

O HERALDO

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Goa's Growing Intolerance is a Threat to Free Expression

Goa, a state renowned for its culture of tolerance, open dialogue, and pluralistic values, is increasingly witnessing a disturbing trend that undermines these principles. The recent assault on the former MLA, writer and historian, Uday Bhembre, is a stark reminder of how the atmosphere of democratic debate in the country is rapidly deteriorating. It is also a disturbing example of how a section of society is willing to use threats and intimidation to silence voices of dissent, particularly when it comes to issues involving history and fact-checking.

What transpired in Margao late on Friday is deeply concerning. A group of 20-25 members of the Bajrang Dal descended on the home of Bhembre, a man who has contributed immensely to Goa's political and cultural history, demanding an explanation for his critical take on Chief Minister Pramod Sawant's recent comments about Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. The fact that such a group felt emboldened enough to intimidate an elderly man in his own home speaks volumes about the prevailing climate of fear and aggression.

Bhembre, now in his eighties, was not one to be easily cowed. Despite the threatening mob outside his doorstep, he stood firm, refusing to be intimidated. His family, friends, and supporters rallied to his side in a show of solidarity, and the group dispersed after hurling a series of threats. But the fact that the incident happened at all raises serious questions about the state of law and order in Goa, and more broadly, in India.

Bhembre, a former journalist and a prominent voice in Goa's political and cultural movements, had published a video expressing his views on Shivaji's role in Goa's history, contextualising the facts in the light of historical evidence and documents. His opinions did not align with the narrative that some groups in the state are eager to promote, and it was this divergence that apparently led to the confrontation.

The Bajrang Dal activists were quick to accuse Bhembre of downplaying the atrocities committed by the Portuguese during their colonial rule and criticised his take on Shivaji's legacy. They demanded to know why he was making such videos and insisted that he had no authority to speak on matters of history. These individuals, instead of engaging in a constructive dialogue based on facts and evidence, sought to intimidate and suppress a respected voice of reason.

One of the most disturbing aspects of this episode is the way Bhembre and his wife were forced out of their home, ridiculed, and threatened. Despite this, Bhembre's wife attempted to reason with the group, stressing that differing opinions should be respected and that Bhembre's views were not intended to offend anyone. This peaceful approach, however, was met with disdain and further hostility.

The response from the police, so far, has been equally disappointing. While Bhembre initially refrained from filing a complaint, he eventually approached the Fatorda police to lodge a formal complaint against the attack. Yet, despite the gravity of the situation, no FIR had been registered at the time of writing. Bhembre himself noted the alarming implications of the incident, stating that it was not just a matter of his own safety, but also the safety of the public at large. If such intimidation can be directed at a figure as respected as Bhembre, who can say it will not happen to others?

The lack of action from the police and government is troubling, especially in a state like Goa, where a culture of open dialogue and tolerance has long prevailed. Various organisations have expressed their concern and outrage over the incident. Bhembre's video was grounded in historical facts, yet it was met with hostility simply because it did not conform to a particular narrative.

This is not an isolated incident. Over the past few years, we have witnessed a systematic attempt to curtail free expression across the country. Journalists, intellectuals, and public figures have been harassed, jailed, or subjected to legal action for simply doing their jobs—fact-checking, speaking truth to power, or offering alternative perspectives on contentious issues. Uday Bhembre's case mirrors this troubling pattern.

The use of threats and violence to suppress free expression cannot be allowed to flourish. If we allow such incidents to go unchallenged, we risk undermining the very fabric of our democracy. Goa, must not succumb to the divisive politics of intimidation. This state has long been a beacon of coexistence, dialogue, and mutual respect. The civil society in Goa must rise to defend its democratic values, ensuring that free expression is protected, no matter how unpopular or inconvenient the views may be.

The attack on Uday Bhembre is not just an attack on one individual; it is an attack on the principles of free speech and democracy itself. It is a reminder that no one, regardless of their age or stature, is immune from the forces that seek to silence dissent. It is imperative that the government and law enforcement agencies take immediate action to ensure that such attacks are not tolerated and that the right to free speech is safeguarded.

comment



EUGENIO VLASSA MONTEIRO

Slavery was the worst tragedy of greed for profit and disregard for personal dignity. Millions were taken from Africa to the Americas in incredibly inhumane conditions



onised to insignificance. Therefore, recovery had specific nuances, as referred to below.

