of contacts. Meanwhile, the ceasefire does mark the start of a new chapter for Palestinians, particularly those in Gaza, and Israelis. While ceasefires are not legally binding, they can perhaps best be thought of as a type of contract between warring parties.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, Chennai

Sleep deficiency causes health issues

Political executives who glorify overwork and sleep deprivation by saying that they work all the time and sleep only for 3 to 4 hours are inflicting as much harm on the people as the celebrities who advertise for pan masala consumption.

Overwork and lack of sleep are no less injurious to health than consumption of pan masala. While pan masala is a leading cause of oral cancer, sleep deficiency and overwork lead to many chronic health problems.

Sleep deprivation of drivers is responsible for many accidents in our country. Any promotion of unhealthy habits like overwork and sleep deprivation and unhealthy products like pan masala must be curbed.

Sujit De, Kolkata

Donald Trumps return

Donald Trump's second term as the President of the US will represent a pivotal time in American history, a new period beyond the world order created by the United States and its allies post-World War II.

It also presents hope for the future of a country returning to conservative social values and prioritizing the economic well-being of American citizens. But for millions of others on the left, his return is the dawning of a dark era — one more nativist, inward-looking and mean-spirited that could leave the marginalized more vulnerable than ever.

Jubel D'Cruz, Mumbai