

O HERALDO

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Velsao locals continue to combat SWR's 'berth' right

Since the start of this year, the residents of Velsao's Primeiro Vaddo have been putting up a brave front against plans by Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL) to expand the rail network in the area. RVNL is a central public sector enterprise that develops rail infrastructure for the Indian government. At Velsao, it is presently in the eye of the storm pertaining to expansion plans for the South Western Railways (SWR).

Protests by irate villagers against the dumping of construction material by RVNL began in January when they noticed that the material - which was intended to be used for track-doubling work - had blocked a traditional motorable access route that residents said was crucial to them. They expressed fears of being landlocked and inundated by rain water during the monsoons if RVNL went ahead with its plans to construct a retaining wall along the village's traditional right of way. The villagers also claimed that work by RVNL was being carried out clandestinely as hearings pertaining to demarcation of the area and a fresh survey of the land were ongoing at the high court of Bombay at Goa.

Development is necessary, but if it happens at the cost of the well-being of citizens, it can hardly be passed off as development. Prudence is key when plans as large-scale as the SWR expansion programme are made

A more recent development saw heated exchanges between the locals of Velsao, Pale and Issorcim, and representatives of the SWR before the inspector of survey and land records at Margao after SWR submitted reports to support its land ownership claims and the locals said that these were insufficient. The cadastral plan of Velsao is missing from public records, the latter claimed, thereby raising valid doubts about the cadastral plan relied on by SWR to make claims of land ownership. They also asked why the cadastral plan that the SWR's reports were based on was not attached.

For the uninitiated, the SWR has claimed that it owns land on either side of the existing railway tracks at Velsao, which is being contested by villagers and the landowners concerned. The friction over ownership revolves around a 10-metre-wide land parcel located between the existing railway track and heritage homes in the area.

Construction, which is ongoing, has also evoked fears among the villagers about inundation during the monsoon, which is just a few months away. They have been left wondering how they will tide over the wet season as the old waterways and drainage systems have reportedly been destroyed by RVNL's workers. Unseasonal rain a few days ago has given them something of a sneak preview of the perils that lie ahead when the monsoon does bear down on the state with all its might. Villagers now fear that the water may gush into their homes as the area in front of their structures has been raised by RVNL almost to the height of their compound walls.

Residents of Velsao's Primeiro Vaddo have been facing the most stress as they have said that RVNL has effectively blocked the sole entry point to their individuals houses, forcing them to pass through their neighbours' properties if they are to enter their own homes. The block is such that they can't even get their vehicles out of their properties, while the Railways lifted and moved vehicles parked along the public access route without their permission.

Development is necessary, but if it happens at the cost of the well-being of citizens, it can hardly be passed off as development. Prudence is key when plans as large-scale as the SWR expansion programme are made. Dialogue and mediation is also necessary if both sides are to come to an amicable solution. Unleashing the police force to detain protesting villagers will hardly serve the purpose as it will only heighten tensions and lengthen the deadlock.

It is high time the government departments concerned review the permissions granted to the Railways for the project and take the local population into confidence as well. If it is already too late, the onus is on the government to arrive at a solution that will allow those affected to access the homes without struggling and also to ensure that the impending monsoon impacts them minimally, if at all. Else the deadlock between the people and the Railways will not show signs of abating and will only result in frayed tempers and altercations which won't serve either side in the long run.

The government must get the situation back on track.



PLASTINO D'COSTA

Every project that has been recently announced and completed in Goa be it the overhead road or the ropeway, gives you the feeling that it is designed for the VIP mostly from Delhi who usually comes for a quick stopover and has no time to navigate the narrow village roads or appreciate the Goan way of life



it gives the freedom to lead a normal life. Hope the Indian fans in UK allow them the privacy they are anticipating.

Without getting into the debate of far right or left agenda, one thing every society aims is to have even distribution of income and wealth. But it is not black

One of the reasons Goa has been a favourite tourist destination among Indian film and sports celebrities is that it gives them the space they long for during their vacation. Goans at best might give you a smile which comes naturally to us due to our basic decency or a kid might request for a selfie, that's it.

