

## O HERALDO

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## The AAP Debacle: A Cautionary Tale for Indian Politics

The recent Delhi Assembly elections have ushered in a new chapter in the political landscape of the capital, marking a significant shift in power dynamics. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), once heralded as a beacon of hope and change, has faced a calamitous defeat, paving the way for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to reclaim control after a 27-year hiatus. This outcome not only raises questions about AAP's governance but also highlights the broader implications for the opposition landscape in India.

The BJP's victory is not merely a reflection of its electoral strategy; it is a culmination of years of sustained effort and a calculated approach to governance. While BJP supporters celebrate this triumph, it is essential to note that the Congress party and other alternative political factions also find solace in AAP's downfall. This election has revealed a broader appeal for the BJP, suggesting that its influence extends beyond its traditional voter base.

The defeat of Arvind Kejriwal, who lost his seat in New Delhi to Pravesh Verma, is particularly striking. This constituency, once a stronghold for AAP, has now become a symbol of its decline. The loss of prominent AAP figures, including Manish Sisodia and Saurabh Bhardwaj, further underscores the party's disarray. While Atishi Singh managed to retain her seat, her victory appears overshadowed by the party's overall failure.

In the wake of this electoral setback, AAP's leadership must engage in a thorough introspection. The decision to allow Kejriwal to step down in favour of Atishi Singh raises questions about the party's strategic direction. Did this move resonate with the electorate, or did it further alienate voters? The party's choice to alter the candidacies of over 20 candidates suggests an awareness of public dissatisfaction, yet this strategy ultimately failed to yield positive results.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh aptly noted that the election outcome reflects not merely a victory for the BJP but a profound defeat for Kejriwal. The frustration with his leadership has been palpable, and while AAP has pledged to serve as a constructive opposition, the question remains: how can the opposition effectively challenge the BJP's dominance?

As we analyse the results, it is imperative to consider not just why AAP lost but how it was defeated. Allegations surrounding the integrity of the electoral process, particularly regarding the voter list, have emerged as a significant concern. Allegations from the opposition parties indicate that between 2020 and 2024, Delhi saw an increase of 4 lakh voters, with a staggering 4 lakh new registrations occurring in the seven months leading up to the election. Such irregularities demand scrutiny from the Election Commission, which has yet to provide clarity on these issues.

The ideological positioning of AAP also warrants examination. Over the past 12 years, has the party effectively challenged the BJP on ideological grounds? Despite facing numerous challenges, including raids on party leaders and internal strife, AAP has struggled to articulate a clear ideological stance. Kejriwal's attempts to engage with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the BJP have led to confusion among voters regarding AAP's core values. This ambiguity has only deepened, particularly in light of AAP's handling of sensitive issues during the COVID-19 pandemic and the Delhi riots.

Moreover, AAP's gradual adoption of symbols associated with Hindutva and its organisation of religious events have raised questions about its differentiation from the BJP. This ideological overlap has alienated AAP's core supporters, who initially viewed the party as a viable alternative to the BJP's religious conservatism.

One of AAP's greatest strengths was its perceived moral integrity and commitment to simplicity. However, controversies such as the "Sheesh Mahal" affair have tarnished Kejriwal's reputation, allowing the BJP to portray him as a hypocrite. The failure to reconcile AAP's ideological stance with its actions has further eroded its appeal among voters.

In the long term, AAP's defeat may not solely reflect voter discontent with its governance but rather signal a deeper ideological crisis. The party must reassess its strategies and its positioning within the broader political landscape. Kejriwal and his colleagues must consider whether they truly understand the aspirations of the people of Delhi and whether their shift in approach has alienated their once-loyal supporters.

Victory and defeat in politics are rarely straightforward. For AAP, the path forward necessitates a critical evaluation of what went wrong and how it can reconnect with its foundational values. The party must strive to regain the trust of the electorate by reaffirming its commitment to transparency, accountability, and genuine public service.

As we move forward, the implications of AAP's defeat extend beyond Delhi. The opposition must unite and develop a cohesive strategy to challenge the BJP's growing dominance. The coming months will be crucial in determining whether the opposition can effectively address the pressing issues surrounding electoral integrity and governance.

The recent Delhi Assembly elections serve as a cautionary tale for political parties across India. The need for clarity in ideology, transparency in electoral processes, and genuine engagement with the electorate has never been more critical. As the BJP consolidates its power, the opposition must rise to the occasion, ensuring that democracy remains vibrant and responsive to the needs of the people.

