

# O HERALDO

The Voice of Goa - since 1900

## Not cool enough for school

The likelihood of the new academic year beginning in April instead of June from this year onwards has thrown the managements of educational institutions, teachers, students and parents into a tizzy. Soon after the government proposed changes to the academic calendar, the All Goa Secondary School Teachers' Association (AGSSTA) came out strongly against it. It warned that the shift, which would be done at too short a notice in the first place, would impact the entire education system in the state.

AGSSTA also opposed plans to extend school hours by 10 hours to 39 hours per week as it maintained that both students and teachers - who are already under considerable strain - would be further burdened by this.

Also, while this decision was probably made in the comfort of an air-conditioned conference room, not all classrooms in Goa are well-ventilated and air-conditioning is but a distant dream

Proposed as part of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, it is believed that the state government wants to begin classes for the new academic year from April 1, 2025 onwards for secondary and higher secondary schools, with holidays scheduled from the beginning of May to the beginning of June. This is supposedly being done so that the academic years for state boards and the Central Board of Secondary Education proceed in tandem and the prescribed curriculum is completed in a time-bound manner.

Be that as it may, what the NEP in general and the government in particular have failed to consider is that India is geographically a large country and doesn't have uniform weather patterns all across at a single point in time. This means that Goa, which is a coastal state and hence has tropical climate, is afflicted by scorching summer heat during the months of April and May, which is why educational institutions are shut during these two months. If starting the new academic year this April is steamrolled by the government anyway - just because there needs to be blind adherence to the NEP - there are sure to be instances of discomfort, heat strokes and related ailments among staff and students alike. Is our education system capable of handling such cases?

Also, while this decision was probably made in the comfort of an air-conditioned conference room, not all classrooms in Goa are well-ventilated and air-conditioning is but a distant dream. How will young children and their teachers get through this? Was there no thought given to their welfare at all?

Then there is also the mental burden that needs to be highlighted. Examinations, including public board exams, are scheduled to be conducted across the state in March or April this year, and teachers will be required to correct these papers. Foisting the additional task of preparing for a new academic year in April itself on the already overburdened teaching community will not only disrupt the announcement of results of the 2024-25 academic year, but will also make it extremely difficult for them to prepare timetables and lesson schedules for the upcoming year. How is all this expected to be accomplished in such a short span of time?

The NEP may have lofty goals and may propose sincere amendments aimed at overhauling the country's education system for the better. But there has to be a solid mechanism in place to ensure that the changes are eased in and consequently well-received by all the stakeholders concerned. Surprises can't be sprung on states, teachers, students and parents and they shouldn't be expected to comply immediately.

As it is, many schools are already struggling with compliance of APAAR ID requirements and are being asked for periodic updates by the education department, when in reality, school managements are having a tough time convincing parents of the benefits of the ID and are therefore not receiving consent from them. The APAAR ID is a unique 12-digit identifier designed to consolidate students' academic and extracurricular records on a digital platform. Integrated with the DigiLocker ecosystem, it enables students to store and access their achievements, exam results, learning outcomes, and participation in activities like Olympiads, sports, and skill training. However, many schools and parents are unaware of the modalities of this initiative and are therefore floundering.

It is high time the central government steps in and handholds states in the implementation of the NEP's goals and also allows them enough time to ease into the requirements of the policy. It is also important that states don't impose such initiatives on schools and instead initiate dialogue with the Centre on how best to tackle such issues.



ROHIT SINHA

We are fixated on a narrow, preordained future, but what about the unexamined futures? What are we not talking about? Whose future is it anyway?



We are fixated on a narrow, preordained future, but what about the unexamined futures? What are we not talking about? We take for granted that car-centric planning is inevitable. We assume Goa's coastline must follow the 'Miami Beach' template. We unquestioningly accept a 'tourist-first' model of development, without asking what it costs the people who live here. What is the social cost of vanishing commons? What happens when we lose local problem-solving mechanisms? What about the growing environmental debt we're racking up? These are questions that

# Whose future is it anyway?

The future. The future. The future. We obsess over it endlessly—in our personal lives, in our families, in our work. And, of course, in Goa. But whose future are we really talking about? The future of the state itself? The future of the people native to it? The future of those who have made Goa their home? Or the future of the millions who pass through, seeking escape from their lives elsewhere?

