

O HERALDO

The Voice of Goa - since 1900

Universal security must for universal ID

We are living in an age of scams that were unheard of but have now become a major part of our lives. Among these is the growing number of cases involving the misuse of documents while applying for Aadhaar cards on one hand, and the exploitation of Aadhaar cards by unscrupulous elements to facilitate all sorts of crimes on the other.

Recently, citizens in South Goa alleged that fraudulent practices, including the submission of fake addresses and misrepresentation of residential details, are being used particularly by migrants to obtain Aadhaar cards. Locals in some sections of the district alleged that their own house numbers and postal addresses were being used without their knowledge or consent. They recounted several instances where tenants and migrants have submitted applications for Aadhaar cards by listing residential addresses of others as their own despite not having even lived at the addresses concerned at all.

The Aadhaar card is essential if one must avail of essential services, which is the reason why many who do not have the document resort to crooked and underhanded ways to apply for it quickly. Citizens, however, fear that rampant misuse of addresses and false representations made before the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) may not only land the applicants of Aadhaar cards in hot water but may have also severe legal implications for them despite these wrongdoings having been committed unbeknownst to them. They have, therefore, been calling for stricter verification processes during the Aadhaar application process by way of UIDAI tying up with local panchayats and municipalities or even conducting independent physical verifications with property owners to ascertain that the addresses furnished in applications are indeed where the applicants concerned reside.

On the flip side, many citizens are accustomed to freely handing out copies of their Aadhaar cards to various establishments and services providers, without even realising that they can be grossly misused just like any other photocopy of IDs such as passports and driving licenses. Aadhaar cards are misused for various forms of fraud such as identity theft and access to financial accounts. It doesn't directly involve the withdrawal of money but information on the card - such as name, date of birth and address - can be used to open fake accounts and apply for loans without the knowledge of the cardholder. Aadhaar doesn't have a PIN or a magnetic strip, like debit and credit cards do, so it's harder to protect the cardholder against misuse when he/she shares a photocopy.

If you suspect that your Aadhaar card has been misused, report it to the UIDAI through their official website or by calling the toll-free number, 1947. If you suspect criminal activity, it would be best to contact the cybercrime cell for assistance. It is also essential that you lock your Aadhaar biometrics on the UIDAI website or through the mAadhaar app so that authentication using your fingerprints is disallowed.

Should you absolutely need to share a photocopy of your Aadhaar card, use a masked version, in which the first eight digits of your Aadhaar number are hidden. Ensure the photocopy is attested with the reason for its use. Be careful to never use a public computer to access your Aadhaar biometrics or any other sensitive information too.

While these are the steps every citizen should take, it is binding on the government, both at the state and Centre, that solid measures are put in place to not only stop such rampant misuse of Aadhaar cards but also severely punish those involved in such crimes. Identity theft is no joke, particularly given the fast-paced world we live in, where money and sensitive information can be swiped away before one can even blink. If laxity in conducting verification during the Aadhaar application process and nonchalance when the ID is fraudulently submitted for obtaining loans etc, continues, the government and law enforcement agencies will be swamped with cases that could have so easily been avoided had stricter measures been envisaged and implemented. A universal ID must have universal security.

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BY INVITATION

Vivek Menezes

By the time you read this Sunday newspaper, the inspirational centenarian Libia Lobo Sardesai will be en route to New Delhi, where she will receive her 2025 Padma Shri award from Droupadi Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan tomorrow evening. It is true our Libby - as she is affectionately known to all - should have been recognised many decades ago, or with her late husband Vaman Sardesai in 1992. Still, even belatedly, it is truly wonderful the right thing is being done now, and it is especially meaningful this diminutive, doughty icon will be honoured by another important pioneer, the first Adivasi (and second woman) President of India. It was so touching to hear Libby's first response to the fantastic news on Republic Day earlier this year: "I am as happy as I was on the day Goa was liberated from Portuguese rule. Today, I feel a similar happiness. Such moments are very rare in one's life. The award has come as a big and pleasant surprise. I never expected or aspired for it."

The fact that Libby didn't expect even the fourth-highest civilian award says something about her humility and grace, and also reveals yet another dereliction of governance in Goa, where some of the most distinguished candidates for national honours languish without ever being championed by their own state, with rare exceptions that come once every few years. Here, let us remember that in November 2023, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said "next year, we will recommend Lorna's name for the Padma Shri" - and we are still waiting - but there are so many others, and in the case of the great Konkani litterateur Damodar Mauzo, he has already won the Jnanpith Award in the meantime. In fact, it was exactly the same for Libby, except for the direct intervention of Narendra Modi's PMO.

