

## O HERALDO

The Voice of Goa - since 1900

## Celebrate Landmarks in Goa's History

Goa is an ethereal paradise on earth in every sense of the term. It has a vibrant history, amazing culture, sweet language and unique identity. Its people are respected all over and have attained high positions in politics, industry and other fields abroad. Yet, why is our government reluctant to celebrate Goa? Why do we not celebrate our history, identity and ethos? If we do not celebrate our ethos, who will celebrate it for us? Will Maharashtra or Karnataka celebrate Goan ethos?

Why does this question beg to be asked? The reason is simple. Ever since the Opinion Poll, the Official Language battle and Statehood were won, successive Goa governments have failed to celebrate these very important landmarks in our post Liberation history. These three days are defining events in Goa's very existence, apart from being intrinsic to our culture, identity, ethos and our very existence.

The Opinion Poll victory with 48.25% votes for Union Territory status shows how we escaped with the

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skin of our teeth from being merged into Maharashtra due to the disastrous project of the MGP and its allies, with merger getting 45.10% votes. Should we not celebrate this stupendous victory? Should we not celebrate the fact that with the Opinion Poll verdict, for which Dr Jack de Sequeira and other tall leaders worked tirelessly, helped us protect our culture, land, identity and language? If we think in retrospect, wouldn't it be a fearful prospect that we would not have a Chief Minister, nor any cabinet minister to represent us and instead we would have one zilla parishad member representing us, as a district of Maharashtra?

Don't we need to celebrate the sacrifices of the many people and leaders who canvassed, shed their tears and blood to save Goa from being merged into Maharashtra? Therefore 16th January (1967) has

to be officially celebrated by which ever government is in power, because it has to realise that the government and the ministers are in power because of the Opinion Poll.

The Official Language battle too was one of the epoch making milestones in Goa's history. Though Konkani is being spoken by 90% of Goans in their homes, a section of Goans led by the MGP espoused Marathi as the language of Goans from the beginning of the language controversy in 1963 till 1987. Elements from the MGP who had joined the Congress still held on to 'Marathi as language of Goans' and the Congress was literally divided down the middle, before voting for the language bill.

It was thanks to the Congress High Command and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in particular that the Official Language Act was passed making Konkani as the Official Language, with Marathi to be used for Official purposes. It has to be respected that many use Marathi (in which they have studied) as a language of religion and culture but Konkani is the mother tongue of Goans. Hence 4th February (1987) has to be celebrated as Official Language Day in a proud and befitting manner and also in memory of the seven martyrs. The only regret is that Romi Konkanni was not recognised as official script, which many see as a betrayal of the Official Language Act.

It appears that because of political reasons, the Opinion Poll and the Official Language Day are not celebrated. The MGP government which came to power after the Opinion Poll in 1967 was antithetical to Goa being a separate Union Territory and since it was against its agenda, it did not celebrate the Opinion Poll day. It was only after the 1972 elections that the MGP decided to go for "working statehood" and give official status to Konkani along with Marathi. It is a shame that the Congress governments, due to deep political divisions, did not celebrate Opinion Poll and Official Language day, nor have the BJP government thereafter.

Finally, though there were divisions within the Goan community, politicians and elected representatives on the first two issues of Goa being a separate Union Territory and Konkani as the Official Language, there were no divisions within Goan community on the quest of Goa for Statehood. However, Statehood Day too is not celebrated in a big way with flag hoisting, fanfare, participation of school and college children by any party government.

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## comment



AMITA KANEKAR

## A tax regime for the 'Billionaire Raj'

Who needs a break from taxes in India? According to the Union Finance Minister, it is those Indians with annual incomes of many lakhs and even crores. As per the new tax regime introduced in the recent budget, to be implemented for the fiscal year 2025-26, Indians earning salaries of up to 12.75 lakhs a year (almost doubled from Rs 7 lakh previously) no longer have to pay income tax on their income. And the highest tax slab is 30% for an income of over Rs 24 lakhs a year (increased from previously). It is noteworthy that, as a result of these proposals, the government will forego revenue of about Rs 1 trillion in direct taxes and Rs 2600 crore in indirect taxes, according to the minister herself.

