

O HERALDO

The Voice of Goa - since 1900

Democracy in danger

The essence of democracy lies in its checks and balances, where the ruling government and Opposition parties work together to uphold the values of freedom, equality, and fraternity. The Opposition, far from being a mere constitutional necessity, is an indispensable force that ensures accountability and transparency in governance. However, this vital institution seems to be faltering in our democratic framework, with grave implications for the health of our nation.

In theory, democracy thrives on debate and dissent. The Opposition plays a crucial role in scrutinising government policies, advocating for the marginalised, and safeguarding the Constitution's principles. Yet, the current political landscape raises a pressing question: are our representatives, both in the ruling party and the opposition, genuinely fulfilling their constitutional duties? The answer, alarmingly, is no.

A disturbing trend has emerged where candidates campaign vehemently against the ruling party, decrying corruption and authoritarianism, only to defect to the very establishment they once opposed after securing electoral victories. This blatant betrayal of voters is compounded by the normalisation of electoral malpractices, such as vote-buying. While not all voters succumb to these unethical tactics, the repeated treachery of leaders who switch allegiances undermines the integrity of democracy and devalues the votes of honest citizens.

Equally concerning is the apathy of the general public. Law-abiding and progressive citizens, who form the backbone of a vibrant democracy, often remain passive spectators to this erosion of democratic values. Their silence, whether borne of disillusionment or fear of reprisal, leaves space for corruption and malfeasance to flourish unchecked.

A case in point is Goa, where Opposition parties have raised voices against glaring instances of corruption, such as government job scams and illegal land conversions. However, these efforts have largely been met with indifference from the public, stemming from a pervasive distrust of political actors. On occasions when an Opposition leader genuinely champions public grievances, they are frequently silenced through coercion or the brute force of political majorities.

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The judiciary, often seen as recourse for justice, is inundated with unresolved cases. From financial scams involving senior citizens to police misconduct, the refrain remains the same: "The matter is in court." While some social organisations and activists persist in their fight against such injustices, their efforts alone cannot compensate for a dysfunctional democratic system.

The state of Opposition parties in Goa reflects a broader national malaise. The Congress, traditionally a key opposition force, has been significantly weakened by defections, with eight MLAs recently joining the ruling BJP. Despite this setback, the party has shown little initiative to rebuild its organisational strength. Meanwhile, relations between the Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) have soured, further fracturing the opposition landscape.

As the BJP prepares for the 2027 elections with a head start, boasting that half its groundwork is already complete, Opposition parties appear uncoordinated and unprepared. The electorate's anger at governance failures is palpable, yet Opposition leaders seem unable—or unwilling—to channel this discontent into a cohesive strategy.

It is undeniable that a strong majority enables governments to make decisive policy decisions. However, history warns us of the dangers of unchecked power. British historian Lord Acton's timeless observation that "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely" rings true today. Without an effective Opposition to hold rulers accountable, the democratic framework risks being dismantled from within.

To revive democracy, the Opposition must rise to the occasion. This involves not only uniting across ideological and organisational divides, but also restoring public trust through principled leadership and meaningful action. The Opposition, media, Judiciary, and civil society must collectively work to protect democratic values, ensuring that power is never concentrated to the detriment of the people. Only then can we hope to build a nation where democracy is not merely a ritual of elections but a living, breathing testament to the will of the people.

Twitter World

Pope Francis@Pontifex

Both Israelis and Palestinians need clear signs of hope. My hope is that the political authorities of both sides, with the help of the international community, can achieve a just solution for the two States.

Jeremy Corbyn

The violence against Palestinians in the West Bank is a reminder that genocide, ethnic cleansing and apartheid have not ended.

comment



RADHARAO F. GRACIAS

The Alternative: National Federal Party

The country was ruled for the first 30 years by the Indian National Congress, as a single party. Once the Congress began to lose its mojo, the Janata Party came into being in 1977, only to disintegrate as its disparate components began to pull in different directions. The first century of the third millennium is witnessing the near total eclipse of the Congress and emergence of the BJP as the fulcrum of power around which its voiceless allies rotate. Both the Congress and BJP have reduced the concept of the "Union of States" to a mere statement in the Constitution. We have constant complaints by regional parties of step-motherly treatment in the allocation of Central funds to their states and unconstitutional interventions in the matter of governance.

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The Congress is effectively an appendage of the Nehru-Gandhi family. The BJP too is similar, except that it is an appendage of the RSS. Both parties function under the remote control of these entities. All attempts at forging a third national party have failed for several reasons, including the refusal of regional parties to subsume their identities into a national party, and with valid reasons too. So the need is for an all India formation that will transcend the country and still simultaneously allow the regional parties



to function and thrive. And there is a constitutional way of achieving this purpose, as detailed below.

