

## O HERALDO

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## Flying squads must swoop in on all illegal constructions

**S**hocked by the rapid pace of illegal constructions across the state, the high court of Bombay at Goa unleashed its wrath on the state government and issued a slew of directions to the authorities to ensure that the sunshine state retains the lush and verdant landscapes that it is so popular for. Among the directions from the high court is the call to establish flying squads to address complaints of illegal constructions, particularly over the weekends when most government offices are shut and violators get a free hand to build without permission left, right and centre.

Justice M S Karnik and Justice Nivedita Mehta, who gave out the directions after hearing a suo motu public interest litigation pertaining to illegal constructions and encroachments, were clearly distraught when they said, "Open spaces are encroached upon. Paddy fields are being converted without any permission.... Roads and road-widening areas are encroached upon without any authority of law. Illegal constructions are

also put up in no-development zones. The competent authorities either do not take action against such illegal activities or avoid taking such actions."

The high court's observations are sad but true. It rightly said that rampant illegal construction without any authority of law has caused the wholesale change of Goa's landscape, unfortunately, for the worse. It in fact comes as no surprise any longer to see buildings come up virtually overnight, considering the pace at which land in Goa is being traded for crores and crores of rupees just so that the who's-who can lay their hands on a piece of paradise and develop it with scant concern for the undue burden plush projects - be they residential or commercial - put on Goa's infantile infrastructure and natural resources.

Among the directions from the high court was the procurement of a special number for every flying squad to enable citizens to register their complaints via WhatsApp pertaining to illegal constructions. It called for stoppage of the constructions in question without an hour of receiving such complaints that must be backed by visual evidence too.

In probably what is the most far-reaching section of its directions, the high court directed all health officers to not issue any permissions under provisions of the Goa Public Health Act for the supply of electricity and water connections to any commercial or residential structures unless the requisite permissions for construction have been obtained along with technical clearance certificates.

The high court has essentially put the entire administration to work - right from the collectors to the municipalities and panchayats - in the crackdown on illegal constructions, particularly those that come up along areas that have been set aside specifically for road widening, irrespective of whether they are meant for commercial or residential use. It has even created seven categories of illegal buildings, including separate categories for those mushrooming in paddy fields and on government and comunidade property.

Measures such as these must definitely be lauded as they are so desperately needed if the state is to be shielded - however little - from the onslaught of concretisation. However, it remains to be seen if the authorities that have been tasked to ensure justice is served in a timely fashion step up to the job and do it without fear or favour.

It is obvious that there will be immense pressure and several attempts by violators - especially those flush with money - to persuade the flying squads to look the other way while they continue to build with gay abandon. However, it is up to the authorities concerned to stand up, fight the good fight and bring the violators to task according to the laws in force. It will be hard, but it must be done if Goa has any chance of being saved at all. Else, the high court's genuine concern and action towards preserving the already degrading landscape will have come to a naught.

## comment



GLADSTONE D'COSTA

It was unthinkable for the US and Russia to vote against a UN resolution condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine and then going further to jointly push a resolution to call for an end to the war without holding Russia responsible for it. This has turned years of post-war US foreign policy and leadership on its head



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## Donald 'Trumps' the world

**U**nfortunately, the title does not refer to a card game, but to the shenanigans by the newly elected US President no less; much to the dismay and discomfort of the world. So far, his presidency has consisted of a series of wild exaggerations, taking liberties with facts. He claims to have been elected by a wild margin; he won by a slender margin of 1.5% of the popular vote. Ukraine has received, according to him, \$300 billion in aid; it is \$100 billion; Ukraine started the war, and it goes on and on. In his first term as President, the Washington Post found 30,573 false statements made by him. He seems to have embarked on breaking his own record. I cannot help comparing the Ukrainian situation to Hitler browbeating Neville Chamberlain into swallowing up Sudetenland by Germany on the grounds of similar ethnic origins. "Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it". Hitler didn't stop there and neither will Putin; who doesn't even recognise Ukraine as a country, but part of the old Soviet Union, and therefore entitled to overrun it. Would Trump or his VP dare speak to Putin or Kim Jung Un the way he spoke to the Ukrainian President? It reeks of undiluted diplomatic bullying never before seen publicly in the history of diplomacy. Regrettably, his insanity doesn't stop there, because his MAGA vote bank thrives on it.