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How can these tax breaks be justified? Even the media seemed astounded at first, with many admitting that most of the developed world have much higher income tax rates than India — the highest slab being usually above 50%, with salaried people usually paying 33% of their income as tax. The surprise was followed by a rush to rationalise the bonanza. We were informed that income-tax-payers in India are more than in most other countries, so a lot of money will come in despite this exemption. Further, we heard, the countries who tax heavily have governments that use the revenue to provide public facilities. In India, that doesn't happen. Hence, it makes sense that the government tax less.



Shouldn't the question be about why our government does not provide more public facilities? But then sections of the establishment believe that even the current facilities are too much. Thus, one recently saw Supreme Court judges asking whether provision of facilities like subsidised food (rations),

stipends, shelter for the homeless, etc. is not turning people into 'parasites' and discouraging them from joining the workforce to 'contribute towards national development'.

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Who is this so-called 'middle class' which needs more money in their hands? In other parts of the world, the term middle class implies people in the middle of the income spectrum, with their income somewhere around the median income of the country, i.e. the level below which lies the incomes of 50% of the population. Is this class that is earning from 7 to 12 lakhs a year (and above) really the middle class of India?

Far from it. According to a study by World Inequality Lab (WIL) in 2023, the median income of India is just one lakh a year. Yes, just one lakh. So the actual middle class would be those who earn around this income, from somewhat less to somewhat more. Why is it, then, that the Indian establishment, including the Finance Minister, the media, academia, and others as well, portrays the middle class as those who earn a whopping 5 lakhs to 30 lakhs per year?

One big reason is surely that they themselves belong to this class of earners and would prefer to call themselves middle class. Because this term has, attached to it, a lot of casteist values beloved of the privileged sections of India, mixed up with superficial 'westernisation'. Middle class implies, for example, dominant caste location, officer-level jobs, ownership of land and gold, high education and a strong sense of entitlement, along with very popular myths of initial poverty, struggle to rise, thriftiness and frugality. The myths are important — they bolster a surreal level of entitlement, such that one can regularly hear this class complain that, while the rich are rich and the poor are poor, it is we 'middle class' who are the real sufferers!

This hypocrisy masks the fact that India is actually now one of the most unequal countries in the world, as the WIL study shows. The top 1% of the population cornered a huge 22.6% of national income in 2022, which makes it the highest earning top 1% of any country in the world. The top 10%, meanwhile, cornered over 60% of national income in 2022. And the bottom 50%, i.e. half the population, received only 15% of the national income.

When it comes to national wealth, the top 1% of India owns more than a whopping 40% of national wealth, while the top 10% owns more than 60% — leaving less than 40% of national wealth for 90% of the population. All in all, the country is now more unequal than it was under the British; the Billionaire Raj, as some call it, has left the British Raj far behind.

Coming back to the middle class, the report further reveals that an income of over Rs 20.7 lakhs a year means that you are in the top 1% of the country, while that over Rs 2.9 lakhs a year means that you are in the top 10% of the country.

This is the reality of Sitharaman's 'middle class': the top ten per cent of the country, who now must worry about how to spend even more money. An even more obscene wedding? More gold? More foreign vacations? A couple more cars, or maybe a personal jet? More properties in Goa? So many difficult decisions — all of which will count as boosting 'national development' for this government!

The WIL report also found that the rise in inequality in India had been particularly intense since 2014, when the BJP returned to power. But things could still improve, it says, if the government was willing to invest heavily in public health, education, and nutrition; and, moreover, to collect a "super-tax" of 2% of the wealth of just the 167 richest families in India, in order to facilitate such investments.

Going by the new tax regime, this is surely the last thing on the Indian government's mind.

