

## O HERALDO

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## Don't re-open Official Language wounds

The agitation for making Konkani, the Official Language of Goa, was one of the most triumphant phases in Goan history, yet it was also one of the most painful. Triumphant, because the mother tongue of Goans, which was discriminated against by the colonial regime, and contested by Marathi protagonists, finally ascended the throne. Painful, because the preceding about two years, were full of turmoil, agitation, violence and even deaths. Seven martyrs lost their lives prior to the declaration of Konkani as the Official Language.

Once Konkani was given Official Language status, through passage of the Goa, Daman and Diu Official Language Bill on February 4, 1987, Statehood was conferred on Goa on May 30, 1987, fulfilling the aspirations of the people expressed in the historic Opinion Poll of January 16, 1967. Except for the political and social turmoil and divisions prior to the Opinion Poll and the passing of the Official Language Bill, Goa as a State has been the most peaceful in the Indian Union, with its high literacy, high per capita income, exemplary communal harmony, high happiness index, etc. This communal harmony and peace are in fact inviting people from other States to come and have second homes or to settle in Goa.

However, a small section of people, misguided by a discarded leader, are again making an attempt to spread turmoil and disturb peace and harmony in the State by stoking regular controversies, such as the 'Goncho Saib' controversy and now to 'make Marathi the Official Language of Goa', not for the love of Marathi but only to stir the communal cauldron and spread hatred. This same element has met another in 2025, who was banned from Goa for the last 10 years,

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by then Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar. This element was also shown the political door by the voters of Panjim, when he tried to defeat Manohar Parrikar in Panjim, since he refused to listen to his diktats.

The attempt made by the MGP and other organisations, post Liberation of Goa, to project Marathi as the official language of Goa had a rationale — fear that Catholic and Hindu Brahmins would continue to dominate and discriminate against the Bahujan Samaj. Hence they made the suicidal attempt to merge Goa with Maharashtra, hardly knowing that democracy works by majority rule. That is precisely the reason why MGP came to power after Liberation. Now, when the bogey of Marathi is being raised, do these elements have the same bent of mind to destroy the State of Goa, its unique culture, identity, cherished values and ethos? All Goans speak Konkani, whether they are Hindus, Christians or Muslims. The Konkani language keeps Goans united. It protects our unity. So why are attempts made to disturb this unity by politically discarded elements?

As far back as 1963, the towering world leader and India's First Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had the foresight to make his solemn promise to Goa, that "Goa has a distinct identity and we will retain it". Goans have laboured through nearly two years of agitation to attain Official Language status for Konkani, sacrificing their sweat and blood. Several hugely attended meetings at Lohia Maidan at Margao (November 10, 1985), Panjim (July 29, 1986 and December 18, 1986) have shown the support of the people for Konkani. Florian Vaz (December 20, 1986), and six other martyrs from Agassaim (December 21, 22, 1986) gave their lives for Konkani. Such a movement was never seen before and may never be seen again. The Official Language Bill was finally passed on February 4, 1987, by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, due to the reluctance of the State government.

After facing such a tumultuous agitation which shattered communal harmony and claimed lives, do the anti-Goa elements want to reopen the wounds of the language agitation? The Official Language act makes Konkani in Devanagiri script the official language, while also providing for the use of Marathi for official purposes. So there is no need for any agitation to make Marathi the official language. In fact, the 1956 re-organisation of states was based on linguistic lines. Hence there cannot be another State with Marathi as the official language, apart from Maharashtra. The only exception is the five Hindi States, which were so carved due to their huge population.

So for the sake of Goa and Goans, in the interest of our peace, harmony, economy, safety and security of Goans and as rational civilised beings, do not open the Official Language wounds which have been buried for the last 38 years.

## comment



ALBERTINA ALMEIDA

## Important legacies of those who have recently made the crossing

These are times when land issues and concerns and rampant destruction of Goa have reached their nadir. These are also times when divisive politics is at its peak. The latest being the effort to pit one minority against another. The Waqf Board controversy rages in the country, and efforts are being made by the powers that be to play further divisive politics in Goa by getting the Church on their side.

In such times, one can draw inspiration from the legacies of two persons who made the crossing recently. The one a retired High Court Judge, whose death found many reminiscing about his integrity as a judge and his judgements articulated in simple language, and the other a journalist who was posted in Goa for a while, but who continued his attempt to understand Goa and voice its concerns through even an article written very recently.

It was the year 2009. There was a complaint before the State Police Complaints Authority, about the ham-handed action during a raid of a madrasa by then Deputy Superintendent of Police of Mormugao. The Chairperson of the State Police Complaints Authority then was Retired Justice (now late) Eurico da Silva. In times, when a little spark is fueled into a big flame, Justice Eurico Silva blazed a different path, in being gentle beneath his firmness and firm beneath his gentleness.

Justice Silva ensured that those who felt offended were allowed to articulate their grievances in what felt like a safe space, and then in his characteristic style secured an apology from the police officer. In the manner in which the proceeding was conducted, the police officer understood that he had crossed the threshold of legitimately expected behaviour, and had hurt the sentiments of the community - and tendered an explicit apology, which was duly accepted by the complainants. The deterrent effect was palpable in the conduct of the particular Deputy Superintendent of Police ever since.

Deeply moved by this attitude in Justice Silva's quasi-judicial posting, I decided to interview Justice Silva post his demission from the State Police Complaints Authority, and had the opportunity to understand the workings of his judicial mind that found ways to navigate the labyrinth of justice holding



people to account in a way that would not only deter them from doing those actions again, and would in fact convert them.

Besides that, given that the survey records are a deviation from the land record maintenance systems that were earlier maintained, it is important to understand the import of its provisions. A judgement that Justice Silva pronounced in his capacity as a judge of the Bombay High Court, in respect of survey records, is an illustration of his lucid accessible language.

Having said that, another person who recently made the crossing and was deeply troubled by the manner in which his own hometown of Tulzapur in Palgarh District of Maharashtra has been destroyed, the patterns of which enabled him to see the oncoming avalanche of destruction in Goa, was Ashley D'Mello. He was posted in Goa as a reporter for a National daily from 1992 to 1996, and returned several times thereafter, until illness forbade it. His sharp instinct was reflected in his writings. At times, when histories are sought to be distorted, his vivid narratives of the histories based on authenticated sources coupled with his interactions with people, are a measure of the kind of journalism that is badly needed today.

As Ashley D'Mello's sister quoted his friend saying, "Ashley was an honourable East Indian and an honorary Goan". In what was the last published article in a Goa 1556 publication '...And Read All Over?', released in Goa an hour before his death at Bombay, Ashley presented his ring side view of the anti-Konkan Railway agitation and the prophetic role of the Church in the agitation, in standing up for justice. The Church needs to continue to support the people proactively in the spirit of standing up for justice, as the railway once again threatens to disrupt the ecology and heritage.

Pertinent to note in the article, is D'Mello's disclosure of his simplistic impressions before coming to Goa of the agitation being one of Goan landlords resisting land acquisition, and his discovery here that the resistance comprised of people from different sections of society, where the Church played an active role in supporting the people. A telling reminder of the need to dispel myths and highlight the specificities of Goa, which, stem from the impact of the varied kind of reigns over Goa, the Portuguese reign being the longest. This is also relevant in the context of Waqf Amendment Bill, 2025, in a state that does not have a Waqf Board, and where yet, the Waqf Amendment Bill has been a subject of discussion of the ruling BJP with, so it is believed, the Archbishop of Goa.

What does this suggest? Does it hold ominous portents for the Church if they don't 'comply'?

When the Congress Government's corruption was bursting at the seams in 2012, the church "sent out a strong message asking the faithful to vote against corruption", as D'Mello's article 'Politics in Goa: Role of the Catholic Church' points out, quoting Tomazinho Cardozo. Will it start its work of sending out strong messages now about the need to change the state of things and the constant polarization in the garb of setting things right? Will it ask whether setting things right should not begin with the majority, so that if indeed they want to right some public wrongs, they should be even-handed and not target a particular religion? Will the Church stand up, like Jesus cleansing the Temple, against exploitation and dishonesty that is plaguing Goa? Will the Church stand up against the price gouging happening with land, taking it beyond the reach of the average Goan? Will the Church stand up against the unfair currency exchange, and the imbalances in international trade, which successive Governments have so far refused to bring within the ambit of discussions in Parliament?

Much to reflect upon in the context of times in Goa today from late Justice Eurico da Silva and late Journalist Ashley D'Mello, about ways of doing, and ways of interrogating!

(Albertina Almeida is a lawyer and human rights activist)

## people's edit

## GOA: MILK THE COW TILL IT BLEEDS.....

FELICIO S FERNANDES

Is Goa a cash cow milked (by a few) to its last drop?

The gamut of Goa's natural resources play a vital role in its sustainable economic development. These resources need to be judiciously harnessed in a sustainable manner so that the future generations can also avail of their advantages. The rampant over-exploitation and ruthless destruction of these resources in recent times has resulted in a colossal detrimental impact on Goa's environment. The rising, unbearable temperatures we are experiencing nowadays has become a matter of discussions and deliberations around Goa (and India in general).

A State holds natural resources as a trustee on behalf of the people - you and me - to ensure that future generations receive the benefit of the inheritance. However, what we see is that sustainable development goals have been thrown to the winds.

There is no effective policy intervention regarding the preservation of our God given natural resources rather, there is a constant depletion and degradation of our natural resources such as the state's Forests, its mindless Mining, the devastation of our Flora & Fauna, the squalor of our once gurgling rivers, the gratuitously given abundance of fish in polluted waters, the destruction of large plantations of fruit trees, the cruel encroachment on our evergreen fields all being done in the name of development is like shooting ourselves in the leg.

Using Goa's pristine and natural resources to its own detriment is the harshest and most heartless 'Environmental Crime' happening right below our noses. Agriculture represents life and living. Our hills are alive, water sozzled reservoirs. Our orchards are a living testament to God's care, predilection and abundance bestowed on us with a vast variety of fruits and vegetables.

Yet, overwhelming and exploiting the system, changing and manipulating legislations to override environmental sensitivities for personal or partisan interests, making short sighted decisions for the benefit of a few godfathers and crony capitalists at the cost of larger social and environmental hazards is using resources to our own detriment. This has led to arbitrary, rampant and unbalanced land conversions.

Recently village gram sabhas in Goa have started demanding for scientific 'Carrying Capacity' studies in order to assess the impact of development projects on their immediate milieu. A case in point being the VPs of Varca, Benaulim, Colva (CCCF), since government departments viz. TCP, PWD and Power bend governance guidelines to favour land and moneyed sharks. These malpractices (e.g. adhoc and arbitrary land conversions of privately owned plots) in turn upset the delicate traditional and social setups in our villages creating polarities and upheavals among once peaceful populations, neighbourhoods and habitats.

In the recent past, the Supreme Court ruled that all mining after 22-Nov-2007 was fully illegal, raising the prospect of recovering some of the loot and also ordered the creation of the Goa Iron Ore Permanent Fund. The estimated loss was stated to be to the tune of Rs 1,44,000 crores. (never recovered).

The TCP Dept. has paid over Rs 3 crores (State Ex Chequer's money) to its Delhi Lawyers to fight its cases (March 13, 2025) in the recent read down Section 17(2) of the TCP Act. This is a clear case of extracting advantage at the cost of our public money and whom shall we question?

Goa the cash cow is being milked to death... Goa is being managed for cash, nay for personal gain of a few, senselessly deriving maximum benefits, squeezing and extracting as much cash out of it as possible without concern for its environmental, conservational, social, well-being or sustainability...Do we not see it? Is the State a real Trustee or a vicious vulture... should we just wait in the sidelines and watch? "Goa - because you exist I remain"

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## Women lifeguards on Goan beaches

It is learnt that in order to enhance beach safety, the state government appointed life-saving agency is in the process of demarcating 65 swim zones along Goa's popular beaches, with 40 already in place across 10 beaches.

The swim zones have been divided into three categories for families, men and women. A dedicated women's swim zone is introduced in order to ensure additional safety and comfort of women on the beaches so that everyone will have a safe and enjoyable experience.

Traditionally, life guarding has been seen as a male-dominated field, but women are now proving their capabilities in this role. Female lifeguards in Goa, like those in other fields, face the challenge of not being taken seriously by beach goers, who may underestimate their authority or ignore their warnings. Incidentally, an adequate number of women lifeguards may not be seen on the Goan beaches. Ideally every beach should have at least a few women lifeguards. Like men, women are equally at risk of drowning in the seawater while swimming. Mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, a form of artificial ventilation, is the act of assisting or stimulating respira-

tion in which a rescuer presses their mouth against that of the victim and blows air into the person's lungs. Lifeguards should be provided with resuscitation device for use in performing mouth-to-mouth. The device has a plastic film shield to place on the casualty's face, with a one-way valve that goes over their mouth.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

## Icon of 'Patriotic Cinema' is no more

Manoj Kumar, one of the titans of India cinema departed for his heavenly abode last morning. Born Hari Krishan Goswami in Abbotabad, erstwhile Pakistan Manoj Kumar carved a niche for himself with iconic roles in films like Shaheed, Upkar, Roti Kapda aur Makaan, Purab aur Paschim, Gumnaam, Rang de Basanti etc.

Throughout his career Manoj Kumar became known for both his acting and direction in films that focused on national pride and patriotism but without the obnoxious jingoism we see in movies today.

These are gentler times when

## letterstotheeditor

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you need not wear your patriotism on your sleeve. Also addressed as Bharat Kumar due to his choice of films, his contribution to Indian cinema earned him several prestigious accolades including a National Award and seven Filmfare trophies. He was also awarded with the Padma Shree in 1992 and the Dadasaheb Phalke Award in 2015. He leaves behind a rock solid legacy, many actors in later years tried copying his method acting but none even came close. Travel well Sir, and keep the Gods entertained with your oeuvre. Farewell.

Rekha Sarin Trehan, Benaulim

## Cleaners deserve respect, dignity

Garbage cleaners play quite a simple but essential role in our society by beautifying our streets and cities. Without their contribution, our neighbourhoods and roads would be messy, smelly and hard to navigate, even more so than they are now.

These hardworking people deserve respect, care, and support. We should try to make their jobs easier by sorting out our waste

and using garbage bins properly.

Jubel D'Cruz, Mumbai

## Bulldozers justice in Prayagraj

The Supreme Court has rightly called the demolition of dwellings in Prayagraj 'inhuman and illegal', consequently ordering the city development authority to pay Rs 10 lakh compensation to each aggrieved house owner. This decision underscores the judiciary's commitment to upholding citizens' fundamental rights, emphasizing that the right to shelter is integral to Article 21 of the Constitution.

The so-called bulldozer justice trend started with the Yogi Adityanath government in UP where the bulldozer became a symbol of a ruthless administration and has spread to other BJP-ruled States like UP, MP and Maharashtra, where authorities carrying out demolitions of properties, cites the alleged criminal cases or encroachments as the reasons, without following the due process of law. The bulldozer demolition amounts to undermining the rule of law. What is surprising is that the latest

spree of demolitions happened despite the SC's clear guidelines. Making the most of legal loopholes, the authorities continue to overturn the SC guidelines. A zero-tolerance approach to encroachments on public land is mandatory and the same yardstick should be applied to illegal demolitions.

Gregory Fernandes, Mumbai

## Don Quixote Trump stokes trade wars

History will remember Donald Trump as the man who single-handedly destroyed all economies of the world, including that of the US. Time will tell. No country is an island. All are interdependent. US needs other countries, as much as other countries need US. One country cannot manufacture or produce everything.

If it produces cars, for example it needs several car parts from other countries. Without these parts the car will be stuck on the conveyor belt. And this exactly is what will happen in all industries. Trump has set off an internecine tariff war which will severely impact all sides. The world will become poorer. The people will suffer because of Don Quixote Trump.

Robert Castellino, Calangute/Mumbai