

O HERALDO

Gruesome murder ahead of Women's Day ominous for gender equality

March 8 is celebrated the world over as International Women's Day. This year, the United Nations' theme is, "For All Women and Girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment." The theme calls for action that can unlock equal rights, power and opportunities for all and a feminist future, where no one is left behind. Central to this vision is empowering the next generation—youth, particularly young women and adolescent girls—as catalysts for lasting change.

The World Economic Forum has painted a grim picture, based on the current rate of progress, that full gender parity can be reached only by the year 2158, that is 133 years hence. The International Women's Day website has a different theme based on the above analysis, ie. 'Accelerate Action for gender equality' with increased momentum and urgency in addressing the systemic barriers and biases that women face, both in personal and professional spheres.

On March 6, two days ahead of International Women's Day, the macabre murder of a five-year-old innocent girl in Usgao, sent a chill down every Goan's spine, who has known the state to be one of the most peaceful in India.

Earlier speculation was rife was carried out as part of a black magic ritual to help the couple conceive a child, however, the police ruled out this possibility, stating that forensic experts had found no evidence of occult practices at the crime scene.

The once peaceful state of Goa, has gained such notoriety that it is now being known for crimes and murders, not only in the national, but international circuit for crimes. A frustrated Chief Minister of Goa has come out against these crimes, saying that most of the crimes are being committed by migrants

The top brass of the police now claim that the deceased child's mother and the accused woman had a heated argument over a matter and in a fit of rage, the accused couple took the child inside their house and killed her

Whatever may be the reason, being 25 years into the 21st Century, being an aspiring 5 trillion dollar economy and flaunting rapid progress, bullet trains and slogans such as Beti Bachao and Beti Pado, the kidnapping, murder and gruesome burial in the backyard, of an innocent girl, is a national shame with regard to gender equality and respect for women, especially the girl child.

Since it qualifies for the rarest of rare, brutal and gruesome case, locals of the vicinity are so shocked and filled with such revulsion that they have called for quick trial and capital punishment. The unfortunate mother of the girl, a Goan was married to a man from Ratnagiri. For two years, the wife and the two girls suffered terribly at the hands of the father. Due to this the mother decided to return to her mother's house in Usgao. They had been staying there for about a year and the neighbour, the childless couple --Babasaheb Alat, 52, and his wife befriended the girls. On March 5, the wife of Alat is seen on CCTV footage taking the girl into the house. The girl was not seen coming out of the house. Alat sacrificed the girl and buried her in the backyard and kept a huge vessel over the grave.

On March 6, he tried to fool the police by even joining the search party, since the girl had been missing from March 5. The CCTV footage provided the clinching evidence to nail the migrant couple.

The once peaceful state of Goa, has gained such notoriety that it is now being known for crimes and murders, not only in the national, but international circuit for crimes. A frustrated Chief Minister of Goa has come out against these crimes, saying that most of the crimes are being committed by migrants. The demography of Goa is undergoing a rapid change from the 1980s, due to the growth of tourism and large scale influx of migrants due to the construction and real estate boom.

Politically, the migrants have become a boon to the politicians, since slums of 3000 to 4000 migrants form potent and 'political fortune swinging' vote banks for MLAs in almost every constituency. The recent statement of an MLA that no one can touch Moti Dongor is an indication of how politicians protect these vote banks and may even interfere with police conducting raids in such slums. Such vote banks exist in almost every constituency, due to which the MLAs win.

Though by and large there is sufficient gender equality based on various HDI parameters among the three major religions in Goa, within the family, at the societal level and legally, with the implementation of the common civil code by the Portuguese and high level of education, there is still scope for improvement in terms of political participation, job opportunities, etc for women.

The Goa government will have to think of targeted strategies to ensure gender equality, education and empowerment of women in the slums as almost 40 percent of the population of Goa can now be presumed to be migrant.



SAMIR NAZARETH

Goans blame outsiders for Goa's problems. Many in India have a plethora of choices - minorities, the past, the Nehruvian socio-economic model - to blame for India's current predicament



The tragedy of Goa is that everyone wants a piece of the pie without accepting the responsibility for the outcomes.

Goa facts

Per the 2011 Census, Goa's population was 14.59 lakhs. This was an increase from the 13.48 lakh as determined in the 2001 census. Per Goa government website population growth rate of 14.8% during 1991-2000 is lower than what it was in 1981-

1990 ie 16.08%. The birth rate has fallen since Goa achieved statehood - 18.24 per 1000 in 1987-88 to 10.87 in 2022-23 and 10.73 in 2023-24. As per the Goa government website Goa's current population is 18.2 lakhs.