Colonies with white majorities were lucky, as they shared resources and means of defence from the coloniser. It was pretty easy to declare independence and continue working without surprises. Nevertheless, many indigenous people were concentrated in ghettos after many others had disappeared in the fight for possession of their land or due to diseases brought by the invaders.

In such context, several countries in Central and South America have freed themselves from the yoke of Spain, such as Mexico, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile and others. Brazil declared independence from Portugal. The United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand did the same with England. The colonising country no longer responded in time to bring soldiers and weapons and subdue the rebels. The new leaders were of the same race as those of the colonisers, so transferring power to new hands was effortless and without tragedies. The newly independent country ended up being an extension of the colonisers, with the

Rich and developing countries. Huge disparities!

Consequences of the Colonisation: One main reason for the disparities between rich and developing countries is colonisation: there were colonisers and colonised, exploiters and exploited. In many situations, important assets were transferred to the coloniser. According to the last Oxfam Report (20 Jan. 2025), the colonial extraction of wealth from India from 1765 to 1900 by the British Empire amounted to \$64.82 trillion. It refers to colonialism as responsible for ruining Indian industrial output by imposing strict protectionist policies that prevented Asian textiles from competing in the market. In 1750, the Indian sub-continent accounted for 25% of global industrial output, drastically reduced to 2% by 1900.

The freedom movements had their expression in the 1950s/70s: It may seem that there was plenty of time to recover from the shock, but the colonial struggle was unequal, with asymmetry of attack and defence power: one side with the power of weaponry and the other dispersed, with meetings prohibited, only able to throw stones or set up ambushes. Everything favoured the maintenance and consolidation of the powerful, reducing the col-

possibility of mutually benefiting from collaboration and facilitating the transition of power.

The humiliating tragedy of slavery and apartheid. In the history that preceded the liberations, many of the future local leaders disappeared because of the disproportionate use of weapons. In other cases, they were enslaved and sold, and many were taken to different continents. Thus, society was disrupted without their leaders and a new organisation imposed by the colonisers. It happened in Africa, where they encountered people of different races, ethnicities and skin pigmentation and used them without respect, enslaving and giving a facade of legitimacy with the parliamentary vote, as done currently with abortion. That allowed them to purchase and sell the enslaved people and take them from one continent to another to work in the crops as there was a lack of local labour force.

Slavery was the worst tragedy of greed for profit and disregard for personal dignity. Millions were taken from Africa to the Americas in incredibly inhumane conditions. During the transport, a high percentage died due to lack of assistance for their illnesses and to the mode of transport occupying minimal space and being tightly tied so that there would be no uprising on the ship. An estimated 12.7 million were taken to the Americas, of which only 10.7 million survived and reached. There were other forms, let us call semi-slavery, in some colonised islands.

These are old times, only worth remembering, for they never repeat. There were forms of segregation, equally detestable, such as apartheid, to make the difference between whites, who considered themselves the superior race, and others. These barbarities came from thinking that intellectual capacities were different: there was the race of masters and that of servants.

All colonised countries wish to advance to achieve acceptable levels of development, allowing their populations to live a decent human life with sufficient and healthy food, assistance in case of illness, and access to basic and advanced education according to each one's possibilities and intellectual preparation.

What makes a country progress? Some countries have made good progress, especially those with a relatively long period of peace; those with good governance, capable of fostering dialogue between all groups to define clear rules of organisation and behaviour, identifying and discovering responses to their desires. All this was done with the possibility of providing education and professional training in an environment where corruption had been made difficult or impossible (as in Singapore). Learning is something natural

for men. Many countries have exemplary development based on the education of their people, such as the Asian Tigers (Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore). Others -such as China, with an authoritarian political regime but liberal in economic terms - have made enviable progress that has awakened its neighbours and led them to ask whether they could grow faster. I am thinking of India, which has had a fascinating trajectory after 1991 when the economic regime, modelled on the centrally planned economy, as in the Soviet Union, shifted to a free initiative model with a decisive growth spurt. It has continued with new reforms to the point that it is a large country with the highest growth rates.

