

# O HERALDO

The Voice of Goa - since 1900

## Tragedy of preventable deaths

In the past 11 days, seven lives have been lost to drowning in Goa. This is not merely a statistical anomaly. It is a clear sign of systemic failure. And the most painful part is that these tragedies were preventable.

Just as the public was reeling from the tragic stampede incident in Shirgao, fresh news emerged with children drowning in Baga, Sirvoi and Agonda. These incidents, which have occurred since April 20, are not isolated. They are part of a grim pattern stitched together by one common thread: negligence.

The blame does not rest on any one party alone. It is shared by careless tourists who flout rules, by parents who underestimate water hazards, and most importantly, by administrations that have failed to enforce even the most basic safety protocols.

The Shirgao incident, which claimed young lives, laid bare the absence of timely safety intervention. In Agonda, a three-year-old girl drowned in a hotel swimming pool where no security guard was stationed. Is it too much to expect that swimming pools in commercial establishments should be monitored? That the beaches; Goa's biggest tourist draw should have trained lifeguards at all hours. Apparently, for Goa's tourism machinery, these are still questions, not mandates.

Tourism is the lifeblood of Goa's economy. But the careless perception that "anything goes" here is turning a vibrant state into a cautionary tale. Negative publicity is already on the rise, with headlines suggesting that Goa is becoming unsafe for travellers. The government must ask itself: Is it doing enough to counter this narrative, not with press releases, but with action?

In some of the recent drowning cases, lifeguards were reportedly present but their instructions were ignored. In others, there were no lifeguards at all. This inconsistency speaks volumes about the patchy implementation of safety norms. Why is it that lifeguard deployment is still being treated as a discretionary option rather than a statutory requirement?

It is legally mandatory for hotels with pools to appoint lifeguards. How many comply? Who is auditing them? If enforcement agencies are asleep, they are complicit. Every hotel that fails to ensure pool safety, every beach without a posted guard, every waterfall without a warning sign is an invitation to disaster.

Let us not hide behind excuses. Yes, some tourists behave recklessly, swimming under the influence, ignoring signs, and venturing into dangerous waters. But the State cannot absolve itself by citing individual carelessness. If signboards alone were sufficient deterrents, we would not be mourning these seven deaths. Clearly, deterrence must come in the form of supervision and intervention.

Drowning does not discriminate by age or awareness. Among the victims were innocent children with no understanding of danger, and well-informed youth between the ages of 20 and 25. From Dudhsagar to Mhadei, from Mashem-Canacona to Ustem-Sattari, these sites of beauty have turned into danger zones. When young people die at scenic spots, the tragedy resonates far beyond families, it tarnishes the entire image of the State.

Goa had already restricted access to waterfalls during the monsoon to prevent accidents. Yet now, with summer water levels lower, drowning cases continue. The season may change, but the inaction remains constant. That is what makes these deaths not just tragic, but inexcusable.

This must be a wake-up call for every village panchayat, every taluka, and every administrative department involved in tourism, law enforcement, and local governance. Permanent lifeguards, safety patrols, surveillance cameras, emergency alert systems, and hefty fines for safety violations must become the norm; not after the next accident, but now.

Each time a child like Sehar or Fatima drowns, or a young adult disappears beneath the currents, we are reminded of what it means to fail as a society. These deaths are not flukes. They are failures of planning of enforcement and of will. Repeating the same mistake is no longer negligence. It is complicated.

The government must act, and act swiftly. Let no more lives be lost to Goa's waters simply because no one was watching.

### comment



VICTOR FERRAO

Pope Francis often reminded the faithful that "synodality is what God expects of the Church in the third millennium"



Pope Francis often reminded the faithful that "synodality is what God expects of the Church in the third millennium." His reforms, including the restructuring of the Roman Curia and the inclusion of lay voices that include women in Vatican governance, reflected his belief that the Holy Spirit speaks through the entire People of God. This legacy challenges the Church to remain open, dynamic, and responsive to the signs of the times.

#### A Church of mercy and the poor

From the moment he chose the name Francis, inspired by St Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis signalled his dedication to the poor and marginalised. His papacy was a clarion call for the Church to become a "Church of the poor, for the poor." He lived this vision humbly, shunning the trappings of papal luxury and grandeur, residing in the

# The legacy of the people's pope

Vatican's Casa Santa Marta instead of the Apostolic Palace, cooking his own meals and embracing simplicity in his daily life.

Francis' compassion was not abstract but deeply personal. He washed the feet of prisoners, refugees, and the disabled, dined with the homeless, and visited conflict zones to amplify the cries of the suffering. His 2013 apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), became a manifesto for a Church that goes to the peripheries, proclaiming mercy over judgment, power and control.

"I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting, and dirty because it has been out on the streets," he wrote, urging Catholics to live their discipleship by radically following Jesus.

His focus on mercy culminated in the 2015-2016 Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, during which he opened "Doors of Mercy" worldwide and expanded access to the sacrament of reconciliation. He also instituted reforms to streamline marriage annulments, making the Church's pastoral care more accessible to those in broken relationships. Francis' insistence that "mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life" reshaped its pastoral approach, prioritising accompaniment over condemnation.