We are not going to behave like idiots and make things awkward for the celebrity if they choose to have a quiet meal in a restaurant. Unfortunately all places in Goa are not safe for celebs seeking privacy. For example, there is no guarantee that celebs are going to get that space on a beach perhaps and this happens because Goans have stopped visiting Goa's beaches, so the ones they encounter on the beach are not Goans, but people on vacation who are not going to respect their privacy.

It's another matter that many celebs, mostly the wannabe ones bribe the paparazzi to follow them at airports and even pay their tickets to follow them to Goa to seek the attention they crave for. But celebs with large fan following and famous preffer people don't notice them during their private visits, so that they can freely unwind. No jokes, for some of them, it becomes such a big nuisance being followed and under scrutiny 24/7 that cricketer Virat Kholi and his film actress wife have decided to make London as their base, because according to them,

and white here. While we address inequalities, we must make sure we do not go overboard in creating lazy dependents by milking only the wealthy as if it is some sort of punishment for the hard work they put.

One of the goals of taxation was to address inequalities, but unfortunately governments have long forgotten that goal, have turned taxation as some sort of weapon meant to harass the tax payer, in order to keep their mouth shut on every crazy decision the government takes. But this piece is not about that debate, it is about seeds being sown to make sure the divide between the rich and not so rich widening.

Goa is one place where people in their Mercedes or BMW will stop at a roadside eatery to relish their 'choris pao' or 'ros olette'. Chances are the guy in the BMW will strike a conversation with the guy eating the same meal and has come on a cycle. So even though there is a big difference in their bank balances, that does not stop them from greeting each other and even striking a conversation. The guy on the cycle has absolutely no problem with the BMW and vice versa.

Unfortunately, this does not happen in other parts of our country. Bombay is a big example where film actors or cricketers are always hounded by locals, paparazzi, tourists, who sometime travel miles just to get a glimpse of their heroes outside their homes without even arranging their own accommodation for the night during their stay in Bombay.

Tired of constant sharing public spaces with the commoners, it is possible that some of these celebs classified as VIP's might have used their good rapport with the Government of Maharashtra to come up with a solution that they be given special treatment in using the country's resources. So to address this issue, the government of Maharashtra has come up with a genius idea. It has decided that the upcoming Navi Mumbai International Airport will have a separate terminal to be used exclusively for politicians, movie actors and Government servants not forgetting the family of the promoter of the airport. No prize for guessing

that one.

Although this airport is still in the planning stage, one can easily analyze the thinking process that goes on within these bureaucrats and politicians these days. Usually happens when people don't change governments often. If this goes through, then India is on the verge of creating a huge class divide which might and will backfire at a future date. This blatant encouraging of VIP culture to share basic infrastructure proves that the infrastructure that has been built is not worthy for the VIP's or so they think.

Every project that has been recently announced and completed in Goa be it the overhead road or the ropeway, gives you the feeling that it is designed for the VIP mostly from Delhi who usually comes for a quick stopover and has no time to navigate the narrow village roads or appreciate the Goan way of life. They just want to reach their destination in quick possible time and the best way to do that is to just go over Goans while completely ignoring them.

Goa has to sincerely ask this question, should we encourage VIP's such as film actors from Bombay to make Goa their second home? Will they add any value to Goa? While we Goans spend lot of time adding value to Goa, these people at best will make a cocoon for them and will never be available when Goa needs them. Their reputation in Bombay is that they mostly live in palatial clean homes but when they step out even to their car, they seem to develop a tunnel vision and have learnt the art of ignoring the filth they are surrounded with while their driver is busy navigating honking cars and terrible traffic jams. It never occurs to them to hold politicians accountable to keep the city clean because they never consider it as theirs.

Goa with great difficulty has overcome the VIP culture at religious and sports events, while it still remains work in progress, let us not invite another set of VIPs who create another set of problems to our way of life. It is incoming and we need to recognize the crisis before it lands on our lap.

