

O HERALDO

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Trapped in the digital underworld

Last week, the Goa Police successfully dismantled an international cyber slavery syndicate. The case gained traction after a young Goan was rescued from an illegal cybercrime centre in Myanmar. Based on the victim's testimony, the Goa Police launched an investigation, leading to the arrest of a suspect in Bengaluru. Further inquiries uncovered a vast network operating across multiple cities, including Mumbai and Delhi. This incident has once again highlighted the alarming rise of cyber slavery as a new and evolving form of organised crime.

Cyber slavery is a modern form of human trafficking that begins with online deception and evolves into forced labour in cyber fraud rings. According to the CyberPeace Foundation, this form of exploitation can manifest as coerced participation in cybercrime, forced employment in online scams, exploitation in the gig economy, or even involuntary servitude.

Victims are typically lured with the promise of high-paying jobs but soon find themselves working 16-hour days under inhumane conditions. The fraudulent activities they are forced into include money laundering, cryptocurrency scams, and romance frauds.

Indian media reports indicate that cyber criminals primarily target individuals in their 20s and 30s, enticing them with data entry jobs. Once they arrive in countries like Cambodia and Laos, their passports are confiscated, and they are forced to make scam calls to Indian targets.

Many of these scams involve online honey trapping, where victims create fake profiles of women on social media. The fraudulent activities range from cryptocurrency investments to romance scams. Once the victims transfer funds, they are abruptly cut off, and their attempts to reach the scammers are blocked.

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During the investigation, the Goa Police discovered that the syndicate was being operated by an unauthorized agency based in Mumbai. This agency was illegally recruiting Indian nationals for jobs abroad without approval from the Ministry of External Affairs.

Young individuals were lured with promises of high-paying job opportunities in Thailand and Cambodia, offering salaries between Rs 60,000 and Rs 70,000 per month. However, upon arrival, their passports were confiscated, and they were coerced into working in cyber slavery call centres.

Cambodia has emerged as the epicentre of this cyber slavery crisis, with Indian media reports estimating that at least 5,000 Indians are trapped there. Many of these individuals were deceived by fake job offers promising legitimate employment but were instead forced into cyber fraud operations.

These fraudulent schemes specifically target Indian citizens, leading to financial losses estimated to exceed Rs 5 billion. The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre reports that nearly 45% of cyber crimes affecting Indians originate from Southeast Asia. Since January 2023 to November 2024, more than 100,000 complaints have been registered on India's National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal.

There have been numerous cases of Indians reporting being held against their will in Southeast Asia. The Indian government has been actively involved in rescue operations, with 360 cyber slaves repatriated from Cambodia in the first five months of this year alone.

In August 2024, it was revealed that over 1,000 individuals from Tamil Nadu had travelled to Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos, potentially falling victim to cyber slavery. Additional cases have been reported in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Delhi. In the same month, 47 Indians who were forced to operate dating app scams were rescued from Laos.

So far, hundreds of Indian nationals have been rescued by either government agencies or international organisations and NGOs.

The issue extends beyond fraud, raising concerns about human trafficking. Government data reveals that out of the 73,138 Indians who travelled to Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, and Vietnam on tourist visas between January 2022 and May 2024, nearly 29,466 have not returned.

India's intensified crackdown on cyber slavery and cyber fraud marks a crucial step toward safeguarding its citizens from this growing threat. The government's efforts, including telecom restrictions, inter-agency coordination, and rescue operations, demonstrate a firm commitment to dismantling these cybercrime networks. However, with thousands still trapped abroad and new scams emerging, continued vigilance and international cooperation are essential to combating this modern form of digital enslavement.

comment



VICTOR FERRAO

Filmmaker Shyam Benegal regrettably described 'India is... a great republic of hurt sentiments...' I like to think that Benegal is wrong but some events in Goa in recent days seem to have set us thinking. These events seem to suggest that we have taken the road to hurt sentiments



We may even ask: are we more hurt than ever before? Or are we more conscious of hurts today? We may even have to ask: Has claiming hurt become a way of making political capital? Is such a political capital strategically produced,

We are living in an untimely period. Goa does not seem to have seen these times before. Hurt and pain have been our lived experience, but today we seem to have begun to claim being hurt to resolve wounds that may be real or imaginary. But claiming hurt was never in vogue in Goa. Hurt is making its presence felt through several technologies of staging in our public sphere. We seem to have stepped in an age of unreason where we are willing to embody hurt and even take the law in our hands or run to the police at the least pretext.