Domestic tourists have increased since the formation of this state - 7.34 lakhs in 1987-88 to 76.69 lakhs in 2022-23, and 84.32 lakhs in 2023-24. Hotels and lodging houses have increased from 275 with 11065 beds in 1987-88 to 7483 with 108679 beds in 2023-24.

The Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) at current prices has increased from Rs 856.15 lakhs in 1987-88 to an estimated Rs 10653257 lakhs in 2023-34. The per capita income at current prices has increased from Rs 7,618/- to an estimated Rs 674684/- in the same time period.

On the other hand, the number of people registered in government employment exchanges has increased from 14065 in 1987-88 to 21,008 in 2022-23, and 18,131 in 2023-24. The vacancies that were notified by this body were 4800; 15,001 and 21,852 for the periods mentioned above. However, the vacancies filled were 1219, 2135 and 1845 respectively. The unemployment rate in Goa is 8.7%, the youth unemployment rate is 19.1%. These figures are contested by the Goan government.

Taxes on property and capital transactions have increased from Rs 253.36 lakhs in 1987-88 to Rs 128552.73 lakhs in 2023-24. The government has spent crores on vanity smart City projects. Goa is becoming a prime market for purchase of second homes. Some second homes are offered at between Rs 40 and 50 crores. Per Savills Research 'The standard sizes of villas have shrunk to almost half from 5,400 sq. ft. to 2,700 sq. ft. in the past five years'. The demand for land has increased to such an extent that it has decreased the size of villas. Is the pie decreasing and therefore more is being made of less. Or to cater to the high demand, builders are building smaller but making a bigger bang for their buck? It's a moot question but - 'would Goa's falling birth rate need more houses?'

There must be a link between increase in per capita income; higher GSDP; manifold increase in tourists, and property and capital transaction taxes; Goa's high unem-

ployment; the much-reported increase in crime rate, and air pollution (poor on Feb 25th as per aqi.in).

Rest of the country

India's GDP is growing, domestic and foreign tourist numbers are near pre-Covid figures, and direct tax and GST collection is increasing. The per capita income has increased from Rs 125,883 in 2019 to Rs 184,205 (provisional) in 2024. However, World Inequality Lab, finds 'extreme levels of inequality in India In 2022-23, 22.6% of national income went to just the top 1%, the highest level recorded in our series since 1922, The top 1% wealth share stood at 40.1% in 2022-23'. Per Blume Ventures, Indians are not saving enough because of an increase in unsecured loans, and household debt to GDP is at an all-time high. Further, consumption in India is not widening but deepening ie the consumption market is not fuelled by new consumers but by current consumers consuming more expensive goods. Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy data indicates the unemployment rate was 8.3% in December 2024.

The inability to bridge the wealth gap is mirrored in the country's inability to control air pollution which costs India 3% of her GDP annually.

Is there a link between increase in GDP, high GST collection, pollution, inequality, and unemployment?

Goans blame outsiders for Goa's problems. Many in India have a plethora of choices - minorities, the past, the Nehruvian socio-economic model - to blame for India's current predicament.

The increase in government collection seems to be benefiting a few, others - who face an uncertain future - are told that they should be proud of the many vanity projects. This makes for India's very own Marie Antionette moment which is exacerbated by this absurd blame-game.

On its website the Goa government claims 'Goa is the coolest place in India', and 'Goa is forever'. The Government of India promised Acche Din, Viksit Bharat, and in its 2022-23 Budget introduced the Amrit Kaal Budget. There is just one question to both - For Whom?

(Samir Nazareth is an author and writes on socio-economic and environmental issues)

The challenge for Goa and India

people's *edit*

THINKING ALOUD ON NOISE REDUCTION

VISWANATHAN VAIDYANATHAN

Caliban, an enigmatic character in William Shakespeare's play The Tempest, muses about his native island thus: "The isle is full of noises, sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not." Alas, the noises that surround us in daily life are far from sweet airs.

Modern street vendors have taken to technology like fish to water, outfitting their vehicles with loudspeakers that broadcast pre-recorded messages at ear-shattering decibels. Curious about the process behind these recordings, I encountered a vendor selling vegetables from a mobile truck. When I inquired about the prices, he didn't respond directly. Instead, he gestured for me to wait, stepped aside, and used a mobile app to record the updated vegetable prices in his coarse voice. Within minutes, the recording was live on the speaker attached to his truck.

While it's encouraging to see street vendors embracing technology to simplify their business, the noise generated by these loudspeakers is certainly less endearing. The arrival of a knife sharpener in our locality in Chennai is heralded by a war cry so intense that residents get an adrenalin rush to run towards him and surrender all their kitchen knives at his feet for sharpening.