The way out is to circumvent the current party system and create a party with duality at the national and State level. It can be achieved by simply registering a new

party, called the National Federal Party (NFP) (or any other name) under Sec 29 A of The Representation of the People Act. The party will have membership and an Executive just like other parties but shall also have Associate Membership like corporate members in companies. Such associate membership may be formal (or informal if the Election Commission raises objections, as it seems to have become an appendage of the BJP too).

The party constitution shall have a provision for creating a General Council in consultation with and including nominees of the associate members, which shall be the policy making body of the party. The NFP shall contest elections only to the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. The Associate members shall continue to contest elections but only to the Assemblies of States, on their own policies, programmes and symbols. The Associate Members shall select the candidates to be fielded in the elections to Parliament from their States and recommend these names to be fielded by the NFP in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha elections. In States where NFP does not have Associate Members, it may select and field candidates on its own.

As a result the NFP will have candidates all over the country contesting on its own symbol, thus filling a vacuum, and provide the voters with a feasible political organisation and little range for individual constituents to move away, as happens with alliances. At the same time, the regional parties will retain their independence with no scope for some High Command from distant Delhi to decide and dictate. The regional parties so entwined with sister regional parties in other States under a common umbrella will be an indomitable force that so called national parties may not be able to play around with, as they presently do. The parties will jointly campaign for national and assembly elections. It will create a win-win situation for

both formations. That would be a true federal structure.

The constant complaint of discrimination by States against the Centre in respect of devolution of funds to the States and other aspects will also be addressed as the State parties will have a control on the policies of the NFP through the General Council and MPs fielded by it on the NFP ticket. Besides, the NFP will be dependent on its State associates to get its MPs elected. The voters will have a cohesive organisation reflecting the aspirations of every State.

I would visualise that parties like the Samajwadi Party UP, RJD Bihar, JMM Jharkhand, TMC West Bengal, BJD Odisha, TRS Telangana, YSR Congress Andhra Pradesh, DMK (Tamil Nadu) Janata Dal (Karnataka) Nationalist Congress/Shiv Sena Maharashtra, UDF formation in Kerala, parties in North East India and others, contesting together for parliament on a single party ticket will be a formidable rival to the national parties that run and ruin the country today.

It would be appropriate if genuine patriots and stalwarts like Adv Prashant Bhushan, Psephologist Yogendra Yadav, Political strategist Prashant Kishore and similar others seriously consider such a formation. Considering the diverse and multi ethnic-cultural-linguistic nature of the country is it not time to move the leadership of the country from the West to the East in true federal spirit?

Such a party will finally fulfil the mandate Article 1 of the Constitution which proclaims 'India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States'. Likewise the National Federal Party shall be a Union of State Parties that will protect and project the myriad interests of the States that constitute the Union.

(Radharao F. Gracias is a senior Trial Court Advocate, a former Independent MLA, a political activist, with a reputation for oratory and interests in history and ornithology)

'Lawless' Goa operates without a licence!

It was certainly sad to hear about the tragic death of a Maharashtra tourist whilst paragliding on Keri Plateau recently. It must be very heart-breaking for the respective families!

Whilst it was termed as an accident, I would say it was absolute "carelessness/apathy" not only from the operator, but also the law enforcing administration of the Goa! Watersports accidents are not new to Goa, and in fact, there have been quite a few. What makes things worse is that the Goa government administration/Collector's office "sleeps/hibernates" on the numerous complaints given by concerned citizens!

In my village of Colva as an example, there are numerous complaints/concerns that have been raised by concerned villagers and the Colva Civic and Consumer forum, an NGO, but it appears that the Goa Tourism/Home Ministry/Collector's office/police, etc, are all waiting again for another fatal "accident" to happen! Why only operators are made party to the fatal accidents? Should the irresponsible govt officials/Collector/Police, etc, not also be made party as they ignore official complaints from citizens? How was this operator allowed to operate without a licence? Why are the respective Goa Minister(s) not made accountable in such tragic cases and instead getting away with unacceptable excuses?

The general issue in Goa is lawlessness/corruption. It looks like many things operate without a licence; be it in this tragic case at Keri or the massive hill cutting/tree cutting/filling low-lying area for real estate projects in violation of environmental/local laws; where respective ministers

shamefully come back with unacceptable/helpless statements: "They were operating without a licence!" The Keri tragedy was just (sad to say) an accident waiting to happen and I dread that even more fatalities will happen unless the respective Goa ministers and MLAs stop making lame excuses, "pull up their socks" and ensure basic laws/complaints/laws/regulations/monitoring are followed thoroughly!