## comment



CLEOFATO ALMEIDA COUTINHO

There are too many lessons for Goa. Both are small states with small constituencies. Both have cosmopolitan outlook. Both have a vocal middle class and well-off citizens with a higher per capita income



The Delhi elections have once again proved that what matters at election time is perception. 'Sheeshmahal' got stuck in the minds of the people. As people get transactional, parties are no longer bothered of long-term development of the state and the people. Short-term electoral games decide the focus on the governance model. Now it is deposits into the bank accounts of the female voters. Even the 'double engine' has realized that the only way to end the three decades power drought in Delhi was via the 'revdi'

For Arvind Kejriwal, 2025 elections was not a walk in the park. Fighting fourth consecutive assembly election on the strength of one man's personality is always a daunting task. Even the Prime Minister with a robust, well-oiled, battle-ready election machinery and with all resources at his command could not repeat the magic in 2024.

The defeat of the Aam Admi Party has number of lessons for the future. The Saturday outcome will not only shape Delhi's politics in the near future but shall also

influence the national political discourse in the country. The BJP's triumph in Delhi gives a fresh boost after the Lok Sabha melt down. After Haryana and Maharashtra and Delhi, it now again looks invincible. The resurgence shall provide them an extra muscle in Bihar. 2027 is not far away when Goa shall again be put on test. Will the India block wither away? Has the Delhi verdict made the search for a progressive alternative to Narendra Modi more difficult?

When AAP arrived in 2013, they promised to clean-air,

water and politics and make Delhi safe for women. They promised transparency and accountability in Governance and made appointment of Lokayukta, their central show piece. Delhi's air is going bad to worse and garbage is unmanageable. Drinking water crisis and transport system is collapsing and the Lokayukta is not heard. There is some song and dance over Schools and Health Clinics. Everybody promises the moon at election-time but why seek accountability only from them? They came on the political horizon with a promise of alternative politics. Their revolutionary promises inspired many educated and high placed Indians here and abroad gave up their comfort-zones for new politics.

The purging out of Yogenra Yadav, Prashant Bhusan and Ashutosh and the expensive renovation of the official residence has cost a lot for a muffer man driving a Maruti 800. The albatross of liquor scam round their neck made it an Alcohol Affected Party. All this gave the party which came as a party with the difference in 2013 to be a very poor of image itself in 2025. The party lost the shine and its leader lost the sheen. Democratic no more! Personality cult was at its height with Atishi, the CM claiming she was only keeping the chair warm.

How can a party which promised complete statehood for Delhi welcome bifurcation of J&K? The party with the difference did precious little to douse the flames in the CAA communal riots in North East Delhi. On Shaheen Bagh, the stand that if the CM had the police, he could have cleared the roads within a few hours. All this was not expected from someone who promised alternative politics. Hanuman Chalisa chanting, pilgrimage grants and doles to purohits cannot compete with power of emotive communal hatred. Playing on the mid path all the time brings no friends from the left and the right is in any case monopolized. The grammar of politics cannot be a 'service delivery mechanism' only with free water and electricity as it's centrepiece. A political party must be rooted in ideological moorings, though at election time there may be some dilution.

There are too many lessons for Goa. Both are small states with small constituencies. Both have cosmopolitan outlook. Both have a vocal middle class and well-off citizens with a higher per capita income. In both states, land is in short supply. In Delhi, it is in hands of central government. Here we believe our land is in the hands of Real Estate sharks controlled from Delhi. DDA and builders are cornering their land and here PDAs are frittering away ours. Both AAP and Congress are targeting the same voter base.

Both AAP and Congress did not learn any lessons from the fiasco in Haryana. The avoidable confrontation had certainly its bearing on the Saturday verdict. It could be argued that Congress danced to the BJP tune in Delhi. For Congress, it was to reclaim its relevance and fight for existence in Delhi. It may have increased its vote share from but it contributed to the non-denting of the PM's invincibility. Somebody can always question what business AAP had in Haryana and Gujarat. It is all a game of one upmanship. All this was avoidable if both had acted with caution and vision.

