

## O HERALDO

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## Is Maharashtra govt more responsive than its Goa counterpart?

The people of the villages of Shirange and Khanyale in Dodamarg, Maharashtra scored a major victory on March 13, with the Sindhudurg District Collector Anil Patil, issuing a letter ordering the temporary halt to stone quarrying and crushing units in the flooding area of Tillari Dam. The victory came on the eighth day of a chain hunger strike by the villagers.

The villagers were protesting to bring to the attention of the District Authorities in particular and Maharashtra Government in general that the illegal quarrying and crushing activities in the flooding area of Tillari Dam, posed a danger to the dam and for fear of their villages getting flooded. Environmentalist Rajendra Kerkar commended the villagers' efforts, stating that the Government of Maharashtra should issue a permanent stoppage to the illegal activities.

Shirange and Khanyale villagers called off their chain hunger strike on Thursday, following the temporary order of the collector to stop the illegal stone quarrying and stone crushing. In a significant gesture, the Tehsildar of Dodamarg came to the protestors with a notice from the Collector of Sindhudurg ordering the temporary halt to stone quarrying and crushing units.

Earlier, the people of Shirange and Khanyale had drawn the support of Goan environmentalists Rajendra Kerkar and Ramesh Gawas, who visited the spot and drew the attention of both the Maharashtra and Goa of the imminent disaster that was awaiting the villages of Shirange and Khanyale and Goa in the long run.

Ramesh Gawas had warned that due to the water shortage that would ensue due to the expansion of the dam flooding area by blasting the adjoining mountain, there would be severe impact on tourism activities in Bardez taluka of Goa. Environmentalist Rajendra Kerkar said that the talukas of Pernem, Bardez and Bicholim were dependent on water supply from the Tillari dam and any damage to the dam would have severe impact on Goa.

The demand from the two Goa based environmentalists and the villagers of Shirange and Khanyale voiced through Herald Media which has consistently highlighted the story, Water Resources Department officials visited the site and one WRD official was heard saying on camera, "it's (the blasting and crushing activities) very risky."

Local Activist Rajan Shetye said that though people were evacuated from the two villages of Shirange and Khanyale, since the area would flood, now quarrying in allowed in the flood plains.

The chain hunger strike was started on March 6 2025. In a sensitive gesture, on the fifth day of the fast, Sawantwadi MLA Deepak Kesarkar met the protestors, who demanded a stop to the blasting and stone quarrying in the village.

Kesarkar ordered the Collector to collect complete information regarding the mines by conducting measurements with the villagers and to take action. Villagers however had said that they would continue their agitation until the government gives them a written statement and the mines are completely closed. If the canal bursts, even areas in Goa will get flooded, they had warned. People of Khanayale and Shirange had demanded action from the Maharashtra and Goa Governments.

However, what is to be noted is the relatively quick action by the Government of Maharashtra to the demands by the people of two tiny villages to stop the illegal blasting and quarrying, carried out by big business interests. The government, the local MLA and the district administration showed tremendous responsiveness.

Comparatively, it appears that the Government of Goa is not so responsive to the people of the State who are fighting for so many issues and demanding quick action against these illegalities. In some cases complaints have been registered but no FIRs are filed. Some cases are in cold storage even as they have been handed over to the Police, to the Crime Branch or the SIT. Prominent among these cases are the land grab cases, the government cash for job scam, the RVNL encroachment on private properties with rank disregard for the rights of the Goan people, the failure of the government to hand over the Suleiman Khan case to the CBI and the failure to illegal stop hill cutting, illegal constructions and destruction of Goa natural cover in general.

If the government of Goa claims to deliver good governance, it has to put in place systems that are responsive to the people. A responsive government actively listens to and responds to the needs and concerns of its people, ensuring that policies and action are aligned to the wishes of the people. A responsive government fosters trust and legitimacy, leading to greater citizen engagement and support for government policies.

By listening to the tiny villagers of Shirange and Khanyale in Dodamarg, in the huge state of Maharashtra, the administration has certainly shown that at least in this case they are responsive and sensitive to the wishes of the people. Can the Goa government follow suit?

