

O HERALDO

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Every deportee flight is overloaded with despair

Three flights have come back from the United States with Indian deportees and each one is overloaded with tales of violence, exploitation and heartbreak. The second flight that arrived late on Saturday had two young Goans, whose cautionary tale shone a harsh light on the perils faced by individuals caught in the web of illegal migration. The emotional toll of their ordeal is a tragedy that deserves our full attention, not just because of the hardships they endured, but also because it reflects a deeper issue that goes beyond a single deportation. It speaks to the desperation of youth seeking better prospects abroad, often falling victim to unscrupulous agents and a system that offers little sympathy for their plight.

These two Goans, both in their twenties, reportedly paid substantial sums to a "consultant" who promised to facilitate their migration to the US legally. For one of the men, a 25-year-old who had completed a course in

Beyond the physical torment, the emotional toll of deportation has been equally damaging. Once in the US, both men were detained for over three weeks, held in a detention center where their dignity was stripped away. To add insult to injury, as deportation became inevitable, they were subjected to the degrading process of being shackled during the journey back to India, a policy that has sparked outrage in Parliament

maritime studies, the plan seemed to be his ticket to a new life. Yet, his dream quickly turned to dust as they faced unimaginable violence at the Mexico-US border. Robbed at knife-point, tortured, and ultimately caught trying to cross into the US through a truck gate, these young men were subjected to a cycle of abuse that few could have foreseen.

The Goans' story is a stark reminder of the dangers posed by "consultants" who prey on vulnerable individuals desperate for opportunity. One of the men, who had worked at a resort in Goa, paid Rs 10 lakh to the agent, part of a promise of a better life in America. This tragic deception led them to Mexico, where they encountered brutal conditions and a heartless smuggling network that took advantage of their hopes and aspirations.

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The political firestorm that followed these deportations has only deepened the national anguish. Opposition leaders raised their voices against the treatment of Indian deportees, among them many women, particularly highlighting the inhumane use of restraints. The images of men and women in shackles, being returned to their homeland like prisoners, sparked outrage, with some lawmakers asking the government whether they had turned a blind eye to this degradation.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar defended the procedure, citing the US's Standard Operating Procedure for deportation. However, the emotional aspect of this debate has overshadowed such technicalities. What is lost in these bureaucratic discussions is the human cost of the policy. The stories of Sikh deportees, forced to remove their turbans in detention, have garnered particular attention, drawing condemnation from community leaders who called the act a violation of religious rights.

Meanwhile, the Goa authorities have remained largely silent on the broader implications of such illegal migration. While Commissioner Narendra Sawaikar urged Goans to follow proper legal channels when seeking work abroad, the fact remains that many are left with no choice but to fall prey to these unscrupulous agents, who promise the American dream and deliver only despair.

In the heat of this political crisis, it's easy to lose sight of the personal toll that these deportations are taking on the deportees themselves. Amidst the angry debates and protests in Parliament, we must remember that behind every statistic is a human story of suffering and shattered hopes. The Goan deportees are just two of many who have been forced to endure unimaginable hardships in their quest for a better life.

What is the solution to this crisis? At its heart, it lies in addressing the root causes of illegal migration. India must ensure that its youth have access to meaningful opportunities at home, so they are not driven to such desperate measures. More importantly, the government must hold those who exploit their dreams accountable. The "consultants" who lure people into illegal migration schemes must be thoroughly investigated, their operations shut down, and their victims supported.

The treatment of Indian deportees, including Goans, should never again be allowed to descend to the levels we have seen in these recent cases. While politicians bicker over the procedural details, the human cost is clear. It is time for a government response that acknowledges not just the need for legal migration, but also the moral responsibility to ensure the dignity and rights of those who seek better lives. Until this happens, the cycle of hardship and humiliation will continue.

comment



JASON KEITH FERNANDES

The Exemplary Prince

The Aga Khan is the title of the Imam or spiritual leader of the community of Shia Muslims known as the Nizari Ismailis, a multi-ethnic group spread across the world, also living in Goa.

The title of the Aga Khan is of a comparatively recent origin when compared to the antiquity of the Ismaili Imamate which reaches into the very origins of Islam.