AAP made a determined bid for 3rd term. We must give it to them they fought an aggressive battle. 'The double engine' dismantled the power structure that was aligned against them despite RSS being powerful in Delhi. Even the municipal corporation elections were taken so seriously that the HM & PM campaigned there as though those were national elections. The opposition has to learn from their killer instinct. In Goa, we shall have municipalities and ZP elections as a precursor to the 2027 state elections.

Hunger for power is what must drive all political parties. Dogged determination to succeed is normally the story of success. But that hunger must be based upon long term development of the state and its people. Personality based politics, not driven by substance but by rhetoric may work for some time. What can happen when the future is sought to be built on the personality and credibility of a single person has been demonstrated in Delhi!

(The writer is a Senior Advocate and a political thinker)

## people's edit

## THE BUDGET 2025 IS BARKING UP A WRONG TREE

SRINIVAS KAMAT

The Income Tax review of slab rates and the exemption from Income Tax for those earning up to Rs. 12.65 lakhs per annum in the 2025 Budget is being made out as a big thing and Narendra Modi and Nirmala Sitharaman are going full blast to garner publicity for offering this concession. As a condescending measure to the middle class, this is being done who for long have borne the brunt of the government's heavy handed taxation policies. They fully deserve these sops given to them. But those paying income tax in the country, are about 8 crore people of which approximately 50% file Nil Tax Returns. Thus the concessions as above apply to only about 4 crore people which is just about 2.5% of the 140 crore Indians. It is therefore very much limited in scope and benefits a very small minority and therefore nothing to crow about and go to town with. With prevailing prices increasing by the day in our economy and with inflation on the rise, everyone deserved concessions or measures to reduce prices making their cost of living lower. But this is precisely what the 2025 Budget has not been able to address. Those who are suffering because of high prices in the economy will continue to do so and there is no relief for them. Measures that sweep across the board to reduce prices would have been desirable for which the present government neither has the imagination or the guts to do it.

Even the concession given on Income Tax has been given because of the buoyant GST collections which over the last few months has been hovering around Rs 1.7 lakh crores. Thus the government can afford to make concessions. However, if the intention was to give the benefit of reduction in prices to all sections of our society, then GST for all items could have been brought down by 5%. This would also combat the rising spectre of inflation. The middle class, long suffering that they have been, would not mind not getting the Income Tax rebates since the GST reductions would have more than compensated for what they would be losing. Here again, the government does not have the guts to touch the GST cash cow since who would like to tinker with lots of money flowing in.

Again my review of GST slabs in this financial year are out of the question because the government would still claim that they have already reduced the Income Tax. The GST has become like a viral disease affecting all walks of life of the common man. It is all pervasive. Tomorrow for the air that we breathe including the polluted one in our cities, there could be a GST on it. For stepping out on the streets, there could be a GST. As said earlier, the vision, imagination and guts required to bring broad based structural reforms to the economy and give it a boost are missing with this government since the people involved in its formulation are either timid or lack the understanding of what is to be done.

They are capable of only tinkering like increasing the limit of Bank Interest earnings or raise the limits of rental income to avoid deducting TDS. This is the extent that Nirmala Sitharaman can go and nothing beyond, tight-fisted that she is and thinking she is running her household budget not realising that it is the country's Budget that she is responsible for. As far as Modi's understanding of finance is concerned, it was aptly summarised in a cartoon where he is shown coming back after talking to Donald Trump in the US and saying - Trump Saab to hamari tareef aur tareef hi kar rabe the! While Trump was ranting away that he would impose tariffs and more tariffs on India! This is the state of our nation, wrong emphasis, wrong policies, wrong initiatives. No wonder we are heading downhill to disaster economically speaking.

## Revival of salt pans

The Goa government will reportedly complete its ongoing survey of all salt pans across the state within six months and formulate a policy for their conservation and support. However, what comes as a shocker is that of hundreds of salt pans across the State only 20 remain operational. Obviously a more detailed survey seems necessary.

The ancient art of traditional salt production is fast dying in Goa as a result of industrialisation and a change in consumption habits. A lot needs to be done in Goa by the government to save this tradition. Produced the same way for over 1500 years, the salt was used for everything from cooking to disinfecting wells, healing a sore throat, bathing, cleaning, and even construction. Fisherfolk used the salt as cleansing and preservative agent in processing seafood. Dried prawns and mackerels, a Goan delicacy during the monsoon season, are preserved using this salt. It is believed that during the Portuguese regime, Goan salt rocketed into a global commodity and exported within India and to South-east Asia, Africa and the Middle East. But now the salt pans have either been abandoned, littered with trash and debris or have been taken over by real estate developers.

