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Shashi Tharoor: The Unpredictable Political Force

Shashi Tharoor, the Congress stalwart from Thiruvananthapuram, finds himself once again at the center of political speculation. Known for his eloquence and intellectual prowess, Tharoor has often been a subject of discussion within and beyond his party. But recent statements and actions have reignited debates about his future, leaving political analysts and party loyalists guessing about his next move.

The latest round of speculation began when Tharoor shared a thought-provoking quote from English poet Thomas Gray: "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." While seemingly innocuous, the quote stirred speculation, especially given Tharoor's history of cryptic social media posts. The political corridors were abuzz with questions: Was this a veiled message about his discontent within the Congress? Was he contemplating a political shift?

Tharoor's political trajectory has largely been confined to Kerala, where he has won four consecutive terms as a Congress MP from Thiruvananthapuram. However, he has never been a dominant figure within the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) in the state. The BJP, which has long struggled to establish a stronghold in Kerala, has been keen on expanding its influence. In the 2024 elections, BJP candidate Rajeev Chandrasekhar gave Tharoor a tough fight, and the party secured its first-ever Lok Sabha seat in the state through actor-turned-politician Suresh Gopi

Tharoor's recent statements in an interview with *The Indian Express* Malayalam podcast added fuel to the fire. When asked about his future, he candidly remarked, "If the party wants to use me, I am available. Otherwise, I have my own things to do. Don't think I have no other options." This remark was widely interpreted as an indication that Tharoor was keeping his options open.

His praise for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's diplomatic efforts, particularly during the latter's US visit alongside former President Donald Trump, further raised eyebrows. His endorsement of India's interest in the F-35 fighter jet purchase; contrary to his party's stance, deep-

ened suspicions of a political recalibration. Congress leader Randeep Surjewala strongly opposed the deal, calling the aircraft "junk," while Tharoor took a more nuanced approach, citing its capabilities despite its cost.

Adding to the intrigue, Tharoor was recently seen alongside Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and UK Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds, celebrating the resumption of long-stalled Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations. While such interactions are routine in diplomacy, in the murky world of Indian politics, they are often read as signals of shifting alliances.

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With the BJP looking for credible faces to spearhead its Kerala ambitions, Tharoor's entry into the party would be a game-changer. Senior CPM leader Thomas Isaac even suggested that if Tharoor leaves Congress, he wouldn't be politically "orphaned" in Kerala. The Left, too, has shown openness to welcoming him should he choose to realign his political ideology.

Within the Congress, reactions to Tharoor's statements have been mixed. Senior leader Ramesh Chennithala downplayed his remarks, suggesting they were recorded before Rahul Gandhi's crucial February 18 meeting. However, K. Muralidharan, another Congress heavyweight, dismissed speculations outright, stating that Tharoor's future was an internal matter for the party.

Tharoor has also lauded the Kerala government's startup ecosystem, crediting the LDF for fostering entrepreneurship in the state. This unexpected praise led to further conjecture about his ideological leanings. However, Tharoor was quick to clarify that his statements were not an endorsement of the Left, but rather an objective assessment of policies he believed were beneficial.

Tharoor has always been known for his independent thinking, often at odds with the Congress high command. His decision to contest the Congress presidential election in 2022 against Mallikarjun Kharge; a candidate widely perceived as the Gandhi family's choice; demonstrated his willingness to challenge the status quo.

comment



PLASTINO D'COSTA

Diluting Brand GOA

Without using too much of technical jargon, let's understand the meaning of brand in the context of GOA. Any goods or services or a place (in Goa's case) that can distinguish itself from its competitors usually is identified with a brand name for easy recall. Let's say a tourist is planning a holiday and budget not a constraint, they will want to ask themselves as to what they need from the holiday and if it turns out to be Chicken Xacutti or Sorpotel, clean beaches, mild weather, past experience, generally decent and smiling local population with good command over English and more importantly hospitable, then naturally Goa will be the choice.

