

HERALDO

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Stop taking lives for granted

Last Sunday, Goa woke up to disturbing news of two young lives being lost in a paragliding accident at Keri. Shivani Dabale, a 26-year-old tourist from Pune, and paragliding pilot Suman Nepali, who was just a year younger, fell to their deaths on the Keri-Permem plateau after one of the cables of their paragliding equipment snapped soon after take-off. For many, the tragedy evoked haunting memories of the drowning of a Pune-based tourist off Calangute beach on Christmas Day after an overloaded boat used for dolphin sighting capsized 60 metres off the coast.

As with the Calangute drowning case, the government's reaction to the Keri tragedy was hardly reassuring, with the tourism department declaring that no permission for paragliding activities on the Keri plateau was granted in the first place. The Mandrem police arrested the owner of the company through which Dabale went on the ride for illegally conducting such operations from atop the plateau. These developments, however, beg the following questions: Were the government and its allied agencies blissfully unaware of the 'illegal' activity all this while? And did it only take a tragedy for the authorities to wake up and act?

The tourism department's statement, "We are saddened by the tragic loss of lives in this incident and express our heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims. The department reiterates its commitment to ensuring that all tourism-related activities in the state adhere strictly to safety regulations and licensing norms," also did not carry much weight, with many citizens viewing it as just one part of the whole charade to act concerned while doing nothing at all to ensure that such situations do not recur.

Yes, the department, in its official communication, went on to urge tourists and operators to "ensure that

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only licensed and authorised services are utilised to prevent such unfortunate incidents in the future", and that "an inquiry will be conducted and strict action will be taken against those found responsible for the unauthorised operation". Not surprisingly, however, there have been reports of Keri having three licensed paragliders while four others conduct operations illegally with the alleged blessing of the local police force and the tourism department itself. Most not only fail to oblige with the rules and regulations in force, according to reports, but, shockingly, the tourism department never checks the porosity of paragliders.

Simply put, porosity is the measurement of the amount of time it takes for a certain volume of air to pass through the paraglider canopy fabric. If a paraglider doesn't meet the standard time, it should either be retired or cut on the lines of what neighbouring Nepal does if the equipment fails the test. In Himachal Pradesh, such paragliders are destroyed entirely. But in what is most alarming, reports claim that paragliding operators in Goa use paragliders that have been retired in Nepal and make their way to Goa, that too right under the government's nose. If this is not blatant flouting of rules and risking human life and limb, what is? And why is the state government and its allied agencies so nonchalant when Goa depends so heavily on tourism to sustain its economy?

Interestingly, the Keri village panchayat had itself passed a resolution that paragliding was not required within the jurisdiction of the local body. However, no action was taken after that, the sarpanch claimed.

There have already been complaints from stakeholders, particularly along the North Goa coastal circuit, that the current tourism season is a far cry from the ones the state has seen in the years bygone. Add to it loss of lives due to unlawful and unregulated adventure activities and the attacks on tourists at beach shacks, and it is all but certain that Goa is set to lose its reputation as a holiday destination altogether.

Quick, decisive and consistent action from the government is what is urgently required if we are to salvage at least some part of Goa's tourist appeal.



Goa has become a soft target for anyone to come and say whatever they like, so much so that paid social media influencers have recently joined the bandwagon, to make a fast buck at Goa's cost, credibility in what they say, be damned



the opposition political parties seems to have lost their tongue and have chosen to stay silent, as if everything is hunky-dory in the country. So when someone gets the itch to criticize, they try and zero in on soft targets, as there is no fear of any retaliation that might impede their status quo, Goa being one of them.

Goa, a Soft Target?

Years back, John Abraham the Indian film actor had an issue the way pigs were slaughtered in Goan backyards. Agreed, John is a strong advocate for animal cruelty and kudos to him for escalating the matter to the then Chief Minister of Goa. John, lives and works in the city of Mumbai, wonder if he has said anything on the issue of how humans are being transported in trains throughout that city, worse than pigs actually. Or, has he shot of any letter to the Chief Minister on the sporadic shootouts that occur in the city?

