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Mental stress and student suicides

Although Goa is an affluent and literate state, there is a high prevalence of mental health problems, including depression and stress. A study found that 15-25 per cent of individuals attending primary health centres in Goa experienced depression and stress-related issues. Of these about 5 to 10 per cent young adults in Goa experienced mental health issues.

Students often experience significant stress and pressure from academic institutions and parental expectations, which can negatively impact their mental health and well-being. They may feel the need to excel academically, leading to anxiety and stress. Excessive homework, projects, and exams can contribute to burn-out and overwhelm.

Comparing oneself to others and the desire to maintain a certain status can add to the pressure. The fear of not meeting academic expectations can lead to anxiety and stress. Feeling overwhelmed and depleted by academic demands can lead to burn-out and a decline in motivation.

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The death by suicide of a 20-year-old student Krishna Kaseera at BITS Pilani's Goa campus in his hostel room raises serious concerns about the atmosphere, competitiveness, supportive environment and safety of students in high profile institutions. This is the third death by suicide at BITS campus Goa in five months, raising serious concerns about what is driving students to take such desperate measures.

The parents of the students have squarely blamed the institution in this case and have refused to accept the body or allow the post mortem unless they get satisfactory answers from the institution. The mother is totally shattered. The family has argued that when they pay such high fees, the institution should also look after the safety of the students and keep an eye on their well-being and not only focus on money.

The family of Krishna Kaseera has stated that there were no CCTV cameras in the hostel area to monitor the movement of the students nor other facilities. They have alleged that even as Krishna was confined to his room for hours, no one noticed it and it was only when they phoned the warden that he went and found that the door was locked from inside.

Krishna's mother told the media that her son messaged her that he was unwell, so she advised him to take some medicines. But when the boy did not respond, she thought he was busy. They have squarely blamed the institution for not doing any checks on students and have also alleged that although he went to a counselor, nothing was done. The pattern of three deaths in the same pattern raises serious doubts about the institution, they pointed out.

In a highly competitive job market, not only in premier institutions, where the fees are indeed exorbitant, but in other institutions, counseling and student welfare is of utmost importance. Especially in institutions which have hostels and where the parents and family support is absent, institutions through their counselors have to take special care to keep a watch on students and closely monitor them for signs of stress. The warden too has to keep a watch on students to look out for signs of distress among students, especially ahead of examinations.

Parents take tremendous care to raise children from birth to adulthood. At this vulnerable age, both parents should not put undue pressure on their children and institutions should ensure that students are not stressed out by loaded curricula and all necessary measures should be taken to ensure that syllabus is completed much ahead of schedule and examinations are spaced out so that students have enough time to prepare.

Most of all what is lacking in Indian institutions of higher education is the freedom to clear the semesters at the students' own pace. In most institutions, students have to complete the course in the scheduled years or else a student is declared failed. Students should be allowed to clear the semesters within a reasonable time beyond the academic calendar and still get grades like any other students who adhered to the scheduled years of the course.

Death by suicide is an utter shame and reflects badly on the educational system as a whole and so called elite institutions in particular. Something radical has to be done by the policy makers and by the UGC and so called elite institutions in particular to see that precious lives are not lost due to faulty structuring of the educational curricula. Strict safeguards too have to be put in place by way of regular and incremental counseling of all students and necessary support systems should be put in place. These three deaths by suicides should serve as a telling reminder about our deficient educational system and that urgent steps need to be taken to rectify the same on a war footing.

comment



ALBERTINA ALMEIDA

Shrinking spaces in Goa's capital city

A discussion has been raging about the shutting down of the Mother Teresa's home in Panaji. Various statements have been floating about the reasons for its closure. But in the cross-fire of exchanges and allegations, what was completely forgotten are that both the Missionaries of Charity and Assistencia da Goa are charitable organisations that need to have adequate finances for carrying out their respective objectives. Towards this, both the State and the community need to rise in support.