(Amita Kanekar is an architectural historian and novelist)

## people'sedit

## LESS IS MORE

ANANTHA PADMANABHAN

A quiet 'revolution' seems to be influencing how we celebrate marriages. More couples are choosing intimacy, sustainability and real connection instead of just putting on a big show.

Even Olympic champion Neeraj Chopra surprised everyone recently with his wedding to tennis player Himani Mor. It wasn't a huge spectacle, but a private, intimate ceremony filled with Haryanvi traditions. Everyone came to know of Chopra's secret wedding only after his social media post. There was a quiet dignity to it, a focus on what truly mattered.

This shift is a big deal. Massive upper middle class weddings can cost a fortune — reportedly upwards of Rs 20 lakh! That kind of financial pressure can be incredibly stressful and sadly, it can even create opportunities for fraud.

My neighbour's daughter, Ms. S, a young professional, almost fell victim to a man she met online. He looked perfect — successful, charming — and possessed everything she was looking for. He talked about marriage, a simple one. She was initially cautious, but started to believe him and his requests for money raised red flags. A quick online search revealed his profile picture was a stolen one. Shaken, she blocked him and thankfully escaped. There was that recent case in Delhi where a man was arrested for defrauding over 50 women with fake matrimonial profiles. It's heartbreaking. Marriage is such a sacred thing in our culture, and to see it manipulated like that... it's a wake-up call. We have to be careful.

Some people argue that big weddings are important... that they boost the economy. They'll say it's about honouring our heritage and supporting businesses. And there's some truth to that.

But traditions can change and smaller weddings can still be deeply meaningful and incorporate all the important cultural elements.

Well, focusing on the core traditions, instead of just the scale, can make a celebration even more special. And think about the money saved! It doesn't just disappear; it can be used for other things that are just as good for the economy.

There's also something bigger happening. Younger generations are starting to question all this conspicuous consumption.

Experiences and real connections are more valued than just showing off. P, a 28-year-old architect, told me, that she wanted her wedding to feel authentic and something intimate." G, a software engineer, disclosed that he and his partner opted for a simple court marriage. "For us," he said, "it was more important to start our life without a mountain of debt."

We're all becoming more aware of the environmental impact of these huge events, all the waste. A and V's wedding was a beautiful example of doing things differently. Instead of the usual plastic and glitter, they had hand-crafted paper lanterns and centrepieces made from local flowers. "We wanted to minimize our impact," A explained. "It felt important to us to celebrate our love without harming the planet." Inspiring, isn't it? And the wedding industry is starting to listen.

Can weddings really be green and truly embrace simplicity?

Absolutely! Look at companies like Greenmyna, started by Nupur and Ashwin. Their own eco-conscious wedding, born from their passion for the environment, became the foundation for their business. They're helping other couples create green celebrations, and it's amazing.

So, the modern Indian wedding isn't about how big it is anymore but how sincere it is. As it's about being intentional, this emphasis on real connection, thoughtful spending and sustainability are likely to get stronger. It's a shift that promises a future where Indian weddings truly reflect the hearts and souls of the couples at the centre, becoming celebrations not just of togetherness, but of a conscious and considered way of life.

## Stop following Google maps blindly

A truck carrying medicines from Goa to Chennai reportedly got stuck in a ditch near a railway gate in the forest near Londa on Thursday, after the driver claimed he was misled by Google Maps on his mobile phone. A crane had to be called to extricate the heavy vehicle from the spot. Be that as it may, when it comes to navigation, Google Maps is one of the most widely used tools in the world. Indeed Google Maps has revolutionised the way we navigate and explore the world. They are generally accurate but its accuracy can be affected by several factors such as obstructions like buildings and other structures, weather, interference, and the number of satellites. Location accuracy can be low due to weak Global Positioning System (GPS) or Wi-Fi signals. In some cases, they may provide inaccurate or outdated directions due to changes in road layouts or traffic conditions. Following GPS blindly while driving is not advisable. They may not show unmanned railway crossings or roads closed for various reasons which can lead to accidents. On the flip side, GPS can be blamed for breaking traffic rules. There was an instance in Goa when a tourist was caught driving the car on the beach. The driver said that he was led to the beach by Google Maps. It is prudent for the motorists to verify the route manually, especially while travelling on

## More Railway stations not needed in Goa

The people of Neura and Sarzora have stood their ground against the Konkani Railway station proposed by the government of Goa and the Railway authorities as they feel that it is just not needed as the Karmali station is in close proximity to the village. Sarzora villagers are demanding for a flyover bridge for years but the government and railway authorities are insensitive to their demands.

