

O HERALDO

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Road safety is a joint effort

Once virtually unheard of in Goa, road accidents have now become a daily occurrence in India's smallest state, with many snuffing out precious lives in the blink of an eye. The recent spate in fatal accidents, most of them involving tourists or non-Goans, leaves much to be desired about the strict implementation of the laws in force and the will of the authorities concerned to bring the violators to task without fear or favour.

One other important aspect that appears to be overlooked altogether is the lack of proper signage along roads and highways in Goa. With speed breakers being set up virtually overnight on some routes without being properly marked, for instance, motorists are taken by surprise and tend to get into accidents as a result. Signage for such speed breakers and rumblers themselves are either missing or covered in foliage, making the situation nothing but a recipe for disaster.

The issue came to the forefront recently when commuters flagged the absence of proper signboards along the Western Bypass in Salcete. They said the issue was compounded by the fact that all heavy vehicles are redirected to the bypass road with the intention of decongesting a significant portion of the national highway that passes through a number of villages. This, they said, does not only hamper visibility due to the size of these vehicles but also confuses them as signboards indicating directions to a particular area are either not large enough or not placed early enough to prepare them to change lanes etc.

For example, they said that while there is no signage to direct vehicles from the highway onto the bypass road, an outdated 'Service Road Starts' board that hasn't even been removed misleads motorists. It is a no-brainer that a confused driver will either suddenly apply the brakes or swerve to get onto the right lane, resulting not only in congestion but also accidents that can be severe enough to claim lives.

Apart from the Western Bypass stretch, the same problem persists along several other frequented routes. One such sore point is the diversion to the Dabolim airport from the new Zuari bridge. The board signalling this diversion for motorists travelling from the north is placed just a few metres before the actual road begins, leaving locals and tourists alike confounded as they are taken by surprise. Many are even forced to change lanes at the last minute which could have disastrous consequences, considering the high speeds at which vehicles moves on the bridge.

Even the installation of traffic signals at key points in the state leave much to be desired. At some areas, such as at Colva and Mapusa, they are hoisted too high up, thereby failing to catch the attention of commuters in smaller cars. A problem like this can easily be resolved by erecting traffic lights at eye level along the median of the road concerned. Road markings should be large enough too, so that vehicles know much in advance where exactly they are expected to halt before the light turns red. Several countries actually paint STOP in large font much before a traffic signal is approached, helping motorists slow down safely and well in advance so that pile-ups do not occur.

Then comes the issue of street lighting. While some stretches are well-lit, others are pitch dark, again endangering precious lives. A case in point at the moment is the stretch of NH 66 from the O'Coqueiro junction at Porvorim right up to the Green Park junction at Guirim. With hardly any illumination and the road rendered almost unmotorable due to ongoing work of the six-lane elevated corridor, commuters have been struggling to get past this zone safely, especially those who are not accustomed to the route.

It is clear that while accidents occur usually due to rash and negligent driving and when traffic rules are not obeyed, the government should do its part in ensuring road signage is correct and strategically placed and traffic signals and streetlights are functional. Road safety is, after all, a joint effort.

What is not for sale in India's smallest state? Is there anything that is not being packaged, and peddled to the gullible? Are there any limits? What about the rights of the people whose lives are being disrupted - don't they have any say? These are the fundamental questions of this awful moment, with Goa under siege by an orgy of illegalities, and falling apart in the absence of accountability.

At every level, the lack of rules underlies every crisis, whether large or small, and it is more the latter - albeit still pointless and unnecessary - playing out with Divar and its pre-Lenten island tradition of colourfully dressed 'Potekars' who roam from house to house, where an inherently intimate insider custom suddenly showed up on the state tourism calendar. The implication is this too is available for consumption, but it never has been in the past, nor is the island prepared for anyone seeking to experience what has never been a "Potekar Festival."

I happen to have roots in Divar, and enjoy being in an islander WhatsApp group where my friend Luis de Souza - he owns and operates the popular Panjim restaurant 'Venite' - wrote this charming recollection: "Potekars is a theatrical expression rooted in village bonds, and ties between families and wards. Every Potekar was known to all the adults, and it was sheer fun and entertainment among the villagers for interaction between all ages. There was not the remotest possibility of any disguise for any unpleasant motive, and it provided a playful enactment of village satire, with character imitations of known neighbourhood figures who had quaint and funny traits [which] were exaggerated and portrayed as pure comedy. For example, I remember one Potekar acting as Francis 'Sutachem Bondol', and another one was 'Bhishitin' - not such an easy role to play as you needed an armament of unpleasant language in an equally unpleasant voice. Another Potekar called 'Barkilem' spoke of village folks against whom (he) she held a grudge like the Duconcar at the local tavern who (he) she swore at in the shrillest sounds your eardrums could bear that the measure was always less than what (he) she had paid for."

De Souza is clear about the meaning of the Potekar tradition: "we can well understand how it is a culture-specific, local, close-knit folklore event. It was all about camaraderie, close-knit goodwill, 'boryeponn'. I remember Mann Amor, Augusta Tia and Mann Almir offering god-dxm and chunnacheyo kholoyo to the Potekars wandering from house to house. Besides the fear aspect among the tiny tots, the cowbells also simultaneously added a melodious jingle to

Potekars and predatory tourism



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BY INVITATION

Vivek Menezes

understandably - because Goa was sold to them as the place to break the rules, and there would be no need to respect the sentiments of the locals. Tensions have been running high, with regular streetside unpleasantness, in an ugly scenario where everyone loses. This is zero-value tourism, with exhaustion on both sides of the equation, and preying on everything that makes this destination so special and attractive in the first place.