This is not the first time that housing spaces/hostels have been left with no choice but to shut down. The organisations that have created and been managing these spaces, with their office bearers' and membership's volunteer efforts, are now in a situation, where despite their willingness to provide their quality and quantity time, and services, and even contribute financially, cannot manage the colossal amount required to defray infrastructure and engagement of service providers and management expenses.

Yet, because of their passion, and commitment, they are the very organisations that are ideal to run or provide services to the marginalised sections of society. That however does not take away from the fact that the Government and the society as a whole — and more particularly its privileged sections have the responsibility of making sure that the last person in the city is taken care of and can lead a life of dignity. It is the Government and the privileged in the society that must provide resources and contribute to the resources respectively.

There must be an inventorialisation of the traditional uses of spaces in the capital city, but the Outline Development Plans prepared under the Town and Country Planning Act, which are actually supposed to do this detailing, do anything but that



It was heartwarming as well as heart-wrenching to hear on a Youtube video, with narrations of the many women who have been supported by the Missionaries of Charity, as they bade farewell to a place which was once their home, and to which they turned, even after they each made their homes elsewhere. This is the same sentiment that should also prevail when homes of people who are liv-

ing in a place for centuries are destroyed, in the name of development, or can no longer be maintained by the charitable organisations, because of the demands of development, and the restrictions of Government, including weaponising the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act.

You have only to look for how carpenter families, fishing families and the barber families have been locked in or cast out over time in Panjim, to know how spaces for the local people, especially those on the margins, can shrink — and now at a galloping speed. The Inland Waterways Act, 2016, the Major Port Authorities Act, 2021, and the Smart Cities Mission (without even a law to back it), are potent weapons in the hands of a corporate State that is unpeople-centric.

The Government of India's Smart City website states that smart cities must be cities that work. One would think in the context of the Constitution of India that the smart cities must work for all — for the last person. It must have spaces for the homes for marginalised sections of society, its transport must be accessible to all — not just to card-holders as the bus driver or conductor on the Smart City buses is suggesting or asked to suggest, its facilities must be accessible to all. A city cannot become smart by denying the existence of these marginalised sections. Smartness lies in ensuring that the cities are liveable, sustainable and have a thriving economy offering multiple opportunities to its people to pursue their diverse interests, as the Government's own website suggests.

But what do we see? The Government is constantly trying to outsource its public spaces, and citizens have to continuously fight back. A petition is lying before the High Court of Bombay at Goa challenging the denotification and transfer of a public pay parking area near the Panjim Ferry Wharf for the exclusive use of guests of M/s Golden Peace Infrastructure Pvt Ltd — the company that is operating the offshore Casino Pride 2.

Earlier an attempt to commercialise a portion of the children's park at Campal for a ticketed Waste to Art Display Park, was thwarted by the active resistance of public spirited citizens, and consequent intervention of the Panjim MLA. The attempt to commercialise came under the garb of promoting tourism. But citizens were quick to respond that while tourists are free to enjoy the parks, it cannot be done by locking

out the local people. However, these attempts at taking away or exclusivising public spaces surreptitiously resurface in benign garbs.

More recently, the tagline for this exclusivising initiative has been 'women's safety'. Women's safety cannot be ensured by suggesting that they confine themselves to what are designated as 'women's zones'. One such zone has been designated at Miramar. There are tourist police in the coastal areas and they must ensure protection of women, be they tourists or local women, instead of these zones. The way the State is operating, designation of certain areas as women's zones will become the slippery slope down which other exclusivisation will follow. Already fish-people have been systematically displaced from their livelihoods, when the further reclamation and expansion of the Children's Park took place at the time of introduction of International Film Festival of India in Panjim.

Clearly spaces are shrinking for those who must actually have the first rights to the spaces. Corporatisation and gentrification are taking over. There must be an inventorialisation of the traditional uses of spaces in the capital city, but the Outline Development Plans prepared under the Town and Country Planning Act, which are actually supposed to do this detailing, do anything but that.

