

O HERALDO

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Beach shack operators in hot water

It took a tragedy for the state government to wake up and crack down on an illegality that has been happening along Goa's beaches for several years right under the authorities' noses. In a belated move, the tourism department has begun scrutinizing shacks that it had allotted before the start of the tourist season, and has issued show cause notices to 38 owners along the North Goa coast for subletting their units.

The knee-jerk reaction came after an irate and red-faced tourism minister ordered strict measures after Amar Bandekar, a local Arambol resident, died after allegedly being beaten by waiters of a shack on the beach there on January 26. Consequent investigations revealed that although the tourism department had allotted the shack to one Manuel Fernandes, it had been sublet to Lalchand Chauhan, a native of Himachal Pradesh. Rohan Khaunte went on to tell some sections of the media that the tourism department would not tolerate Goans subletting their shacks to Delhiwallahs and outsiders.

Although 38 show cause notices have been issued in North Goa, as many as 108 of the 265 shacks allotted in the district were found to be sublet, mostly to outsiders. Another 40 shack operators will shortly be served similar notices asking them to explain why their shack licenses should be cancelled and their structures dismantled. Hearings are likely to begin by the end of this month.

Jolted shack owners are now attempting to ensure that they don't get caught by the long arm of the law. They have sought an assurance from the government - which they claim to have obtained - that beach shacks which have been sublet to locals will not be targeted. According to them, it is common for shack operators to make multiple applications in the names of their family members for shack allotment, which is done by way of a lottery system. In the event of a family getting more than one shack license through the lottery, the extra license is often given to another traditional beach shack operator who wasn't successful during the allotment process.

However, Section 8 of the Goa Beach Shack Policy, 2023-2026, very clearly states, "The beach shack allottee shall not sublet the beach shack under any circumstances." Therefore, if one goes by the letter and the spirit of the beach shack policy, it is amply clear that subletting of any nature is not allowed. Nowhere does the policy make leeway for transfer of shacks to other traditional shack operators who didn't manage to land a license during the allotment process. Hence the 'deal' that shack owners' associations are attempting to make is essentially flawed and comes across as a desperate move to protect their interests as a majority of shacks on government property along the state's coast have clearly been sublet.

One association opined that this situation could have been prevented if only one member of a family is permitted to apply for a beach shack license. It went on to take aim at the tourism department by stating that the department makes more money if there are more applicants for shack licenses, particularly because the Rs. 10,000 application fee is non-refundable, even if one doesn't land a license during the allotment.

It is obvious that the finger-pointing has now begun and it remains to be seen if the government will indeed accede to the request of the shack owners where subletting to locals is concerned, or if it will roll up its sleeves and come down uniformly on every shack that has been sublet. Laws and rules are made for a reason and must not be circumvented to suit one's convenience or to save one from punishment.

Until the government and the shack owners understand this, nothing much will change on the ground, or in this case, along the coast.

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BY INVITATION
Visitação B. Monteiro

The Village Panchayats of Goa

The Village Panchayats were established in Goa in 1962 - they have completed 62 years. They were established with the main aim of giving the people of Goa good village governance. It is time to evaluate the village governance today and rectify what has gone wrong in the very system, in order to achieve the good of the village.

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The 73 and 74 Amendments to the Constitution of India, give wide ranging powers to the Panchayats, but in Goa again, these powers are limited by the powers that may be in power at a given time.

Subsequently various committees like Development Committees were to be constituted as per the various Finance Commissions but most of them remained on paper only.

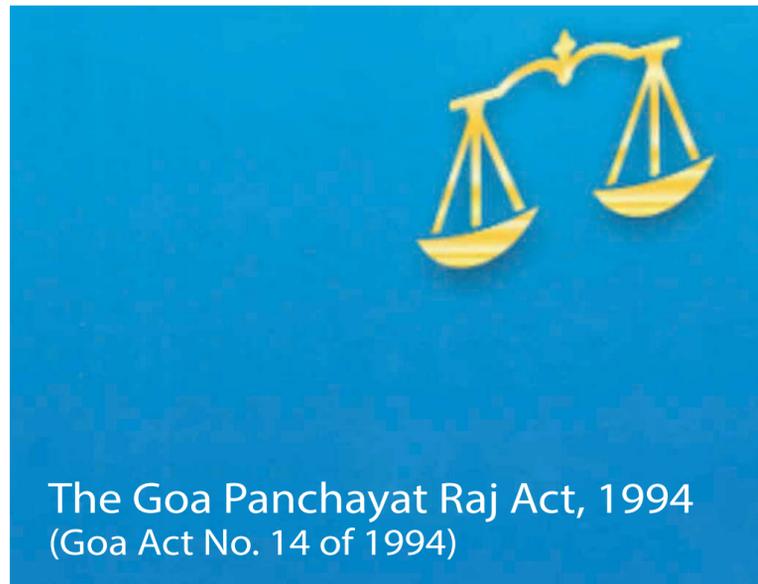
In 2016, the Government of Goa by its Office Gazette Series I No. 16 dated 21st July 2016, led to the constitution of various Village Panchayat Committees such as: Village Development Committees, Garbage Committees, etc.

