

O HERALDO

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Time to address the growing threat of road violence

The tragic and untimely death of former Ponda MLA Lavoo Mamedar, following a scuffle with a rickshaw driver in Belagavi is a stark reminder of the dangerous escalation of road rage and how seemingly minor disputes are turning fatal. The cultural and geographical proximity between Goa and Belagavi ensures that many Goans make frequent visits to this city. Thus, the nature of this tragic event brings to the forefront a troubling pattern that has plagued not only Goa but several regions across the country - the disturbing rise of road rage, altercations, and fatalities that stem from minor traffic disputes.

In Mamedar's case, a petty accident involving a slight bump between a car and an autorickshaw led to a heated exchange that spiralled into fatal violence. Although the exact circumstances are under investigation, the tragic outcome underscores a deeper issue—how can a simple road incident result in the loss of life? Sadly, this is not an isolated incident. Goa, in recent years, has experienced an uptick in road rage incidents that often culminate in serious injuries or even death. The broader implications of these incidents extend well beyond the local roads and into the very fabric of Goa's economy.

Goa's tourism industry has borne the brunt of this increasing violence. The state, which relies heavily on tourism, has been suffering due to the negative publicity surrounding road-related altercations. Accounts of tourists being attacked or dying in road incidents have led to a tarnished image of the state. Tourists, both domestic and international, have expressed concerns over their safety, and many are opting for alternative destinations. The financial implications of this decline are profound, as businesses dependent on tourism have suffered. While the Goa government has stepped in to address these concerns with measures aimed at improving road safety, the road to resolution remains long and fraught with challenges.

The fundamental question we must ask is: how have we allowed life to become so cheap that a minor road dispute can escalate into a fatal altercation? This question strikes at the heart of the problem. The Mamedar incident was a clear demonstration of how poor conflict resolution and unchecked road aggression can have tragic consequences. What is more disturbing is that this escalation is no longer seen as exceptional. On the roads of Goa and indeed across India, arguments between drivers often turn physical, sometimes with deadly results. It is essential to reflect on why this behaviour is becoming more common and alarmingly, more accepted.

There is a pressing need for greater education in road safety and conflict resolution. To prevent further tragedies, road rage awareness and de-escalation training should be made mandatory for all individuals before they are granted a driving licence. Such initiatives are not merely educational but a necessary step towards fostering a culture of responsibility and respect on the roads.

Furthermore, the consequences for drivers who exhibit aggressive behaviour must be more severe. Should licences be revoked for drivers who repeatedly display poor road etiquette and aggressive behaviour? Driving is a privilege, not a right and those who endanger others on the road should face strict repercussions.

Another critical consideration is the role of mental health, particularly in the post-Covid era. The pandemic has had far-reaching effects on the mental well-being of individuals. Stress, anxiety, and post-Covid fatigue have affected many, potentially exacerbating road rage incidents. Are we adequately addressing these issues? It is worth exploring whether mandatory psychological assessments should be included as part of the process for obtaining a driving licence. After all, someone who is mentally unfit to drive poses a risk not only to themselves but to others as well.

The rise in road violence also raises a fundamental societal question: are we normalising aggression as an acceptable response to conflict? It is deeply troubling that physical violence is becoming an increasingly common reaction to minor road disputes. This cultural shift has serious implications, particularly in Goa, where tourism is a cornerstone of the economy. If tourists no longer feel safe due to rising road violence, they will understandably choose other destinations. The resulting decline in tourism would have devastating consequences for local businesses and workers who depend on a vibrant tourist trade.

In this context, we must ask ourselves: what kind of society do we want to be? One where violence is an accepted solution, or one where dialogue, patience, and mutual respect prevail? The tragic death of Lavoo Mamedar should serve as a wake-up call for all of us. It is time for a collective reassessment of our attitudes towards road safety and conflict resolution.

The responsibility lies not only with individual drivers but with the government, law enforcement, and society at large. The current approach to road safety is insufficient, and more comprehensive measures are needed to address the root causes of road rage and violence. Conflict de-escalation training, stricter penalties for aggressive behaviour, and better mental health support for drivers are essential steps in fostering a safer environment.

comment



SHANTI MARIA FONSECA

The wheels of justice will not stop unless the wheels of injustice are brought to a grinding halt. Gaza is not for sale and the land and the resources belong to the Palestinian people. As the fight against oppression continues, we are reminded that every voice matters in the pursuit of justice

End the Palestinian ordeal: Gaza not for sale

When US President Donald Trump publicly and brazenly announced his plan to take over the Gaza strip, everyone was stunned including the man standing beside him, the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Trump says everyone he has spoken to loves the idea. But whom has he spoken to?

