

## O HERALDO

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## Will people's protest go up in flames?

**L**ate last month, the Cuncolim police registered an offence against Hughes Precision Manufacturing Pvt. Ltd., a company having its unit at the Verna Industrial Estate, for allegedly violating safety regulations regarding the storage and transportation of gunpowder, which led to a shocking blast and resultant blaze at magazine number 1 of the warehouse on March 21.

In his complaint to the Cuncolim police, Deputy Collector and Sub-Divisional Officer, Manohar Karekar, claimed that Hughes Precision Manufacturing Pvt. Ltd. had failed to adhere to the safety guidelines and standing instructions issued during the licensing process for handling explosives. During the investigation that followed, it was discovered that on March 22, the company had illegally stored an massive 11,000 kg of gunpowder in its magazine number 2 without obtaining the necessary sanction from the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO).

The authorities also accused the company of failing to inform police, fire officials, and other emergency responders about the additional stock of explosives in magazine 2 during the rescue operation at magazine 1, which would have caused catastrophic damage and loss of life had the fire from the blast at magazine 1 spread to magazine 2.

Negligence on the part of the company prompted the Salcete mamlatdar to seal the godown used to store gunpowder, while the Cuncolim police sealed the exhibits at the scene of the explosion.

Distressed by the incident which could have quite easily escalated into a tragedy, residents of Naquerim-Betul staged a silent protest at the district collector's office, demanding action against Hughes Precision Manufacturing Pvt. Ltd. They strongly opposed the establishment of the company in their community, and said they feared for the safety of their lives and environment particularly after the explosion which had exposed them to significant risk. They also claimed that no investigation had been conducted into the company's activities even as they demanded an immediate inquiry into the company's operations.

Further, the villagers raised concerns about the potential contamination of nearby freshwater springs during the monsoon, warning that runoff from the site could pollute vital water sources, which would in turn pose a severe threat humans and wildlife who depend on the water from these streams. They demanded a thorough investigation and the immediate suspension of the company's operations until the situation was resolved.

For the uninitiated, a gunpowder magazine is a fortified building or structure specifically designed to store gunpowder safely. They are often built with thick walls and curved ceilings to contain any potential explosions and protect against fire, a risk inherent with storing such a flammable substance. The primary function of a gunpowder magazine is to store gunpowder securely, preventing accidental ignition or theft. Historically, gunpowder magazines were crucial in the context of the military, particularly for ships carrying cannons.

Very often, such magazines have multiple small units to isolate explosive material in case of a fire, minimizing damage. Interestingly, while gunpowder itself has been largely replaced by modern smokeless powder, the term "magazine" is still used for storage facilities for explosives and other ammunition.

Therefore, if a magazine contains such a potentially dangerous substance, it should first hold all the requisite licenses and should be allowed to operate only upon a thorough inspection by the authorities concerned. That magazine 2 was holding a large quantity of ammunition without valid permissions says all about the company's oversight or nonchalance and the authorities' failure to conduct regular inspections to ensure the guidelines are adhered to.

Ultimately, the section that suffers is the common man and had the blaze at Betul on March 21 not been contained in time, the consequences could have been much more deadly and far-reaching. Will the authorities act and will the company concerned realise it missed disaster by a whisker and take proactive steps to follow the storage rules in force, or will this be yet another exercise in futility for the protesting common man?

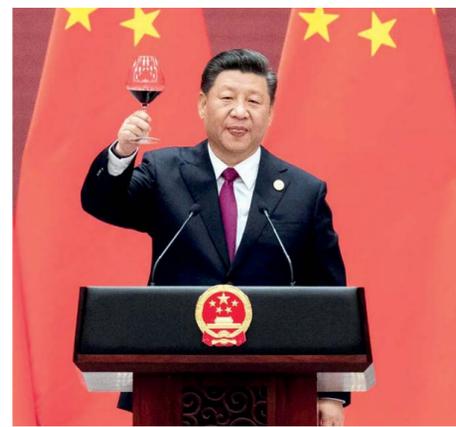
Let's hope people's objections and demands don't go up in flames.

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BY INVITATION

Vivek Meneses

## CHINA ON TOP



**But when similar tricks have been tried abroad, the results have not been what Trump and company expected or promised. They have failed to stop Israel's unconscionable bombardment of the Palestinians, and shocked the world with their callous cancellation of 92% of USAID foreign aid programmes, including many serving the most vulnerable people across the globe**

**T**here comes a moment, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to new," said Jawaharlal Nehru at his poetic best in 1947: "when an age ends" and another begins its "tryst with destiny." Make no mistake that is what happened this past week, as the United States of America very publicly wrecked its longstanding advantages as the guarantor of the prevailing world order. In just a few rollercoaster days, President Donald Trump's lurching policies - more threats than actual tariffs - erased trillions from global markets, severely weakened the dollar (but not against the rupee), and picked a fight with China that the Americans very obviously cannot afford or survive. This reversal atop the superpower standings has been long anticipated, but no one thought it could happen almost overnight, in one of the most shockingly incompetent own goals in history.