Don't get us wrong John, you are free to come and criticize whatever you don't like in Goa, it still believes in free speech and we try to encourage anyone pointing out our flaws, but when you give us the impression that you are being gagged in the place you reside and work, then your comments on Goa seem a bit far-fetched.

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John is not the only person whose voice is muzzled, the entire country minus

Just for example, the Mumbai film industry made funny memes and maybe rightly so, criticized the then highly educated and economist Prime Minister for the falling rupee in 2013, but none of that gang seem to have any remarks to make on the weak rupee that is on a free fall and have fallen to an all time low in recent times that even the helpless Reserve Bank of India seems to have given up defending the rupee, yet there is nobody discussing this issue. Only goes to show that words of this industry sound hollow to such an extent that they have become a nuisance to democracy letting things pass off with no accountability and scrutiny. No use having so much influence on the society if you are unable to do or speak the right thing.

Because the influential have chosen to remain voiceless, paid influencers have taken that space, as they have the capability to twist facts and speak any which way their benefactor wants them to. So someone wants to get at Goa's tourism, very easy to tarnish its image by having a biased one sided argument and all of this is done in perfect synchrony to make it look real. Once they achieve their goal the bandwagon moves to another topic in another place with another issue. It's just a matter of time the innocent people consuming this crap are going to figure out genuine issues from phony ones.

India coastline is approximately 7500 kms and Goa makes up for only 160 km, basically just a dot on the map and yet the entire country longs to come to Goa on a vacation. This fact only goes to show that Goa in spite of our shortcomings is doing something right because it seems to have the capacity to attract tourists by the plenty. Call it the food, the hospitality, the vibe or the freedom to choose your clothes, for tourists it is a welcome change from the regressive places they come from.

But Goa is in a dilemma, it cannot allow everyone to come and overwhelm the place all at the same time. Controls need to be in place because tourism should never exceed to an extent that they become a hindrance to the local Goans. So when these paid influencers started visiting Goa and tried to publicize that Goa's tourism days are numbered just because they did not see maddening crowds, it never occurred to them that maybe it was intentional.

Goans for the first time in many years reclaimed some of its lost territory this year. While competition from Asian countries, high transportation costs and accommodation costs were some of the reasons discussed by influencers, nobody spoke of high taxation and inflation which happens to be the main reason for dwindling tourist numbers. A vacation to Goa is definitely going to be postponed if people are going to exhaust their income on food which is the first priority, and people are also becoming tax averse, they are fed-up of paying taxes and are making a beeline to park their hard earned money in tax free countries such as the UAE. How come influencers missed these aspects which have taken a hit on consumption in the country including tourism?

Only goes to show these influencers work as per a given agenda, they have got a chance to manipulate because prominent citizens have gone in mute mode and have slowly passed the baton to these influencers who now have the power to control the narrative. The film industry is just an example this writer used, each and every industry is gone in applause mode for trivial achievements and in mute mode for big blunders the country makes.

You know the country's narrative is severely compromised when people like Narayan Murthy speaks on how Kareena Kapoor mistreats her fans, or our childhood hero Amitabh Bachchan has switched from an angry young man to basically a pussy-cat. Maybe he should revisit a song he once sang himself which had the following words, 'Yeh bhi koi Jina hai Laloo'.

(The author is a business consultant)

Congratulations and jubilations

Congratulations to the owners as well as the entire Team of O Herald staff on this landmark Jubilee of its publication. I got the chance to see what a newspaper is and read O Herald for the first in 1960 which I spotted in our Church office when it was published in Portuguese language. O Herald has remained an informative, interesting and balanced newspaper throughout the 54 years that I have been its contributor and is, indeed, a credit to its owners and staff.

I am one of those people who do not want my entire life to depend on a hand-held electronic gadget and so the hard copy of the paper is not only ideal, it is also a god-send.

Another round of applause should go to Goa for its encouragement and full support of a free press, which we have been enjoying since liberation and in today's world, that is a rare and precious gift.