#### Social friendship and breaking down walls

Pope Francis' vision extended beyond the Church to the world where he championed "social friendship" as a remedy for division and polarisation. In his 2020 encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, he called for a culture of encounter, urging humanity to transcend borders, ideologies, and prejudices. Drawing from his interfaith dialogues, particularly with Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, he co-signed the 2019 Document on Human Fraternity, promoting peace and mutual respect among religions.

Pope Francis was unafraid to address global injustices, condemning economic systems that prioritise profit over people and advocating for migrants and refugees. His visits to places like Lampedusa, Lesbos, and the US-Mexico border highlighted the plight of those fleeing violence and poverty. He taught that love is not self-interest that begin with the family and extends out words in concentric circles. Such view of charity as beginning at home was used to justify hate politics that saw empathising with the refugees was suicidal. Christian love is not self-preserving but self-dying, he said and promoted the opening of the doors of the nation to strangers and refugees.

"Building walls means condemning oneself to death," he declared, challenging nations

to embrace solidarity over isolation. His outreach to Indigenous communities, including his 2022 apology for the Church's role in Canada's residential schools, modelled accountability and reconciliation.

#### Caring for our common home

Perhaps no aspect of Pope Francis' legacy resonates as universally as his commitment to environmental stewardship. His 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'* was a ground-breaking call to care for the Earth, which he described as "our common home". Linking ecological degradation to social injustice, he argued that the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth are one.

The encyclical's Gospel of Creation emphasised that the natural world reflects God's love and demands our respect. Pope Francis' environmental advocacy inspired global movements, from the *Laudato Si'* Action Platforms to grassroots initiatives in parishes.

He integrated ecology into Catholic social teaching, declaring that caring for creation is a moral imperative. His tireless efforts to address climate change, including his addresses to world leaders at COP conferences, cemented his role as a moral voice on the global stage.

#### A lasting impact amid challenges

Pope Francis' papacy was not without controversy. His reforms faced resistance from traditionalists who feared a dilution of doctrine, while progressives sometimes felt his changes did not go far enough. Yet, his ability to navigate these tensions with humility and prayer left an indelible mark on everyone. He remained a pastor at heart, calling the Church to be a "field hospital" for a wounded world.

As the Church mourns his passing, it is called to carry forward his vision: a synodal Church that listens, a merciful Church that embraces the poor, a joyful Church that lives the Gospel, and a prophetic Church that heals divisions and safeguards creation.

Pope Francis' legacy is a roadmap for a faith that is vibrant, inclusive, and deeply engaged with the world. His first words "Pray for me" to the faithful, often repeated over the years, echo now as we have laid him to rest: 'I am praying for you'.

In this moment of grief, the world remembers a pope who walked with the lowly, spoke with courage, and loved with the heart of Christ. May his soul rest in the peace of the God he served so faithfully, and may his vision continue to inspire the Church and humanity to build a future of mercy, fraternity, and care for our common home.

(Fr Victor Ferrao is an independent researcher attached to St Francis Xavier Church, Borim, Ponda.)

### people's edit

## IS EARTH TURNING UP THE HEAT TO SCOLD US?

RAGHAV GADGIL

World Earth Day arrives each year on April 22, when Indians are under the lid of heat. In 2024, the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) confirmed that the global mean near-surface temperature was 1.55 ± 0.13°C above the 1850-1900 average. This makes 2024 the warmest year in the 175-year observational record.

Panjim touched 37°C in April which 'felt like' 40°C due to high humidity of 77%. There was uproar over the beginning of the academic year of schools in Goa due to heat wave warnings by IMD. Night-time is no longer a refuge. IMD shows minimum temperatures running 1.6-3°C above normal across Konkan, Goa and parts of Gujarat, while pockets of North India sit a full 5°C hotter than their usual lows. Since the records of 1901, the minimum temperatures experienced in October 2024 in India have been the highest. Globally, NOAA has charted a steady climb in average minimum temperatures over the past decades, a trend that accelerates the moment Greenhouse gases pile higher. Earth isn't just angry at noon; it mutters through the night.

Heat, unlike many hazards, touches every life. The heat indoors impedes attention span as the sweat glands constantly nudge the brain to regulate temperature. We feel exhausted. The overhead tank in our homes has started supplying warm water than usual. Higher heat results in the increased use of air conditioners and fans, drawing their electric power from fossil fuels. Last May's heat wave, India logged its highest national electricity demand. Physics compounds the problem: resistance in transmission wires rises with temperature.

In Goa, coastal humidity turns a 35°C afternoon into a sauna and a warm night. The DHS has issued advisories urging residents to avoid outdoor work from 11am to 3pm and sip water every half-hour. A 2023 paper published in Nature found that days with the weakest winds recorded the strongest urban-heat-island readings which means wind keeps the heat distributed in the cities in a process known as 'heat advection'. A study in Urban Climate in 2022 says the urban heat advection (UHA) is a meteorological process that modulates the air temperature. This seems to have aggravated the heat crises in Goa.