In recent times, it seems that aspects of life in Goa that hold value beyond mere monetary considerations are gradually diminishing. The debate between preservation and development is often portrayed as a zero-sum game, which may limit our collective imagination. This isn't just about nostalgia or resistance to change; it's about failing to recognize that genuine progress means more than just economic expansion. It's about asking: Development for whom? At what cost? And to what end?

Observing the current dynamics, it appears that the balance of power has shifted towards a more top-down approach, potentially at the expense of grassroots involvement. While both centralized and community-driven efforts are essential, the scales have tipped towards a more bureaucratic and detached form of governance. Institutions designed to regulate and govern are becoming obstacles, entangled in inefficiencies and distanced from the daily realities of citizens.

Your level of care for the commons is directly linked to your time horizon. The deeper your sense of belonging, the further into the future you are willing to look. And here's the interesting thing—Goa is getting younger. We fixate on religious demographic shifts, but the real, transformative shift is generational. More young people are committing to Goa long-term, seeing it not just as a retreat for retirees or luddites, but as a place to build futures. If Goa's future belongs to them, shouldn't they be part of shaping it now?

For policymakers, it's time to recalibrate assumptions. If you look after the public good, the industry will follow. Dynamism comes from people, not just infrastructure. Economic models that value cultural and social capital will win favour over extractive ones. Cultural infrastructure has real pay-offs, beyond just heritage and nostalgia. Culture is not just something to be preserved—it's something to be lived. If we reduce culture to artefacts of the past, we erase its role in our collective future. Do we really want to live in a world

rarely make it into policy discussions, yet they shape the reality of daily life.

The future cannot be limited to mere economic expansion—it has to account for social and cultural capital, for hybrid models of development that strengthen our public spaces, for local economic frameworks that nurture growth without gutting our communities. If tourism is going to remain our economic backbone, can we at least acknowledge the need for a diversified spine? Can we build economic models that don't just cater to transient visitors but also empower residents?

If the state isn't leading, then what should a citizen response look like? The village square needs to come back. The same structures that isolate and disconnect us, must be combated with localised action, by champions who reclaim agency over their own spaces, setting and expanding a vision for their immediate surroundings. Picture a panchayat that is not just a bureaucratic unit but a space for civic engagement and enjoyment. This emergent dynamism when nurtured, rooted in place, is where citizen 'care' thrives - revitalizing the everyday, fostering local pride, and creating traditions that are homegrown and meaningful, evolving naturally with time. You need to tend the garden everyday for it to be resilient through seasons.

While repeating the mistakes. But if we must believe in our exceptionalism, let's use it to build a different future.

Look at Chorao. A small, local island community just took a stand. The Chorao-Madel panchayat unanimously resolved not to allow commercial and environmentally destructive mega projects that threaten their island's fragile ecology. This is civic action with a political stance, and it is extraordinary. More power to that.

Goa has everything it needs to be a model state. A civic-minded population. A highly literate and globally connected citizenry. An unmatched cultural and natural heritage. The resources to do things differently, to build a future that doesn't have to mimic every other place that has already sacrificed itself at the altar of unchecked growth. Why aren't we thinking harder about our own model of development?

Our baseline is higher. So why aren't our aspirations? That prioritizes the future of those who will live in it. Whose future it is anyway?

(The author is a strategy consultant and writer living in Goa)

## people'sedit

### ESSENTIAL GOODS AND SERVICES SHOULD BE TAX FREE

BY SUJIT DE

Every year, the Union Budget gives the government of India an opportunity to rid our country of its inclination towards indirect tax which is a cruel way to burden the poor and the middle class with more taxes than the rich. But year after year, every budget, unfortunately, clings to this practice.