Add to this, the medley of garbage collection vehicles with their signature jingles. A long procession of speaker-fitted street vendors march past our area from early morning till evening, featuring a diverse array of sellers: fruit, vegetables, flowers, potted plants, and waste paper vendors; sellers of sleeping mats, Flipkart (a steamed rice dish) and kolam flour; repair services for everything from sofas to gadgets; and traders offering money for old laptops, used gadgets, and silk sarees. This ever-growing list seems to mock the likes of Amazon, Flipkart, and other e-commerce giants. While some traditional vendors still shout their wares the old-fashioned way, their numbers are dwindling.

Public transport comes with its own set of auditory challenges. Some co-passengers treat their phone conversations as theatrical performances, projecting their voices at volumes suited for a stadium. From loud bargaining over purchases to executives chastising contractors and bosses reprimanding employees, a whole spectrum of workplace drama unfolds on the move. Others unleash WhatsApp or YouTube videos without headphones, creating a chaotic blend of soundscapes—political rants on one side, spiritual sermons on the other, leaving the rest of us stuck in a surreal blend of spiritual politics or political spirituality.

Stepping out of a metro station in Chennai, I once mistook the sudden barrage of explosions for a transformer burst or, worse, enemy carpet bombing. To my relief (or dismay), it was a funeral procession where crackers were being burst in close proximity to passing vehicles. While regulations limit fireworks during festivals, such rules seem absent for other occasions. The result? Deafening and hazardous fireworks that jeopardize both public safety and peace of mind.

In our evolving hybrid work culture, where online classes, seminars and remote work are the norm, such disturbances can be more than just inconvenient—they can be debilitating. Perhaps it's time for policymakers, law enforcers and stakeholders to do some 'loud thinking' about keeping public spaces and residential areas calm. Ironically, even a jarring debate on television about reducing noise pollution could spark meaningful steps in this direction. So, let's make some noise about noise reduction.

Check on occult practices needed

In a country which is taking giant strides in Information Technology (IT), digital world, space science, etc, it is shocking to note that there still exist people who believe in black magic or superstitious beliefs.

While many cultures have beliefs and practices surrounding magic, there is no scientific evidence to support the existence of supernatural forces. Black magic "works" only on mentally weak people, not because it actually works but because it affects their psychology. The recent suspected case of human sacrifices in Kerala has brought into focus the severity of crimes related to witchcraft and occult practices and the prevalence of superstitious beliefs, black magic, and sorcery in a progressive state like Kerala.

In India, practicing black magic is punishable with up to seven years in prison and a fine ranging from Rs 5,000 to Rs 50,000. Goa does not have a specific anti-superstition law, but it does have laws that can be used to deal with superstitious practices. To a large extent there may not be instances of occult practices in the state. Nevertheless police need to keep a watch on such occult practices in the state.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Will Goans be given first preference for jobs ?

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant

Unfair pricing by private hospitals

The impunity with which private hospitals make patients bleed financially is a poor reflection on the Central and state governments, which have been found deficient in providing affordable medical care. In this context, the Supreme Court has rightly called on the Union and State governments to draft policies aimed at preventing the exploitation of patients and their families in private hospitals. This practice is often seen as unethical and anti-competitive as in-house hospital pharmacies charges are excessive compared to outside pharmacies. Patients should have the freedom to buy medicines from any pharmacy of their choice based on price, quality, or convenience. Hospitals might push for specific brands or medicines due to tie-ups with pharma companies.

The onus is on policymakers to frame guidelines to curb rampant exploitation of patients and their families. Government agencies like the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission and Competition Commission of India should strictly monitor and penalise such practices. A comprehensive reform of the drug regulatory system can go a long way in easing the woes of

happless patients
Gregory Fernandes, Mumbai

Smuggling of drugs across the India-Pakistan border is quite rampant. Punjab shares approximately 553 km of the border between the two nations. As is known, narco-terrorism and arms influx have driven the youth of Punjab into a state into despair and something needs to be done to eliminate or control the dual evil.

Evidently, the use of technology is quite crucial in preventing the influx of drugs and arms. The Punjab government is said to be keen on utilising the anti-drone technology to beat the perpetrators of drugs' smuggling at their own game.

Although the Border Security Force is totally engaged in thwarting the nefarious designs of the unscrupulous elements from Pakistan, a coordinated effort is the need of the hour. Anti-drone techniques like radars, cameras and jammers are a few globally used methods.

Radio frequency techniques and Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) jammers are highly acclaimed anti-drone technologies that are currently

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letterstotheeditor

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