In a recent statement, the Palestinian envoy to UN Riyad Mansour has stated that, "Gaza is not for sale and the land and the resources belong to the Palestinian people. Palestine is not a real-estate deal. It should and will be built. People must be allowed to return to their homes and stay on their land. The Gaza strip is not a free piece of land for anyone to grab. Those days are long since gone. Following this, the Israeli Ambassador to the UN who backed President Trump's plans for the US to take over Gaza firmly stated that the same should be achieved with consent viz the consent of the people moving out and the consent of the countries where they will be received.

Gaza, a paradise at one time, has been reduced to rubble today by America, Israel, the EU not excluding

people, who lost their homes, their land and their way of life. Today Gaza is known as the largest living memorial monument for the victims of genocide. Let us hope that this genocide will be the last in history.

Look at the Palestinians today? They are bravely walking into Gaza with heads raised high. Americans had written them off as a useless ragtag people full of fear. Their only one desire was to see them die or disappear. They thought that they would wake up one morning and find the Palestinians in the wilderness. But that has not happened. The Palestinians who have faced and lived through unending assault on their lives and livelihoods, dispossession, war and attack for such a long period of time have been tempered as steel - will not buckle down anymore. Negotiations are going on to achieve long term Peace agreement beyond the present cease fire. Seated beside the King of Jordan, Trump repeatedly kept calling the Hamas "The Islamic Resistance Movement" as bullies who are trying to pretend to be a tough group.

International law stipulates the exercise of inalienable Rights. Time to honour and affirm these Rights, to open the doors, re-construct Gaza and end the illegal occupation forever. "Trump's plan to forcefully push out the Palestinians from the land of their ancestors has back-fired in his face, with the whole world standing behind the Palestinian nation. In one voice, he has been clearly told, "We will fight you Donald". The children of Gaza are relentlessly screaming on the streets, "Let Trump rant all he wants. Even if Trump strikes Gaza with fire-belts, we are not leaving Gaza. Let them drop a nuclear bomb. We will all go to God together." Despite the difficult and tragic situations, they continue to live. They refuse to bend and be displaced.

Only few days ago, UN special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese went on to state that, "what President Donald Trump proposes to do is "utter nonsense". His proposal is totally unlawful. People talk of ethnic-cleansing. This is even worse - inciting forced displacement which is

an international crime. What he wants to do is unlawful, immoral and irresponsible. It will make the regional crisis even worse! The international community which has 193 states is trying its best to put a final end to this war. This is a population of genocide survivors who need to be helped and rescued. No one has a right to tell them how they should rebuild or develop Gaza. The Palestinians themselves will decide this. Time has now come to say "Enough is Enough". Let us not be distracted by President Trump or the Zionist. 'The Palestinian right to self determination and statehood is not negotiable.'

The world is sick and tired of the ongoing war in Gaza. In a recent humiliation for Israel, their Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni was expelled from the 10th UN Alliance of Civilization in Summit Portugal. Multiple representatives led by Algeria's Foreign Minister Ahmed Abtaf protested and insisted that the presence of Israel: which is a state led by criminals and being tried for 'genocide' would destroy the credibility of the organisation. Her invitation was revoked prompting her to leave in disgrace. It is only a matter of time should the present situation continue, it is bound to escalate to escalate into a World War III.

I do not know where and when this is going to end. But it is going to be at a great cost. I am absolutely certain that Freedom will dawn one day for the Palestinians. The wheels of justice will not stop unless the wheels of injustice are brought to a grinding halt. Gaza is not for sale and the land and the resources belong to the Palestinian people. As the fight against oppression continues, we are reminded that every voice matters in the pursuit of justice. An avalanche, a tsunami is about to hit us. The collapse has begun. No place for anyone to remain neutral in these times of extreme turmoil. We all know what is happening in Gaza and we have the people and power to change it. People's united power and voice is the only way to change the tide. Let's dream of a tomorrow where there will be everlasting Peace for the children and families of every Palestinian.