The Central Bio-diversity Act 2002, subsequently amended in 2023, ordered the constitution of Biodiversity Committees in the villages. These village Bio-diversity Committees are mandated to map the bio-diversity of the village and update the PBR from time to time.

Despite all that is said about the Village Panchayats, they are far from the effective achievement of the lofty aims envisaged in the various Rules and Acts in order to give the village good governance.

If we look at Goan Village Scenarios today, we have to sadly admit that the Panchayats, instead of contributing to the peaceful and overall development of our villages, have only divided our village people, creating groups fighting against each other. The Sarpanch, mostly allied with the local MLA has his own group of supporters set against the opposite group. Similarly, most of the Panchas have their own supporters and opponents. This vivid division is clearly noticed in our Gram Sabhas where, instead of listening to the one who speaks the truth and follow it, people will oppose him/her creating noise disturbances where one can hardly be heard. Thus most of the Gram Sabha's time is wasted and villagers say it is useless to attend them. Perhaps if a Speaker is appointed to conduct the Gram Sabha proceedings, the problem could be solved.

I fail to understand why the Police Force is brought to the



The Goa Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 (Goa Act No. 14 of 1994)

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Gram Sabhas. Village matters/ issues should be peacefully discussed by the Villagers and solutions arrived at for the good of the village.

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I would suggest some important changes as follows:

A. House numbers, hut numbers and structure numbers

Residential houses have house numbers. Huts where people reside can be given a residential hut number. There are other huts around the house for storing firewood, salt, other things, etc. These huts are to be measured in area and given hut numbers. People have seen so many huts being given house numbers which afterwards have been converted into pakka houses.

In our villages, there are so many structures which are to be surveyed as structures. There are monuments built in honor of freedom fighters or prominent people of the village. Likewise, temples, churches, mosques, crematoriums and cemeteries, forts etc are to be recorded as structures. All of them should have proper structure numbers with a description of the structure and the area occupied by it.

Next come the shop/shed numbers. These also cannot be given house numbers but should be recorded as shops /sheds

with the area occupied by them.

B. Gram Sabhas

Gram Sabhas are the most important village body meetings where the villagers meet to discuss the well-being and progress of their villages and the issues affecting them. They are sacred temples of democracy at the grass root level of the village. They should be marked with transparency and accountability but unfortunately, many villagers try to avoid them because of the fights taking place at most of them and the unsatisfactory replies given by the Presidents, especially about big construction projects, fearing that the Gram Sabha may block them straight away.

Another ticklish issue is about two villages having a common Village Panchayat and a common Gram Sabha. One village only is affected by one issue while the other is not. How does the common Gram Sabha decide about the issue / project? Shouldn't that affected village only decide about it? The validity of such common Gram Sabha decisions can become a legal battle. It is a question to be dealt with legally.

C. Regulate aberration

Just two and a half years back, we have seen no-confidence motion moved against the Sarpanch, in a particular village, just the next day of being elected a Sarpanch. There is also another case where a no-confidence motion was moved against the elected Sarpanch within 15 days of his election, with the ostensible reason that he had failed to

carry out the development of the village. What development can one expect from the Sarpanch within 15 days of election to the post? Therefore, there is need to regulate this aberration.

D. Time bound proposals

Many Panchayats do not accept any other topic in the Gram Sabha meetings, stating that they have not been submitted within the time limit of four days before the meeting.

Unforeseen issues may have cropped up affecting the village in the last four days which require urgent discussion. The Panchayat cannot reject such a topic only on the ground that it is brought at the last minute.

E. And lastly, a word about Panchayat Secretaries

Panchayat Secretaries are appointed by the Government. They are supposed to guide the Panchayat according to the Goa Panchayat Rules and Regulations. They also write the minutes of the Panchayat Body Meetings as well as Gram Sabha Meetings. It is observed that many of these Secretaries who are political appointees, do not even know elementary English in order to record the minutes correctly. Many people and I myself have observed this many times. For e.g. They write: he/she 'sad', instead of 'said', and commit many such mistakes, thus distorting the correct meaning of the words.

There are many other issues about Panchayats that cannot be written in a small article of this nature. I hope that the new Panchayati Raj Act will take into account the many issues affecting the Panchayat Raj in Goa and once drafted, will be kept for public scrutiny, inviting suggestions and objections before it is finalized, as it was done, in the Goa Agriculture Policy.