This over dependence on indirect taxes has been adding insult to injury of rising inequality. Inequality in India has already reached an alarming proportion. As per the report filed by the Paris-based World Inequality Lab, India has one of the highest levels of income and wealth inequality in the world.

In India, the poorest of the poor have to cough up substantial and the same amount of indirect tax as their creamy counterparts when they are to buy anything from soap to slippers and from food to medicine.

If we calculate the percentage of indirect tax payment on one's total income, we will see that a poor person's contribution towards GST is higher than that of a rich person.

Moreover, when he buys an LPG cylinder or uses diesel dependent transports or tractors or faces inflation as a result of high tax on diesel and petrol, his contribution towards tax and tax related expenditures are naturally much higher than that of even the richest man in this country in proportion to their respective incomes.

While direct taxes depend on the taxpayers' ability to pay, indirect taxes are blind to the economic status of the taxpayers. Direct taxes are an equitable way to fill the State's coffers. More income tax must be levied on the higher income bracket as has been the general practice in developed countries. India needs to follow the modern welfare states that rely more on direct taxes like income tax, "super tax" for the super rich, and inheritance tax.

Interestingly, when a suggestion was made to introduce the inheritance tax in India, some politicians said that it would burden the poor and the middle class. But the fact is that it would actually protect them without burdening them with more tax.

Inheritance tax can reduce inequality because with this money, a government can provide social security to its citizens which protects the poor and the middle class. Moreover, as there is no income tax for a minimum income bracket, there would not be any inheritance tax upto a certain valuation of property. So, inheritance tax will not burden the poor and the middle class.

While a superrich in India can inherit huge property without paying a single rupee to the government coffers, a person has to pay 55 per cent in Japan as inheritance tax for it. It is 50 per cent in South Korea, 45 per cent in France, 40 per cent in the USA and the UK, 34 per cent in Spain, 33 per cent in Ireland, and 30 per cent in Belgium and Germany. Those countries spend the money to ensure that every citizen gets quality health care and quality education.

India needs to rectify its economic policy. Banks should sanction more micro-loans for farming, cottage, and small enterprises that can mainly generate employment and less NPA-generating macro-credits. Moreover, the poor who are reeling from high inequality, rising inflation, and nagging unemployment must not be burdened with GST. GST should exist only on luxury and non-essential goods. But essential goods and services must be free from taxation. Instead, India should rely more on direct taxes.

## Bardez reels under water crisis

Many parts of Bardez reeled under the water crisis for 6 days! Water tankers were scarcely available and fleeing consumers. This crisis was due to a breach in the Tillari canal in Maharashtra and Goa unable to make alternative arrangements! The government was unable to access the water in the Amthane dam as gates were jammed and navy divers had to finally be called to help open it!

The PWD blames the WRD (Water Resources Department) and whilst the CM has initiated an inquiry, there is a serious problem with inter departmental coordination! For example in Rainbow Valley, Mugalli it is reported that the PWD has lodged a complaint against the Power department regarding public safety and danger to government property regarding road digging. No protocols have been followed and they have even approached the police!

This is not a new problem and rampant in Goa where one department does not coordinate with any other or competent authority or even its own sub departments and causes immense damage to private/government property with serious consequences for the citizen and loss to the exchequer.

There seems to be no accountability and it is difficult to put the blame where it belongs! Water is an essential commodity and depleting. The government has to

make every effort to save water, cannot afford to permit inefficiency, leaking pipes, poor quality and accord priority to the citizens health and ease of living which are a critical ingredient of good governance!

John Eric Gomes, Porvorim

## Novel way to protect Goa's shoreline

On Saturday (Jan 25) along a 100-m stretch of the Colva beach, the Water Resources Department (WRD) placed geobags to stop sand erosion. As per reports, these cost Rs 5 lakh compared to concrete walls, that would have needed Rs 75 lakh, and has a guarantee of 10-15 years. In the next 4-5 years, sand dunes are likely to form which are the first lines of defence against erosion by the sea.