We don't understand as to why the authorities are proposing new railway stations when they are just not required. Acquisition of land for such projects will only end in destruction of the village.

Looks like the government is all out to sell our beautiful Goa for the greed of money. The destruction of the State's ecology lies before are very eyes. Our hills, forests, water bodies, and paddy fields have vanished. We Chandorkars are facing many problems due to the railway station in the village.

The crime rate is soaring with the influx of migrants, land prices have begun to soar and are now beyond the reach of locals,

## letterstotheeditor

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All letters must contain correct postal address and telephone number. Letters are liable to be edited for brevity.

unfamiliar roads, as blind reliance on GPS can sometimes lead to major inconvenience and even accidents.

## Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

## Ronnie D'Souza, Chandor

## Class of parasites created by freebies

Once again, the Supreme Court has decried the freebie culture adopted by political parties in their bid to woo voters. Every major political party in India desires to win elections and there is nothing wrong with it because social service is an offshoot of power.

But in the rat race for power, promises are freely made. Most of the freebies offered by the politicians are far-fetched, unrealistic and outright ridiculous. Nevertheless they are unabashedly made because there are certain sections of the society that are gullible to tall promises though the clever can easily see through the assurances.

Most of the parties freely promise but are not forthcoming on the huge burden their "free promises" will put on the exchequer if at all the promises are to be remotely met. Apparently, the hands of the Election Commission (EC) are full with the onerous responsibility of conducting elections. Who, then, is going to arrest the unsavoury practice? Courts, of

while citizens of Goa continue to suffer in silence. The authorities should stop construct more railway stations in the State but instead maintain the existing ones.

## Ganapathi Bhat, Akola

## Might is just not right!

This has reference to the report 'Hands joined in human shield to save their lands' (O Herald - February 14, 2025). Disgusting scenario indeed, this is what power can do. One can understand the frustration and desperation of the residents of Primeirovaddo in Velsao at the bulldozing tactics resorted to by the authorities.

This action of dumping construction material in front of ancestral homes is inhuman. Are the authorities working for the welfare of the people, one wonders. This brings us to some basic questions, development for whom? For whose benefit is the infrastructure being undertaken? Is it actually required?

Are the locals being consulted? It is heartening to see however, the locals standing up against the might of the authorities. More power to the people!

## Melville X D'Souza, Mumbai

## Gender neutral language needed

In order to eliminate ambiguities



and thereby decrease disputes and litigation, the finance minister introduced the Income Tax Bill 2025 in Parliament. This bill is concise, lucid, and easy to read and comprehend.

It replaces the Income Tax Act, 1961, which had become intricate over time due to amendments, had intricate language, had an elaborate structure, and was voluminous.

Despite these advantages, our finance minister being a woman and the crafters of the Income Tax Bill, 2025, have made it predominantly male-centric, giving little elbow to the fair sex and by not using gender-neutral language.

Though the Income-Tax Bill, 2025, is applicable to all genders, they have adopted the masculine terms "director", "assistant director", and "deputy director", and male pronouns like he, him, his, and himself, although there exist feminine words "directress", "assistant directress", and "deputy directress", and feminine pronouns like she, her, hers, and herself. The Constitution of India, under Articles 14 to 18, provides for the right to equality for all citizens of the country as a fundamental right. Gender-neutral legislation draughting is necessary in a democratic nation since the present generation believes that all people are created equal and capable of greatness in all endeavours. The onus lies with us to use gender-neutral language and pass it on to future generations.

K V Chandra Mouli, Mysuru