## comment



AMITA KANEKAR

## Voddakode lost, 'aarti-ghat' gained... so enjoy the heat!

In the middle of surely one of the hottest March months in Goa's living memory, we hear from the Tourism Minister Rohan Khaunte, that Panjim is going to get - what? More shade? Drinking water fountains? Tree plantation? New gardens? Some control over activities like construction and road-digging which are adding to the heat? No. Panjim is going to get the construction of an 'aarti ghat' on the banks of the Mandovi.

This doesn't surprise us. Perhaps one of the best cities in the whole of India till about 30 years ago - small, clean, green, pedestrian-friendly, quiet, and built at a human scale - Panjim is now an unrecognisable mess, that too after a reported expenditure of over Rs 1000 crore of public money. Construction or re-construction everywhere you look, including the beach. Age-old trees felled by the score. Shady public spaces turned into sunstroke zones. Existing public infrastructure hammered. Old low-rise buildings surrounded by vegetation replaced by glass towers belching out hot air from air-conditioning vents, and surrounded by car parks and more car parks. And the less said about the roads - actual death-traps for more than a few users - the better.

Among the many homes and other buildings earlier demolished or sliced through at the altar of road works there was one of the earliest Catholic shrines of Goa, more than four centuries old, which just disappeared overnight



So, what is the government's solution to the ongoing heat wave? Drink water and stay at home between 11 am and 3 pm. That's the official advisory. How are regular jobs to be held with this schedule? And what about all the students, essential service workers, construction workers, domestic workers, delivery persons, etc. etc. who have to be out at all hours? The government doesn't care. The onus is on you. Stay at home. Or face the heat, literally.

The government's job, meanwhile, seems to be to increase the heat, given that whatever is happening in Panjim can be found, with small variations, all over Goa. Like Porvorim and the entire Bardez-Pernem highway zone. Among the many homes and other buildings earlier demolished or sliced through at the altar of roadworks there was one of the earliest Catholic shrines of Goa, more than four centuries old, which just disappeared overnight. The latest casualty was the beloved Khashreshwar temple at Porvorim's Voddakode, along with the old vodd (banyan tree) for which the site is named - uprooted despite mass protests. Is this how a democratic government is supposed to respond to legitimate and nonviolent citizens' protests: with police deployment and threats of lathi charges and arrests? Savant likes to talk about liberation from colonial rule, but what kind of liberation is this, where a gathering of citizens for a peaceful cause is treated like criminals?

Practically every village in Goa is up in arms against land conversions, or some project, or other so-called 'development'. And facing them, in shameless opposition to the peoples' will, is the government. The recent announcement that the high court has struck down the rules enabling the notorious Section 17(2) of the Town and Country Planning (TCP) Act (introduced 2 years ago to allow spot conversion of land into buildable settlement zone), saw TCP Minister Viswajit Rane immediately declaring that the government would appeal against the ruling to the Supreme Court, and also that investors in Goa should not worry!

Yes, investors need not worry, because this government will pour in all the public money it can, to ensure a ruling against public interests. As for the latter, the government imagines that their divide-and-rule policy by misrepresenting Goa's colonial history, will distract Goans from current realities. But are we really so foolish? Is it so difficult to understand, especially in this sweltering weather, the environmental madness that has been unleashed on us; and how all this wholesale destruction of fields, forests, hills, orchards, rivers, and wetlands, this actual wiping out of Goa at breakneck speed, is going to af-

fect us in the future?

And not the distant future, but the immediate future. Goan hospitals are reportedly already thronged by patients with heat-related illnesses. If you catch a viral flu via the dust today, or sunstroke on a hot shadeless road tomorrow, or find no water in your taps the day after, you know who to thank - the ones who are speeding by (or overhead) in their air-conditioned SUVs, the ones who don't ever walk on foot, don't have their houses sliced through by roads, nor their lands taken for unending projects. Those who have never planted a banyan in their whole life, who don't even understand a fraction of its value, whose expertise lies in 'disappearing' trees overnight. Like Nero fiddling while Rome burnt, these rulers will holiday in Switzerland while Goa burns up.

The conviction that they can get away with anything and everything is in our face. Thus you have Chief Minister Pramod Sawant's astounding response - that he himself was not accused - when questioned about the accusation of corruption against his government by a former minister of his own party, who claimed to have recently paid 15-20 lakh rupees to get some work done.

