

O HERALDO

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Facing the heat over dry grass fires

The dry grass fire that engulfed a field at Cambrabhat, Taleigao, earlier this week was so severe that residents of nearby homes and apartments – many of them children and senior citizens – were forced to move to safer places as thick smoke invaded their houses and made breathing difficult. According to the directorate of fire and emergency services, 30 people, including two elderly individuals aged 95 and 70 years, were rescued, and a government ambulance was also summoned to attend to any potential medical emergencies.

The fire, which began on a small patch of grass close to noon, when wind speeds are generally high, rapidly spread across an entire swathe of farmland and was so severe that even personnel of the fire and emergency services were overwhelmed in trying to contain it. This is despite the fact that fire tenders from the Panjim headquarters as well as the Pilerne and Porvorim fire stations were deployed to help quell the fire as quickly as possible. The situation was compounded by the fact that although several fire tenders were at hand, the could not access the fields due to lack of an adequate road.

However, while no major injuries to people were reported, the local ecology took the greatest hit with more than 50 snakes, frogs and tortoises being charred in the blaze. Firefighters said that crops that were cultivated in the vicinity of the blaze site were also destroyed. Forest Minister Vishwajit Rane subsequently confirmed that a departmental team had been tasked with assessing the damage and that a detailed report was awaited.

Residents of the area hardly began settling back into their homes, when yet another fire erupted in another patch of farmland in the area just two days later, filling the air with a blanket of thick smoke and causing the people to panic once more. While they believe that such fires are sparked by the annual practice of stubble-burning during the summer, they have underscored the risks associated with this act, given that the Taleigao-Caranzalem belt has rapidly evolved from a sparsely populated locale to a semi-urban and urban area over the span of a few years.

There is yet another section of the local population that believes the yearly field fires are slowly but surely wiping out the village's biodiversity. Residents accuse the local authorities concerned of turning a blind eye not only to the recurring large-scale blazes but also to the fact that landfilling is being carried out in many farmlands under the guise of legitimacy. They say that while the government on one hand talks about creating 'green lungs' for the state, it allows natural vegetation to be destroyed blatantly and in full public view on the other so that the construction of luxury apartments can be facilitated for the benefit of non-locals with deep pockets.

Whatever be the case, it is crucial that farm fires be nipped in the bud before the situation at Taleigao and Caranzalem go from bad to worse. It is common knowledge that a majority of farmers intentionally set their fields on fire to quickly clear them for the cultivation of the next crop and because the find the practice – however detrimental to the environment – to be cost-effective.

But the actual cost of farm fires is far dearer. Such blazes release large amounts of smoke, particulate matter, and greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, contributing significantly to air pollution, which can lead to respiratory and cardiovascular problems, particularly for vulnerable populations. Also, burning crop residue results in the loss of essential soil nutrients like nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, and sulphur, impacting soil fertility.

Legislations to curb such occurrences also seem to lack teeth. Across the country, burning any pollution-causing material, except fuel, is prohibited under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981. Going by the blatant and regular farm fires at Taleigao, it is all but clear that those involved in the act rest assured that they can go scot-free and therefore continue to go about their practice with impunity.

Panch member of Taleigao, Agnelo Da Cunha, recently confirmed to the media that farmers do, in fact, set fire to the stubble in their fields. He, however, said they should exercise caution while doing this. He also singled out the local comunidade and said that it should take the necessary action as the blazes mainly destroy land belonging to the comunidade.

Yes, a lot must be done and a lot more suggestions can be offered from various sections of society. But will these translate into action on the ground? Or will the fields and the fauna continue to burn on the altar of complacency and collusion? Only time will tell.

comment



GLADSTONE D'COSTA

A new pope is elected by a two-thirds majority. If this majority is not reached during the first ballot, the ballots will be burned in a stove, with black smoke rising through the Sistine Chapel's chimney to signal that the election is still ongoing



His papacy came at a time when the scandals of mass priestly sexual abuse shook the Church, particularly in Boston and later around Theodore McCarrick in 2018. In Canada, it was brought to its knees. Yet he refused all attempts at cover up. Indeed, some of his detractors would say he

Habemus Papam

Who could have ever imagined that this announcement made from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica on the 13th March 2013, would usher in such a dramatic period for the church. Cardinal Bergoglio, better known as Pope Francis, was a first in many ways; the first Jesuit, the first South American, indeed the first non-European to be elected as Pope. How Francis is remembered will depend entirely on who is doing the remembering. He wasted no time in delving into the problems that faced the Church and nobody wanted to talk about. He opened the doors and windows of the establishment to allow the fresh air to pervade and clear the cobwebs that had accumulated over the years, making the Church more relevant to its constituents.