around? There is no doubt that sanctions are hurting Russia, with 9% of GDP expenditure on defence and 11% inflation. What made Trump ease off on sanctions? Some foreign policy experts suggest this is a means to contain China which the US sees as the real enemy. To believe that Trump could breach the bond between these two friends of old is, as they say, "living in cloud-cuckoo land". He doesn't stop there. Canada would now become part of the US; ignoring the fact that King Charles is still the head of that country. "Greenland will become ours one way or another". And most alarmingly, all Palestinians will be thrown out of Gaza, which the Americans will then turn into another "riviera". More pipe dreams and delusions of grandeur. Interestingly, he has his eye on Ukrainian mineral wealth. If he fails to strike a deal with President Zelenskyy, he leaves the door open for Putin to walk in and take over that same wealth. In trying to sound like a strongman seeking to whip the economy into line, he appears to rant like a genuine wannabe dictator.

Of more immediate concern is the extent to which his 'dreams' affect India. Much was made of the deportations of illegal immigrants under the present regime. To be fair, deportations are not new. Even in Trumps first term, they were less than in previous presidencies. The main issue was the fact that the deportees were chained and shackled, which Jaishankar explained as being standard procedure for the US. What is being overlooked is the myriad reasons for Indian citizens leaving the country at both ends of the economic spectrum. The media is full of the illegal migrants deported, without much discussion of their reasons for entering illegally in the first place, and via extremely difficult routes to reach the promised land. Handing out their life savings and borrowings, often touching crores, to dubious 'agents' these people in their desperation to escape caste, religious, political and economic bias, are prepared to go through the 'dunki routes' seeking a better life. They are routed through South American countries like Ecuador, Bolivia, Guyana, Columbia, El Salvador, Guatemala and

Mexico. The perilous routes take them through jungles, exposing them to dangerous forests and criminal gangs, only to be arrested as soon as they cross the Mexican border. Lost in all this depressing information is the fact that in 2023-24, about 7000 affluent individuals with well established businesses left India for Singapore, Dubai, US and UK, to embark on 'global diversification'. They sought to invest in private debt, cryptocurrency, and tech stocks like Meta-Google, which India's regulatory system prevents them from doing. Though the numbers are small, their impact is as damaging as the illegal migrants. The reason behind HNIs leaving India seems to be similar; better standards of living, better educational and health facilities, political dynamics, better work-life balance, escape from social stigmas, and eventual citizenship. Our country needs to address these issues urgently, apart from tackling the US government.

Finally, there is the 'tariff war' launched by Donald Trump. He is even losing staunch supporters like Fox News, with the struggling economy taking a hit due to his on-again, off-again tariff threats that have businesses paralyzed and investors watching their portfolios diving daily. The first criticism is that the tariffs are not applied uniformly, but rather influenced by politics. The, often illogical, penalties are predicted to set off a world recession. Fortunately, most economists anticipate the India will not be hit too hard given the nature of trade with the US and the various options available. According to Professor Rogoff, though tariffs hurt both parties, the one imposing them stands to lose the most. At the end of the day, it serves no purpose other than causing financial chaos, and triggering a recession.

As Lord Palmerston said, in politics there are no permanent friends or enemies; only permanent interests. In this case, the question is whose interests?