This answer reflects not just a confirmation of the accusations but also the brazen confidence that they don't matter, that creating divisions and distractions, especially in the garb of religion, is all that is needed to stay in power in Goa. That's why ordinary locals and their concerns don't matter. Thus, all government's infrastructure projects - coal corridors, port development, massive road expansion - are all at the cost of ordinary Goans, and for the benefit of outside corporates and a few Goan ones too; while their land conversions and construction frenzy are again for the benefit of Indian settlers and tourists. After converting Goan tourism into another word for sleaze unlimited - casinos, drugs, trafficking, and every other kind of perverse thrill - they now hope to sell 'spiritual tourism'. Perhaps they will find takers for this too. Even if they don't, the huge monies to be made in the construction projects for it is all that really matters.

(Amita Kanekar is an architectural historian and novelist)

## people's edit

### KEEP FROM NOSY PARKERS WHEN IN PUBLIC PLACES

NARAYANAN HARIHARASASTRY

That was a sunny Saturday evening when I had returned home earlier than usual from the private engineering college where I had a good innings as a lecturer post my retirement from Air Force. As wanted to me, I stepped out of my house after my evening coffee washed down with some crisp snacks. Stirring my stumps soon I got at the vast quadrilateral ground, a good two kilometers away from our house, where regular walkers would be coming for their matinal or vespertine constitutional as also a few others to play volleyball, badminton and other outdoor games.

That day my unflinching walking partners pitched in the after I had completed walking two full rounds around the field. One of us, also in the twilight years of his life like others would keep breaking bread with us during our walk by talking about political matters touching those of the southern states while the rest of us would be listening to him as he was more in the swim of political events than were the rest of us. We would thus complete six or seven laps around the field every day before dispersing and going our ways.

After a long walk one day, I ambled towards a nearby bus stop, flumped on one of the benches and was chilling out. Hardly would I have taken an alto relieve when a guy, I had never seen before approached me and queried, "Hello Sir, how are you?" adding "You look very weary and stricken" as if he had keenly observed me before that occasion and found me chirpy.

Merely setting at naught his de trop query, I remained buttoning up my lips, yet he added, "Be like me Sir, and keep your pecker up, shedding all worries". By then a bus came screeching to a halt relieving me of his unnecessary queries about my wellbeing. Stepping double quick he boarded it and waved to me standing on the entrance of it announcing his age, a figure about eight years less than mine. I cared not a hang to reciprocate his gesture of waving to me. Given the dusk descending by and large, I left the spot and started walking homewards at a quick pace, musing, "Oh! How peculiar certain species of men are, among us thrusting themselves into our private affairs".

Once while on my way to the vegetable market in our neck of the woods another guy, seeming to be a tad familiar face accosted me asking humbly, "Sir, how old you are, may I know?" This left me somewhat in a huff, yet without exhibiting my aversion I asked him, "How old do you think I would be". As he quoted a figure I told him, "Yes, a tad closer to that" and left at a quick pace as darkness began descending fast. I label such men as nosy parkers thrusting themselves into the private affairs of others to their utter disgust.

There are as well other sorts of men who exhibit a keen interest to concern themselves in the private affairs of others. It is better to give such gossips a wide berth so as to be free from getting into a sulky vein when in public places.

### Significant drug bust

The recent big drug bust involving hydroponic cannabis shows that illegal drug operations are growing in our area. This is not the first time similar setups have been found in empty warehouses, rental homes, and even luxury apartments. These illegal farms are dangerous because they can cause fires due to faulty wiring, landlords often don't know their properties are being used, and the money made from these drugs can support other crimes like trafficking and gang activity. This is a serious problem that affects the safety of our community.

To stop this, we need to take strong action. First, there should be stricter rules on selling hydroponic equipment to prevent misuse. Second, landlords should check their tenants properly and inspect their properties regularly. Third, the public should be educated on how to spot and report suspicious activities. Finally, police from different areas should work together to catch these criminals before they set up more operations. Instead of just reacting when a bust happens, we should focus on preventing such crimes in the first place.

Ruth Pereira, Saligao

### Mangoes beyond the reach of common man

It seems that mango referred to as the "King of Fruits" is fit to be consumed only by the king given the price it commands in the market today. Goa's GI tagged

### letterstotheeditor

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All letters must contain correct postal address and telephone number. Letters are liable to be edited for brevity.

