

# O HERALDO

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## Goa stares at acute water crisis

Water is no longer just a resource; it is power. Experts have long warned that future conflicts will not be over oil, land, or gold—but over water. In the 21st century, dwindling freshwater supplies, rising sea levels due to climate change, and surging global population growth have made water management one of the most complex and critical geopolitical challenges. The demand for water is projected to increase by 55% between 2000 and 2050, making it more valuable than oil in the coming decades. Yet, despite this looming crisis, the Goa government appears alarmingly passive while neighbouring states like Karnataka and Maharashtra actively exploit Goa's water resources, threatening the state's future stability and survival.

Take the Mhadei River dispute. A long-standing issue that threatens to dry up Goa's lifeline. Karnataka's government has boldly announced in its budget that a contractor has been appointed to execute the Kalsa

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Bhandura project, aimed at diverting Mhadei's waters. This blatant provocation should have triggered an immediate and aggressive response from the Goa government. Instead, Goa's Chief Minister has offered a feeble defence, claiming that the Union Environment Ministry's decision holds more weight than Karnataka's budget declaration. This passive stance is nothing short of negligence.

Every drop of water redirected away from Goa is a direct blow to the state's ecological and economic stability. Goa's agricultural sector, drinking water supply, and biodiversity; all dependent on the Mhadei are now under threat. How much longer can the government afford to sit on its hands while Karnataka siphons away Goa's rightful water?

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The Supreme Court has already ruled that mining activities cannot be carried out in submerged or water body areas, and it is the state's constitutional duty to protect these resources. But Maharashtra has brazenly violated these rules, allowing illegal mining to continue unchecked. And what has the Goa government done? Nothing. Instead of applying diplomatic and legal pressure on Maharashtra, Goa's leadership has turned a blind eye.

It defies logic. The Goa government has invested heavily in Tillari, yet it remains a mute spectator as Maharashtra destroys the very infrastructure that was meant to secure Goa's water future. The frequent bursting of the Tillari canal leading to the loss of billions of litres of water is a direct consequence of this mismanagement. This isn't just administrative failure; it's betrayal. When Goa's resources are being looted, silence is complicity.

Environmentalists have been sounding the alarm for years. Senior environmental expert Dr Rajendra Kerkar has repeatedly warned that ongoing blasting in the Tillari Dam region will drastically reduce its water retention capacity, ultimately leading to water scarcity in Goa. Just this week, environmental activist Ramesh Gawas visited the site with officials from the Goa Water Resources Department. The team reportedly left in shock after witnessing the extent of the illegal mining. Five to six illegal mines are currently operating in the area. But despite repeated warnings, the Goa government has done little more than shrug its shoulders.

If this trend continues, even the booming tourism industry that Goa thrives on will suffer. Without adequate water supply, hotels and restaurants will struggle, and the ripple effect will devastate the local economy. Yet, the government remains unmoved. How can the leadership sleep at night, knowing that Goa's water security is being dismantled brick by brick by neighbouring states?

If Karnataka succeeds in diverting Mhadei's water and Maharashtra continues to destroy Tillari, Goa will face not only water scarcity but social and political instability. Water is survival, and without it, Goa's future as a thriving state is in jeopardy. The Goa government's reluctance to confront these issues head-on raises serious questions about its competence and loyalty to its people.

comment



JOSE MARIA MIRANDA

**Stifling dissent and being intolerant of criticism and opposition, is unacceptable in a democracy. It is also undesirable and dangerous, though it may help, for a while, keep away and silence one's opponents. We know what a humiliating defeat Indira Gandhi had to face, subsequent to the imposition of Emergency**

### The Fate of Press Freedom in India Over Years.



been unabashedly aggressive towards criticism and exposure of its misdeeds and the so-called independent agencies have succumbed to pressures and become Government agents and most of the media has caved in to such an extent that much of what is happening either remains unknown to the outside world or only half-truths are revealed. People have not even spared the judiciary, being highly critical of it, though it still seems to be our last hope. It is reported that in the last ten years, 20 journalists have been murdered in India and it ranks 159th in Press Freedom among

## Aggressiveness, arrogance and intolerance unacceptable in a democracy

People in public life, be it politicians, bureaucrats, journalists, historians, writers, opinion makers, activists, etc are always subject to be applauded, criticized or even assaulted, especially if they are vocal and dare refuse to toe the official line.