*(The author is the Past President of the Goa State IMA, the founder member and Past President of VHAG, and a member of the National Executive Committee of the VHAI.)*

## people'sedit

## LIVING WITH GENTLENESS: A CHALLENGE FOR A HARSH WORLD

JOHN MALVINO ALFONSO

**F**elix Silva, also known as Simon Stock, was a well-known Carmelite priest who served the faithful in the village of Shellim. After his transfer, many people in the village, recalling his work and the way he walked through the streets, would say, "Even the rocks call him—'Simon Stock, Simon Stock.'" This expression spoke to his deep relationship with both the people and nature, a bond that was evident even after his passing. Though he is no longer with us, his legacy continues to live on in the memories of those who knew him.

When we think of "rock" or "stone," we often associate them with strength, solidity, or harshness. Sometimes, these terms describe someone unyielding or hard to understand. However, when used to reflect our relationship with nature, they carry a deeper meaning, reminding us of our connection to the world. While many excel in the public sphere, we may struggle to be authentic in personal relationships, becoming like stones—cold and unyielding—to others.

Stones are strong, but they don't speak. They don't show gentleness. Yet, people who have managed to soften the stone—both within themselves and in others—leave a lasting impact. Consider the story of a priest who served a parish in North India and worked with a particularly difficult parishioner named Miguel. Miguel often disrupted church activities and was feared by the community. On Christmas Eve, he even threatened to disrupt the service, prompting parishioners to make alternative arrangements to ensure everything went smoothly.

Despite the tension, the priest noticed Miguel outside the church as Mass was underway. Rather than reacting with anger or fear, he approached Miguel with an open heart. "Miguel, today we are celebrating Christmas. Please, come inside," the priest said. Moved by this gesture of kindness and understanding, Miguel entered the church, sought forgiveness and later became an active member of the congregation.

This transformation highlights the power of gentleness to soften even the hardest hearts. We may encounter difficult people who challenge our patience, tempting us to harden ourselves in response. But this is when we must choose compassion over hostility.

Living by example is a powerful way to make a difference. By embodying gentleness and compassion in our daily lives, we become agents of change, softening even the toughest hearts with love and kindness. We can't offer what we don't have, but when we lead with kindness, others will be inspired to do the same.

How we communicate is crucial. Every interaction is an opportunity to show empathy and understanding. Anger can be met with love, and harsh words with gentleness. In a world driven by a "tit for tat" mentality, we must remember that responding in kind doesn't contribute to constructive dialogue. Instead, we should offer patience, kindness, and understanding, regardless of how others treat us.

Ultimately, our responses should reflect our values, not how others behave. The challenge is to soften our hearts, even in the face of harshness, and choose gentleness over hardness. Living with gentleness has a ripple effect, transforming communities. When we act with compassion, we create an environment of understanding that encourages others to do the same, helping to smooth the rough edges of the world.

Franklin said, "if you fail to plan, you are planning to fail."

Hard work coupled with astute planning works wonders, talent alone is not enough to see you through. And neither can you depend on luck to attain success in life. The harder you work the luckier you will get. History is witness to the fact that working hard is the key to success.

**Vinay Dwivedi, Benaulim**

## Personal care products pose risks

Consumers use a wide variety of cosmetics and personal care products. Cosmetics today have become an essential, unavoidable necessity to an increasing number of individuals. Many of the chemicals and contaminants in cosmetics and personal care products likely pose little risk, exposure to some has been linked to serious health problems, including cancer. Even permanent hair straightening treatments are a form of chemical processing for your hair. The dermatologist says that hair rebonding or straightening is like suicide for their hair.

The chemicals enter the body through the skin, inhalation, ingestion and internal use, and pose the same risks as food chemicals. Formaldehyde, toluene, lead acetate, parabens, bisphenol A, Para-Phenylenediamine (PPD) and other pollutants have been related to health issue. There needs a regulatory measures to safeguard public health and minimize the risks associated with these products.

