

## O HERALDO

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## Crucial questions need answers after Pahalgam massacre

The blood spilled in Pahalgam has stained the conscience of a nation. Twenty-six innocent lives were lost in a brutal terrorist attack that has shaken Jammu and Kashmir and the rest of India to its core. Among the haunting images and viral videos that emerged from the aftermath, one stands out: Sheetal Kalathia from Gujarat, crying in anguish, confronting a Union Minister with piercing questions. "What about the taxpayer? Where were the soldiers? Where was the medical help?" Her pain echoes the unanswered questions haunting every Indian today.

Why was there no security at Baisaran, a tourist hot-spot known for its picturesque beauty? How could such an attack happen in one of the world's most militarised zones, especially after the repeated assurances that Kashmir is now "normal" and safe? These questions demand more than token responses they demand accountability.

For decades, Kashmir has lived under the shadow of conflict. Veteran journalist Anuradha Bhasin rightly notes that since the 1990s, it has been rare to see any public space without some form of security. Her bewilderment is justified: how could such a lapse occur in a region that has always been under tight surveillance?

More troubling is the speed with which authorities released details about the attackers, sketches, names, affiliations within hours of the incident. How were these conclusions reached so quickly, when security forces

reportedly took time to even arrive at the scene? Bhasin, like many others, questions the credibility of the investigation and warns against political narratives overshadowing ground realities. The abrogation of Article 370 was supposed to usher in peace, but sporadic violence and loss of life continue, revealing an unsettling truth: military presence may suppress, but it does not resolve.

Security experts are divided. Professor Amitabh Mattoo of JNU points to a recent trend pulling back visible military presence at tourist sites to promote a sense of normalcy. But this "invisible strategy," as he calls it, seems to have created a dangerous blind spot. Former J&K DGP SP Vaid echoes this concern, arguing that remote tourist zones should have at least basic

police deployment. The Kashmir Valley spans 120 by 38 kilometers; the idea that it's impossible to secure every corner cannot justify failing to secure well-known, populated locations.

Perhaps the most alarming aspect of the Pahalgam attack is the deliberate targeting of civilians, especially Hindus. An ominous shift from traditional strategies of targeting security forces. Retired Lt Gen Satish Dua compares this to the Hamas-style attacks seen in Israel in 2023. This new tactic is designed not just to kill, but to amplify terror, to provoke a visceral response across the nation. Women survivors, traumatised and grieving, become messengers of horror fuel for the emotional fire the attackers intended to light across India.

Why are civilians now in the crosshairs? Mattoo suggests this may be a calculated move to shatter the illusion of peace and reject the notion of a "normal" Kashmir. It raises another uncomfortable question: was there an intelligence failure?

Both Mattoo and Dua agree. Yes, there was. The lack of advance warning, the absence of electronic intercepts, and the missed signs especially provocative statements by the Pakistani Army Chief days before the attack suggest a breakdown in our security apparatus. India, Dua warns, is over-reliant on electronic surveillance and must reinvest in human intelligence to prevent such tragedies.

In the wake of the massacre, the Indian government convened an emergency Cabinet Committee on Security. Harsh measures were taken revoking Pakistani visas, suspending the Indus Water Treaty, and expelling diplomats. But punitive diplomacy cannot compensate for the failure to protect citizens on Indian soil.

Pahalgam is not just a site of tragedy; it is a mirror held up to the nation. It forces us to confront uncomfortable truths about our preparedness, our policies, and the narratives we choose to believe. The cries of grieving families must not fade into background noise. We owe them justice, answers and above all change.

## comment



LUIS DIAS

The most vociferous GALF defenders, predictably, were those who got some degree of limelight or mileage from it over the years, or were close to the organisers; and the most ardent critics, those who hadn't, or weren't. But the matter is a little more nuanced than that



Another personal observation: Margaret Mascarenhas wasn't the easiest person to get along with, but even her detractors cannot deny her huge contribution to Goa literature. The absence of a posthumous tribute to her by GALF (or maybe I blinked and missed it) was a churlish low blow, by any reckoning.