Prince Karim Al-Husseini, the fourth bearer of the title of Aga Khan passed away on the fourth of this month. This news was not an anonymous fact to me, but part of personal history. Growing up in Panjim in the 80s, and ever since, one could not help but encounter images of his smiling face in the various shops run by members of the mercantile Nizari Ismaili, or Khoja, community in the city.

There was more to the fourth Aga Khan, however, than simply the image of a smiley face in Panjim stores. He was, as was his office, intimately tied with the Goan, and Portuguese, world. Take for example, the fact that part of the municipal garden in the centre of Margão, formally known as the Aga Khan children's park, was constructed in 1959 by a Goan businessman named Abdul Javerbhai Mavany in the honour of the Aga Khan III. The Aga Khan visited Goa in 1960, because he was awarded the Grand Cross of the Order of Prince Henry the Navigator by General Vassalo e Silva, the last Governor General of Portuguese India. And why wouldn't he visit, given that his murid, his spiritual wards, were an integral part of the Portuguese nation in India and Africa.

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When the future of this population was threatened at the time of the independence of the territories of Angola and Mozambique, not only did the Aga Khan IV smooth the way for their move to Portugal, but counselled their integration into Portuguese society.

"This is your country now. Stay loyal to your country," he advised the Ismaili retornados, as he did other Ismailis dislocated from their homelands. More recently, he established the Diwan of the Imam in Lisbon.

While many speak of this shift from France to Portugal as a part of a strategy of asset management, the fact is that the Aga Khan, and the Nizari Ismailis he leads, have had a long, and storied relationship with Portugal, to the extent that one could consider him, and the Ismailis, as integral to Portuguese history as Vasco da Gama.

His reign of 67 years as Imam was almost as long as that of Queen Elizabeth, who reigned for 70 years, and time will come to recognise him, if the world has not already, as a prince in the same model as that of Queen Elizabeth, and closer home like Sultan Qaboos bin Said of Oman.

Like Elizabeth II, the Aga Khan IV presided over his community at times of dramatic geopolitical changes. Like Sultan Qaboos, he was a practitioner of quiet diplomacy for peace. Succeeding his grandfather to the Imamate in 1957, the reign saw him successfully deal with the expulsion of Asians from East Africa, and their resettlement in Canada and other parts of the developed world, the relocation of Ismailis from Portuguese Africa, the independence of Central Asian countries such as Tajikistan in the wake of the collapse of the former Soviet Union, and the political unrest in Afghanistan and Pakistan, not to mention India.

His response to all of these changes was to use his personal wealth, and the contributions of Ismailis, to set up a vast network of institutions that sought to respond not merely to the interests of Ismailis, but the quality of life of the communities among whom the Ismailis lived. It is the hallmark of great men, that we are inspired by them even in, and after, their death. The Aga Khan IV, one realises, spent his life in inter-religious dialogue, a dialogue marked not simply by conversation, but in actively collaborating for the common good with those of other faiths.

What is astounding is the absolute gamut of concerns the Aga Khan's network of institutions took up, ranging from developmental concerns, education, microfinance, to architecture - establishing the now prestigious Aga Khan Award for Architecture. In India, the Aga Khan Foundation has intervened in restoring the monuments in the Deccan, as well as more famously the gardens around Humayun's tomb.

In so doing, Mawlana Hazar Imam Aga Khan IV, demonstrated for us, the unfortunate souls that live in an age of venal mediocrity, the standards for what it is to be an exemplary prince.

Niccolo Machiavelli's sixteenth century opus The Prince offers us the model of a prince who is cunning, conniving, manipulative and believes that the ends justify the means, giving us the term we use today for particularly wily politicians: Machiavellian.

Machiavelli's prince has unfortunately come to be what we expect from the princes of our age, and it is therefore only with the deepest regret that one sees the passing of the Aga Khan IV who embodied the idea of the ideal prince, one who operates out of a sense of noblesse oblige - the sense that nobility comes with a set of responsibilities, obligations, to those who do not share the same fortunate situation as those with lesser privileges. That wealth does not exist for its own sake, and for personal pleasure alone, but to aid the pursuit of excellence, and the common good.

The exemplary nature of his politics emerged through reminiscences of his daughter, Princess Zahra Aga Khan. She pointed out that her father had always taught her that institutions were to be built with a hundred to five hundred years perspective, and crises were not to be responded in the immediate perspective, unless it threatens the livelihood and life of the jamaat.