Let's give credit where it is due: they made an excellent selection. They recognised Libby's extraordinary record of national service, especially in the Western Ghats jungles for six years running the Voz da Liberdade (Goencho Sovonecho Awaz) clandestine radio station that broke the news embargo. In her own words:



100 Years of Libby: limited Edition Print, Signed by Libia Lobo Sardesai and Nishant Saldanha (2024)

Libby was the first Director of Tourism, and helped found the Women's Cooperative Bank and the College of Home Sciences. She turns 101 on May 25th - which calls for a public celebration - but still continues to be an indomitable, lucid and luminous presence, and a constant encouragement to everyone around her

"all communications were suspended. The people of Goa had to rely only on the propaganda of the Portuguese, and they could not know anything about what was happening in the outside world, and how the [freedom] movement was going on. The people were getting desperate, and they were losing their morale. There was no way of communicating with the Goans or educating and enlightening them in any way."

When this adventure began, there were four idealistic freedom fighters in the jungle: Nicolau Menezes and his wife Alda, the intellectual Vaman Sardesai, and the fire-cracker "chit of a girl" who had been working at All India Radio when they hatched the plan. After a short while, the older couple couldn't manage, and after that it was just Vaman and Libby who did the job, and on Liberation Day on 19th December

1961, they exulted high in the skies above their homeland in an aeroplane given to them by Krishna Menon (an indelible moment that is pictorialised in Nishant Saldanha's vibrant artwork on this page) to broadcast the good news that Goa was free.

There is much more before that highlight, and long after as well. Libby represents the best Indian history in so many different ways: her heart first stirred as a young Bombay girl witnessing the bloody aftermath of Quit India movement rallies, and while still a student, she was the Secretary of Tristão de Bragança Cunha's anti-colonial Goan Youth League. Then, after wartime years as a censor/translator for Italian prisoners of war (where many other Goans were similarly employed) she got her first degree at the new Siddharth College established by Ambedkar,

where Babasaheb himself expressed pleasure about her signing up. Nissim Ezekiel took her to hear MN Roy speak, and even later in life - Libby married Vaman on the anniversary of Liberation Day in 1964 - she remained actively engaged with the likes of Aruna Asaf Ali.

Back in Goa after 1961 - except when Vaman Sardesai was India's Ambassador to Angola from 1988-1991 - this phenomenal power couple held a series of important posts in the newly Indian administration. Libby was the first Director of Tourism, and helped found the Women's Cooperative Bank and the College of Home Sciences. She turns 101 on May 25th - which calls for a public celebration - but still continues to be an indomitable, lucid and luminous presence, and a constant encouragement to everyone around her.

Tomorrow, the rest of India will get to know all about our Libby - you can count on her being the star of the show - but I asked her favourite grand-niece Nerissa Britto what it was like to grow up with her, and she told me via email from Mumbai: "as a child I spent a lot of time with her at her house. Though back then, she was still in the thick of her professional life, she would still take time out to read to me every afternoon before my nap, take me to Miramar in the evenings and wait patiently till I had my fill of playing. She always encouraged me, and still does - to take on new tasks, new challenges and push myself. As I grew, I realised how progressive, motivated and accomplished she is. Her ability to push through and get a task accomplished is almost unparalleled. Her example shines across generations as a lady who is way beyond her time, unfettered by any societal restraints, progressive and very, very adaptive and practical. She is also very open to meeting new people and making friends, both very young and old. I am very happy that she is being recognised and feted formally."

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

Papa Francesco: The Pope of Surprises

LAVOISIER FERNANDES

Pope Francis' 12-year papacy brings to mind the words of St Thomas Aquinas, who described Providence as "prudencia Dei"—the prudence of God. This sentiment echoes with Pope Francis' own words in one of his catechesis: "Our God is a God of surprises."

Looking back at the Pontificate of Pope Francis, it is evident that he has been an undeniably "providential" Successor of Peter, reflecting the divine prudence of God, which is filled with unexpected surprises.

When Pope Francis stepped onto the balcony of St Peter's Basilica for the first time, the world was caught off guard. Many had expected a different outcome, as he was not a frontrunner. Yet, his election marked a series of historic firsts: the first pope from the Western Hemisphere, the first from South America, and the first Jesuit to lead the Church. This unanticipated moment foreshadowed a papacy that would continually surprise and challenge expectations.

His leadership was marked by grace, often misunderstood, but always rooted in a deep commitment to living the Gospel. He became, to many, a Pope of surprises, unwavering in his trust in the God of surprises.

A Pope of Gestures and Pastoral Vision

Reflecting on the papacy, it is clear that Pope Francis was not just a leader of words, but of gestures—actions that spoke of his deeply pastoral vision.

More significantly, for the Universal Catholic Church, he was a revelation—prompting the Church to move beyond tradition while remaining firmly rooted in the deposit of faith, always led by the Holy Spirit, and thus inviting the Church into a true encounter with Christ.

Discernment, encounter, and accompaniment were key themes of his pontificate whilst highlighting the mercy and tenderness of God. He revived pastoral theology, emphasized the importance of caring for creation, championed synodality—thus making synodality the heart of his approach to Church governance and dialogue.