**K G Vilop, Chorao**

## letters to the editor

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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**

## Helmets used as 'weapons' in road rage incidents

Calangute police have reportedly booked three tourists after a local taxi driver was allegedly assaulted and his vehicle vandalised in Nalkavaddo on Wednesday evening. The tourists reportedly began attacking the taxi driver with helmets. Sensing the aggression, the driver fled the scene leaving the car behind. If not, he could have suffered injuries which could even have proved fatal.

The angry tourists then turned their fury on the vehicle, severely damaging it by smashing the windshield and rear glass using the helmets. Incidentally this is the second time in the past few weeks where tourists have used a helmet to attack a car driver. Two tourists from Nasik in Maharashtra reportedly assaulted a car driver with helmets at Sangolda.

Be that as it may, it appears that tourists are now using the helmet to attack locals in incidents of road rage. This must be the norm in other states to settle

scores on the road by attacking with a helmet.

On the contrary, Goans settle an argument verbally following an accident but never resort to violence. Helmets having a very hard surface can definitely be used as a dangerous weapon to settle scores in incidents of road rage. Recently there were reports of a 45-year-old man having succumbed to fatal head injuries after being allegedly attacked with a helmet by two unidentified bike-borne men in a road rage incident in Kharghar at Navi Mumbai. Helmets that are used in attacks need to be attached as evidence in the court of law.

**Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco**

## Cybercrime on the rise in Goa

Cybercrime in Goa has been increasing at an alarming rate in recent years. According to National crime record bureau (NCRB) reports indicate a 300% rise in cyber fraud cases since 2020, with scams ranging from online banking frauds to phishing and identity theft. Despite multiple arrests, the conviction rate remains shockingly low, raising concerns about the effectiveness of our legal and investigative systems.

Goa is becoming a hub for cybercriminal activities. If left unchecked, this trend could severely impact the state's reputation and

citizens' financial security. First, law enforcement agencies must receive advanced training in cyber forensics and tracking digital fraud. Second, our legal system must streamline the prosecution process to ensure swift convictions, setting a strong deterrent. Third, public awareness campaigns should educate citizens on identifying scams and reporting suspicious activities. Schools and colleges should also incorporate cyber safety education into their curriculum. Strengthening our legal, educational, and law enforcement frameworks is the only way to ensure Goa remains a safe place in the digital era.

**Disha Vidhan Kenavdekar, Mapusa**

## The key to success

Denzel Washington once said, "You only live once, so do what you feel passionate about. Take chances professionally. Don't be afraid to fail. Don't be afraid to fail big, or to dream big."

But we need to remember that dreams without goals are just that... dreams, and they ultimately fuel disappointment. So have dreams, but have goals; weekly goals, yearly goals, monthly goals, daily goals. And understand that to achieve these goals, you must be disciplined, be consistent, persevere and work hard every day, not just on Mondays and Tuesdays. As Benjamin

## Twitter World

**Rana Ayyub @RanaAyyub**

When you weaponise your religious festivals to show the less privileged in the country 'their place' and humiliate them, about time you question your own faith and devotion.

**Mohamad Safa @mhdksafa**

Sorry America, while you're struggling to pay for your health care, rent, and education, remember that your government couldn't help you because they have to give Israel billions of dollars in US citizen tax money to bomb and kill innocent children in Gaza.

**Editor-in-chief:** Raul Francisco A. Fernandes. **Executive Editor:** Satadru Ojha (Responsible under PRB Act) **Regd Office:** St Tome Road, Panjim, Goa. Tel: 0832- 6750840 (Editorial) and 0832- 6750839 (Advertising) **Margao:** 2737689. **Mumbai Office:** 16-A, Bell Building, 2nd Floor, 19 Sir PM Road, Fort, Mumbai - 400001 (Tel: 22840702/ 22844908). RNI No: 43667/83.

## How to contact us:

For press notes, general queries desk@herald-goa.com.  
For Reporters reporters@herald-goa.com For Business news business@herald-goa.com For Letters to the Editor editor@herald-goa.com  
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