(The author is a well-known columnist and author of the book 'Goan Village Communities')

From Estrangement to Engagement: 50 Years of India-Portugal Ties

2025 marks the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between India and Portugal. This golden jubilee marks not just a milestone in diplomatic history, but is a testament to the transformative power of dialogue, shared values, and mutual respect.

First, a little bit of background. Relations between India and Portugal began amicably 1947 after India gained independence and diplomatic relations were established in 1949. However, they soon went into decline in 1950 after Antonio Oliveira Salazar, Portugal's dictator, refused to surrender the Portuguese enclaves. Indian military action under "Operation Vijay" liberated Goa on 19th December 1961, ending 451 years of Portuguese rule. However, the strained diplomatic relations were restored following the Portuguese Carnation Revolution in April 1974, which overthrew Salazar's Estado Novo.

The transformation from chilly diplomatic relations to a thaw in ties between India and Portugal unfolded during Mario Soares' regime in Portugal. One of the most influential politicians in Portuguese history, Soares was the external affairs minister of Portugal when India and Portugal finally signed a treaty on 31st Decem-

Anish Esteves

ber 1974, recognising India's sovereignty over Goa, Daman and Diu, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli. This treaty came into force on 3rd June 1975.

While relations were cordial, bilateral engagement between India and Portugal was sluggish owing to Portugal's preoccupation with restoring domestic political stability and integrating with the European Union (EU), as well as India's focus on its region. The exchanges of presidential visits in 1990, 1992 and 1998, followed by the visit of PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee to Lisbon in 2000 for the first India-EU Summit, and the visit of Portuguese PM José Socrates to Delhi for the 8th India-EU Summit during 2007 Portuguese Presidency of the EU, provided the much-needed boost to contemporary relations.

More recently, bilateral relations gathered steam with the reciprocal visits by PM António Costa and PM Narendra Modi in January and June 2017, respectively, followed by the visit of PM Antonio Costa in December 2019 and the State Visit of President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa to India in February 2020.

Today, India and Portugal have a strong trade partnership, and cooperation spans diverse sectors, including technology, science, education, and

UPFRONT
The Goan diaspora community is also growing in Portugal. According to figures available in the public domain, the Indian community in Portugal is estimated to number around 1,25,000. This includes 35,902 Indian nationals (as per the latest official data from Portuguese Border & Immigration Services- SEF) and an estimated 90,000 persons of Indian origin including 10,519 OCI card holders, belonging to different walks of life

health. The impact of this diplomatic milestone is best exemplified by the remarkable growth in trade volume, approximating US\$1,204.41 million (according to 2022-2023 data). Major Indian exports to Portugal include textiles, metals, chemicals, plastic, rubber, footwear, and leather, while major Portuguese exports to India include metals, minerals, paper and pulp, wood and cork, and optical and precision instruments.

India has many opportunities to increase trade with Portugal, though this has not been able to grow at the desired level due to several obstacles. The interest of a Portuguese manufac-

turer in setting up an olive oil bottling plant in Goa, is, therefore, a step in the right direction.

Apart from commercial relations, the two countries have also secured a trajectory for growing people-to-people connections over the years. An MoU on cultural cooperation was signed on 24th June, 2017 during PM Narendra Modi's visit to Portugal. A large number of cultural performances, youth and literary exchanges, seminars, art exhibitions etc have also been held across Portugal in the last few years. Organisations like the Lusophone Society of Goa (LSG) have played an impor-

tant role in promoting and supporting the Lusophone culture (Portuguese-speaking people, region, and countries) in Goa and pursuing projects related to the Portuguese language and Lusophone cultures in the fields of arts, charity, education, science and technology.

One of the significant aspects of cross-cultural relations between India and Portugal is growing academic relations. Every year, scores of students from both countries take part in the student exchange programs where Indian students visit Portugal and Portuguese students visit India, which provides them with an unparalleled journey of cultural immersion. Opportunities like these provide the younger generation with a new cultural and learning environment, while aiming to create culturally conscious citizens with a global outlook.

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of life. Many Goans living in Portugal frequently maintain a strong connection to Goa, be it through religious events (as was witnessed during the latest Exposition) or celebrations back home.

All in all, for India-Portugal ties, the potential is vast, and there are hardly any significant challenges apart from the dual citizenship problem. The future of India-Portugal relations are bright and ties between the two nations are expected to grow even stronger. In order to ensure the longevity of their partnership for the next 50 years, it is hoped that both countries will understand their mutual interests and undertake initiatives to take bilateral ties to the next level. By doing so, India and Portugal can ensure their alliance remains relevant and resilient in the face of a changing global landscape.

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