(The author is a business consultant)

people'sedit

GOA'S ECOSYSTEM OF LOOT AND SCOOT

BY FELICIO FERNANDES

In an interview on March 5, 2025, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Pandurang Madkaiakar accused his party's government in Goa of being involved 'only in corruption' and alluded to a minister of forcing him to pay Rs 15 to 20 lakh bribe. "Nothing is moving", he said. "They are only busy counting money. All ministers are busy counting money. Nothing is happening in Goa, every minister is busy making money; no matter how.... all ministers. People are waiting to send them home." This may be a case of the pot calling the kettle black, but it exposes an unwritten code of doing business.... LOOT.

Loot has become a natural phenomenon, rampant and ferociously eating and tearing into all institutions, be it political, governmental or bureaucratic. The Goan polity is scourged with these epidemics of party defections, rigged elections, a weak Legislature, internal conflicts mostly propelled by the size of potential loot that can be extracted from lucrative portfolios, erratic governance, a manipulated and dysfunctional executive, portfolio allocation based on appropriation of the maximum share of loot and prospective looting avenues available, money and muscle power, favouritism in business dealings and connivance among looters.

Thus political leadership gets leveraged using state machinery to prioritise their personal interests over the collective welfare of the public.

The recent attempt by the Goa Government to amend the Code of Communitidades had met with belligerent oppositions from the stake holders who insisted that the current code in vogue was comprehensive and thorough and that the amendment was superfluous and unnecessary.

The Communitade land which had been allotted to the Zuari Agro Chemicals Company decades ago for industrial purposes was now being used for construction of residential units. The loot of land at Amdai (Sanguem) for the beer project, the forced imposition of the Mopa airport onto a dense forest, the battle by Tiracol villagers against the Leading Hotels, the conversion of paddy fields into settlement zones at Taleigao village, the allowing of slums and tenanted homes to migrants to settle as potential vote banks, be it on the Saligao or on the Mapusa hill or at the Moti Dongor or the slopes of Odxel in Taleigao or the Chimbhel cluster of migrants and so on. Don't forget the brute mockery of Goans by legislating that a coconut tree is grass (Goa Legislative Assembly January 14, 2016) has only exposed the extent legislators holding power would bend to loot and fight over the distribution of loot. 25 lakh square meters of land has already been converted to settlement zones and ownership endorsed to big non-Goan land sharks.

Be it the vanquishing of the tiger dens at the Vagueri hills or destruction of the pristine hillocks in Goa and even obliterating the golden coastal zones of Goa all have a one-word agenda... LOOT.

Politicians and their babus exploit their power over a mute population. When political power is concentrated in the hands of a few people, corruption raises its ugly head and it is used to create wealth in favour of those who hold it. They buy and sell influence. There is no accountability as in the case of the recent 'Cash-for-jobs' scam. It's an ethics called 'You scratch my back - I scratch yours' and of course their disdainful camaraderie written off as "We are all in this Together"

When legislators and bureaucrats stoop so low just to "make hay", the sun will stop shining on Goa and Goans, will be disenfranchised (both demographically and politically) from their own land which we so dearly and passionately call 'Amchem Goem'

Switch over to smart meters

Goa is reportedly implementing a smart metering project to replace existing electricity meters with smart meters for over 7.4 lakh consumers. The project is expected to be implemented in a phased manner over two-and-a-half years starting in 2025-26. In the first phase, the project will be implemented only for commercial establishments and later extended to domestic consumers. The smart meters will use GPRS technology for communication and have several advantages. They will provide real-time data for accurate billing. They will help curb electricity theft and leakages. By being connected through a web-based monitoring system, prepaid smart meters enable consumers to optimize their electricity consumption.

However, some individuals may have concerns about smart meters collecting and sharing personal energy consumption data. In case of network disruption, there will be a need for manual reading.

Smart meters can malfunction, leading to inaccurate readings, and consumers may not be aware of it. In Goa, the common man, especially the pensioners, may not be in a position to make pre-payments for electricity and hence will have to live without electricity till the smart meter is recharged. There is no option for part payment. More importantly what happens to the unpaid electricity bills which run into crores of rupees once the switch-over

to smart meters takes place? Not long ago Goa had switched to digital meters from analog meters and now there will be a shift to smart meters. Will it be a smart move?