We have been people who valued peace and harmony above everything and have put up with worse trauma and pain through the dramatic past of our society. Filmmaker Shyam Benegal regrettably described 'India is... a great republic of hurt sentiments...' I like to think that Benegal is wrong but some events in Goa in recent days seem to have set us thinking. These events seem to suggest that we have taken the road to hurt sentiments.

The demand for hurt sentiments appears to be rising and seems to have become a convenient way of addressing people and their views that are unwelcome to us. The reigning condition seems to have fractured our belonging to India and Goa. Living at a time of mass-mediated outrage may have led to a condition that Benegal describes as a republic of hurt sentiments. This is why while distancing from the contemporaneity of the claims to being hurt in its finer details, maybe we have to discuss the state of hurt in general and examine how it raises emotions that call for revenge, reparation and even violence. Maybe we have to also examine the politics of claiming hurt.

The fact that the hurt gets visibilised in the claims to being hurt and produce hurt politics, we need to seek ways of dealing with it to give peace and harmony a chance in our society. In the reigning market of outrage, we cannot simply add to the decimals of hate by our own outrage against outrage. What we need is to work to produce a discourse that will enable us to understand how we have reached a point where we find ourselves today.

In this context, where there are several possible reasons that may explain why we have the state of affairs that afflict us, I find Slavoj Zizek's view profoundly insightful. He teaches that we today, live in a society that wants coffee without caffeine or beer without alcohol or meat without fats, etc. Such a society also desires the other without his/her otherness. The minority is desirable as long as he/she sheds his/her otherness. He/she has to become like the majority. Everything seems to become worthy of embrace as long as it is deprived of its substance or otherness. It is the demand for a decaf-

circulated and mediated in our society to benefit a political elite? Maybe it is time that we discuss the place of hurt sentiments in our political as well as public life.

Hurt is a felt sentiment and produces pain that can cripple our lives but claiming to be hurt that might fuel politics of hurt is never a therapeutic option. Wounds cannot be healed by wounding the one who wounds. This is why the claim to being hurt though may appear reasonable at first sight has to be viewed as a dangerous excess. It fosters a sense of victimhood that can fracture peace and harmony of a society.

Some scholars view the claim of being hurt as staying within the architecture of censorship like the 'obscene', the 'offensive', the 'hurtful' and the harmful employed by the power elite in any society. This is why they challenge us to critically examine populist mobilisation of hurt. This problematises both the agents as well as affected addressees of hurt. Affective economies of hurt circulate within all spheres of life and humanity has great strength and resilience to cope with them. Hence, a hermeneutics of hurt might generate empathy and enable forgiveness that will heal the one who hurts and one who is hurt.

Real Goans have a large heart and have put up with great pain and trauma in the past without claiming victimhood. We cannot amputate or expel hurt, we can only heal the hurt otherwise the chain of violence and hurt will spiral and we will indeed become a republic of hurt sentiments. Goans can indeed break this chain of hurt.

Just in case the claim to hurt was simply a pretence to silence and marginalised voices of dissent, we have the challenge to move from this decaffeinated state to authentic humanness as well as Goan-ness. Goans cannot let peace be a failed performative. Sovereignty of Goa and Goan-ness is certainly above what we may call sovereignties of hurt.

It is by Goanising that we become Goans and radiate Goan-ness. Goan-ness is fragile. It is produced by all Goans together. It is not an essence thrust upon us. We have collectively produced it. It is deeply colonial. Hence, we can certainly settle the unsettling claims to being hurt made by some in a peaceful dialogical manner. Moreover, there is a huge gap in giving and taking offence or insult. Our refusal to take offence can take the sting out of those who wish to build a republic of hurt sentiments and benefit from it. We do not have to intro-ject or extro-ject hurt. Just take what is deemed as hurt in our stride. If we invest too much energy in what is deemed as hurt, we might not be able to rise above the hurt. Escaping from hurt is not an option but addressing it and letting it go is the way ahead. Letting go is the Goan susegad way to freedom.

