

O HERALDO

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Gentleman Pope Leo faces big challenges

Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost, a long-time missionary in Latin America, was elected as the surprise choice to be the new leader of the Catholic Church on May 8, as global leader of the 1.4 billion-strong Catholic Church, becoming the first US Pope in Church history and taking the name Leo XIV.

Hailing from Chicago, he is also a citizen of Peru, where he has spent much of his life and was elected on the second day of the conclave, by 133 red-robed cardinals who were sequestered in the Sistine Chapel. After his election, Pope Leo appeared on the central balcony of St Peter's Basilica after white smoke billowed from a chimney atop the Sistine Chapel, and uttered his first words "Peace be with you all," to the cheering crowds, speaking in fluent Italian. He speaks English, Spanish, and Italian fluently.

Prevost, 69, who spent most of his life as a missionary in Peru became a cardinal only in 2023. After he appeared on the balcony of St Peter's Basilica he showed "great elegance and charm". Pope Leo XIV is known to be a "gentle man" who is "very accessible".

Pope Leo, is the 267th Pope to follow St Peter and was ordained a priest in 1982 at the age of 27. He earlier served as the Superior General of the Augustinians.

Pope Leo XIV's election is a great joy to Indians since Robert Francis Prevost, visited India twice in 2004 and 2006 as the Superior General of the Augustinians. He spent time with religious communities and faithful in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, leaving behind a legacy of humility, spiritual depth, and simplicity.

Robert Francis Prevost returned in October 2006 to participate in the Asia-Pacific Meeting of the Order of St Augustine, again residing at the Augustinian house in Mariyapuram from October 3 to 6. Those who met him described him as a man of exceptional humility, saying he was incredibly simple, down-to-earth, and always willing to adapt. He never asked for special treatment—he travelled in modest vehicles and stayed in rooms with basic amenities. His humility deeply touched all who met him in Mariyapuram.

Pope Leo XIV face a number of challenges as he steps in the shoes of his predecessor Pope Francis. As he steps into his new role, Pope Leo inherits a Church navigating complex issues:

1. Sexual abuse scandals: Pope Francis made historic progress in confronting the Church's past failures, including convening a 2019 summit and allowing limited cooperation with civil authorities. Yet, many feel reforms fell short, particularly in terms of mandatory reporting to law enforcement. Pope Leo will be expected to take bold, transparent steps to restore trust and deliver justice.

2. Role of women: Under Francis, women gained greater visibility, including the right to vote in major synods. However, the question of ordination and broader inclusion within the hierarchy remains unresolved. Pope Leo must clarify where he stands on advancing gender equality in the Church.

3. LGBTQ+ Inclusion: Francis made headlines with his now-famous remark, "Who am I to judge?" and later permitted blessings for same-sex couples. While some welcomed these steps, others criticised them as too conservative or too radical. Pope Leo will need to navigate this sensitive terrain, balancing doctrinal consistency with pastoral compassion.

4. Shifting center to the Global South: As Catholicism declines in Europe, its center of gravity has moved to the Global South. With flourishing congregations in Brazil, Mexico, the Philippines, and across Africa and Asia, the Church must expand its global representation. Francis began this process; Pope Leo is expected to continue and deepen it.

The world Pope Leo XIV now shepherds is marked by war, inequality, climate crisis, and widespread emotional and spiritual wounds. Catholics everywhere will be praying that he brings healing, unity, and meaningful reform—honouring the legacy of Pope Francis while leading the Church with his own distinctive voice of gentleness, humility, and courage.



SAMIR NAZARETH

Societies grow on trust. Corruption is one consequence of distrust and not valuing administrative, political and legal structures. This leads to the addition of systems which causes inefficiencies



Multiple checks

One would assume that the Security checks the passport and ticket at the door of the departure building to ensure only those supposed to fly enter the terminal. At the counter, the passport is checked to ensure the name on the ticket matches with that on the passport, and the passport and visa it contains is valid for the country where one is heading to. A similar process is conducted by the immigration officer before he stamps the passport with the exit date. This stamp is sometimes checked by another immigration officer after one passes through the immigration counter. The passport is then checked as one queues to board at the boarding gate. Then it is checked for the last time as one enters the aircraft. On entry into the country,

the passport is checked twice by immigration officers. The checked-in and cabin bags are also checked twice.

Is at least one check unnecessary?

A rationale?

For the passports, a case can be made that these are checked to ensure only travellers enter the airport, then only travelers for a particular flight and destination enter the plane. This could be important in India given that there are many first-time fliers. Any mistake is costly for everyone. But does that require this many checks? Is this a way to keep passengers occupied and slow their movement towards their departure gate?

What of the Customs routine, and that of the airline staff's inability to access information at the check-in counter?

I think a lot of these procedures and systems have to do with the lack of trust. Are officials checking each other to ensure they are performing their jobs or are they double-checking passengers because they assume passengers will gyp the system?

These examples suggest that systems in India are created and function on the suspicion that people will deceive. Systems distrust people and people distrust systems. There is a history.