From the very first moment he appeared at the balcony, it was apparent that this papacy would be different, and more appealing. He dispensed with the various trimmings of apparel. His often off the cuff remarks were initially attributed to a pontiff still getting his bearings. It was soon apparent that was his style. Deliberate, strategic ambiguity, questioning teaching and practices through what is said and what is left unsaid. This was particularly relevant to marital and sexual ethics, including Communion for the divorced and "remarried" as well as the Church's clearly established teaching on homosexual behaviour.

did not go far enough. His standard, disarming reply was "Who am I to judge". On the martyrdom of Fr Jacques Hamel, by Islamic extremists who slit his throat while he stood at the altar, he replied "I don't like to speak of Islamic violence... There are violent Catholics!" Those who betrayed the Church were dealt with harshly. Cardinal Becciu was summarily dismissed from his position and told "I no longer have trust in you". The Cardinal was convicted of embezzlement and fraud. Yet the President of Argentina, Javier Milei, who called him an "imbecile", and a "filthy leftist" was warmly embraced at the Vatican.

His views were crisp. Abortion was a "throwaway culture...and truly murder". Euthanasia and assisted suicide: "are practices to be rejected." Even as more women were given greater responsibilities in the administration of church affairs, it was a firm "NO" to women priests, or removing celibacy. He allowed the blessing of same-sex couples in his belief that "we cannot be judges who only deny, push back, exclude"; sparking off enormous controversy in Asia and Africa. He was a deft politician too. Though the details of the agreement with the Chinese government remain a secret, Church leaders in China were to be appointed by consensus.

The focus now shifts to the choice of a successor. Will he be a conservative, radical or a compromise moderate? He will be chosen by a "conclave", meaning "a room that can be locked up," or simply, "a closed room.". Members of a "College of Cardinals" will be locked behind the doors of the Sistine chapel to vote for a new pope. There are 252 members at present, but only 138 are eligible to vote being below the age ceiling of 80 years. This will be the most diverse conclaves in the history of the Catholic Church with members from 90 countries most of whom were appointed by Pope Francis. Before the conclave begins, the College of Cardinals will meet in congregations to discuss issues facing the Church and generally get to know each other. Politicking is frowned upon and buying votes, called "simony" is against

Church law. Electronic jamming devices will be set up to prevent eavesdropping, Wi-Fi and cell phone use. As they file into the chapel, the cardinals will vow on a book of the Gospels to keep the conclave proceedings secret. After these rituals, the Master of Papal Liturgical Celebrations orders "Extra Omnes," which means "Everyone Out." The doors of the Sistine Chapter will then be locked, and the conclave begins. Nine cardinals are chosen at random to run the election, with three being "scrutinizers" who will examine the ballots and read them aloud. As each ballot is dropped into an urn, the voter declares, "I call as my witness Christ the Lord who will be my judge, that my vote is given to the one who before God I think should be elected."

A new pope is elected by a two-thirds majority. If this majority is not reached during the first ballot, the ballots will be burned in a stove, with black smoke rising through the Sistine Chapel's chimney to signal that the election is still ongoing. On the days thereafter – there will be four ballots a day up to 32 or 33. If a new pope is not chosen after 13 days, there will be a day of prayer and reflection. Then the election will be between the top two candidates, one of whom must receive a two-thirds majority.

Once chosen, he is asked "Do you accept your canonical election as Supreme Pontiff?" By saying "Accepto," or "I accept," he becomes the new leader of the Catholic Church, and the ballots burned so that the chimney emits white smoke. The new Pope then chooses a name, which often reflects his religious inclinations. He will then go to the "Room of Tears" to dwell on his new role and its burdens; often bringing the new Pope to tears. He then wears the attire of a Pope and after his election is announced from the balcony of the Basilica, he will greet the crowd and deliver his first blessing.

And a new pontificate would have begun.

(The author is the Past IMA Goa State President, founder member and Past President of VHAG, and a past member of the Central Executive Committee of VHAI)

Is dog tax necessary?