Arwin Mesquita, Colva

Please leave Goa alone

Despite vociferous opposition from niz Goenkars, the government is planning to develop a permanent EDM zone at Anjuna, not to mention a massive Film City too in North Goa.

The Tourism Department intends to put up a fully equipped 'plug and play' facility on 150,000 sqms of precious land which would have sophisticated sound systems, lighting, stage setups and audience facilities.

The hilltop site belongs to the Anjuna Comunidade i.e. the locals too are stakeholders. The people in the North Goa's coastal belt are already suffering due to numerous clubs playing loud music till the wee hours; the occasional EDM festivals make it worse. The State is in a way institutionalising torture inflicted on the populace by such 'entertainment' zones.

The government has not taken the villagers into confidence about this move. The environmental and social impact of this detrimental plan on Goa will be enormous; large tracts of green cover will be destroyed, moun-

letterstotheeditor

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tains of garbage will be generated, there shall be a quantum rise in crime levels and drug peddling due to such a harebrained scheme. Goa has breached its carrying capacity two decades back, but the politicians want to worsen things further. To them I say: "Please leave Goa alone." How much more degradation and destruction can a land and its people suffer in the name of development?

Vinay Dwivedi, Benaulim

Cyber fraudsters hacking elders

It's really shocking that senior citizens are targeted by cyber fraudsters as the elders' only fast media source of connecting to their near and dear ones although they are not at all tech savvy, and as result, fall prey to the cyber fraudsters. Even sometimes tech savvy people too fall prey to such scammers.

According to senior citizens, as reported to the media, the scammers are hacking the senior citizens' WhatsApp accounts and sending fraudulent money requests to their contacts and when they click, their account gets hacked. Hence, the cyber officials should monitor the messages when a complaint is filed without any delay so the more elderly citizens do not fall prey to such cyber scammers. The cyber officials should release advertisement what are the dos and don'ts, while using WhatsApp by elderly citizens on print as well as TV channels and YouTube channels to advise the elders not to click on suspected messages as once the messages of money request is sent, the WhatsApp

account is hacked as many senior citizens depend on the app for faster communication and stay in touch with their children abroad which has created fear among elderly people. This needs to be addressed by the cyber officials on a war footing or else more elderly people will fall prey.

Diomedes Romano Pereira, Corlim

Why are MLA LAD funds not utilised?

It is shocking to note that in the last three years nearly Rs 150 crore remained unutilised by the MLAs from their entitled Rs 300 crore funds under the MLA Local Area Development (LAD) scheme.

Incidentally, four legislators exceeded their ceiling limit. It is pertinent to note that under the scheme, the MLAs can get projects worth Rs 2.5 crore sanctioned annually. A total of Rs 300 crore was reportedly allocated across 40 constituencies since 2022, when the scheme was notified and each constituency has got a total allocation of Rs 7.50 crore.

Incidentally, the MLA-LAD scheme was set up in line to enable the elected representatives to recommend development works for creating assets and amenities in sectors such as drinking water, primary education, public health, sanitation and roads.

It is indeed flabbergasting to note that several MLAs probably feel that there is no need to carry out further developmental work in their respective constituencies.

Should citizens believe that their constituency is overdeveloped and that there is no scope for further development? People

from several constituencies do not have adequate water supply, the roads are in bad condition while public health and educational facilities need to be upgraded. Obviously, funding these projects is not a problem. So what stops the elected representative from utilising the funds for developmental work? Is it indifference and lackadaisical attitude on the part of the elected representatives?

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Fillip to India's space mission

India's SpaDeX docking mission has unequivocally underlined its tremendous space capabilities. Two satellites already sent to space on December 30, were united or connected to explore exciting opportunities.

Docking or joining or connecting two satellites, by bringing them to the same orbit like a single object, has thus become achievable, thanks to the re-doubtable ISRO. Multiple space launches with a common aim is now easier for India.

This will help scientists prepare for upcoming space missions including Chandrayaan-4, manned mission to the space and moon and building of space stations.

The unwavering hard work and missionary zeal by the ISRO scientists, in the third attempt, is a tribute to their never say never attitude.

After the Chandrayaan-2 setback, ISRO has recouped admirably well, and after the soft landing of Chandrayaan-3, it seems "sky is never the limit" for the country's proud space organisation.

It is pertinent to mention that the Centre has announced the creation of India's own "Bharatiya Antriksh Station" by 2035.

Ganapathi Bhat, Akola