Knowing all of this, what is going to happen at this year's Potekar non-festival, which is now thankfully being un-advertised? Hopefully, the islanders will be left unmolested to do what they like to do, but my WhatsApp group contains a number of warnings that it should not be treated as an open invitation fancy dress party: "if any local residents find outsiders (of course after proving the identity) dressing as Potekars at any point, let's be quick to gherao and pack them off there itself. We Divarcars do not require the Tourism Dept to promote our tradition [and] at the same time we should not allow the Tourism Dept to take over / capture this tradition of Divar."

(Vivek Menezes is a writer and co-founder of the Goa Arts and Literature Festival)

Twitter World

Shekhar Gupta @ShekharGupta

IAF chief drops truth bombs, says his force in dire need of 35-40 aircraft/year, has fallen far behind in tech...Also, says willing for an Indian product which offers even 85% of what foreign markets have.

Rishi Sunak @RishiSunak

Britain has always chosen to shape the world, not be shaped by it. We must lead by example - spending more on defence, standing firm against authoritarian threats, and seizing frozen Russian assets to help Ukraine defend itself and rebuild. Now is the time to act.

A multicultural nation cannot be defined by a single language

In a move that is bound to reignite debates over national identity, immigration, and inclusivity, US President Donald Trump is reportedly set to sign an executive order declaring English as the official language of the United States. If this order is implemented, this would be a historic first as, despite the country's 250-year history, the US has never had a national language, as is the case in India.

While English is undoubtedly the dominant language in American life, this executive order is far from a neutral administrative decision. It must be considered in the context of Trump's broader political agenda, especially his steps to disassemble diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. The question before us is not just about language but about the fabric of a multicultural and multilingual society and whether such action supports harmony or leads to division.

Some people may consider the decision to make English the official language as a good step. The logic being that English is already the de facto language of government, law and business in the US. Supporters argue that by making it a de jure language also would help promote national unity and streamline government functions. However, such a perspective

SHIVANSHU K SRIVASTAVA

overlooks the ulterior negative implications of this decision.

At its core, language is not just a means of communication; it is a marker of identity, history, and culture. The United States, a nation built by immigrants, is home to more than 350 languages, according to the US Census Bureau. Spanish, Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, and Arabic are among the most spoken languages aside from English. The decision to impose English as the official language sends a clear message: linguistic and cultural diversity is no longer welcome.

This move does not occur in isolation. It aligns with Trump's broader crackdown on DEI programmes, which were created to address historical inequities and ensure greater representation for minorities in education, employment, and governance. His administration's aggressive stance—eliminating equity-related grants, contracts, and requiring federal contractors to disavow DEI initiatives—suggests that this executive order is not merely about language, but about erasing policies that acknowledge diversity as a strength.

Ironically, many of the earliest settlers who laid the foundation of the United States were non-English

UPFRONT

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speakers. German, French, Dutch and indigenous languages flourished alongside English in colonial America. The unwillingness of past governments to execute an official language originated from the belief that America was unique specifically because it adapted diversity rather than enforcing uniformity.

Even founding figures of the USA like Thomas Jefferson and James Madison never tried to impose English as the national language. The United States thrived for centuries without such a law because language assimilation occurred naturally over generations, without coercion. The assumption that an official language is necessary for national unity is therefore historically unfounded as evident from the situation in India which does not have a single official language but total 22 to respect the multilingual culture.

Moreover, multiple studies have

shown that immigrants in the US overwhelmingly embrace English. According to research by the Pew Research Center, more than 90% of second-generation immigrants speak English proficiently, and by the third generation, native languages often disappear entirely. If language assimilation is already occurring organically, what purpose does this order serve, if not to stigmatise linguistic minorities?

Declaring English as the only official language could have far-reaching consequences for millions of non-English speakers in the US. It may pave the way for restrictive policies, such as reducing the availability of government documents and public services. Such measures could disproportionately affect Latino, Asian, and indigenous communities there, who already face fear of systemic barriers to equal participation in civic life.

The economic implications of this

move are also worth noting. The US economy benefits significantly from its multilingual workforce. Industries such as healthcare, education, tourism, and international trade depend much on employees who can communicate in multiple languages. An English-only policy could inadvertently undermine these sectors by discouraging multilingualism rather than embracing it as an asset.

The debate over language policy is not unique to the United States. Many countries have grappled with similar questions, and their experiences offer valuable lessons which the US must consider before taking any such firm decision. India, for instance, has a total of 22 officially recognised languages and over 1,600 dialects are spoken in different parts of the country. Despite a huge linguistic diversity, English serves as a crucial link language alongside Hindi. Rather than enforcing a national language, India has adopted a pragmatic approach that allows multiple languages to coexist peacefully in governance, education, and daily life. This policy has helped maintain unity in a diverse nation, even as linguistic disputes occasionally flare up.

In contrast, the countries that try imposing monolingualism often meet with backlash. In Canada, the imposition of English in historically French-speak-

ing Quebec led to a huge political tension, ultimately resulting in a bilingual national policy. Similarly, in Spain, the suppression of Catalan and Basque languages under Francisco Franco's regime fuelled resentment and separatist movements that persist to this day.

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Outside the courtroom, the real trial will be whether the American nationals will accept or negate the idea of a monolingual country. The US has long prided itself on being a land of opportunity, where people from all backgrounds can contribute to society without being compelled to leave their identities. This order disagrees with that intent, substituting it with a narrow, exclusionary definition of American identity.

Ultimately, the strength of a country is not determined by the language it mandates, but by the values it upholds. The United States must decide whether it will embrace the pluralism that has defined it for centuries, or retreat into a dividing vision that seeks to erase the very diversity that has made it great.

The world, and history, will be watching.