However if a tourist is interested in experiencing cold weather and snow, or relish rogan gosh or go snow skiing they definitely will choose Kashmir over Goa. Same is the case of a tourist who wants to experience calm backwaters on a houseboat, relish Malabar mutton curry, or fish moilee, than Kerala becomes their preferred destination over Kashmir. Simple, first time visitors or regular visitors, while deciding a destination have certain expectations of the place, the regular visitors remember the uniqueness of the place hence turn up again

But here is where the GOA story took a different turn, sensing there is money to be made many Indian businesses and individuals plunged into the tourism business of Goa, tourism capacity was scaled up to such an extent that the space got crowded in no time



and again, and new visitors go by information available in the public domain or word of mouth. If the place turns out to be below expectation or over the period of time losses its uniqueness then the brand takes a hit.

So, how was brand GOA built, well nobody set out deliberately to make one, but our lifestyle, our basic decency, our architecture, our fas-

ination for good food, our concern for the environment, our willingness to give time for social issues at the cost of our personal time and careers, our festivals, our celebrations, our (susegad) take it easy lifestyle all went on to make GOA a sought after brand, not forgetting Goans living abroad and their contributions as terrific brand ambassadors for Goa with their interactions with prospective foreign tourists and passively promoting Goa.

This brand building of Goa did not happen overnight, but overtime foreign tourists from cold weather countries did find a great escape to the warm weather of Goa with top of the line cuisine, clean beaches armed with extra purchasing power due to the Indian rupee's perpetual fall and hospitable Goans including taxi drivers who unfortunately these days are being called taxi mafias by fellow Indians.

But here is where the GOA story took a different turn, sensing there is money to be made many Indian businesses and individuals plunged into the tourism business of Goa, tourism capacity was scaled up to such an extent that the space got crowded in no time. This situation panicked even the older players who had set up their business much before the crowds entered because everyone was fighting for their market share. So compromises started seeping in and businesses started agreeing on even the weirdest request the client made during their stay or while hosting an event.

So whatever our lead singer Remo Fernandes or Chris Perry or Lorna and many more built brand GOA one song at a time, started to get diluted with mostly item numbers or Punjabi Bangra, songs that are not native to Goa. One might argue in a private event the host has the freedom to choose the type of function they want to have, but then most private events are never private but seriously disturb other guests in the same property who came to GOA for peace remember. Also if the event does not have Goan content or Goan cuisine, then why choose Goa as your destination, why not choose Jhumri Theliya.

You come to Goa because

of its uniqueness and then go all out to destroy the very same distinctiveness which brought you to Goa in the first place. It is here that the government should have stepped in framing laws that promote Goan culture and our way of life, but that is too much to ask from a government who is responsible in diluting brand Goa years ago by introducing casinos which were never a part of Goa. Chasing revenue is the only thing they know, while taking brand Goa for granted.

Government believes Goa's brand building as some one or two or even three day's affair at best, do a big road show, host a film festival, promote it on media and think you have contributed in building a brand. Unfortunately it does not work like that. You cannot have a carnival show in Margao promote everything Goan for three days and keep permanent street food stalls not even hundred meters away from the show, selling shev puri and pani puri for 365 days. So you have successfully managed to confuse the tourist and diluted the brand because now the tourist visiting Goa is confused if Goan staple diet is really the pani puri.

So here is what ought to happen, government before opening up any activity must bury their ego and go to the people to ask permission if the said activity will add value to Goa. For example, Indian actor John Abraham wants to setup a car racing academy in Goa. Really John, we are supposedly susegad and racing business is diametrically opposite to what Goa stands for. Just because you befriend a politician and use your charm does not mean Goa is ready for racing, infact India is not ready for racing; ask yourself why Formula One dropped India from the circuit.

Finally to those in the tourism business and in charge of hospitality please don't bend backwards to accommodate everything the tourist asks, if the brand gets diluted you will have no choice but to pack up and leave. Adding value to brand GOA is actually for your own survival.