Many past GALF editions have clashed with our Child's Play concerts or rehearsals. This year I missed days 2 and 3 as I was already committed to attend a symphony concert in Mumbai. But I went to the opening day, largely because I had

# All that glitters....

A couple of months ago, Goa's indefatigable journalist, writer, publisher and Wikipedia editor Frederick Noronha stirred a hornet's nest with his column 'Literary colonialism, Goan-style' in the local press, criticising some aspects of GALF (Goa Art and Literary Festival).

Noronha began by speaking about two opposite camps, those who go 'ga-ga' over literary festivals, and the dissenters. Strangely enough, the reaction to his article was also polarised into two camps. The most vociferous GALF defenders, predictably, were those who got some degree of limelight or mileage from it over the years, or were close to the organisers; and the most ardent critics, those who hadn't, or weren't. But the matter is a little more nuanced than that.

I agree with Noronha, that some speakers and events often seem like lazy 'fillers', and that there is a degree of bias in who gets invited back again and again (fond as I may be of some of them).

A huge frustration Noronha didn't mention is the inexplicable delay in the scheduling each year, sometimes until the last minute. Much as one would then like to attend, it is impossible to drop everything at such short notice.

begun reading William Dalrymple's latest book 'The Golden Road: How Ancient India Transformed the World' (2024) and he would be discussing the book with Vidya Dehejia, whose writings and lectures, particularly on Chola bronzes I have long admired.

I found the keynote speakers that preceded the discussion (Sumana Roy 'The quest for the plant script'; Shanta Gokhale 'The importance of Silence in releasing human imagination'; Ramesh Ghadi's hard-hitting Konkani poems) extremely engaging and thought-provoking.

Dalrymple's slide presentation was difficult to see from where I was seated, but having now finished reading the book, I can appreciate the points he made in the discussion.

Halfway through the book, just as Dalrymple was elaborating on the wide reach of India's ideas and influences throughout the world (the 'Indosphere'), I couldn't help thinking of the BBC sketch comedy show 'Goodness Gracious Me' created by Sanjeev Bhaskar and Meera Syal, the "Everything comes from India" routine. And sure enough, a few pages further, Dalrymple mentions it himself.

'The Golden Road' is a fascinating read, and deserves all the praise showered on it. Indeed, at the start of the GALF discussion, Dehejia read out several reviews of Dalrymple's book from around world, all gushingly positive, save one. Dehejia described this reviewer as "a scholar who appears to be from the field of subaltern studies", who spoke of Dalrymple's "bias in favour of the knowledge of the head over knowledge of the hand."

She moved on from there to the different approaches to history from academicians versus "popular" historians. Apparently, academicians feel that popular historians are "supported by a network of trade publishers, literary festivals, [she emphasised this], and mostly upper-caste mentors." "True," she added, "but what's wrong with that?" I could think of several things "wrong with that", too many to get into here.

I looked up the dissenting reviewer, he was Kiran Kumbhar, "postdoctoral fellow at the Center for Advanced Study of India, University of Pennsylvania, historian and medical doctor, currently teaching and researching at Yale University's South Asian Studies Council." Kumbhar's review ("The Indocentric Road Taken") appeared in the India Forum (28 November 2024). I've reproduced some excerpts: "The knowledge-makers

Dalrymple chooses to typify as unknown and forgotten stars of South Asia are not the highly skilled and consistently neglected pot-makers or farmers, but the very ubiquitous Archimedes' of the subcontinent: the Aryabhata and Brahmaguptas. Considering the kinds of 'literature, arts and the sciences' that occupy the bulk of this book, one might well come away believing that it was only Brahmins and adjacent privileged-caste groups who had the ability to conceptualise and create anything of value in South Asia."

"Such implicit bias in favour of 'the knowledge of the head over that of the hand' - not that the latter is ever divorced from intellectual analysis - is a persistent problem in how histories of science have conventionally been imagined. It is the reason why for a long time women were mostly absent as actors in historical accounts of science and medicine, despite being skilled frontline healers and nurturing a tremendous repository of medical knowledge. It is also the reason why the majority of South Asia's people and communities - the 'lower'-caste and 'untouchable' Bahujans and Adivasis - are either a marginalised minority or completely absent in the region's science histories: including, unfortunately, in 'The Golden Road'."

"An ode to a 'forgotten' India which needs to be given its rightful place in a Euro-American-centric globe ends up replacing one form of cultural supremacy with another. The obsession with an original centre of intellectual genius ignores cross-cultural exchanges and knowledge produced out of labour."