Mankurad mango is reportedly fetching vendors a handsome Rs 500 per piece as the first crop of this season begins arriving in local markets.

At some places, the fruit is even sold at Rs 7,500 per dozen. However the price the fruit commands also depends on its size. Even this could be beyond the reach of the common man. The question that arises is whether the Mankurad mangoes are being exported to foreign countries where they are in demand as the fruit is now GI tagged. By the end of March and through April large quantities will be harvested and will flood the markets and prices will drop.

However, this will raise the question of whether mangoes are artificially ripened. Artificial ripening of mangoes is done using chemicals like calcium carbide or ethylene gas. While these methods can speed up the ripening process, they can also be harmful to human health. Those ripened artificially often have a bland taste and a bitter aftertaste, while natural mangoes boast a sweet and pleasant flavor without any bitterness. A naturally ripened one will sink when put in a bucket of water while the artificially harvested mango will float. If the mangoes have bruises or spots, it might be due to the injection of chemicals. The authorities concerned need to keep a vigil on whether artificially rip-

ened mangoes are being sold.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

### Untiring efforts of Goa Foundation bears fruit

Courtesy the untiring efforts of Norma Alvares of the Goa Foundation, the High Court of Bombay at Goa has directed the state government not to issue any further permissions of Zone change under Section 17(2) of the TCP Act. The Court has read down the rules and guidelines under the section which were almost criminal to begin with. Lakhs of square meters of agricultural/orchard land has been illegally converted to 'settlement zone' by ministers, real estate sharks, politicians, outsiders owning land in Goa and many other inimical to Goa's interests. The ravishing of the state has unsurprisingly been facilitated most by the felonious talents of the TCP minister with the blessings of the CM.

Incidentally Rane is claiming that the HC has not struck down Section 17(2) but instead ordered modifications to rules and regulations of the Act. The Goa government will move the Supreme Court next week, possibly to find some loophole in the court judgement which can be used to keep their 'conversion' game going.

Hearing another suo motu PIL on unlawful constructions and encroachments, the HC came

down heavily on the government for allowing and encouraging unbridled illegal construction in the state. The judicial bench issued instructions to the Chief Secretary to take action and make available two additional demolition squads for the two districts. In a related development, the Court also directed an immediate halt to all deforestation on the cliffs around the court building at Penha Da Franca. Goa is being destroyed most by the lawmakers who are supposed to be protecting it, hopefully this tight rap will bring a halt to the brutal assault on our land, or will it??

Vinay Dwivedi, Benaulum

### New RTO fines for traffic offences

The latest circular issued by the MORTH of the new fines to be imposed on motorists from March 1, 2025 is a welcome step but one particular area of concern is the PUC violation by motorists.

Does this act apply only to small cars, two and three wheelers? Why are the heavy vehicles exempted from this act? The govt owned Kadamba buses and trucks are the biggest violators of this with their exhausts emitting a cloud of black smoke. Another item of this circular is the fine on seat belts. Why are the seat belts not made compulsory for heavy vehicle drivers also. Any particular reason?

Lucas D'Souza, Verna

### Hoist by their own petard

Donald Trump's tariffs tantrum just cost American farmers \$21 billion in agricultural exports. China has officially stopped imports of US beef and grains and shifted its business to Canada and Brazil. Canada, Western Europe and Mexico too have taken their custom elsewhere.

The West's prosperity will be built on pilfered wealth from stolen lands, from slavery to colonial massacres to modern exploitation, its crimes are undeniable.

The 'American Century' in its violent twilight is collapsing under its own weight as Trump's trade wars backfire, allies resist military demands, and there is massive blowback from the citizens themselves. An unhinged man's perilous pursuit of neo-colonialism (read proposed annexation of Greenland, Canada, Gaza and Ukrainian mineral deposits) threatens the demise of US supremacy with cataclysmic meltdown, nay a metaphorical Armageddon.

Western imperialists and oligarchs, past and present, whose greed has led them to this moment, are being consumed by the very Frankenstein they helped create. They would do well to remember that power and influence are always cyclical; Empires come, Empires go. Hopefully the rest of the world and particularly the right wing zealots will learn a lesson from this mother of all upheavals.

Rekha Sarin Trehan, Benaulum