Part of why everything collapsed, of course, is the shambolic and shameless crony-capitalist-in-chief in the White House, and the highly dubious mixed bag of grifters, fanatics and crooks in his Make America Great Again (MAGA) "movement". Flying high on their own supply of hot air, they started this term as wrecking balls, and have mostly gotten away with it because - as we have all sadly learned - the USA never actually had sufficient internal checks and balances to prevent the whole-scale destruction of norms and precedents from within. Thus, Trump has been playing the bully with notable success: the universities (mostly) caved, the biggest law firms came crawling, and an entire ecosystem of assiduous sycophants materialized at Mar-a-Lago.

But when similar tricks have been tried abroad, the results have not been what Trump and company expected or promised. They have failed to stop Israel's unconscionable bombardment of the Palestinians, and shocked the world with their callous cancellation of 92% of USAID foreign aid programmes, including many serving the most vulnerable people across the globe. Meanwhile, we have seen an emergence of Vice President JD Vance - the son-in-law of India via his wife Usha Chilukuri - as an attack dog in international affairs, with each episode going badly wrong: the

classless picking on Vzioldymyr Zelensky in the Oval Office, the absurd arm-twisting of Norway about Greenland. This week Vance was once again both crude and offensive: "We borrow money from Chinese peasants to buy the things those Chinese peasants manufacture. That is not a recipe for economic prosperity. It's not a recipe for low prices, and it's not a recipe for good jobs in the United States of America."

The thing about bullies, of course, is they're actually afraid. And once everyone sees it, the game is over for them. This is what played out in real time as stocks plunged and bond yields surged earlier this week, and Trump immediately backed off to "pause" his incredibly ill-conceived "reciprocal tariffs" while doubling down on trade war against China. Here's how the Finance Ministry of China described what happened: "On April 10, 2025, the US government announced that the "reciprocal tariff" on Chinese goods exported to the US would be further increased to 125%. The US's arbitrary imposition of abnormally high tariffs on China seriously violates international economic and trade rules, disregards the post-World War II global economic order built by the US itself, and violates basic

economic laws and common sense. It is completely a unilateral bullying and coercion. China strongly condemns this. Even if the US continues to impose higher tariffs, it will no longer make economic sense and will become a joke in the history of world economy."

I liked the veteran China analyst (and senior American journalist) Howard French's contextualization of what has just taken place, in Foreign Policy: "Many Chinese people justified authoritarianism by turning to the familiar argument that the concentration of power in a disciplined executive can get things done in ways that are not possible amid the palaver and chaos of democracy. For years, Chinese graduate students in my classes boasted about this systemic advantage, but that ended with the suffocating atmosphere of Xi's crack-down and the alarming economic slowdown that came with it. Suddenly, conversations turned to what political theorists call the "bad emperor" problem. As a new generation of young adults bemoaned the loss of an era of nearly certain opportunity, they began to see life under authoritarianism as a matter of sheer luck. In a blink, they realized, a seemingly enlightened dictator could be replaced by a rash

and benighted despot."

French says that "it has become increasingly obvious that the world's oldest and most powerful democracy now faces the bad emperor dilemma. With each passing week, the United States' vaunted system of checks and balances has shown itself to be largely impotent in constraining US President Donald Trump's power." And, "though Trump may not realise it, his theatrical escalation of tariffs on China, which he raised to 145 percent, will likely be a gift to Xi. Yes, Beijing will face difficulties in the short term—perhaps even the long run—but Trump's behavior distracts Chinese people from Xi's own shortcomings and lends force to Beijing's long-standing propaganda about the superiority of its political system and Washington's villainous designs in trying to keep China down. To the world at large, China now looks like a more moderate force in the international order oriented toward stability and the status quo. If a country has to choose a superpower to hitch its wagon to, China may loom as the preferable option."

Here is French's conclusion: "Bad emperors are not only self-sure and impulsive. They also tend to be badly informed. That is because by the time they have fully subjugated their own political party and surrounded themselves with yes-men, they are rarely exposed to information that contradicts their views. Trump has conflated his sense of his own invincibility with that of the United States. Because no one at home has been able to resist him, he now imagines that no one in the world can, either, [however] not only is China roughly 11 times more populous, but in little more than a generation, it has also become the leading trading partner of most countries, a greater source of finance capital than the World Bank, and a military power of the first rank. The United States will not be able to intimidate China on the basis of tariffs, nor through a bad imperial president's exaggerated sense of his own power and the nation's capabilities. It must look at its own weaknesses—not with misplaced nostalgia for a past that is never coming back, but with a positive and demanding agenda for the future."

(Vivek Meneses is a writer and co-founder of the Goa Arts and Literature Festival)

## Language Challenge: Lessons in Harmonious Multilingualism

**I**ndia, with its vast cultural and linguistic diversity, is often described as a subcontinent rather than a country. It is home to 22 officially recognised languages under the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution and over 19,500 dialects spoken across different regions. This linguistic richness, while a source of cultural pride, has also led to complex challenges in governance, education, administration and social integration. The issue of language in India has become increasingly contentious in recent years, especially in states like Maharashtra and the southern regions. These developments offer important lessons for other linguistically diverse states like Goa.