Stifling dissent and being intolerant of criticism and opposition, is unacceptable in a democracy. It is also undesirable and dangerous, though it may help, for a while, keep away and silence one's opponents. We know what a humiliating defeat Indira Gandhi had to face, subsequent to the imposition of Emergency.

That was because by shutting people up, jailing Opposition leaders and curbing Press freedom, she was unable to assess the people's anger and disillusionment over these and other happenings. Undoubtedly, it was perhaps the darkest period of the history of Independent India and just as the post-Independence communal and 1984 anti-Sikh riots, we want no repetition of this sad past and no effort must be spared to ensure that we are never any close to such incidents.

In the last ten years or so, however, India has witnessed ample instances of extreme intolerance. The aversion to opposition and to voicing the truth has been so acute that many have labelled it as undeclared Emergency. Even if one wants to disagree, the fact remains that the Government has

180 countries. Rana Ayub, the fearless journalist, who writes to Washington Post says in India Journalism is under assault. Not unexpectedly, she has been a victim of smear campaign and several FIRs and Court cases have been filed against her, for being outspoken about the journalistic freedom in India.

The ED, CBI & Income Tax have been used as weapons to frequently and selectively terrorise Opposition leaders, particularly during election season and reveal a pattern designed at weakening the Opposition rather than conducting a free and fair investigation, which would be welcomed by all those who aspire for a good and corruption-free governance.

However, even after the marginal win of NDA in the General Elections and just before Jarkhand & Maharashtra Assembly polls, some compromised investigative agencies raided and arrested Jarkhand Chief Minister Hemant Sorren and in Maharashtra Sanjay Raut and others closely associated with Uddhav Thackeray. Ajit Pawar, whose 1000 crore worth assets, including a resort in Goa, were seized by I T Dept in 2021, accused of benami transactions, was absolved and had his assets returned a day after he took over as Dy CM in BJP led Maharashtra Ministry in late 2024.

In 2023, Press reports indicated that: 1. From 2014 to 2022, 121 political leaders had been investigated, of which 115 were from Opposition 2. There was a fourfold increase in ED cases against politicians as compared to the ten year rule of UPA 3. During the period, only 25 cases had been concluded of around 6000 registered, the percentage being just 0.42%. 4. Twenty three prominent Opposition leaders facing corruption charges got relief after switching to BJP of which three were absolved and cases closed. Remaining twenty cases have either been stalled or put in cold storage

About two years back, 14 political parties had petitioned the Supreme Court against the Government misusing the CBI, ED and other agencies to clamp down on dissent and to incarcerate Opposition leaders, thus leading to an uneven playing field. The petition also pointed out that scrutiny often eased for Opposition leaders who subsequently joined the BJP, suggesting a selective approach to investigations. However, a bench, under then CJ Chandrachud refused to entertain the petition, stating that politicians cannot claim higher immunity

and asserting that if Opposition feels that their "political space has shrunk, the remedy is in that space, the political space, not the Court".

It may be recalled that, under the same CJ, the SC did not step in to decide several years old crucial cases pending before it, on the draconian Prevention of Money Laundering (PMLA), which legal experts feel have a direct impact on the rights of the accused as guaranteed under the Constitution.

Closer home, we have had lamentable cases of intolerance, presumably either promoted or abetted by those in power. The late night assault on the privacy of the reputed octogenarian writer, former legislator and noted and respectable personality, Adv Uday Bhemre is not only reprehensible but also grossly distasteful and it only proves to what levels some fanatics can descend to advance and impose by force and sheer numbers their own views and agenda. The same aggressiveness, brazenness and arrogance which is witnessed in going ahead with projects and decisions to benefit a few influential individuals, by discarding people's concerns, interests, welfare and even human rights, is observed in such actions which put decent people with integrity and intelligence to shame.