The long-term well-being of the jamaat was always of greater importance than an immediate response to a political crisis. What was important was to build institutions and ensure that the institutions would outlast the people that currently populated them. Vision, restraint in response, a concern for lives and livelihoods, and institution building, all the hallmarks of a great prince's politics!

It was, therefore, with more than just the pain of a cherished childhood memory passing away that one encountered the news of the death of Prince Karim al-Husseini, but with the realisation that the world was deprived of a stellar example, at precisely the moment one requires someone of his stature. We pray that God will grant Prince Rahim al-Husseini Aga Khan V, the grace to fill the huge void that his father has left behind.

To the Aga Khan IV in the meanwhile, in addition to the traditional Muslim prayer for the dead, we can, and indeed must, offer the words of immortal bard in his play Hamlet:

"Now cracks a noble heart. Good-night, sweet prince; And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest."

(Jason Keith Fernandes is a socio-legal scholar and a theologian)

Dreams shattered for many Goan youth

A plane with 112 Indians who were deported from the United States for illegally residing in that country landed in Amritsar on Saturday night. This is the third such arrival in a span of 10 days as part of the Donald Trump administration crackdown on such immigrants.

It may be recalled that two youths from Goa, who were among the 116 Indians who were deported in the second batch for illegal immigration have since returned home. More Goans are expected to be deported in the days to come.

Several of these immigrants have either sold or mortgaged their properties and homes to raise funds to go to the US to eke out a living and support their families. To add salt to injury, they were deported in a most inhumane manner with handcuffs and foot-chains and in military transport planes just like Prisoners of War (PoWs).

Be that as it may, illegal immigration cannot be condoned. All immigration norms should be respected. The NRI commission can guide people about the formalities that need to be completed to go abroad. It is learnt that many try to enter the US illegally through agents since the immigration formalities are cumbersome and lengthy. Hence youth take the risk by trying to enter America through agents.

The agents who are responsible for the youth entering the US illegally need to be brought under the scanner. This will stop illegal

immigration not only to the US but to other countries as well.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco
Time to return back to nature!

This has reference to the report 'Handwoven heritage: Laxmi Velip keeps the dying art of mandri mats alive.....' (O Herald, February 17, 2025).

Great! This news item took me back in time when we used to love lying down on these mats called mandris, even in villages in Mumbai, like Gorai. There was no need to even spread a bed sheet, just lying on the bare mat gave one a great feeling.

It is sad to note that today's modern world is killing all traditions, cultures, heritage. Hats off then, to Laxmi for keeping alive this centuries-old art of weaving mandris.

In the meanwhile, I look back on my younger days when I had weaved small table mats and coasters out of coconut leaves which, I'm happy and proud to say, I still have them with me. Today's generation may never experience the joy of making such things with their own hands. Perhaps, it's time to return to nature. And, thanks to your newspaper for focusing on such news stories.

Melville X D'Souza, Mumbai
Noisy bikers need to be put in place

With reference to the news in one of the local dailies that the Calangute traffic police have

seized a two wheeler with modified exhaust making loud noises, I wish to congratulate them for this long awaited action.

I am a senior citizen living in Porvorim and face untold difficulty in managing to sleep and enjoy the peace and tranquility of the locality. Unscrupulous riders keep zooming around throughout the day and at times late nights with bikes modified to make loud noises.

Numerous appeals from me at different times in different local papers to check this menace have regrettably not yielded any results. Thank you Calangute police once again for your bold start in the right direction!!

Ruben de Oliveira Fernandes, Alto Betim

Smart City more of a bane than boon

For Panjim, Smart City means clean and good roads, water, electricity and beautification. But this project is a bouquet of hits and misses with the latter taking the lion's share.

The recent water and gas pipeline damage during sewerage work at Bhatlem has made life miserable for residents and commercial establishments. Despite the promise of a perfect lifestyle, Smart City will end up becoming a sci-fi fantasy if the challenges are not resolved at the earliest.

Hopes for a comprehensive development has now been replaced with dissatisfaction. Projects have

become bane for the people with deadlines not being met. People are comparing this situation to that of 'Stitching a blazer to cover a bare body, when a simple pant and shirt to protect the person's dignity would do.'

K G Vilop, Chorao

Acute shortage of parking space

Maharashtra is facing a mounting problem of vehicular congestion in its cities especially Mumbai which causes traffic jams and blocking of vehicles which provide emergency services like ambulances and fire brigades.