(The writer a social scientist and is a senior practicing criminal lawyer)



the many mute spectators world over. Turkish President Erdogan of Turkey: has stated that "Israel must compensate for the damage it has caused to Gaza. He slams Donald Trump's Gaza ethnic cleansing and has rubbished Trump's Gaza proposal of sending the Palestinians into exile away from their land. 'No one has or will have the power to force the Palestinian people to experience a second 'NAKBA'. The mass expulsions of Palestinians from their homes during the 1948 war. The word 'NARBA' is Arabic for 'catastrophe'. The Nakbha had a profound impact on the Palestinian

Goa could face water crisis this summer

In July 2019, the Goa government had reportedly ensured that all projects will be completed before 2025, which will enable the state to move forward to achieve the water summit of 24x7 water supply to all. The government has now admitted that it is not possible to provide water 24x7 but has plans to ensure water supply for four hours a day to every household.

Will the water be supplied after midnight? It is learnt that infrastructure development for this will be completed by the end of 2026. It needs to be noted that the end of 2026, is several months away but very close to the 2027 assembly elections. Will citizens have to endure the water shortage for so many months?

It is learnt that despite stringent directives from Goa Human Rights Commission (GHRC) and repeated assurance from the government residents of Majorda-Utorda-Catala village panchayats continue to grapple with severe water shortage. Around 80 households in Bethoda in Ponda are facing a severe water crisis with most taps running dry for the past week. The villagers have blamed the mushrooming residential buildings for the water crisis. This is the situation in several other villages.

The state may have received back-to-back years of surplus rains in 2023 and 2024 but myopic planning and rampant over development have ensured that people are consistently denied sufficient water-supply to their homes. We are

letterstotheeditor

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already into the summer season and things could only get worse in the next couple of months. Will a separate 'Department of Drinking Water' resolve the issue? One will have to wait and see.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

How strong is the US economy?

The United States, by far the largest economy in the world, has glaring chinks in its economic armour. With \$ 36 trillion as its debt, both internal and external, the chasm that the US economy is faced with is a cause for alarm. Also, the US which has the highest gold reserves in the world at 8,133 tonnes the worth of which is less than a trillion dollars denotes that with a budgetary allocation of about \$ 6.8 trillion is probably not keeping it in solid footing.

At least three countries like China, its northern and southern neighbours Canada and Mexico respectively have huge surplus exports to the US. Most of the \$ 50 trillion which is the total market capitalisation of its stock market is in the hands of private companies with Nvidia and Apple having a market capitalization of \$ 3.1 trillion and \$3.0 trillion respectively.

It is now to be seen if with the formation of the department of government efficiency (DOGE), a face-lift to the economy can take shape without also affecting the cordial relations with Ameri-

cans as well as foreign countries which is required for America to maintain its influence world-wide through USAID.

It is a fact that United States has the best quality of technologies but will this be sufficient to ensure that the US remains competitive in world trade. Elon Musk, the richest man in the world with a net worth of \$ 400 billion is tasked with the onerous duty of making the US slim, trim and efficient. With diligence the task can be achieved in a methodical manner, but without losing the goodwill of the people.

Eldvicio Miranda, Panjim

Landmark judgement in prolonged legal battle

In a significant legal development, the Sessions Court in Goa on February 14, convicted Vikat Bhagat for the rape and murder of Danielle McLaughlin, a 28-year-old Irish woman who was backpacking in India. Her body was found in a field in Canacona in March 2017. The court found Bhagat guilty under IPC sections 302 (murder), 376 (rape) and 201 (causing disappearance of evidence).

The legal proceedings were initially presided over by Judge Sayanora Telles Laad and later overseen by three other session court judges. Throughout the trial, Bhagat's behaviour behind bars raised concerns, prompting the court to order him to be handcuffed during trans-

port for hearings.

Reacting to the conviction, the family of Danielle expressed gratitude to the policemen, lawyers and the court for finally bringing justice to her.

The prosecution demanded a maximum sentence for Bhagat, with the judge stating that she would pronounce the quantum of sentence on February 17, 2025. The maximum sentence in such a case is capital punishment.

The verdict marks a landmark judgment in a state where more acquittals than prosecutions have been witnessed.

Everette Assis Telles, Margao

Accord approval for panchayat ghar

The villagers, the Village Development Committees (VDCs) and gram sabha members of Village Panchayat of Chinchinim-Deusua, keep on highlighting pending approval issue of panchayat ghar cum multipurpose project at every meeting. Thanks to Ex MLA and Hon'ble Minister Filipe Neri Rodrigues, who managed to acquire about 10,000 sq mts for the said project about 17 years back. Over the past years, the initial plans of panchayat ghar cum market complex were changed and new plans for a panchayat ghar cum multipurpose complex, including swimming pool were prepared. GSIDC is the agency to execute this work.