This dysfunctional relationship between Indians and systems that are supposed to facilitate Indian society and economy is not new. Elections were once conducted by ballots. To prevent electoral rigging Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) were introduced. But many allege that EVMs can be made fallible. To prevent political horse trading, the Anti-Defection Law or the 52nd Amendment to the Indian Constitution was passed. But recent political history shows there are ways to circumvent this law. What is worse is there have been news reports of police and investigative agencies being used to achieve political and business ends.

Forget politicians, even in the everyday, there is a constant endeavour to circumvent the system. Let's not even talk about the habit of not following traffic laws or laws that directly benefit citizenry.

This cat and mouse game seems to be a way to keep large sections of the economy occupied. But does it do India any good?

Politicians and government servants take an oath of

allegiance to the Indian Constitution. But there is enough occurring and reported on to suggest that they lean towards a lesser but more immediate calling.

Nationalism, trust and corruption

If nationalism is on the rise, why hasn't it resulted in an increase in mutual trust between citizen and system? It's pointless asking why nationalism has not increased trust between citizens for the simple reason that nationalism is devotion to the state and to one group of people above all else. Thus, nationalism inherently creates schisms amongst people. But what of that between people and systems? Has the increasing number of Indians stridently declaring love for India translated into respecting systems?

Societies grow on trust. Corruption is one consequence of distrust and not valuing administrative, political and legal structures. This leads to the addition of systems which causes inefficiencies.

What does all the pride in the country translate to? Reducing corruption? As per Transparency International's latest Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), India ranked 96 out of 180 countries. Per CPI, the country was less corrupt last year. CPI ranks countries based on 'perceived levels of public sector corruption according to experts and business people'.

Respondents to the CSDS-Lokniti 2024 pre-poll survey blamed both the central and state governments for the rise in corruption. So here in lies the paradox, respondents to the CSDS survey also indicated that corruption was not high on their priority list when voting.

Potentially, the country is fine living with distrust and corruption. This could be because everyone seemingly benefits by participating in it in one form or another. Thus, the love that one claims one has for one's country is separate from, and does not influence, action towards its betterment.

Will becoming a multi-trillion-dollar economy enhance trust and reduce corruption? Currently the increasing GDP does not need enhanced civic duty. But for how long? The only way to teach trust is to act on it. Any takers?

(Samir Nazareth is an author and writes on socio-economic and environmental issues)

India's tryst with checks and balances

people's *edit*

KINDNESS IN THE BLACKOUT

ANANTHA PADMANABHAN

The year 1971, remains etched in my memory, not just as the year of the Indo-Pakistan War, but as a time when the simple act of being a ten-year-old schoolboy was punctuated by the unsettling realities of conflict.

Life in our defence establishment township transformed overnight. Instructions to shroud our windows with dark paper became the norm, a visual testament to the unseen threat looming beyond.

Even the headlights of vehicles underwent a rather strange metamorphosis, painted black to a sliver, casting a meagre beam on the road ahead.

The wail of air raid sirens became a frequent soundtrack to our days, often followed by the abrupt silence of power cuts, plunging our world into darkness.

One such evening, the familiar shriek of the siren sliced through the air as my school bus trundled along. The streetlights flickered and died, leaving us in an eerie twilight.

Abruptly, the driver instructed us to get off whilst the bus was still moving. My young legs tangled and I tumbled onto a rough patch of baby gravel, meant for extending the road, its sharp edges instantly stinging both my palms.

The driver, usually a bit gruff but not unkind, helped me up, offering a rather strange piece of advice about running a few steps after jumping off.

He then took me to the company dispensary, where my grazed palms were bandaged, throbbing with a dull ache.

Stepping out into the inky blackness, a wave of disorientation washed over me.

The familiar landmarks of my route home had vanished in the oppressive dark. Time seemed to stretch endlessly as I wandered, lost and increasingly frightened.

Perhaps two hours crawled by before the streetlights flickered back to life for a fleeting moment, only to be swallowed by darkness again as another siren wailed. The fear, a cold knot in my tummy, finally gave way to tears.

Just then, a figure emerged from the gloom, the distinct silhouette of a man in military uniform. He noticed my distress and with a reassuring voice, offered to guide me home.

We began our trek, a seemingly endless criss-crossing of shadowy lanes. In the blackout, every house looked identical, each a silent, indistinguishable form.

Just as despair began to creep in, a familiar voice cut through the darkness, calling my name, again and again.

It was my dad!

Guided by his anxious calls and the beam of his torch, we finally reached our house. Relief washed over me, quickly followed by a fresh wave of emotion as I saw my father's panicked face. The sight of a military man escorting his bandaged son had clearly alarmed him. The officer patiently explained the circumstances and my father's initial worry transformed into profuse gratitude.

That night, huddled safely at home, the pain in my palms was a dull echo compared to the vivid memory of being lost and the unexpected kindness of a stranger.

The blackout, meant to obscure us from an unseen enemy, inadvertently illuminated the fundamental goodness that resides within people.