One of the factors contributing to the problem is found to be the parking of private vehicles on the roads. The Maharashtra government is now mulling a policy of asking the people to show they have a parking space before registration of new vehicles.

The situation in Goa may not be identical or as grave as it is in Mumbai but we do have a major parking problem in our cities. Our cities are small in size and they lack sufficient parking places due to which we see unregulated and haphazard parking.

The authorities have taken some measures to ease the situation but these are not enough. There is acute shortage of parking space due to the growing number of new vehicles on the roads. Gone are those days when only the affluent households possessed a car. The population of vehicles in

people's edit

TAKEN FOR A RIDE, BUT NOT QUITE!

SANDHYA VASUDEV

I grew up in a town where the cycle rickshaw was in vogue. This was pedalled by a person in front and seated two normal sizes, or three skinnies, on the seat behind. The seat had a hood for sunshine or rain. This type of cycle rickshaw differs from its cousin in the northern states, wherein it is not pedalled, but pulled by a person trotting, the apparatus somewhat similar to the yoke used in cultivation.

But the cycle rickshaw cannot sustain in bigger cities and the auto rickshaw has turned into the most popular mode due to its unique ability of navigating fast through any traffic maze. I remember the cockroach when I spot an autorickshaw squeezing expertly between two vehicles. Just as a cockroach needs just its whiskers to gain entry to pull its entire body through, the driver needs just the nose of the autorickshaw to push itself, and he manages to drag the whole body through, with the adjacent vehicles gliding away like the epochal parting of the Red Sea.

My grandson Kanishk, never having seen an "auto" before, has been fascinated by the three wheeled "cool" vehicle and thrilled to have a ride in it once or twice, while on a visit to India. We have even managed to get him a toy model of an autorickshaw. The auto drivers may be sporting a uniform, but they certainly differ in their outlook. I have had several experiences when the auto drivers had been least interested in going in our direction and preferred to drive empty than earn some bucks. While travelling alone, I occasionally make small talk with the driver if I find him chewing any type of tobacco product. I ask him if he has a family and then gently ask him to stop the habit, citing the terrible consequences. I now understand that the person per se is much more than being the mere driver. One was a graduate and spoke English quite fluently, one was an enthusiast and maintained his auto like a luxury car, one was well versed with Indian politics, yet another held strong views on government policies.

But recently my husband and I boarded an auto in Bangalore wherein the driver proved to be an actor. We boarded the vehicle after a function, dressed in formal attire including jewelry. The driver refused to switch on the meter but stated smilingly that he would take as much as we gave. Surprised at this, we replied that we would pay him the same price as we had paid on our onward trip. Soon, after navigating a turn, he started speaking on his cellphone, as if he had received a call. He started sobbing, asking the caller if his wife was safe and said that he would reach as soon as possible. After he hung up, he implored us to give him five thousand rupees as his wife, who had been admitted to the hospital earlier, was to be operated on. I had read about such a fraud only days earlier, and asked him to drop us then and there and proceed to the hospital. His expression indicated that we had caught him in the act and he sped away without a word. We felt grateful for the busy street with people around.

Goa will continue to grow fast requiring more parking space. The Government and civic authorities should therefore draw up a long term plan and address the parking problem in the cities before the situation goes out of hand.

Rodney de Souza, Assagao
Move to save farm land is just excellent

After banning sale of agricultural land, the Goa government has now proposed to ban the conversion of all fields designated as 'rice', 'moraad', 'kher' and 'khazan'. Well, this has been stated by Chief Minister Pramod Sawant during the launch of the government's ambitious 'State Amritkal Agriculture Policy 2025' recently.

Speaking further, the CM said that even if the Town and Country Planning Department does approve conversion of agricultural fields, the NOC from the agricultural director would now be mandatory, adding that no NOC would be granted for any such conversions in future.

I wholeheartedly support this proposal of the government because many Goans of late are seen practically filling their ancestral agricultural fields in rubble using JCBs, converting them into private properties overnight by first planting a few trees to bluff people around and slowly selling them to developers and scrapyards owners.

The government should bring in the above proposal at the earliest to permanently stop this madness of converting uncultivated ancestral agricultural fields under some pretext or the other and slowly selling them for the sake of making a quick buck.

Jerry Fernandes, Saligao