Need to learn from exceptional leaders. The situation in Africa is sad in general. They seem to lack the consistency to take the country's Constitution seriously and learn to live within the defined rules, accepting defeat when it comes without revolts that usually pit some against each other and destroy the ability to build wealth.

Politicians in African countries need to introspect and remember the teachings and behaviours of indisputable leaders like Nelson Mandela from South Africa to understand what the democratic game means, with victories and defeats giving rise to the alternation of power, teaching everyone that the democratic vote is binding to accept and follow.

Another leader in the democratic game is Mahatma Gandhi, who always respected human life, whether of the coloniser or the colonised, because it is of incalculable value. He suffered from the atrocities committed by the English against the Indians, but he never incited any revenge except passive resistance. He never resorted to violence to impose the voice of those multitudes who followed him.

The principles that guided the actions of Mandela and Gandhi should be taught from the earliest grades of primary Education, recalling episodes of their lives when they suffered at the hands of the oppressors without ever using violence against anyone. That was their nobility and a unique, compelling way of defeating the injustices and atrocities of the all-powerful colonisers!

In conclusion, some countries like India were robbed and destroyed but recovered well in an environment ambitious for peace, good governance, and high intellectual and scientific preparation. Others, with white majorities, had a swift transition and did well. Others with slavery and disrespectful rules are struggling with their identity and remaking their personality and growth.

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Secure GI tag for traditional 'pez'

'Pez', also known as 'Canjee' is a Goan rice porridge which epitomises the essence of Goemkar-ponn. In Goan homes, pez prepared from red parboiled rice is usually served before noon with fried salted fish besides tender raw mango pickled in brine and concentrated previous day's curry. The warm gruel is satisfying and filling. Pez is also consumed by Goan Catholics on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. It is consumed by Goan labourers working tirelessly out in the fields under the hot sun thus hydrating them and providing the energy and nutrition to do the laborious work. This simple food is also administered to the sick and the convalescing as it is easy to digest, nutritious which aids in regaining back the strength and any loss of appetite. Pez is also served to parishioners in several parishes in Goa after the mass on feast days. It is high time all Goan restaurants include the traditional Goan pez in its menu. Goa is keen on expanding its offerings of Geographical Indication (GI) tagged products so as to strengthen the authenticity of the local products. With the acquisition of GI tags for many Goan products, it provides recognition and protection to unique products, highlighting their distinctiveness and origin.

Efforts are being made to acquire Geographical Indication (GI) tags for the local Goan products; and it is thanks to these initiatives that a variety of Goa's delicacies like Bebinca have been officially recognized. It would be in the fitness of things to also secure GI tag for the traditional Goan Pez.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Tourism going for a toss in Calangute

It is easier for those in power to shift the blame downward rather than address the root causes and the most marginalised or powerless groups are often made scapegoats. There might be numerous hotels or restaurants which are given to outsiders to run or guest houses on leases to operate but it is criminally illegal for shack holders if they sub let them to outsiders.

There have been murders committed in hotels in the past but life has gone as usual but a murder happened in a shack then all the shack holders are to be punished. The downfall in tourists in the state is because of shack holders for serving idli sambar for break-

fast. We have a MLA in the government for the last fifteen years who doesn't know whether he is in ruling or the opposition. Even worse is the one who is bereft of ideas. It's easier to criticise than to formulate a solution. The once famous constituency is dying of infrastructure to sustain the uncontrollable tourism but it's the fault of everyone involved in the tourism sector and not only of the one elected to run it.

Valent Mascarenhas, California/ Goa

World leaders need to rein in Trump

US President Donald Trump has taken on the role of the world's self-appointed super cop, using his transactional approach to diplomacy, including quid-pro-quo tariffs, to dictate terms across the globe. His recent clash with Ukrainian President Zelenskyy is a glaring example of his combative style. The meeting ended on a sour note after Zelenskyy refused to exchange precious metals for US military aid to combat the Russian invasion. Trump even went so far as to accuse

Ukraine of instigating a potential third world war. He also took jobs at previous US administrations, criticising them for providing vast amounts of military aid and financial assistance to support Ukraine's fight against Russia.