(The author is a business consultant)

people's edit

NATURAL CALAMITIES UPROOT AND DISPLACE PEOPLE

BY ASHLEY NORONHA

With ever rising worldwide natural calamities like wildfires, tsunamis, cyclones, earthquakes, volcanoes, storms, taking place with repeated frequencies around the world, people are being sporadically displaced or moved away through either self-evacuation or aided state evacuations, from their natural habitat and homes. The overwhelming crisis dealing with such calamities are too high and unbearable and difficult to counter or endure, with the result many are left homeless, with no shelter, due to loss of homes, materials and properties.

Their age old homes are in ruins or in tatters due to destruction caused by earthquakes, typhoons, floods and people do not have the means to rebuild and get things sorted out. They have to encounter and battle severe cold, wild fires and floods all the time, during their life threatening ordeal sometimes with no aid forthcoming. Natural disasters may cause loss of life and health impacts, property damage, loss of livelihoods and services, social and economic disruptions and environmental damages. Impacts of earthquakes lead to destruction of life and property. Bridges, dams may collapse, with possibility of additional harmful effects like landslides, flash floods and forest fires. The wildfires in California were unprecedented which ravaged and destroyed entire cities and villages, people fled or took temporary shelters in makeshift shelters in unoccupied, abandoned buildings or simply left in the open, in biting cold without a roof.

Wild fires burn vegetation and modify properties of the exposed soil. The main causes of such disasters are tectonic shifts, lunar activities, deforestation, soil erosion, air pressure, and ocean currents. If this can happen in a wealthy country, then imagine how much more devastation such calamities can cause in a poor impoverished country. In such times, help is hard to come by. Disaster management committees should be well prepared to take on such calamities and bring timely relief to the affected people. There is a need to create self-help groups to help in aid and lend tangible support to all such affected people. Some potential countries lie in disaster prone areas which are under a perpetual threat of experiencing such high magnitude earthquakes and tremors displacing multitude of population to nearby safer areas devoid of such disasters. Floods are a common cause of people losing homes in some countries which require adequate relief measures to be administered, by providing makeshift shelters, food and materials. Science should be extended into research to study occurrences of such natural calamities to warn people of impending arrivals of destructive natural disasters, so that people are evacuated, airlifted, provided shelters and relief materials well in advance much before an impending doom. Most often, the executive managers or administrators get into action well after destruction or deaths have occurred. Logistic support like tents, food, medicine, water, sanitation with sewage facilities should be provided in dire circumstances. Government assisted projects like lending a helping hand will go a long way in bringing relief to these beleaguered and desperate people. Lip service without any tangible help being delivered are of no use. Host countries should supply tents with sewage facilities and also provide food and medicines in the hardest of times. Usually all such help is at the mercy of donor countries who at times keep a hands off policy due to allegiances between warring factions, as friend or foe nations.

Ban the rent-a-cab facility in the state

A 45-year-old Goan mother and her 13-year-old son were struck and dragged for approximately 50 metres on the Mapusa Housing Board Siolim Marna shortcut route on Wednesday by a 20-year-old tourist from Nagpur-Maharashtra who crashed a rented multi-purpose vehicle (MPV) on their two wheeler scooter while attempting to overtake a truck at high speed, veering into the wrong lane.

Eyewitnesses claim that the tourists attempted to flee after hitting the scooter but crashed into the truck ahead of them, preventing their escape.

Well, the government should take a very serious note of such type of incidents and decide to ban this nuisance creating rent-a-cab facility ones for all in the state. Most domestic tourists who don't even know to drive properly are seen misusing this facility, consuming alcohol/drugs and simply going on a long drive with their families/friends in different parts of the state after hiring big hi-fi vehicles and in the bargain killing innocent Goans by causing serious road accidents.

And to make matters worse, the police instead of giving justice to the road accident victims are allegedly seen giving these nuisance creating domestic tourists full protection during such incidents, hesitating to file any police complaints against them, taking them in their air conditioned vehicles at their police stations like big VIPs, preparing weak panchamas or accident reports and then personally helping such culprits to finally get fast bail

within a few hours in Goa.

The government should permanently dismiss all such known corrupt cops from service who have made it a trend/habit to extort money from domestic tourists during most road accidents to set them free and also ban the rent-a cab facility in the state on top priority basis.