Similarly, extremely condemnable was not alone the attack on the well-known and vocal activist Rama Kankonkar but his earlier arrest on flimsy grounds, which are nothing but attempts at curbing activism, which the Government is fearful of, as it is now spreading all over Goa and coming in the way of it going ahead with its evil designs.

What is shocking is that while some people are being targeted for their genuine views, grievances and actions, others are being treated with kids' gloves. This has been evident in umpteen cases like those of Fr Bolmax, Velingkar, Bhemre, Kankonkar, etc. In some cases, FIRs are still to be registered and some simple cases are treated as non-cognizable, whereas graver ones as non-cognizable.

We are painfully aware that nowhere in the country, the Police acts impartially, with few honourable exceptions, but it shouldn't be oblivious that Governments change and some day or the other the wrath of the people could turn on those who unjustly target them, at the behest of those in power.

(The author is a retired banker)

people's edit

## PERCEPTIONS AND REALITY

IBONIO D'SOUZA

We humans are capable of thinking thoughts only one after the other, and not have several thoughts at the same time. This limitation often leads us to look at things or people with one single perspective. So when we are dealing with a situation or thought or another person, we tend to see only what is obvious to us, not realising that everything in this Universe has multiple sides and aspects to it. If we were able to literally tilt our heads, and have a different view or perspective of everything, we would have a more rounded view of life and would automatically become less judgmental and upset, and more loving and accepting.

If the behavior of the other person suits us, if it sits well with our belief systems and conditionings, we call it good and it makes us happy. Whereas if the behaviour is contrary to our expectations, comfort zone, our belief systems, we label it as bad or unwanted. In all such circumstances, what we actually need to do, is to try and see if there can be a different explanation, a different point of view, for the behaviour. We need to become empathetic, and move into that person's shoes, to see why he or she behaved in a particular manner. When we stick to our perspective, we become unidimensional, and we land up with more judgments, anger, hatred, irritation, frustrations, jealousy and grief.

Consider our earth which is a globe. It is impossible for us to see it from any one angle and conclude about its totality. When we are focused on one part of our world, like the United States of America, we cannot obviously see the continent of Australia...and so on. The point being we cannot inspect the world from any one angle or perspective and come to a conclusion. We obviously need a global view.

In the same vein, when dealing with daily life, with events, with people, with our successes and failures, it is easy to see things in a particular manner, in a particular view, which is often dictated by how that event affects us and by our conditionings. But in order to get full information, we need to move our thoughts and vision around, and examine the event or person or behaviour completely enough.

When faced with situations, we must try and take a global or complete or a different view, rather than trying to have a narrow tunnel vision. It is obvious that even when we meet someone, we can see that person's face, but cannot see his/her back at the same time. If we shift behind that person, we can see the back but we lose sight of the face. To see the person totally, we would constantly have to keep moving around him and changing our opinions about him. Likewise, we need to constantly be gathering, editing and updating our information about people and events, so as to get the complete picture and complete truth, rather than to stand in one place and get only one fixed, partial view of situations, people and human behaviour. Everything in this Universe is dynamic and constantly changing... and that makes it necessary for our opinions and perspectives to also be constantly changing to live life as realistically as possible.

### Reopen schools as per favourable conditions

The delegation of parents and Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) members are absolutely right in urging the government to reconsider its decision on reopening schools. They have raised valid concerns over extreme heat, water shortages and power fluctuations, arguing that reopening in April would be both uncomfortable and unhealthy for students as well as teachers. Furthermore, such a decision will only create more anxiety among parents.

The government should consult the Meteorological Department to assess weather conditions before making such crucial decisions. The effects of extreme heat are unpredictable—what if there is an earthquake or a heatwave? Have we considered the dehydration risks for students?