It is learnt that the Mapusa Municipal Council has reportedly announced the introduction of a new tax on dog owners. As part of the new regulation, a one-time registration fee of Rs 500 will be charged for each dog, with an annual renewal fee of Rs 100. Registering a pet dog with the civic body is a good step but why should the dog owner be made to pay such a hefty dog tax? The dog owners could have been charged a nominal registration fee. And who will pay the dog tax for the stray dogs roaming on the streets? Will pet cats also be taxed in future? Should there be any uniform tax profile for all breeds of dogs that included high breed dogs and local breed? If a household has more than one pet dog paying the dog tax could mean extra financial burden. In general, whenever tax is collected the government uses the money for the welfare of the people. Will the dog tax be used for the welfare of the pet dogs? It is pertinent to note that dog lovers usually adopt stray dogs from the dog shelter. If they have to pay dog tax then it will dissuade them from adopting these stray dogs. Hence the number of stray dogs in the dog shelter will only increase in due course. The authorities concerned need to have a rethink on imposing dog tax.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Stubble burning is man-made

The recent fire in the Taleigao fields is a cause for concern to

letterstotheeditor

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All letters must contain correct postal address and telephone number. Letters are liable to be edited for brevity.

all nature loving Goans. This is going on for sometime now with alblom with the authorities turning a blind eye obviously with a hidden agenda.

We have seen fires in fields - the most recent one in Taleigao besides San Jose de Areal and hill fires in Molem and other places where cashew plantations are burnt down to ashes obviously for real estate development. The Portuguese during their rule in Goa had meticulously brought the cashew plant to Goa from distant Brazil and which has survived for ages and the real estate mafia are trying to give it a slow death. Stubble burning besides creating air pollution also has a very cascading effect on the health of the elderly n children. Our politicos fail to realise this just for a few crores which they make but ruin the next 3/4 generations in the long run. If urgent steps are not taken immediately we are heading for a disaster in the forthcoming years.

Lucas D'Souza, Verna

Resolve issues through dialogue

The latest launch of India's Operation Sindoor has significantly heightened tensions between India and Pakistan, raising concerns about potential escalation into a broader conflict. The operation involved missile strikes on nine alleged terrorist infrastructure sites in Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir, in

retaliation for a terrorist attack on April 22. The targets were identified as training camps and logistical hubs associated with militant groups like LeT and JeM. The operation marks one of the most significant military engagements in recent years, highlighting the persistent volatility in the Kashmir region and the potential for rapid escalation between the two countries.

Both countries are nuclear-powered and previous stand-offs, after the Pulwama-Balakot incident in 2019, have shown how quickly things can spiral without direct diplomatic channels or international mediation.

Major countries that expressed its support to India against Pakistan earlier, has now softened their tone and urged both the warring nations to exercise restraint over the escalation situation and engage in dialogue to prevent further deterioration. While the immediate future may witness continued military engagements and heightened tensions, the likelihood of a full-scale war remains low due to the mutual understanding of the devastating consequences such a conflict would entail.

Gregory Fernandes, Mumbai

Time to prove patriotism

It is not by choice that India finds itself at war with Pakistan and the scourge of terrorism. While the southern parts of the country may feel removed from the conflict, the war's toll—lives

lost, massive expenditure, and post-war repercussions—is a national burden. This isn't just the army's war—it's India's. In moments like these, every citizen has a role. Whether through financial support, austerity, or moral solidarity, we must stand firm behind our forces. By postponing luxuries and contributing to war funds, we not only strengthen our military budget but brace ourselves for the fiscal aftershocks of prolonged conflict. History speaks. In 1965 and 1971, India fought not only with weapons but with the resilience of its people. Once again, we must channel that spirit.

Let us prove that patriotism isn't a sentiment reserved for parade days—it's an everyday commitment, especially when the nation is tested.

Gopalaswamy J, Chennai

India gives a befitting reply

It took a mere 25 minutes for the Indian missiles and bombs to pound enemy targets and destroy them. 25 extraordinary missiles precisely struck 9 terror camps of Pakistan to spread joy and jubilation across India. Pakistan's terror backbones Lashkar-e-Taba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Hizbul Mujahideen were broken so badly that it may take years, if at all, for the evil conspirators and ex-ecutors of terror to recoup.