It is a labour intensive process requiring toiling under the hot sun for hours and is no longer a viable source of income. Only steadfast support by the government can save this profession

## letterstotheeditor

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from extinction. The government needs to sell the traditional salt in packaged form through its outlets.  
**Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco**

## Assagao VP's right move on ferocious dogs

The Assagao panchayat has taken the right move on ferocious dogs in the area. The panchayat has taken the decision to punish the owners of Pitbulls and Rottweilers for leaving them unattended in public places. The move comes after a dog attacked a local a few days back. The panchayat has decided to punish those who leave such aggressive dogs unattended. There is a ban on Pitbull and Rottweiler breeds.

However, the panchayat has asked owners and those adopting such dogs to take caution and not to leave them in an open public place. The said move was required to prevent more incidents of dog attacks in the State.

The other panchayats should come out with such public notice to avoid such attacks in future and make pet owners responsible for the attack.

The Assagao panchayat's action should be applauded.  
**Raju Ramamurthy, Vasco**

## Money down the drain?

As per reports, the state government incurred an expenditure of

Rs 3.2 crores over the past five years on legal fees related to the Mhadei water dispute and the declaration of the Mhadei Wildlife sanctuary as a tiger reserve. These expenses include the fees of legal counsels, senior lawyers and SC advocates.

The battery of high profile legal eagles was hired by the sarkar to fight it's case in the High Courts and Supreme Court and get a favourable verdict. All the money spent has not yielded any results as Karnataka is going ahead with it's plans to divert the Mhadei waters into the Malpraha basin. Goa has not been able to even get a stay by the courts regarding ongoing work by it's neighboring state.

There is also no clarity whether the Mhadei sanctuary will be notified as a tiger sanctuary as ordered by the Apex Court, the state government is on a sticky wicket here. Perhaps the state should have hired lawyers who specialise in interstate disputes, we seem to be fighting a losing battle here.

**Vinay Dwivedi, Benaulim**

## Idiosyncrasies of Trump

US President Donald Trump's "America First" policies have had significant impact on global trade, immigration, and international relations. His trade wars with China and the imposition of tariffs on Canadian and Mexican

goods have disrupted global supply chains and increased costs for businesses and consumers. Trump's aggressive stance on immigration, including the deportation of Indians, has raised concerns about human rights and the treatment of immigrants. The increased scrutiny of H-1B visas has also affected many skilled workers and companies that rely on foreign talent. His polarising rhetoric and actions have contributed to tension and unpredictability during his tenure, further amplified by the recent assassination attempt on him.

The events surrounding the Capitol attack on January 6, 2021, were unprecedented and deeply troubling and his decision to pardon those involved has sparked controversy and raised questions about accountability and justice. Despite the gravity of the situation, he has managed to secure another term as President.

In this changing political landscape, the upcoming meeting between PM Modi and President Trump on February 13 will be significant. Discussions will likely cover a range of issues, including trade, defence cooperation, and strategic partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region.

PM Modi, known for being a catalyst for change, will address Trump's concerns regarding the trade imbalance. He has threat-

ened to impose higher tariffs on Indian goods if India does not adjust its tariff policies.

The allegations of the murder of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Khalistani separatist, by India will likely be a significant topic of discussion. The Canadian Commission report found no definitive link between the killing and the Indian government, contradicting PM Trudeau's earlier claims.  
**Everette Assis Telles, Margao**

## Trump's vision for Gaza is just not practical

US President Donald Trump's proposal to forcibly relocate 2.3 million Palestinians from Gaza is not a peace plan—it is a call for ethnic cleansing. By suggesting the mass expulsion of Palestinians to neighbouring Arab countries and redeveloping Gaza into a luxury destination, Trump is disregarding history, human rights, and regional stability. First, Palestinians are not stateless wanderers but a people with deep historical and national ties to their land. They have already endured the 1948 Nakba and further displacement in 1967. Forcibly removing them again would be an unprecedented violation of their rights.

Second, Trump's plan has been rejected outright by Arab nations, even those allied with the US. They understand that past forced expulsions have never been reversed and fear that accepting displaced Palestinians would legitimise Israel's land grabs.

**Gopalaswamy J, Chennai**