When Social Media did not exist, O Herald was a lifeline that gave us news in and around Goa. No breakfast is complete without a copy of O Herald on the table. If for any reason its arrival on the stalls is delayed for whatever reasons, people get restless and can be heard murmuring "Aiz Herald azunui iunk nam" (Herald has not yet come today). If you forget to pick up the copy, on entering the house, the family will ask "Herald Addunk naim?" (Didn't bring the Herald?) There is always some dispute as to who should read it first and the Father normally gets the preference, The housewife will scan through post lunch and the children will go through in the evening. Thereafter it reaches the bedroom for reading the other news of the day. O Herald has been a launching pad for many writers, news reporters and journalists. It has helped many a person to build their career. I remember the Late

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.

Proprietor Caetano Fernandes always encouraged the youth specially to write and no material was ever rejected. It has sailed through many highs and lows and some unpleasant moments for publishing the truth.

I wish the publication many more fruitful years and may it continue to be the eyes, ears and the voice of Goans for time to come.
Jonas Correia, Aldona

Major disaster averted at Verna industrial estate

A devastating fire reportedly broke out at a car service center in Verna Industrial Estate on Tuesday afternoon, causing extensive damage to 33 vehicles. The fire, which reportedly started in nearby dry grass, rapidly spread to the service center premises, resulting in estimated losses running into crores of rupees. The vehicles were reportedly engulfed by the flames along with other equipment, including a diesel generator, a paint booth and a compressor.

All these are flammable that could have led to the spread of the fire along with the fuel present in the vehicles. It was by providence that the fire did not spread to other units in the Industrial estate which could have led to a major fire disaster. It is prudent to mow the grass in the vicinity regularly to prevent it from accumulating and drying out. Dead branches and twigs from nearby trees need to be cut. Though there could be fire stations close to Industrial Estates in the state, it would be prudent to have a fire engine stationed within the premises 24x7.

A fire audit needs to be carried out of all the units functioning in the industrial estate. Those units which manufacture inflammable products need to take extra precaution to prevent fires. Precaution also needs to be taken while

storing inflammable raw material. It seems prudent to have fire hydrants installed at all the units in the industrial estate along with smoke detectors and fire extinguishers. Fire safety demonstrations can go a long way when it comes to fire safety.
Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Youth must attend gram sabhas

Gram sabhas/meetings of village panchayats are important as it is where people discuss the problems, developments, infrastructure, essential services (garbage disposal, water, electricity), safety, illegal tenants and other issues. Most villages have common problems while some may have village-specific matters. For example, in the recently held gram sabha of Loliem-Polem village the people rejected the film city project, in the Divar Island they opposed the government's proposal to designate the island as a tourism village and were against housing projects with more than 12 flats and swimming pools; while at Chorao-Madel the villagers were against jetty and an eco-resort.

If we see published pictures of the gram sabha in the newspapers, it is noticeable that most of the members are in their late 50s and 60s and many are even in their 70s and 80s. Rarely teens, youths and those in their 40s may be present. This is concerning. When an 18-year-old happily goes to vote once in 5 years for the Lok Sabha and State Assembly and takes selfies to upload in social media, he/she could attend the village meetings. As residents of the village, they get a chance to raise their voices against illegalities, suggest ideas for improvements and volunteer to help whenever necessary. Later they should not crib that out-

siders have settled, land is being sold, no occupations etc.

With their knowledge and access to technology, social media, internet etc., youths are better placed than the seniors, to think out of the box. Their enthusiastic contributions in gram sabhas would be a morale booster to the elderly citizens. How long would the latter be able to shoulder the responsibilities and tackle the problems faced in their villages? Villages can be remarkably improved by the involvement of the younger people, either as participants, panch and sarpanch. And could be a stepping stone to politics!
Sridhar D'Iyer, Caranzalem

Callous attitude of government

The statement by the Tourism Department that the paragliding activity at Kerim is illegal, baffles comprehension. The Tourism Department's next statement that tourists should ensure that only licensed and authorised services are utilised, is a very clear and shameful attempt by the department to shift the onus of ensuring that all tourism-related activities have been legally authorised, from the Government (which has the authority to verify that requirement) upon the tourist.