Kumbhar also twice quotes Mark Twain to demonstrate that the true origins of any innovation or accomplishment lie in the vast history and collective experience of humanity, but that "The Golden Road" is earnestly invested in giving civilizational credit to the last man." It further underscores the unfortunate truth of the aphorism 'Pas de documents, pas d'histoire' (No documentation, no history). 'Knowledge of the head' and 'the last man' get written about and immortalised; the subaltern 'knowledge of the hand' goes largely unwritten, unsung.

Kumbhar's review adds valuable perspective to 'The Golden Road' in particular, but in any reading of history in general.

(Dr. Luis Dias is a physician, musician, writer and founder of Child's Play India Foundation. He blogs at [luisdias.wordpress.com](http://luisdias.wordpress.com))

## people's edit

## SMOKE IN THE VALLEY, PROFITS IN THE BOARDROOMS

EVERETTE ASSIS TELLES

Another act of terror strikes Kashmir, and the cycle begins anew. The grief is overwhelming, the anger righteous, the nationalism amplified. Flags wave, slogans trend, television screens flicker with demands for revenge. But beyond the din of rage and rhetoric, the most inconvenient question remains unasked—who truly benefits from this tragedy?

Not the civilians, who have lost their loved ones. Not the soldiers, whose blood seeps into the soil of a land they were told to protect. Not the weary peace-seekers, who once dared to dream of an end to the violence. No, the real victors of terror are found elsewhere, in conference rooms and corridors of power, where every explosion is an opportunity and every death another entry on a balance sheet.

Each attack begets a new round of military deals, acquisitions, and deployments. Defence budgets are revised upwards. Surveillance technology is upgraded. Drones, missiles, radar systems—bought and sold, tested and used, the machinery of war fueled by the horrors of the latest assault. The suppliers are far removed from the smoke and sorrow. Israeli drone companies, French jet manufacturers, American radar tech providers, Russian ammunition dealers—business thrives where bodies fall.

And what of the political class? An act of terror is a boon for those who trade in narratives. It galvanises sentiment, silences critics, re-frames debates. In one country, it strengthens nationalist fervor, rallying the people behind strongman posturing. In another, it reinforces military supremacy over civilian leadership, justifying strategic realignments under the guise of self-preservation. Terror is the great political weapon—one that provides distraction, control, and manipulation without ever requiring accountability.

Then there is the media, where tragedy is spectacle, and outrage is currency. Television studios morph into virtual war rooms, anchors posture as generals, headlines scream vengeance. Reports of diplomatic failures, intelligence lapses, or historical grievances take a backseat to performative patriotism. The viewers, stirred to fury, remain captivated, unaware that their rage has become a monetized commodity, fueling advertisements, driving viewership, and ensuring that the business of terror continues uninterrupted.

Let us forget, those orchestrating the violence—the terror networks themselves—also emerge stronger. A single well-timed attack secures fresh recruits, validates their relevance, and ensures continued funding from shadowy benefactors. And, as expected, the overreaction from their adversaries only pushes more disillusioned individuals into their ranks, feeding the cycle of extremism they depend on for survival.

But perhaps the most insidious beneficiaries lurk beyond the immediate theatre of conflict. Foreign powers, watching with calculated detachment, observe how the flames of Kashmir serve their own strategic interests. While India is caught in its perpetual struggle with Pakistan, distractions mount elsewhere. The Line of Actual Control remains tense, the Indo-Pacific strategy falters. Across the globe, defense corporations seal new deals, intelligence agencies push revised agendas, and geopolitical players refine their maneuvering—all made possible by the continued volatility of South Asia.

And what of the common man, the citizen who is expected only to react—to grieve, to rage, to demand action? He is encouraged to wave the flag, chant the slogans, call for blood, believe the theatre, accept the script. But rarely is he asked to reflect. He is not told to follow the defense contracts signed in the aftermath, nor to trace the financial gains of those amplifying war cries on television. He is never prompted to examine what laws were quietly passed while he was distracted by noise.

It is time to dismantle the illusion. National security is not safeguarded by reactionary outrage. Patriotism is not measured by the volume of chants. If we are to break free from the manipulation, we must watch movements, not just words. Monitor alliances, not just accusations. Demand transparency, not just rhetoric.