In an article titled, "A novel way to protect Goa from SEA (Shoreline changes, erosion, and accretion)," this writer and Dr A A Viegas (Goa University) had suggested the use of discarded coconuts (tender and normal) and husks to help reduce beach erosion (O Herald 18.6.2023, Sunday). These materials instead of being dumped along roads, drains and piled-up in waste dumps, could be put to better use. Considering the daily generation of thousands

of coconut wastes, their hard-ness and easy availability, these could ideally be utilised to act as barriers against the sea waves. The WRD could try the technique (detailed in the above-mentioned article) along another stretch of Colva. This could assist to check and compare the efficiencies of coconut wastes with that of the geobags, to arrest sand erosion. Additionally, this method could be used along one of the North Goa beaches where there is significant loss of sand. Hope the authorities would be keen to implement the above suggestion.

Sridhar D'Iyer, Caranzalem

## Tragedy at Maha Kumbh

The unfortunate stampede that has resulted in the reported deaths of 30 innocent devotees and 60 more injured is definitely a man-made disaster that could have been avoided with right contingency plans in place.

When very special security arrangements were in place for VIPs including Home Minister Amit Shah to have a dip at the confluence of the Ganga without any problem and return safely, why such a care was not taken in respect of the other poor devotees? Have we ever heard of any VIP meeting with such fatality in any of such large religious or political

congregations? When the UP government was boasting of an expected record -breaking crowd of over 100 million people to have a dip at the confluence of the Ganga on the day of Mauni Amavasya, should not they have also planned well for the safety of the people? Owning responsibility for this tragedy, Adityanath should resign as the Chief Minister of UP. Hope he will not put the blame on the opposition parties as usual, for this disaster to escape admonition and wrath of the families of those who perished in the tragedy and the common man!

Tharcus S Fernando, Chennai

## Goa's poor roads damaging vehicles

The digging of roads at various places in Panjim under the Imagine Panaji Smart City Development Ltd project has been causing serious inconvenience to the residents. The government collects taxes and it's bound to provide good infrastructure including roads. It should pay for vehicle wear and tear by bad roads.

The bad roads in the city not only inconvenience motorists but add to their financial burden. They have to spend more on maintenance of vehicles that get damaged more. Bad roads also increase

consumption of fuel. Maintenance cost of vehicles has gone up. It also affects operation of city bus service. Roads in many areas appear like those of Malgudi Days tales. With the frequent, indiscriminate digging of roads for smart city project, Goa has no option but to go through the peril daily. It has become a common sight for us to see the roads being dug every often in almost all the areas.

K G Vilop, Chorao

## Rape an atrocity to human society

The heinous crime committed on a mentally challenged girl by five brutes has been condemned.

Infact the year-wise cases registered in South Goa itself are really alarming! How many victims have been delivered justice?

It is high time to deliver true justice to the victims and society. Can anyone imagine what trauma the victim and family goes through?

As soon as the evidence is confirmed against the accused; justice should be delivered. To deliver justice to helpless victims and to prevent the occurrence of more such rapes in our country, it is imperative that the accused should be sentenced to death.

Society please wake up! It could happen to anyone; of each of our near and dear ones too. Seek true justice to all women and children.

Are women safe even after 76 years of Independence???

Rosebud Leitao, Chinchinim

## Twitter World

P. Chidambaram @PChidambaram\_IN

One more building block of freedom was knocked down today when the Income Tax department canceled the non-profit status of Reporters' Collective. The official reason given is "journalism does not serve any public purpose". The true reason is that independent journalism does not serve the govern-

ment's purpose.

Dr Ambrish Mithal @DrAmbrishMithal

Half of my day is spent in explaining results of tests that I had not asked for & were not needed. Often they are part of a lab "package". The other half is spent in discussing supplements or vitamins which I did not advise but patient is taking anyway.