Yet, amidst this turbulent episode, there is a silver lining. European nations have rallied in support of Zelenskyy, rejecting Trump's stance. What initially seemed like a warm reception at the White House quickly deteriorated into tension, as the Ukrainian president held firm in his position, eventually leaving the meeting in frustration.

Back home, US media has been abuzz over an incident in which Trump showed deference to Indian Prime Minister Modi by pulling out a chair for him during a meeting. In many ways, this moment epitomised the growing influence of the US over India, a country that had previously been a tough negotiator in international relations. Former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger once said "It may be dangerous to be America's enemy, but to be America's friend is fatal".

It is now more crucial than ever

people's *edit*

WATER BODIES NEED TO BE RESPECTED

SRIDHAR D'TYER

One of the most distinguishing features as compared to the other planets of Mother Earth, is the presence of water. About 71% of the Earth's surface is covered with water, the salty seas and oceans containing 97%. Freshwater constitutes 3% and is in the form of wells, streams, rivers, lakes, ponds and locked in ice and glaciers in the polar regions and in icy terrains like the Himalayas. It is given that water is essential for the existence of flora, fauna and humans. Water is also needed for industries, in factories, during mining operations, construction of infrastructure etc.

As elsewhere in the world, India is fortunate to have numerous water bodies but we fail to respect them. Though we pray to the rivers and conduct rituals, but overall, we tend to use the water bodies as 'garbage collectors'. We pollute them in various ways such as by throwing garbage, discharging untreated sewage and industrial wastes, reside along the banks and vicinity of water bodies and dispose waste in them, fill the water bodies to erect buildings, bridges and so forth.

The effects of the above actions are noticed when flooding occurs during monsoon because the channels for the water flow are choked with waste or have been concretised. Later we blame nature and climate change for human-induced water disasters.

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) assessed 603 Indian rivers and found 311 stretches along 279 rivers to have low Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD) and high content of faecal coliform. Data indicate that 25% of the municipal solid waste is not processed.

India has taken several remedial measures to keep the water bodies clean and spent crores of rupees yet, large amounts of untreated agricultural, industrial and domestic run-offs still continue to pollute the water bodies.

The government can do only so much by cleaning a few kilometres length of the Ganga, Yamuna or other rivers. Temple authorities cannot repeatedly spend money to clean the ponds nor the coastal States can keep the beaches spotless umpteen times. There are stringent rules and regulations against polluting water bodies but it is anybody's guess about their strict compliance and implementations, in letter and spirit.

It is for the people to maintain the water bodies as uncontaminated as possible by not littering them. We must take the responsibility to keep the water bodies unpolluted by refraining from discharging waste and untreated wastes of any kind, throwing garbage, by not bathing, and washing clothes, animals and vehicles and in several other ways.

Cleanliness is not only next to godliness but would also help to maintain hygiene and/or to stop and minimise the spread of water-borne diseases. Let us not take for granted the 3% of freshwater on the earth for in no time it could reduce due to increase in pollution, population, deforestation, environmental destruction and associated changes in the weather pattern and rainfall.

Let us make a small beginning by keeping the water bodies in our vicinity clean. This could be at an individual level or as a group of concerned citizens.

If treated with reverence water is the elixir of life else it could turn bitter and toxic and may lead to 'water wars'.

for world leaders to unite and rein in Trump's unchecked idiosyncrasies before they spiral out of control, as American hegemony threatens to reshape global dynamics.

Everette Assis Telles, Margao

From ally to asset: The US-Ukraine fallout

The abrupt failure of US-Ukraine talks underscores a troubling low in American diplomacy. Trump's insistence on securing indefinite rights to Ukraine's rare minerals in exchange for past aid—while rejecting Zelenskyy's request for security guarantees—was a blatant betrayal of trust. Ukraine, once a key ally, found itself treated as a business opportunity rather than a partner in need. The talks' undiplomatic nature, with raised voices, Trump walking out, and Zelenskyy skipping lunch, further damaged relations. This shift signals that US commitments are now transactional, undermining credibility and emboldening adversaries like Russia. Such treatment of a war-torn ally weakens global trust in the US, proving that administration changes do not necessarily maintain the nation's moral or strategic responsibilities or commitments. The fallout from this episode will have lasting consequences on international alliances and geopolitical stability.

Gopalaswamy J Chennai