The dead deserve more than performative grief. The living deserve more than orchestrated rage. The next time Kashmir is bathed in smoke and sorrow, do not simply ask who fired the bullet—ask who profited from its trajectory.

### Signboard against mega projects

There is a growing resistance against mega housing projects coming up in the villages due to concerns of depletion of water resources, unreliable power supply and unsustainable land sales to outsiders. Against this background, a modest signboard put up by the gram sabha of Betalbatim village panchayat cautioning potential developers about purchasing land in the village has reportedly triggered a ripple effect across Salcete Taluka. The signboard mentions that the village has exhausted its resources and that the carrying capacity of the village has exceeded. The signboard has also cautioned that the builders, promoters and developers may buy land in their village at their own risk. Developers and land buyers are now transforming their once-quiet coastal locality into gated communities. Trees are being cut indiscriminately, and the environmental impact is devastating. Putting up such signboards is a novel way to keep land sharks at bay as the developers may not be aware of the ground reality. The signboard has drawn wide atten-

tion about unregulated development and its long-term impact on rural communities. There has been a sharp increase in mega construction projects, accompanied by a surge in the sale of land to outside investors. Local authorities and government bodies appear to have failed to take timely action in this regard. The signboard reflects a broader sentiment growing in many Goa villages. Other village panchayats too should follow suit. Hopefully this act of resistance will prompt authorities to take quick and meaningful action.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

### Strong retaliatory action, really?

India suspending the Indus Water Treaty is being tom-tommed as a 'surgical water strike' by the partisan media and presented to the gullible public as strong retaliatory action against Pakistan for the Pahalgam massacre. It is pertinent to note that less than

8% of the water in the trans-Himalayan river which originates in the springs near Mount Kailash in Tibet comes from India. The waters flow through Ladakh and Pak administered Gilgit Baltistan before emptying out in the Arabian sea south of Karachi. It's main tributaries are the rivers Shyok, Kabul, Gilgit, Kurram and Gomol in non-Indian territory, infact the Indus river is just a glorified stream within India. It begins to take shape as a mighty river, fed by its tributaries only from Baltistan onward. We also don't have the infrastructure or wherewithal to either store the surplus water or divert it elsewhere. Similarly India blocking 16 Pakistani YouTube channels (surgical internet strike?) is projected as a befitting reply to our wayward neighbour. It is another matter altogether that these channels can still be accessed by the tech savvy in the dark web. Instead of taking responsibility for their failure to protect innocent Indian citizens, the netas are only feeding us such inane

narratives to remain in power; body count is the least of their worries.

We the people (who have already been blamed for not being patriotic enough by a cabinet mantri) need to see the Machiavellian moves of our leaders through the prism of rationality and logic and not get swayed by jingoistic pseudo-nationalism.

Vinay Dwivedi, Benaullim

### Weaponising the truth

Congratulations to Padma Shri Libia Lobo Sardesai, hopefully this award will inspire another wave of freedom fighters to do what she did back in pre-liberation days. She used non conventional means to pierce through false narratives, and delivered truth to a people that were worn down by subjugation. On Salazar's orders, Goans were kept in the dark about the waning strength of their colonial masters, they were denied news that

other colonies were successfully fighting back. Libia's radio bulletins, broadcast from beyond Goa's borders, gave Goans precious hope.

Goans today are distracted by ingenious red herrings and we are worn down by so many instances of criminal negligence that it almost seems legal. Today's Libbys would ideally sift through the white noise of news, and weaponise truth by using modern IT to create a website solely for Mai Goem's festering wounds, where concerned daughters and sons across the world could weigh in and provide insightful and cost effective solutions. Goa deserves well-being metrics, and defenseless future generations would be best served if civilians monitored neglected metrics like coastal erosion, river pollution, coal dust, youth unemployment, double tracking, land grabbing, Farmers' issues, khazans, corruption, EoDB, E-governance ranking, accountability, time bound services, #rosto, PWD, legislating Goa's own Future Generations Act, Goa: Vision 2035 and upgrading to Sustainable high-end tourism. Thank you Libby.

Chris Fernandes, Miramar

## letterstotheeditor

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