This is akin to saying that the tourist is to blame for any harm that may befall him/her for not verifying the operator's license to operate. There is nothing that can be more ludicrous than such statements, which demonstrate an irresponsible and callous attitude on the part of the government. Soon-after the department, without realising the inherent contradiction states that "... the department reiterates its commitment to ensuring that all tourism related activities in the State adhere strictly to safety regulations and licens-

people'sedit

A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT MLAS

JOSE MARIA MIRANDA

Land is scarce, but in high demand in this small State of ours. Retired Chief Justice Ferdinando Rebelo, himself an ex-MLA, slammed Goa MLAs for changing land laws and thereafter themselves buying land or allowing it to be sold, thus altering even the demography of villages in Goa. As all those who love Goa do, he rightly found this shameful and ridiculous. Goans and the MLAs of yesteryears, like Justice Rebelo, lived by some values and principles, which they considered precious and worth living for, for a land, which was their cradle, and "worth fighting for", in the unforgettable words of another retired Justice Gautam Patel. Justice Rebelo also touched on the points often raised by many, about Goa's carrying capacity, water availability and other infrastructure and whether any study was done on these.

Sadly, it is none other than our own representatives, who are acting as brokers, and auctioning and selling Goa to outsiders, who are the highest bidders. They are driven by imperishable greed, insatiable love for money and power and most of all a disgusting absence of pangs of conscience and love for their land. The way laws for land use are being changed at the stroke of the pen, without any application of mind, is not only atrocious but criminal. Not only will Goa's beauty, which we have been so proud of, be diminished or destroyed, but prices of land have already skyrocketed, making it unaffordable for Goans. Goa's demography and its culture will be severely affected with possible serious social consequences and finally Goa's environment and ecology might be badly affected, with landslides and other disasters occurring and livelihoods and lives being lost. If we haven't realized what can possibly happen, we must take a cue from other States, which have learnt bitter lessons from their assaults on Nature. There is imperative need for restricting further the sale and use of land instead of converting more to settlement.

Another ex-legislator, Farrel Furtado revealed that a student of hers had paid Rs 25 lakhs to join the Police force. How shameful and how do we expect the Police and other Govt. servants to be clean if they have to pay to get jobs? The cash for jobs scam, is still being investigated without any seriousness or willingness to arrive at the truth. The appointment of a retired Judge to investigate it, would have given some credence to the Government if it desired to delve deep into it. But, it will never happen, for reasons well known to all and the knowledge of who is or could be involved.

To what levels have we descended, Honourable Ministers and MLAs? Do these entitle you to the prefixes I have just appended to your titles? The discrimination against and marginalization of Goans surely would not have been tolerated anywhere else.

I have no hesitation in crediting this Govt. with tremendous development in infrastructure, though much of it may not be meant for Goans' benefit, and in accusing the Congress of not having done enough on this count. But to speak truthfully, we never touched such abysmal levels of lack of transparency and accountability.

Let the docility of Goans not be overstretched and their tolerance levels tested.

ing norms", when it did nothing to verify and act against a very open, apparent, continuous and brazen exercise of paragliding activity carried on in the village, and that too by a non Goan!!! Sheddung crocodile tears with statements such as "...we are saddened by the tragic loss of lives..." post facto, is hypocritical as the department failed in its duty and obligation.
Antonio Lobo, Mapusa

Ban parties, shacks at turtle nesting sites

North and South Goa turtle nesting beach is drawing domestic and foreign tourists in large numbers and these seashores are acknowledged as 'Turtle Beach'. It should restrain the authorities from granting permissions for parties and shacks along beaches notified as turtle nesting sites. Since this is a turtle nesting site, there cannot be much activity around the place. The shacks are not permitted within the proximity of the nesting site. There is a specific provision and a law under the Forest Conservation Act. It is a time for policymakers to engage in a effective discussion about the future of Goa Tourism. Tourism has become the bread-and-butter for the state's revenue generation.

Stringent enforcement of regulations will help to curb unruly tourist behavior and protect the local culture. Shack owners cannot bend the rules in the name of tourism. The recent another scam hit by a multi-crore villa rental scandal, duping over 500 unsuspecting tourists by exploiting loopholes on renowned booking platforms shows that, there needs effective policy. The police should keep a tight vigil along the beaches and crack down on activities which violate the law and bring disrepute to the coastal state. The lack of governance and proper functioning of the government and the absence of the economic and social ecosystem has gone into chaos.
K G Vilop, Chorao