There is no substitute for democratic planning with the involvement of citizens. The 74th amendment to the Constitution of India stipulated the setting up of ward committees. But this has been intercepted by the Smart City concept, which while being inclusive in its vision has been exclusive in how its processes are visualized. The Special Purpose Vehicle — Imagine Panaji Smart City Development Limited (IPSCDL) in the case of Panjim, is a non-elected body, a wholly owned Government Company, designed in a way as to assert corporate control over the city. It is inherently a model of outsourced governance. Therefore, along with challenging each shrinking space and non-provision of public spaces in cities, we need to fundamentally challenge these undemocratic means of governance, which infest the policies these bodies follow. Else we will only be unwittingly wallowing in an incestuous cesspool of governance.

(Albertina Almeida is a lawyer and human rights activist)

people's edit

FESTAM! THE SOUL OF GOAN CELEBRATION

JOSEPH LEWIS D'SILVA

Days before the feast, dona de casa (lady of the house), invites relatives and friends. Feast celebrations requires careful planning. She rises early, dips her hand in the dishpan and with joyful efforts, prepares sanna and vodge (steamed rice muffins and flour fritters) to make the meal as delightful as that of Hotel de Jakin. Her main aim is to make her feast friends happy with her lovingly prepared food.

Dia da Festa (feast day), is a joyous occasion for Goans; a time for meeting invited friends and relatives. Although, feasts involve considerable experience and lots of expenses; the happiness they bring is worth every rupee.

On the feast day, the Igreja (Church) is decorated with flowers, and strings of beaded bulbs like a bride on her wedding day.

In the early morning hours, the Alvorada (Dawn) — a five piece brass band — welcomes the first streaks of light of the feast day with tunes of good old days, which pleases the mind, soothes the ears, and swells the heart with joy.

Flower girls, rise early for the first Mass, powder their faces, smooth their gowns, eye it critically in the mirror and then like ships they go sailing down the streets towards the Church. After the Mass, they stand outside the Church and pin the paper roses on the lapel on the festive folks approaching for the subsequent services. In return, people drop some coins into their flower baskets. The Church embraces the faithful like a dove welcoming its flock.

The feast crowd consists of batkars (landlords) and mundakars (tenants); alongside Bombay uncles and Dubai aunts and others, giving the procession a touch of fashion parade.

The colourful procissao (procession) flows out of the Church with the Cross and the lighted candles, carried with pride and pomp by Opmus-clad confrade (brotherhood members in capes). The Church bells peals joyfully like a tipsy fiddler on a roof. The choir-master controls the choir of ten voices, a five-piece brass band and the rhythmic dhol-kasas (a pair of drums). The procession, rich in colourful vestidos de festa (festive dresses) gives the procession a touch of a fashion parade to any observer.

The Roman God of love runs around in the feast fair. Many give witness to the fact that Cupid drives many mobile bachelors and nubile spinsters to catch and match. Besides this fact, there is evidence of love signs expressed in the words of Konkani song: festa dis feriant Mis, Happy Feast munnon cheddhe cheddhandit ditat kiss. (On feast day, Mass is heard in the festive fair, and boys wish girls, Happy Feast with a kiss).

Goans have a fabulous feast-meal. It starts with cerveja (beer) or hot drinks, followed by feast dinner which consists of caldo de galinha (chicken soup); assado de leitao (roast piglet); arros refugado (spiced rice) and the much loved sorpatel — (a dish of pork with its liver, heart and blood).

Under the starry sky, the feast day concludes with a lively dance bash. Here young hearts, dance with smiling lips and sparkling eyes. They waltz clasping waist with eloquent hands; they dance the snake dance by contorting their body into various shapes with meaningless or meaningful communication with fellow dancers; swaying hips to the tune of soft lilting music. Those who do not run to shake their legs on the dance floor, go and sit to watch Tiatro (Konkani drama) equally rich in entertainment.

Such are the feasts which are not just religious observances, but heartfelt celebrations of Goan identity — a blend of devotion, culture, music, food and community. As generations pass, the spirit of the Goan feast continues to live on echoing the laughter, prayers and our rich heritage.