The IPCC report says warming is "unequivocally" our fault. Earth's natural buffers—oceans, soils, forests—are groaning. India's per capita CO2 emission is 2.1 tonnes as compared with the USA (14.3T) and China (8.4T). If the penetration of ACs in Indian homes (5%) marches toward the likes of the USA (~90%), imagine the impact.

Then come the ripple effects that no forecast captures. More heat pushes families toward weekend escapes to water parks, waterfalls and distant hill resorts. Each outing adds kilograms of CO2 exhaust. Tyre friction heats the asphalt, already shimmering like stove coils. Picnickers brim with fizzy drinks (invisible exhaust), and portable tandoors puff charcoal smoke. Hotter days provoke extra showers; multiply just one additional bath per person by India's half population, and you tap aquifers that monsoon rains increasingly fail to replenish. Small indulgences, cloned by millions, become climate compound interest.

Each weekend, picture 10 extra leisure seekers across thousands of towns across India. Adage "Small steps lead to big ones" holds true.

So, is Earth turning up the heat to scold us? The planet sets the exam; we keep failing the tests. Keep ignoring the syllabus, and we might discover that we have been barred from living on this planet.

## Drowning incidents in swimming pools

A 3-year-old girl reportedly drowned in a swimming pool at a resort in Agonda after she accidentally fell into it.

A few days back a five-year-old girl from Bihar allegedly drowned in the pool of a five-star hotel at Arpora. In the past, there have been incidents of little children, left unattended, meeting a watery grave. Every hotel worth its name has a swimming pool. The swimming pools should have at least a supervisor to keep a watch.

Children, who have had swimming lessons, still need close and constant supervision when in or around water. When not in use, swimming pools need to have a four-sided detachable fence that is at least four feet in height and fully encloses the pool. The hotel management should remove all toys from the pool area that might attract children to the pool when the pool is not in use.

Parents should designate a responsible adult to supervise closely and constantly when children are in or near water. Adults watching kids in or near water should avoid distracting

activities like reading, using the phone, and consuming alcohol.

Life jackets should be used by children for all activities while in and around the swimming pool. Swimming pool safety entails heavy responsibility in the hotel hospitality field. The hotel staff should be familiar with CPR skills in case of any eventuality.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

## Timely measure during testing times

Amid rising tensions with Pakistan following the Pahalgam terror attack, the government is keeping a close watch on the development at the border.

The measures to be taken during the drill include operationalisation of air raid warning sirens and training of civilians on civil defence aspects to protect them in the event of a hostile attack. The other measures are provisions of crash blackout measures, early camouflaging of vital plants and installations and update of evacuation plans and their rehearsal. It

is a right step in the right direction keeping in view the tense situation in the sub continent.

A series of high-level meetings, including with top defence functionaries, as India weighs its options for countermeasures against the April 22 terror attack which left 26 civilians, mostly tourists, dead. It is a timely measure to keep people abreast with the latest emergency measures to be taken in the wake of a tense situation. The youth must be ready to know the basic needs in a testing time. These mock drills will have a direct impact during testing time.

C K Subramaniam, Navi Mumbai

## Missionaries of Charity's right move

In my view, the management of Missionaries of Charity made the right decision to move out of the hustle and bustle of a busy city like Panjim.

All was well that ended well, considering that 44 inmates from St Inez were reportedly relocated to two other shelters run by Mis-



## letterstotheeditor

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sionaries of Charity nuns in Goa.

It is not understood why such a hue and cry is being raised over the pull-out. Having seen the shelter in Carambolim and inquired from time to time as to its needs, I was convinced that it was well managed and could, in due course and given the right support, effectively and entirely fill the gap left behind by the closure of activities at the Panjim shelter.

Carambolim is a peaceful, quiet location amidst a real feel of the authentic Goan environment. It is conveniently located opposite a church and close to Karmali railway station. Interested parties who are needlessly pushing for return to St Inez, may instead wish to bolster support to the Carambolim shelter to enable it expand its activities.

Anita Pinto, Baga

## Need to control flyover accidents

Accidents on flyovers are on the rise in India. The very step to decongest roads and stream-

line traffic is proving hazardous to vehicular flow. No policeman can regulate the drivers on flyovers. So, it becomes important to think of novel ideas to infuse discipline among the drivers. The time taken by a vehicle to travel from the entrance of the flyover to the exit can be a handy way of identifying speeding drivers.

The method needs appropriate technology and exemplary hard work to see the light of day. Deviating from the correct lane may prove to be a mistake on highways, on flyovers such blunders could prove fatal. Flyover roads are bound by a parapet wall on one side and a median on the other.

A vehicle breaching lane discipline can throw another off balance resulting in accidents. At night, the glare of the opposite vehicles may blur a driver's vision. Architects have to incorporate new methods of parapet and median wall construction, laying emphasis on design that offers convenience to drivers, keeping in mind the safety aspects.

Much has been said about the height and material of the parapets and medians which require a regular review.

Ganapathi Bhat, Akola