Pakistan occupied Kashmir

people'sedit

PRECISION BEYOND BORDERS

CS KRISHNAMURTHY

In the quiet hours before dawn on May 7, India silently shifted gears in its approach to national security. At exactly 1:05 am, the Indian armed forces launched Operation Sindoor — a swift, focused counter-terrorism strike that sent a powerful signal beyond our borders.

This wasn't just another military operation. It was a carefully measured response to the Pahalgam massacre on April 22, where 26 innocent lives — mostly tourists — were lost in a brutal, senseless attack. That tragedy wasn't just another incident in the long history of cross-border terrorism; it was a moment that demanded a clear answer. Operation Sindoor was India's way of drawing a red line — one that can't be crossed without consequence.

In just 25 minutes, nine terror hubs in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) were targeted with 24 precision missiles. These weren't random spots — they were established hideouts for groups like Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). Among the sites hit was the JeM headquarters in Bahawalpur, reportedly killing key associates of Masood Azhar. For India, this marked a shift — not just hitting back at terrorists near the border but striking deeper, at the heart of their planning and operations.

What stood out in this operation was not just the boldness but the restraint. There was no targeting of civilian areas or military bases. As Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri put it, the strikes were "responsible, proportionate, and preventive." The goal wasn't provocation — it was prevention.

Unlike earlier missions such as the 2016 surgical strikes or the 2019 Balakot airstrikes, Operation Sindoor showed how much India's approach has evolved. This was not just about speed, but about precision, planning, and patience. In a world where news leaks in seconds, pulling off a high-stakes mission in total secrecy was no small feat. One senior military official summed it up well: "It wasn't a knee-jerk response — it was a message, sent with clarity and control."

The government, despite intense pressure from the media and public for immediate retaliation after Pahalgam, chose not to act in haste. It let the armed forces decide the timing and scale. That decision to wait — and strike when ready — showed maturity and confidence.

Pakistan's reaction was predictable. It began with denial, then offered vague investigations, and soon switched to threats. But beneath the bluster, the panic was visible — especially when their stock market tumbled even as India's remained stable. That contrast reflects a deeper shift — a more secure, composed India, standing firm, both militarily and economically.

Critics may debate the risks of deep strikes, but history offers some perspective. From the 1980s onwards, Pakistan's deep state has repeatedly backed terror groups, often under the guise of religious causes. Time and again, India's peace overtures were met with betrayal — be it the aftermath of the Lahore Bus Diplomacy or the Kargil incursion. Operation Sindoor shows that while India still values peace, it won't turn a blind eye to violence.

The real message from this operation is simple: India is willing to act, not out of anger, but out of conviction. It won't escalate unnecessarily, but it will not ignore threats either. Terrorism — no matter who funds or shelters it — will be confronted.

As an Indian, I see this not as a moment of celebration but of clarity. We didn't act out of rage, but with resolve. Operation Sindoor is a reminder that peace is not always passive — sometimes, it must be protected with precision.

Let the world take note. India's silence is thoughtful. But when it speaks, it speaks with strength.

(PoK) has always been a nursery for terror training and the Indian forces did commendably well to locate and strike at five targets there. 'Operation Sindoor' is the most exhaustive military action on Pakistan-sponsored terrorism by India in nearly five decades. While the Balakot attack was on a single terror launch pad, 'Sindoor' targeted nine such launchpads and went even deep into the Pakistan territory.

What 'Operation Sindoor' has done is to unequivocally send an unambiguous message that India will no longer tolerate terror on its soil in any form. Gone are the days when posturing and planning were the only counter attack mechanisms employed by the governments in power. At the same time, India has displayed a remarkable combination of attack and restraint by focusing only on terror hubs and sparing civilians.

Ganapathi Bhat, Akola

Hats off to armed forces

Hats off to our Prime Minister, Narendra Modi and the Armed Forces for their retaliation for the Pahalgam attack on our tourists. The Prime Minister has aptly christened this operation as 'Sindoor'. The most heartening news is that all the opposition leaders, especially the Congress leaders, had hailed the efforts of our Armed Forces on their successful mission. The Operation Sindoor and the support and cooperation of our Opposition Parties must have given a clear message to the perpetrators of terror; a loud and clear signal that Indians will not tolerate terror and we are United.

N Viswanathan, Coimbatore