Restore past glory of Bambolim beach

The Town and Country Planning (TCP) Department has reportedly issued a stop-work order and a show cause notice to a starred hotel for constructing a retaining wall along the Zuari river bank at Bambolim following a directive from the Goa Coastal Zone Management Authority (GCZMA). It is also learnt that the technical clearance granted earlier to the company has been revoked after the GCZMA raised objections and issued a stop-work order. The initial clearance was reportedly based on a no-objection certificate provided by the GCZMA which has since been withdrawn. The company has been directed to halt all ongoing construction work on the site with immediate effect. This must be considered as a huge moral victory to all those who objected to the project. But then, they should not be satisfied with the issuance of the stop-work order. The company needs to be directed to restore the Bambolim to its past glory at its own cost. It is observed that with debris, gravel and stones strewn all over the place there is hardly any part of the beach left. It presents a pathetic

sight as hardly any beach sand is visible. Bambolim beach was once a popular picnic site and was visited by many elderly people for their annual dip in the sea water. Directing the company to restore the beach will also act as a deterrence for such illegal activities taking place. In future the authorities concerned need to be careful while issuing permission for such construction work along the coastline.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Time to protect mother earth

This has reference to the photo 'Sewage scourge' (Herald May 2, 2025).

Such a dirty sight, rather frightening, that of raw sewage being pumped into mangroves near the Interstate Bus Stand at Pato, Panjim. Whatever happened to the Smart cities project? Needless to say, this issue must be taken up seriously. Yes, it does affect the environment. This is no way to treat God's creation. I mean, where are we

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heading, if not on the road to Environmental Disaster? We are destroying the very things that are meant for protecting us from the forces of Nature. In Mumbai too, mangroves are being destroyed steadily by dumping construction debris.

World Environment Day is just a month away. Let's keep this day in mind and work towards protecting the environment, protecting our Earth. Our is the only planet which has life! You Live only Once!

Melville X D'Souza, Mumbai

Freedom of press is non negotiable

Democracy craves for reliable and impartial press that transcends pulls and pressures. "World Press Freedom Day" is observed on the May 3 every year to remember the values that define press freedom. There was a period when the freedom of press was threatened almost on a daily basis.

Newspapers thrived only on the absolute integrity, and dedication to duty, of the

owners and editors of newspapers. The press recouped beyond imagination and, perhaps, the vivid memories of those days laid foundation for an assertive and aggressive press steadfast to take on the high and the mighty.

Independence of the press, however, is always under scrutiny. Freedom of expression as a human right cannot be seen separate from people's access to fair and unbiased information. Press is the watchdog of democracy; but the people themselves are the watchdogs of an independent press.

Founding father of the US, Thomas Jefferson had famously said he would have a free press without a government but not a government without a free press.

Ganapathi Bhat, Akola

Pak and terror are interconnected

Pakistan is home to at least 12 groups designated as 'foreign terrorist organisations' like LeT, JeM JuD, Jihadi group, Taliban, HM, etc. Spewing venom is by

birth of Pakistan culture. Pakistan supports and sponsors terrorism. Terrorism was supported under the guise of religion and tenets and justified by clerics and bigots. Pakistan PM is Shahbaz Sharif for physical appearance but functionally the army rules the country. Terror cannot be separated from Pakistan. Pakistan was born on anti-India plank and it is its only identity and is comprised of the troika of the power hungry Army, the avaricious politicians and the opportunistic terrorist organisation.

Pakistan fooled the Americans for years that they were with them on the war on terror, all the time taking billions of dollars and training the Taliban to kill NATO forces. The list of lies and deceit is endless and well documented by several books written by Pakistani, Indian and Western authors.

Most of the Pakistani generals are corrupted and are preparing to have settled life in the foreign countries in the name of war against India. Pakistan was carved out of India not naturally but forcefully by murky, cunning, selfish and egoist M A Jinnah in connivance with Britishers under the guise of two-nation theory.

K G Vilop, Chorao