The present VP body along with

people'sedit

BALANCING ACT: CAN GOA MARKET TOURISM WITHOUT LOSING ITS CHARM?

ASHLEY NORONHA

Tourism is the state's dominant revenue-generating industry, requiring robust marketing and careful balancing. Excessive and unchecked publicity can lead to overexposure, diminishing its appeal and making it harder to sustain against rising global competition.

All stakeholders need to nurture this sector with the utmost care and take corrective action rather than allowing it to spiral into a free fall by indulging in a vicious blame game. We must ensure that gross negligence does not creep into any area of the industry. A marketing strategy should be in place to tackle and prevent the steady decline in the arrival of high-quality, high-end tourists. Low-end tourism is on the rise, which does not bode well for the economy and does not contribute to local businesses or the Goan economy.

Tourism, which was introduced by hippies in the 1970s, was taken over by the state in the 1980s and has since become the mainstay and backbone of the Goan economy, particularly after the closure of mining. It has grown into a multi-billion-dollar industry. Following Covid, which caused a slight downturn, tourism gradually picked up, though with an influx of low-end tourists, which has overwhelmed the state.

Exploitation will kill the golden goose before we see any real dividends. Hence, it should be nipped in the bud and curbed in a timely manner. Of course, tourism should be supported by world-class infrastructure, including good roads, a disciplined transport system, affordable hotel tariffs, low taxi fares, clean washrooms, and strict enforcement of rules against drugs, public drinking, open-air cooking, and loud music. Shack activities are sluggish, as the high-end tourist footfall is declining, and many tourists are likely to head to other, more exotic destinations offering better deals. A thorough inspection by all stakeholders is necessary to improve numbers. Heritage sites, for which Goa is famous, need thorough refurbishment and better upkeep. Extra funds should be allocated by the government to maintain deteriorating infrastructure, with a phased approach to improvement. The current infrastructure is poorly maintained, with inadequate scheduled upkeep and supervision.

Cuisine culture should be maintained at high standards, with no compromise on the quality of food served to visitors. High-end visitors are selective and known to change their preferences swiftly, often due to better offers elsewhere. These visitors prefer a clean, garbage-free environment. Tourists should get value for their money; if not, they will move on, as most are on tight budgets and aim to maximise their experience in limited time.

The government should explore ways to attract guests by offering free arrival visas, providing an incentive for them to return. Bureaucratic hurdles in visa processing or currency exchange should be reduced and streamlined. Visitors have reported being accosted by migrants or beggars selling water or robbing them. These individuals should be rounded up and deported, as such actions are necessary to protect the state's reputation. More clean, toll-free toilets with automatic flushes should be installed in cities, market places, and even on beaches to maintain their pristine beauty. Beautiful beaches have been ravaged by open defecation due to the lack of adequate washrooms, which are essential.

The tourism sector has been plagued by 'fatigue' and requires adjustments to certain policies, such as offering holiday packages, free visas, and significant improvements in infrastructure and cleanliness. These measures will help address high expenses, counter exorbitant taxi fares, and deter exploitation by taxi operators and touts. This, in turn, will prevent negative reviews on social media or by word of mouth. Tourism is stagnant locally and requires a paradigm shift in its policies to boost the arrival of tourists from both local and international markets.

MLA is making all out efforts to get this project approved by leading many delegations to the chief minister who is holding the finance. We are happy to learn that the CM and Panchayat Minister has given assurances to approve the said project, which is not yet accorded financial approval. Recently our neighbouring VP Assolna and VP Bogmalo-Chicolna laid the foundation stones for new panchayat ghars. We earnestly request our CM to accord financial approval before the financial year end and fulfill the promises in this year of hope, so that we could have a modern panchayat ghar to conduct various activities benefiting all sections, under one roof.

Rosario D Rebelo, Chinchinim

A bond of respect

US President Donald Trump has lauded Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, calling him a "tough negotiator" and commending the courtesies extended during his visits to India. Trump highlighted Modi's diplomatic acumen and strong leadership while referring to him as a "good friend," underscoring the mutual respect and camaraderie shared between the two leaders. This acknowledgment reflects the deepening partnership between the two nations during their tenure, marked by significant strides in trade, defense, and strategic ties. The statement further cements Modi's global image as a formidable leader and emphasizes the importance of India-US relations on the world stage.

Gopalaswamy J, Chennai