So to his teachings and writings were not new in Catholic moral doctrine, they were just presented in a different style compared to his predecessors whilst having this exceptional ability to communicate in a simple language, engaging with pastoral challenges head-on, both in his writings and off-the-cuff comments.

Embraced the Franciscan Attitude
Drawing inspiration from St Francis of Assisi and his commitment to simplicity and humility, Pope Francis embraced these cardinal virtues of the Christian life, advocating a "poor church for the poor."

From the outset, Pope Francis broke with papal tradition in both word and action. On his first Maundy Thursday, he washed the feet of women inmates, sending a powerful

UPFRONT
His spiritual discipline was well-known—he went to confession every two weeks and kept an early morning routine, rising at 4 am to spend the first two hours in prayer, scripture study, and preparing for the day's homily

message of inclusion and equality. He chose to live in the modest Casa Santa Marta, for the luxurious papal apartments, and wore a simple pectoral cross—the same one he had as a bishop. Refusing the red papal shoes, the ornate mozetta (cape), and the white rochet (lace surplice), Pope Francis represented the spirit of servant leadership.

In keeping with his simplicity, Pope Francis also travelled in small, affordable cars like the Ford Focus and Fiat, rejecting the use of luxury vehicles. He preferred to refer to himself as the "Bishop of Rome" instead of the more formal titles of "Pope" or "Supreme Pontiff," reinforcing his desire to remain close to the people he served. He also chose not to stay at the luxurious papal summer residence in Castel Gandolfo, enduring the summer heat in Rome to remain accessible to the faithful.

Reforming the Vatican Curia unlike any since Vatican II

Pope Francis approached the long-standing issue of Vatican Curia reform with fresh eyes, seeking to restructure Church governance for

greater efficiency and transparency. His apostolic constitution Praedicate Evangelium ("Preach the Gospel") introduced significant changes that had been in discussion since Vatican II, marking the most significant reform to the Curia in decades and emphasized that: "The Roman Curia is not set between the Pope and the Bishops, but is at the service of both, according to the modalities proper to the nature of each."

A significant aspect of the reform was the inclusion of laypeople in important leadership positions within Vatican offices. For example, the reform now allows for a nun to be appointed as the head of the Dicastery for Bishops, and a female theologian to lead the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, a role that has traditionally been held by Cardinals. Additionally, the reform also paves the way for a layperson to potentially serve as Secretary of State, a position that has historically been reserved for clergy.

A pastoral reform was the update of matrimonial nullity trials, introduced in Mitis Iudex Dominus

Iesus and Mitis et misericors Iesus (2015). These reforms streamlined the process with a single judge system, focused on Pastoral accompaniment, and transferred the responsibility for implementation to local dioceses.

Similarly, his commitment to transparency in addressing the clergy abuse crisis went further by enforcing zero-tolerance policies, mandatory reporting, background checks for seminarians, and safeguarding reforms. He also removed the former pontifical secrecy that had hindered investigations into abuse cases. This move played a key role in restoring trust in the Church, both within and with the wider public.

Championing human dignity and social justice

In the aftermath of scandals and crises that had significantly damaged the Church's credibility in the new millennium, coupled with declining Church attendance, Pope Francis sought to restore the Church's moral standing in public opinion. His papacy emphasized mercy, humility, and outreach to marginalized communities. Pope Francis also challenged conservative factions within the Church, much like Jesus challenged the Pharisees. He pushed for liturgical changes and confronted clericalism while staying deeply grounded in the deposit of faith and Church doctrine.

His advocacy for social justice—addressing issues like poverty, climate change, and the refugee crisis—redefined the Church as a champion of human dignity. His

focus on issues such as divorce, same-sex relationships, and the struggles of those living in sin reinforced the Church's commitment to compassion and mercy.

Along with these initiatives, Pope Francis also highlighted the significance of interfaith dialogue and global peace-building, aiming to promote understanding and collaboration among different religious groups.

"Remember to pray for me": A humble request

Pope Francis began his papacy with a simple but profound request: "Remember to pray for me." This call for prayer became a constant theme throughout his interactions with people, from world leaders to everyday faithful. During a 2013 flight from Rio de Janeiro to Rome, he shared that asking for prayers was a lifelong practice, especially after becoming a bishop. "I feel, I have many weaknesses and problems; I am a sinner too," he confessed, offering a deeply personal insight into his request.

A final prayer

As we reflect on the gift of Pope Francis' papacy, we continue to pray for him. Let us join in this prayer for our departed Papa Francesco:

"O God, faithful rewarder of souls, grant that your departed servant Pope Francis, whom you made successor of Peter and shepherd of your Church, may joyfully dwell forever in your presence in heaven, enjoying the mysteries of your grace and compassion, which he faithfully served on earth."