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Lacking cultural common sense

Power and arrogance are blatantly proliferating today! Our culture which prides itself on Sanathan Dharma and tolerance is getting violent and lacks common sense! Satya Mayve Jayate seems to have gone for a toss! We dare not speak the truth even in jokes and our Constitutional rights of Art 14 (right to equality), Art 19 (Freedom), 21 (Life and Liberty) are under constant threat as there are non state outfits which seem to have state patronage with a democratic government which bristles at the slightest criticism!

A stand up comedian jokes on the Maharashtra CM and central government, has got him into so much hot waters that besides trolling him and being slapped with breach of privilege, the studio where he performed was vandalised.

A SP MPs house is attacked in Agra over a remark he made in Parliament on Rana Sanga! How can we have unity in diversity when those in power want to impose their views, likes and

dislikes and what is worse all institutions right from Parliament, the highest Judiciary to dispensing of equitable justice, transparency and accountability are in disarray!

The Aurangzeb controversy has been made a national issue. Wanting to impose so called Hindu culture and as the South sees it Hindi by coercion/force, digging up ancient history and trying to create false narratives to penalize the present generation for it makes no sense. With dangerous wars in Palestine and Ukraine, the power and economic balance in the world is rapidly changing. Let us have the common sense to stand united, help each other to navigate this dangerous era trying to bring peace, prosperity for all and tranquility to ourselves and the world.

John Eric Gomes, Porvorim

Tackling the opioid menace

The United States has named India and China as primary sources for facilitating the direct and indirect supply of precursor chemicals and equipment used by drug traffickers, along with being the primary source for illicit fentanyl.

A diverse set of foreign criminals are targeting US health and safety, critical infrastructure, industries, wealth, and govern-

ment according to its 2025 Annual Threat Assessment report released by the office of the Director of National Intelligence. The report is an evaluation of global threats to US interests, it highlighted the growing role of several countries in supplying materials that were fueling the fentanyl crisis in the US.

Fentanyl and other synthetic opioids caused more than 52,000 deaths in the US between November 2023 and October 2024, said the report. It added that certain transnational criminal organisations were producing and trafficking large amounts of illicit drugs that were endangering the lives of US residents.

This comes against the backdrop of the Donald Trump administration intensifying its crackdown on fentanyl trafficking. Earlier this month, an India-based chemical manufacturing company and three of its employees were charged in a federal court in Washington for illegally importing precursor chemicals used to make illicit fentanyl and other opioids. India too should crackdown on such merchants of death operating from it's own soil.

Vinay Dwivedi, Benaulim

Common citizens overburdened

The charges for using ATM's are being increased it has been re-

ported beyond the number of free access that is allowed presently. Similarly toll charges on our highways is said to be increased from April. Everything is going up and the government seems to be bent upon charging for everything.

The common man is thus being burdened one after another, with this, that or the other charge. As for toll charges, a huge amount is being collected ostensibly to pay for the road or improvements on it but then even after recovery of the full cost, the toll charges continue to be levied since the collection process is on auto-pilot mode, be it by Fastag or otherwise.

Road users take it as a given charge and do not bother to waste their time contesting it. In fact, the process of payment of toll charges is a nuisance that interrupts, introduces congestion and holds up travel and should be withdrawn once the cost of the road is recovered. Some years ago, the local residents staying near the River Kali bridge at Karwar in Karnataka had found that the toll booths were a nuisance to people living in the nearby villages and the toll charges were continuing to be charged even after the cost of the bridge had been recovered.

A public agitation was launched and the toll booths were closed. This is what should be done since otherwise the government will silently keep recovering money through the toll charges fooling the people.

Srinivas Kamat, Mysore

Twitter World

Mohamad Safa @mhdkfsafa
You know what else died in Gaza? The myth of western humanity. I never want to hear any western leader ever talk about human rights.

Volker Türk @volker_turk
Peace is not merely an absence of war - it is the presence of justice, of law, of good governance. As we

navigate rapid technological change, rising conflict and inequality, human rights remain our clearest compass.

Pope Francis @Pontifex
Even if our past seems burdensome, complicated, and perhaps even ruined, we can always give it to God and set out anew on our journey. God is merciful, and He always waits for us!