The linguistic diversity of India has always posed a challenge to national integration. After independence, one of the first major debates in the Constituent Assembly was about the national language. While Hindi was eventually adopted as the official language of the Union, English was allowed to continue for an indefinite period. The idea was to gradually transition to Hindi, but that has remained largely aspirational. As Jawaharlal Nehru once stated, "No language can be imposed on the people. It must win their acceptance."

Over the decades, several regions resisted the imposition of Hindi. The most notable was the anti-Hindi

VASANT PEDNEKAR

agitations in Tamil Nadu in the 1960s, which significantly altered the central government's approach to language. The central policy gradually shifted from imposition to accommodation. However, the tension between promoting a common national identity and preserving linguistic diversity has never fully disappeared.

In recent years, language politics have flared up in Maharashtra and several southern states, sparking fresh debates over linguistic rights and national unity. In Maharashtra, there has been a renewed push to prioritise Marathi in public life. The state government mandated the use of Marathi on commercial signboards and emphasised its use in educational institutions. Though rooted in the desire to preserve local culture, this move has sparked legal and social disputes. Critics argue that it alienates non-Marathi speakers, including migrants and business owners from other linguistic backgrounds. As one local business owner in Mumbai remarked, "Language should be a bridge, not a barrier." The controversy reflects a broader struggle between linguistic pride and social inclusivity.

States like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala have historically resisted the imposition of Hindi. In Tamil Nadu, for instance, Hindi is often viewed as a tool of cultural domination by the North. The state continues to promote

## UPFRONT

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Tamil aggressively, and political parties across the

spectrum have opposed any moves by the central government to promote Hindi as the primary medium of instruction or administration. The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which advocates for the teaching of three languages, has met with resistance in the South. Though the policy allows flexibility, the trust deficit between the center and these states often leads to misinterpretations and political posturing.

The root of India's language problem lies in the balancing act between national integration and regional identity. Language is not merely a means of communication; it is a carrier of culture, history, and identity. As Mahatma Gandhi aptly put it, "A language is an exact reflection of the character and growth of its speakers." Efforts to promote any one language at the expense of others can trigger fears of marginalisation. Furthermore,

India's rapid urbanization and migration have made cities more linguistically diverse than ever. A rigid approach to language can lead to exclusion, especially in education and employment. At the same time, neglecting regional languages risks eroding cultural identities and traditions.

Goa, with its own rich linguistic heritage, stands at a unique crossroads when it comes to language policy. Konkani, the official language of the state, shares space with Marathi, Hindi, and English in various aspects of Goan society—from education and administration to media and culture. As the state continues to grow in diversity and development, it must remain alert to the language-related tensions seen in Maharashtra and South Indian states. These examples offer key lessons for Goa in managing its multilingual identity.

Goa must resist the temptation to over-promote any one language at the cost of others. While Konkani is

the official language and an integral part of Goan identity, the state must continue to recognise and respect the presence of Marathi, English, and Hindi. A multilingual approach in education, administration, and public communication will create a more inclusive environment for both locals and migrants. In a multilingual country, mutual respect is the only sustainable policy.

Goa has a history of cultural harmony, but language politics can easily become a divisive issue if not handled delicately. In Maharashtra, for example, the insistence on using Marathi on shop signboards sparked protests and legal challenges. Goa can learn from this by promoting the use of Konkani and Marathi through incentives and awareness rather than compulsion. Policies should focus on encouraging pride in local languages without marginalizing those who speak other tongues.

The debate around the medium of instruction in schools continues in Goa, particularly between supporters of English-medium schools and proponents of mother-tongue education in Konkani or Marathi. While preserving the local language is essential, Goa must also recognise the role

English plays in higher education, employment, and global connectivity. A flexible, parent-choice-based approach, coupled with strong Konkani/Marathi language

education as a subject, may strike the right balance. A language should empower students and not limit their opportunities.

With a significant number of people from Karnataka, Maharashtra, and North India residing in Goa, the state must ensure that minority language communities feel welcome and valued. Language should never become a barrier to public services, employment, or education. Just as Tamil Nadu's resistance to Hindi imposition shows the importance of respecting regional identity, Goa must ensure that the reverse doesn't happen—by safeguarding the rights of linguistic minorities while promoting the state's own language.

Instead of relying on regulations or mandatory policies, Goa can take a more creative approach to language promotion. Cultural festivals, social media campaigns, mobile apps, and local cinema can be powerful tools to popularise Konkani and Marathi among the youth.

The future of any language lies with the younger generation. Goa can involve students, artists, writers, and cultural organizations in projects to preserve and popularise Konkani and other regional dialects. Competitions, debates, music, and literature festivals can create excitement around language rather than treating it as a formal requirement. As it is said that, when we speak in Konkani, we speak from the soul of Goa.