Jerry Fernandes, Saligao

Speed governors for rent-a-cars

There was a hit-and-run accident that took place in Siolim on Wednesday, the second such case in just one week.

This time, a mother and son riding on a scooter were struck and dragged for nearly 50 meters by a car leading to multiple injuries. Be that as it may, it must be said that of late there have been several accidents taking place on Goan roads, many of which have ended in fatality. In most of instances, the vehicles involved are rental cars and the accidents have been caused due to over-speeding.

Tourists who rent a car, drive the vehicle recklessly since the vehicle does not belong to them and they cannot be held responsible for the damage caused to the vehicle. Civil society has called for a ban of these rent-a-cars. It is pertinent to note that in February 2024, the state government implemented stringent measures to enhance road safety, making the installation and functionality of speed governors, which

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is in compliance with all rules, mandatory for rent-a-cars. The presence and operation of speed governors needs to be verified during the renewal or issuance of fitness certificates for transport vehicles.

The question that arises is whether a check is being kept by the police on the installation and efficient functioning of speed governors of vehicles on Goa roads, especially with respect to rent-a-cars.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Police escort service needed

Goa Police must start a new department called "Police escort services". This service should be mainly for those criminals who want police protection after hit and run accidents and also to escape from police custody.

Matias Lobo, Tivim

Trump means business, India?

Trump's presidential term has been largely transactional and policy conducted more from a profit perspective than pragmatism or astuteness. A recent example has been the introduction of the Golden visa (permanent residency) scheme for anyone who can invest \$5 million in the US. The previous EB-5 investor visa scheme involving a fee of @ \$1 million which would fast-track long term stay/ citizenship for non US citizens would stand scrapped.

The 'golden visa' category can

also be rolled out by India, there could be rich Sri Lankans, Nepalese, Afghans or Maldivians who would be keen on 'buying' Indian citizenship given the bad socio-political and economic conditions in their own countries. The only thing is that there has to be strong legal scrutiny and strict vetting of prospective applicants by the government lest gangsters, drug barons, fugitives and others of their ilk try to sneak their way into the country via the legal route..

Vinay Dwivedi, Benaulim

National Science Day celebrated globally

National Science Day is a globally celebrated event commemorating the Raman Effect discovered by Sir C. V. Raman, the renowned Indian physicist, on February 28. This day is highly significant as it aims to raise awareness about the importance of science and its contributions to society. The theme for National Science Day varies each year, but it always revolves around promoting scientific knowledge and encouraging young people to pursue a career in science. The theme for National Science Day this year 2025 is "Empowering Indian Youth for Global Leadership in Science and Innovation for VIK-SIT Bharat." The focus of this theme is to emphasise the crucial role that science and technology play in tackling global challenges and creating a more sustainable future for everyone. In essence, National Science

Day highlights the significance of science and its impact on society by promoting scientific inquiry and inspiring future generations of scientists. National Science Day was first observed in 1987. It is celebrated across the country in schools, colleges, and universities. National Science Day is also celebrated in research institutes, medical colleges, and science institutes.

Jubel D'Cruz, Mumbai

Lokpal has to draw a line

Although the much hyped institution of Lokpal does not seem to have made much headway in bringing powerful public servants to book in corruption cases, it recently was in the news for the wrong reasons after it was severely castigated by the Supreme Court for hearing a case against a sitting High Court (HC) judge in January and seeking the guidance of the chief justice for further action.

According to the Lokpal, a HC judge is not a Constitutional authority because High Courts were not established under article 124 of the Constitution. When the case came up before the top court, the judges were miffed and declared that the action of the Lokpal was "very, very, disturbing", a strong comment indeed. The SC declared that a HC judge was a Constitutional authority and not merely a statutory functionary.

By all means, the top court has succinctly reminded the anti-corruption ombudsman that it has to draw a line in cases where constitutional functionaries are involved.

Ganapathi Bhat, Akola

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It is much easier to hide corruption when the system is extremely inefficient. However, corruption sticks out like a sore thumb in an efficient system.