According to the government circular, the academic year 2025-26 for Goa Board schools will commence on April 1 for Classes VI to X and XII, with summer vacations starting from May 1, and reopening on June 3. While the government has assured that classes in April will end by 11.30 am to mitigate the impact of summer heat, has it taken into account the current rising temperatures? Do classrooms have air-conditioning? Forget air-conditioning—how can students even sit in such unfavourable natural conditions? This decision must be recon-

sidered. Please revoke this directive and issue a revised, balanced circular that takes into account the concerns of Goan communities and students. Schools and colleges must reopen only when weather conditions are naturally favourable.

Rajesh Banaulikar, Arpora

### Rampant land scams must be stopped

The ongoing land scams in Goa under the present government reveal that corruption has reached its peak. Government authorities seem to have no hesitation in approving dubious land deals, as they are themselves complicit in the system.

Can land ownership be claimed solely based on Form 1 & XIV without possessing old documents proving purchase, inheritance, or legal transfer? Some unscrupulous lawyers manipulate this process by preparing fraudulent title deeds using Form 1 & XIV as the sole legal document. How are such transactions even approved by the government?

To make matters worse, individuals are changing their names through unofficial means just to match the records in Form 1 & XIV. When queried under the RTI Act, crucial documents are often found to be missing. Shouldn't the police and the registrar's

### letterstotheeditor

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office take strict action against such fraudulent land sellers?

The government must step in immediately and ensure that any land sale where original sale deeds or inheritance records are not produced is flagged as fraudulent. Simply stating that Form 1 & XIV is not a legal document is not enough—any transactions based on it should be suspended. If such sales are allowed to proceed, the government must take responsibility as a guarantor, considering that many overseas Goans have had their land sold off illegally with the involvement of corrupt officials.

The Chief Minister must ensure that no sale deed is finalised unless all ownership documents are verified. Furthermore, a dedicated police officer must be appointed to investigate fraudulent land deals and hold the culprits accountable.

Gregory E D'Souza, Siolim

### Health is the only wealth

You may have a thousand problems in life but you can tackle them one way or the other...until you have a problem with your health. Then, it becomes the only problem. All of a sudden, the issues which led to stress like relationships, money, deadlines at work, bitchy relatives, children, a bigger house/a bigger car/a fat-

ter bank balance or rather a lack of them etc pale into insignificance. If you come down with a major illness or terminal disease even your family too suffers.

Endless rounds of hospitals, never-ending pathology tests, CT/ MRI scans, doctor's consultation fees, followups, nursing care, skyrocketing costs of medicines some of which might have to be imported from abroad exhaust the immediate family physically, mentally, financially and emotionally.

Medical insurance companies reject claims at the slightest pretext which makes matters worse. Illness makes even the most beautiful things in life lose their meaning. The aphorism 'Health is wealth' is pretty outdated, now 'Health is the only wealth'. Proper diet and regular exercise at least five days a week will ensure that 70% of the diseases will never afflict you, and if you are lucky to live in a pollution free environment that figure goes up to 80%. Good health first and foremost, everything else is secondary; this should be your life mantra.

Vinay Dwivedi, Benaullim

### Rupturing pipelines and depleting water level

It is learnt that over a million litres of drinking water went waste after the valve of the main

Selaulim water pipeline was damaged by a JCB machine at Paroda on Tuesday, disrupting water supply to Salcete and adjoining areas.

It must be said that there needs to be a permanent signboard next to the air-valve which is at ground-level. In another incident, a pipeline which was ruptured at Guirim last week during excavation remains unrepaired leading to wastage of huge amounts of water. Ironically the government has advised the citizens to make judicious use of water when a large amount of water is going waste due to damage to the water pipeline.

It is necessary to always contact utility companies before digging to locate underground utilities and take necessary precautions during excavation. There is a need to use hand tools to carefully expose and avoid damaging existing pipes. Be that as it may, the rapid depleting water levels in key reservoirs across the state have become a major issue with most reservoirs reportedly hitting the 50 percent mark except for Selaulim dam in South Goa which remains relatively stable at 70 per cent capacity.

It is learnt that the water level in Tillari reservoir has suddenly dropped to 52 percent. And we are just at the beginning of a long summer season ahead with over two and half months left before the onset of monsoon. It seems that (God forbid) Goa could face a water crisis this year.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco