

O HERALDO

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Will alliance with BJP benefit the MGP?

The State BJP is on a rampage, having declared in many fora that it will contest all the 40 seats in Goa, in the 2027 State Assembly Elections. When quizzed by the media, whether the BJP rules out alliance with the Maharashtra Gomantak Party (MGP) in 2027, the standard response has been that it will build its organisation in all 40 constituencies and booths.

This stance has frightened the wits out of the junior or smaller party the MGP, which has now been reduced to two MLAs. The MGP leadership had to rush to New Delhi to meet the BJP high command to keep the coalition going. After their return from New Delhi, the MGP stance has been that the coalition will remain. However, in its latest response, Power Minister Ramkrishna 'Sudin' Dhavalikar has said that the elections are still two years away and that he may not be 'there'.

After the MGP leaders' return from New Delhi and after the BJP foundation day function, the State BJP Chief Damu Naik has again stoked the controversy and very specifically stated that the BJP will contest all 40 seats. Off the record, Damu Naik has said that this stance is to keep the BJP cadres in all constituencies active and not to demoralise them.

It may be recalled that the BJP and MGP did not have an alliance going into the 2022 Goa State Assembly Elections. So when the BJP became the party with the largest number of seats (20) it decided to go in for a coalition with the MGP which won 2 seats and then to make the government even stronger, 'imported' 8 more MLAs from the Congress.

However, the moot question is 'Will a pre-poll coalition benefit the MGP?' MGP was the first political party to come to power in Goa in the 1963 with 14 seats, two short of majority and formed a coalition with the Praja Socialist Party with two seats and two independents. In 1967, the MGP won a simple majority with 16 seats and was supported by 2 independents from Daman and Diu. In 1972, the party won 18 seats - highest the MGP touched in an Assembly of 30 seats. In 1980, the party was decimated winning only seven seats and then faced the ignominy of Shashikala Kakodkar, the defeated CM joining the Congress and MGP retaining only 2 MLAs. The party then saw a revival only in 1989 Assembly Elections, the first after Statehood where the party won 18 seats in a House of 40, due to the language agitation, where it supported Marathi.

Goa's political history shows that MGP played a big role in helping the BJP make its debut in Goa Assembly by forging a pre-poll alliance with the party in 1994 Goa Assembly elections. Previously, in 1984, the BJP which independently contested 17 seats, drew a blank. In 1989, the BJP contested 8 seats and again drew a blank. It was only after they forged an alliance with the MGP in 1994 that the BJP made its debut in Goa Assembly winning 4 seats, while the MGP won 12 seats.

Thereafter in 1999 Goa Assembly elections, the scales tilted and while the MGP won only 4 seats, the BJP won 10, which helped it to come to power after withdrawing support to the Francisco Sardinha government in 2000. In 2002, BJP emerged as the single largest party with 17 seats forming the government and the MGP's fortunes further dipping to 2 seats. The BJP has won 21, 23 and 28 seats in the 2012, 2017 and 2022 elections and has been in power since 2012 on its own steam though keeping a semblance of coalition, but mostly preying on Congress MLAs.

With rise in the fortunes of the BJP, the MGP's fortune has conversely dipped to 3 seats in 2012 and 2017 and 2 seats in 2022 Assembly Elections. The MGP has admitted the two parties are fighting for the same Hindu vote bank. In fact, the BJP has gradually usurped the entire vote bank of the MGP in the New Conquests, with only Sudin retaining his stronghold in Madkai, from where Dayanand Bhandodkar first contested, and now Mandrem, with Jit Arolkar winning the seat.

Now with a powerful organisation and money power, it is the MGP which needs the coalition rather than the converse. The MGP has to realise that wherever the BJP has ruled, it has literally swallowed its coalition partner as seen with the Shiva Sena in Maharashtra. It is high time the MGP which espoused to soft Hindutva, rebuilds its own party organisation in at least 8 constituencies and keeps alive the legacy of the celebrated hero of the Bahujan Samaj Dayanand Bhandodkar, and capitalise on the dissatisfaction of the people with the BJP, rather than get sucked into the BJP juggernaut. It has to fight the elections independently, if it has to survive.

comment



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Old Goa has a rich history and is the greatest attraction of this world tourist destination. No wonder that, like many other historical places in India, Old Goa was chosen as a UNESCO protected site, covering an area of approximately 800 hectares and many important monuments like the Basilica and the Cathedral. India is not only a founding member of UNESCO but is also part of its World Heritage Committee and a signatory to various Conventions including Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Instead of priding in UNESCO's tag, as a world acknowledgment of Old Goa's history and being happy that it is a great source of revenue to the tourism industry, recent

Why does the government want to destroy Old Goa?

However much one may wish to avoid castigating the Government regularly, surely not without reason, for its acts of omission and commission, it appears that we will have no respite in creating awareness and drawing Government's attention even to its own acts or others, where its support or connivance cannot be ignored.

Speaking recently, at the inauguration of Multipurpose Cyclone Centre in Margao, the CM is believed to have warned people against burying fields and said that he won't allow constructions in NDZs, to avoid a Wayanad type of catastrophe. Was it a jumla, will he claim having been wrongly quoted or was it, at last, a change of heart, is what we really wonder or is he making activists and well-meaning people feel like fools, as aren't these very issues they have been fighting for in the streets and expensive Courts? And aren't these mainly promoted or supported by his Govt, despite some raps from the Courts? But, let me leave this for some other time.

happenings seem to suggest that a veiled attempt is being made either at destroying Old Goa or diminishing its importance, perhaps because it is mainly derived from the existence, past and present, of Catholic Churches and Convents.

Perhaps, it all started with an illegal bungalow of a former Minister, who recently accused this Government of being busy in counting money - a statement he later retracted. Allegedly, his construction was within 300 metres of the protected Basilica. Not surprisingly, the bungalow got a reprieve from the Panchayat, headed by none other than the wife of the owner, stating that all permissions were obtained. However, the report of Tiswadi Mamladar, submitted to High Court includes this and structures of some Panchayat functionaries among the 54 in Old Goa heritage zone.

It may be recalled that, in 2014, before the Exposition, late CM Parrikar had demolished 156 structures around the Basilica. Old Goa has a history of illegal structures in the prohibited or regulated zone, with Panchayats and the Government doing very little about them. In January 2025, the Additional Director of Panchayats reversed Old Goa Panchayat demolition order of 12 structures, which allegedly did not have either Panchayat or ASI's permission. Whether some structures will get the axe, with the recent High Court order on illegalities, or whether they will get "protection" in the Protected Heritage zone, is to be seen.

The illegalities in Old Goa came to a climax, with the controversial construction of a bungalow, allegedly belonging to a spokesperson of the BJP, a few yards away from another protected monument, the Convent of St Cajetan.

Massive protests, demolition orders by the Panchayat, hunger strikes, etc never worked, for obvious reasons and the matter now lies with the Supreme Court, which is scheduled to hear the case on May 20. In most cases, as in this too, a totally new one storey bungalow appeared where permission was obtained for repairs for an allegedly different structure.

As the protests had died down, awaiting SC decision, another issue cropped up,

where heavy excavation was carried out by GTDC for the so-called PILGRIMAGE REJUVENATION AND SPIRITUAL AUGMENTATION DRIVE (PRASAD). Whereas permissions for works are obtained from the Archaeological Office in Delhi, the ASI in Goa is required to inspect and supervise them, which apparently was not done in Surveys Nos 154/1, 2 & 3, in front of the Basilica, which was often used for parking and falls within 100 metres of the protected monument. It is surprising that the Government seemed more interested in finding out how the rumour of a mall coming up there, has surfaced, possibly with the aim of targeting the activists. It was obvious from videos, which went viral, that some cannon balls were seen at spot and possibly some could have been taken away alongwith excavated mud. Even a day or two after the complaints, the balls were lying unattended. They are evidence that something historical existed at the place and such careless attitude doesn't behove of people in charge of artefacts and archaeological remains.

The "Save Old Goa Action Committee" has been the watch dog for the happenings, with some committed stalwarts like Peter Viegas, Glen Cabral and others keeping an eye and creating awareness among the people. 35,000 people have represented to the Government that a Master Plan is needed for Old Goa. They have protested against the mushrooming of projects due to come up in the Heritage Zone, which include four farm houses with 10 bedrooms each and swimming pools, concealed as water tanks, a floating jetty, a helipad, etc.

It is surely not that things are happening without the knowledge of the Government. In fact, they very much are and perhaps its approval and connivance cannot be ruled out. Every beautiful place in Goa is under attack by the land mafia, which has the tacit support of the Government. But unless there is a hidden purpose behind it, can Old Goa be spared from destruction and unnecessary development, which could even result in losing UNESCO tag?

(The author is a retired banker)

people's *edit*

RASH DRIVING IN GOA, A GROWING CONCERN

MOLLY FERNANDES

Just weeks ago, an unimaginable tragedy struck a family as they were immersed in the preparations for their daughter's wedding. A speeding car crashed into their vehicle from behind, leading to devastating consequences. The pillion rider suffered a severe brain injury and, after two agonising days, tragically succumbed to their injuries. A loss of their beloved daughter was a grave blow to both the families involved in the marriage preparation.

Goa, with its picturesque landscapes and vibrant culture, is a magnet for tourists and locals alike. However, amid the charm of winding roads and serene beaches lies a pressing issue - the rash driving. This reckless behaviour not only endangers lives but also tarnishes the tranquility that the state is known for.

From over speeding to weaving dangerously through traffic, rash driving takes many forms. The roads of Goa, often narrow and winding, are ill-suited for reckless vehicles. Yet, instances of drivers exceeding speed limits, ignoring traffic signals, and overtaking without caution are increasingly common.

The state's reputation as a tourism hub exacerbates the problem. With visitors eager to explore, rented vehicles - especially motorbikes - are frequently misused. Many tourists, unfamiliar with Goan roads and traffic norms, inadvertently contribute to the chaos. Locals, too, are not exempt; impatience and poor adherence to rules often lead to dangerous situations.

The consequences of rash driving are grave. Road accidents in Goa have surged, leaving families to grapple with the loss of loved ones and permanent injuries. Pedestrians and cyclists, who rely on the roads for daily travel, are particularly vulnerable.

Beyond physical harm, rash driving has environmental repercussions. Frequent braking, rapid acceleration, and collisions contribute to noise and air pollution. The damage caused to vehicles and infrastructure also adds financial strain on individuals.

Several factors fuel the prevalence of rash driving. Insufficient road safety awareness, combined with lax enforcement of traffic laws, creates a breeding ground for reckless behaviour. The absence of adequate road signage and lighting exacerbates the problem, especially in rural areas.

Alcohol consumption is another major contributor. Goa's nightlife, characterised by vibrant parties and easy access to liquor, often leads to drunk driving incidents. Despite existing laws, enforcement remains inconsistent, allowing offenders to escape unscathed.

There is need to educating drivers about road safety through workshops, advertisements, and community programs can foster responsible behaviour, before issuing licences. The road lighting, clearer signage, and designated lanes for different vehicle types can reduce confusion and accidents.

So too, the rental agencies should ensure tourists are briefed on local traffic laws and safety precautions before handing over vehicles, or provide a driver asking them to pay. Similarly, the residents can play a role by reporting violations and advocating for safer driving practices within their neighborhoods. And also, the local market areas that create nuisance by parking on both sides of the road, could be tackled by the local panchayat or the sitting MLA.

Rash driving is not merely a legal issue; it is a social challenge that calls for collective action. By prioritising safety and accountability, Goa can reclaim its roads as spaces of harmony and beauty.

Most importantly, let us all embrace habits that safeguard lives, starting with the simple yet vital act of wearing helmets while riding two-wheelers. Helmets save lives—they are not just an accessory, but a shield against unforeseen risks. Let us steer toward a future where every journey in this idyllic state is not just memorable, but also safe.

Live CCTV footage at police stations

Thieves reportedly broke into five shops in Panaji on Thursday which rattled local residents and the business community. It is learnt that the Panaji police have arrested three suspects at Kolhapur in Maharashtra. The burglars did a reconnaissance to survey the area and plan their robbery, the CCTV of which has gone viral on the Social Media.

Be that as it may, CCTV systems are indispensable tools which capture crucial visual evidence in crime investigation. Goa police have mapped around 7,000 CCTV cameras at private houses and establishments across more than 1,300 locations. However the government has not enforced any regulation requiring the sharing of such footage, leaving it to the discretion of the property owners.

It must be said that CCTV footage can be useful in detecting crimes. However live CCTV footage can prevent crimes. Most cameras have a web-based interface that allows one to access the live feed serving as vigilant electronic eyes. Real time CCTV footage when available at the police stations can go a long way in quick action by the cops in preventing burglaries and other crimes. If the CCTV footage of the reconnaissance conducted by the thieves at Panaji was available at the police station live, the burglaries could

have been prevented. Real time monitoring of vehicle movement can also be used in order to apprehend traffic violators. Live CCTV footage can play a vital role in preventing crimes while recorded footage is used for detecting crime.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Railways and luggage theft

Section 100 of the Railway Act says the Railways cannot be blamed for the passengers losing their luggage "unless it is proved that the loss is due to negligence or misconduct on its or its employees' part."

The Maharashtra State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission had earlier held that the Railways cannot get blanket protection if the passenger whose money or valuables have been stolen is able to prove negligence or misconduct on the part of the Railways.

Recently, the Delhi High Court has ruled that the passenger was responsible for the safety of his luggage and the Railways was not liable for any theft unless there was misconduct or negligence on the part of its officials. The absence of the attendant or conductor per

se cannot mean negligence unless the "coach was left open for someone unauthorised to enter the coach".

Petitioner's case was that he lost his valuables because the attendant was fast asleep and the conductor was missing. But there was no record before the court that the theft could not have been committed of by a co-passenger. Preventing unauthorised entry into coaches and ensuring the coach latches are secured at night, and overall vigilance are an AC conductor's responsibilities.

Ganapathi Bhat, Akola

Finally justice after extradition

Mumbai terror attack accused Tahawwur Rana's is considered a significant development in India's efforts to bring those responsible for the 26/11 attacks to justice. Earlier, he has been arrested by the US in 2009 for his alleged link with David Headley, the LeT operative tasked by Pakistan to carry out the reconnaissance for target in Mumbai by LeT terrorists. His trial in India will focus on his alleged role in facilitating the attacks and collecting information on handlers involved in.

letterstotheeditor

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

In a chilling experience, ten terrorists from Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) infiltrated the city on November 26, 2008 launching simultaneous attacks at multiple high-profile locations of Mumbai. The siege lasted over 60 hours leaving 166 dead and over 300 injured. The attackers were heavily armed, used satellite phones, GPS, and had handlers in Pakistan guiding them in real-time.

The prolonged standoff exposed the serious gaps in urban security and intelligence coordination. India's efforts to expose Pakistan's terror activities will receive a boost if investigators can make a strong case against Rana compelling him to spill the beans. Finally, Rana's extradition is a significant step in the quest for justice and closure for the victims of the 26/11 attacks and their families.

Gregory Fernandes, Mumbai

Right from the Nazi playbook

Books on the Holocaust, histories of feminism, civil rights and racism, and Maya Angelou's famous autobiography, "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," were among the nearly 400 volumes removed from the U.S. Naval Academy's library this week after US Defense

Secretary Pete Hegseth ordered the school to get rid of ones that promote diversity, equity and inclusion. The move marks another step in the Trump administration's far-reaching effort to purge so-called DEI content from federal agencies, including policies, programs, online and social media postings and curriculum at schools.

In addition to Angelou's award-winning tome, the list includes "Memorializing the Holocaust," which deals with Holocaust memorials; "Half American," about African Americans in World War II; "A Respectable Woman," about the public roles of African American women in 19th century New York; and "Pursuing Trayvon Martin," about the 2012 shooting of the Black 17-year-old in Florida that raised questions about racial profiling.

We are seeing a similar purge and falsification of past history in India by the Sanghis who want to paint our country as one homogeneous Akhand Bharat ruled by valiant Hindu kings who made the Mughals bite the dust in every war fought in the past. The first thing the Nazis used to do after invading countries in WW1 and WW2 was to burn all historical tomes, scientific manuals and research material so that the chapter of Nazi supremacy could be written afresh. We have entered the same era now, scary times.

Vinay Dwivedi, Benaulim