(Fr Victor Ferrao is an independent researcher attached to St Francis Xavier Church, Borim, Ponda.)

Resisting the republic of hurt sentiments

people's edit

VASCO FIGUEIREDO, THE PEOPLE'S MAMLATDAR

ROSELLE M F SOLOMON

Time flies but never fails to leave its shadow behind. Just as much as the best memories of an accomplished person brings pain to one's memories, so do those moments return to hark back many years later as a matter of pride in the deeds and accomplishments of the person who has departed this earthly space.

Vasco Figueiredo was no ordinary government officer. His work traversed every taluka of Goa. In each work space he left behind a deep-seated imprint. That is saying something remarkable for a person who was not necessarily on top of the pyramid of the bureaucracy. The top layer is often contended by success and glory which comes from success and achievement where it matters most- the work space where reality gets an option to find justice and corrective measures.

Vasco Figueiredo was inimitable and illustrious as a Mamlatdar. He seemed to know the law like the back of his hand so much so that he rarely had to look up those bulky law books to assure him that he was right in his decision making. For him justice without love was mere law. People referred to him as the 'Peoples Mamlatdar'. No airs about him whatsoever. He was a simple man who anyone of any rank in the office could approach and expect to receive a fair-handed decision. Even Chief Ministers walked into his office preferring not to summon him into theirs. You could see respect written all over them when they walked into inquire about an imminent decision they had to make on a rough matter. Vasco had his handsome smile, and an even more sturdy answer. In the office, they would say of him: 'But he knows it all. He never gets things wrong'.

Quite unusually, Vasco knew by instinct that serving at the level of Mamlatdar was the ultimate seat of influence in serving the people. At that level, he would say, nothing was too little to matter. On the contrary, the more insignificant it seemed, the more magnitude it assumed in Vasco's eyes. In the upper echelons of power, it was elitist and Vasco abhorred that choice. What counted first and last was to serve those who needed him most. After all, he often asserted, why would he want to be in high places merely for status.

As a devout Catholic, he did not wear religion on his sleeve. His heart was where the people lived and to the weakest and poorest, he went the extra mile. It was as if he followed the principles of Antodya. To him that word did not belong to the Gandhian era. 'Antodaya', to him, implied a pledge to handle their greatest felt needs and the rise and development of the last person in society. No gaps in these endeavours.

Service is a powerful provider of higher levels of happiness, fulfillment and meeting life's needs that was far out of reach from the common person's hands.

That was Vasco and a hundred anecdotes could be told about the 'Peoples Mamlatdar'. It is a life to be followed by all those who saw him at work. To this day, his colleagues from the past, have their eyes lit up in awe just the mention of his name.

If this government and its officers had an identical vision and world view that rare officers like Vasco Figueiredo had (and we do have a few), Goa would witness effectual governance that one could deem as a marker and model to follow. For, in the final analysis, progress and governance are inextricably intertwined.

A year after his passing, we still recall and salute Vasco Figueiredo for his indelible contributions to Goan society.

letterstotheeditor

For letters to the editor contact us at editor@herald-goa.com.

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

MI's knack of making superstars

Mumbai Indians have unearthed yet another young talent in IPL 2025 season.

After Vignesh Puthur, the left-arm wrist spinner who hogged the limelight with his 3-wicket scalp against CSK, left-arm pacer Ashwani Kumar from Punjab has made a spectacular debut, claiming 4 wickets against KKR, including the big one of Andre Russel.

In the process, he became the first Indian bowler to claim four wickets on IPL debut. If one thought that Puthur did well on his debut, Ashwani Kumar one-upped his teammate. Every franchise has a different approach to bid players at the IPL auction.

Teams like CSK bid for senior and proven players and some look for stars. But MI stands apart in this regard. Winning is what matters, and MI has five IPL titles to prove that. But no one invests in talent like they do. The franchise has a knack of making superstars out of unknown names. Vignesh Puthur and Ashwani Kumar are just two of multiple examples of MI's scouting system.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, Chennai

Humane face of Justice Eurico

The gavel of Justice da Silva has fallen silent but his magnanimous acts will echo in his esteemed memory.