The gruff bus driver's unexpected care, the military man's selfless act of guiding a lost child, and my father's frantic relief – these moments, born out of a time of fear and uncertainty, underscored the enduring power of human connection.

Even in the darkest of times, the essence of our shared humanity can shine through, offering solace and a path back to safety and belonging.

Shortage of essential goods during wartime

As attacks by Pakistan escalate, India retaliates. India reportedly thwarts fresh Pakistan bid to strike military sites in Jammu and Pathankot. Several such attempts have been foiled by Indian air defense. Tension soars between the two countries amid fears of a wider conflict. Goa may not be directly impacted by the ongoing stand-off between India and Pakistan. But the ripple-effect of the ongoing conflict may be felt in the state in the days to come.

This could be in the form of rising prices of essential commodities and food items. Several unscrupulous traders could engage in hoarding in order to increase the price of essential commodities, vegetables, fruits, etc. These traders could be falsely spreading the news that essential commodities are not arriving in the state. Citizens could also engage in panic buying and stocking of food items in order to beat the possible price rise.

Union Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Pralhad Joshi has urged citizens to remain calm and avoid panic buying amid false rumours of shortage of essential goods following Operation Sindoor. He assured that India has ample food reserves and fully operational supply chains. We in Goa may have not felt the tremors of the war thus far. Nevertheless

the Goa government needs to see to it that there is no shortage of food items in the coming days and act against those traders who engage in hoarding.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Gun-slayers should be brought before law

Operation Sindoor has created a huge wave across the world. It has become a topic of India's highest priority and exigency right now and a case conference of diverse scenes, including politicians, sportspersons, film stars, and mundane residents, who hailed the nation's reprisal to Pakistan to the Pahalgam terror attack in one voice.

Social media surged with posts, tweets, and videos on Operation Sindoor, and TV news channels covered it extensively, turning it into a trending topic. During the last few days, people discuss it at work, at home, on streets, and everywhere literally. The mere mention of 'Operation Sindoor' seems to have perked up all Indians, cutting across caste and religious barriers, with renewed energy.

It seems as though the entire nation is engulfed in excitement, with people eagerly anticipating the forthcoming developments. 'Operation Sindoor', the very

name chosen by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, appears to have rendered some kind of justice to the women, who lost their husbands in the gruesome terror attack, and it will fulfil its entire purpose when the gun-slayers are brought before the law.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, Chennai

Want a war? Pay for it

The US dollar has weakened against all currencies across the world, courtesy Donald Trump and his absurd tariff policies. The USD to INR exchange rate has declined from Rs 88 to Rs 84, an almost 5% drop.

This should have immediately translated to a 5% drop in price of petrol, diesel and gas. But on the contrary, the prices have gone up as the government has increased the excise duty on these items. Today, crude oil, trades at its lowest price of @ \$ 71 a barrel but those benefits are not being passed on to consumers.

As we are a nation at 'war', one can expect the prices of petrol, diesel and gas to rise. After all someone has to pay for this war and you want a war; therefore you will have to pay for it. Even those who don't want war will have to pay for it, there is no choice.

Rekha Sarin Trehan, Benaulum

Futility of war

Is India too becoming a military-industrial complex? Consider the fact that many Indian companies, including those owned by Ambani, Adani and Mahindras have now diversified into defence production.

These items are being sold to the Indian defence forces, maybe they are coerced into buying it on grounds of patriotism and Atmnirbharta.

Many of the stocks, especially the ordnance, has an expiry date, it has to be either used by that date or discarded.

A war promotes the sale of these companies who mint billions as the forces have to augment or replenish their arsenal periodically.

War is music to the ears for these behemoths, but it is a disaster for the nation.

The USA has the biggest Military-Industrial Complex, it has been at war, inciting a war or supporting a war at some location or the other across the globe ever since it came into existence @ 250 years ago.

Is India going down that very same path? A nation known for beacons of peace in Buddha and Gandhi, is seemingly headed in the wrong direction.

Vinay Dwivedi, Benaulum

Tourism in doldrums

That several beach shacks have closed early this year is indicative of the sorry state of Goa Tourism. No statistics are needed to prove the point. To my mind, there are a few things that need to be fixed urgently.

The taxi issue must be resolved. The system is unique and not seen anywhere. The government must get all taxi unions under one common platform and compel them to form their own aggregator app.

Goa was known for its hospitality, much before the slogan atithi bhavo deva was coined. Nowadays media reports and social influencers portray only hostility. Hospitality, is very much in the Goan DNA, but a few rogue elements are giving it a bad name. If the taxi issue is solved, much of the hostility will vanish. Dogs have taken over Goa like never before. When in Goa, I do not go for morning walks any more for fear of attracting the ire of stray dogs. Hotel rates must be competitive. Tourists find it cheaper to go to Vietnam instead of Goa for a holiday. Affordable homestays must be encouraged in villages near tourist hubs. These villages may be given some incentives for purchase of bikes and solar panels. Finally, the tourism dept must come up with a catchy slogan encapsulating traditional Goan hospitality and tranquillity.

Robert Castellino, Mumbai