Many years ago, just after Liberation around noon time, a frail and fair elderly lady was literally shoved in the courtroom of Justice Eurico Silva. The lady was trembling in fear as she had never seen the malicious manhandling of the police and Justice Eurico da Silva on seeing the commotion stopped the proceedings of his August court, came down, approached the lady and politely asked her what had happened.

She replied in Portuguese that she was accused of robbing coconuts in daylight. It transpired that a 'Mundkar' had filed a false complaint. The era of false complaints and abuse of the process of the law had started soon after Liberation.

Justice da Silva saw the malicious intent of the complainant in connivance with the police. Justice da Silva requested one of the advocates sitting in the front row to file a bail application as 'Amicus Curae', bail was immediately granted and the nuisance was clipped in the bud.

'Justice done and seen to be done.' Justice da Silva kept the torch of honesty and integrity high. Justice is taught at the level of the cradle and cannot be bought'. This is a eulogy by his sons to their esteemed father as a last farewell.

Agnelo Furtado, Chinchinim

Salute genuine Goan activists!

To non-Goans (India/abroad), Goans seem to have the perception to be known as susegad and complacent!

However, one interesting thing I would like to share with reference to my recent travels at some tourist hotspots in India where it was really sad to see the environment/forests/hills, etc, being destroyed by the real estate lobby, land sharks, celebrities, etc, all aided by corrupt politicians!

As I was driven around quite a few at these sites, names were given to me as purchasers of large tracts of land (including eco-sensitive zones) and I noted that many of these names were the same ones doing the same in Goa with the help of corrupt Goan ministers!

The difference however was there was hardly any fight or opposition to the destruction in those places versus the scale of which we see genuine Goan activists fighting in Goa against the specific/destructive real estate companies/celebrities/land sharks, etc, all aided by a heavily compromised Goa government!

I feel proud of these Goan activists and salute them for their hard work, sacrifices and resilience despite all odds and challenges/pressures our forth by

the Goa government! On this front, I can say that Goans are not susegad/complacent versus people from other Indian States!

Arwin Mesquita, Colva

Konkani should be Goa's official language

A group of pro-Maharashtrawadi elements/die-hard Marathi supporters led by former RSS chief Subhash Velingkar on Monday were heard demanding equal official status for Marathi along with Konkani in the Official Language Act, 1987 (Act 5 of 1987) giving their own silly justifications in Goa.

Well, Konkani is a language of our unique identity and cultural heritage of Goa.

Konkani was rightfully made the sole official language of the State way back in 1987.

The Marathi supporters should therefore stop trying to divide Goans on religious/linguistic lines.

Forget about the circulation of Marathi newspapers, the language that is practically still spoken by 90% of our Goan population (irrespective of caste, creed and religion) in the State in their day-to-day affairs or in public is definitely not Marathi, but Konkani.

Konkani language is a unifying force, which still binds all the major communities of the State

into one linguistic community. And for this very reason, Konkani alone must remain as Goa's sole official language.

The pro-Maharashtrawadi elements should stop demanding more rights for Marathi in the State because as per the Official Language Act, they can make good use of this language for all official purpose in Goa, i.e. government correspondence, invitations, functions, circulars, police panchanama, etc.

The advertisements for government vacancies today clearly mention/say that besides Konkani, knowledge of Marathi can be desirable for candidates who wish to apply for govt jobs in Goa. This being the case, what more rights do they want for Marathi in Goa? Do they want to show that Goa is an inseparable part of Maharashtra by giving equal status to Marathi along with Konkani in the Official Language Act? Goans should wake up from their sleep at the earliest and thwart the evil designs of all these known anti-Goan morons because their latest attempt is nothing but a dangerous game plan to somehow discard Konkani from the top position under some pretext or the other and to slowly make Marathi the sole official language of this State to finally fulfil their long cherished dream of turning our world famous unique Goa into their very own 'Zalach Pahije' mini Maharashtra. Long live Konkani. Viva Goa, Viva Goenkar.

Jerry Fernandes, Saligao