

O HERALDO

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Time to stop the road-widening frenzy

In 2023, the Goa legislative assembly passed the Goa Highways Law (Revival of Operation, Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2023, for the purpose of acquiring land to construct new roads and widen existing ones, with the exception of national highways. When the cabinet had approved the bill prior to it being tabled in the assembly, a government official had said that the state had been facing issues in acquiring land to widen roads in order to cater to the ever-increasing vehicle density. The official said that the public works department was unable to correct several accident-prone zones as the Goa Highways Act, 1974 — which made provisions for this — was defunct, leaving the state with no valid legislation to acquire land. The new law was expected to make it easier for the PWD to acquire land for major district roads, village roads, and for road widening too.

It is a known fact that the procedure to widening a road or to lay a new one altogether is a lengthy one. First, the government department concerned submits a request to the district collector, including details like the purpose of road widening, number of beneficiaries, and financial arrangements. The collector then probes the application and, if it is approved, a team inspects the area in question and prepares a detailed project report. Thereafter, a preliminary notification is published in the official gazette, informing members of the general public of the acquisition that is sought to be carried out. Following this, a public hearing is held to address any objections from the affected parties, and, upon these being settled, the government declares the land required for a public purpose and the collector issues an order for the acquisition of land.

Then comes the acquisition process. The land is marked out, measured, and planned by the authorities. Notices are served to the affected parties and a detailed inquiry is conducted to determine the value of the land and any other claims. After this, the collector makes an award, determining the compensation to be paid to the affected parties. Only upon the compensation being paid to those concerned is the land acquired by the government.

If the task of widening an existing road requires strict adherence to the procedure above, it is baffling that unauthorised road-widening projects are being taken up by Calangute MLA Michael Lobo and his wife and Siolim MLA, Delilah Lobo, in several areas of their respective constituencies. The earliest project initiated by Michael was in his own village of Parra, where compound walls flanking the main road were demolished overnight and rebuilt further inland to make way for a broader road and an adjoining footpath. Several trees that grew along the existing road were also felled without a second thought for the purpose. Before the people knew it, the 'project' spread further north towards Nagoa, which falls within the jurisdiction of the Arpora village panchayat.

When Delilah was elected as Siolim MLA during the most recent assembly elections, Siolim too bore the brunt of the Lobos' road-widening frenzy, resulting in several age-old trees being cut and people's properties being demolished without any official order to make way for a wider road amid vehement protests. If anyone thought the MLA couple would stop there, they were sorely mistaken, going by the most recent uprising at Anjuna over a similar project initiated as part of Michael's alleged corporate social responsibility (CSR) contribution.

What is surprising is the Lobo couple's blatant disregard for the law despite the fact that officials of the PWD themselves have confirmed that there is no official approval for road widening in Anjuna's St. Sebastian Vaddo, and that the only sanctioned activity was the "reinstatement of tarmac" in the area where electricity poles had been excavated. The Anjuna village panchayat too distanced itself from the road widening project, and said that letters were issued to residents only to ensure compliance with the recent high court order pertaining to illegal roadside constructions.

An environmental lawyer recently told the media that the contractor roped in for the Lobos' road widening project at Anjuna does not even possess a valid work order. "Also, in the event that any land that is privately held, is alongside the existing roadway and has not been acquired in accordance with the provisions of the Land Acquisition Act, these structures on such land cannot be classified as 'encroachment'," the lawyer said and added that if the PWD or panchayat proceeds with road expansion without following legal acquisition procedures, it would constitute encroachment by these very authorities.

The Lobo method of widening roads willy-nilly needs to be stopped and the MLA couple must be pulled up by the government of which they are a part. If the government chooses to instead turn a blind eye to this situation, it will be construed as the government itself being complicit in such illegalities. Also, if the Lobo method is allowed to continue, the couple might soon start building flyovers and bridges under the tag of CSR, which would undermine all the hard work that big-ticket projects like the Porvorim elevated corridor and the Atal Setu have had to put in to seek approvals, compensate private land owners and only then execute work.

comment



BLAISE COSTABIR

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Remember, individuals flock to Goa regardless of their travel experience. Mopa cannot rival the initial impression that visitors receive upon arriving at Dabolim, where they are greeted by picturesque vistas of lush landscapes and the shimmering expanse of the Arabian Sea. Each arrival is imbued with a palpable sense of excitement and anticipation, as the warm hospitality of the Goan people permeates the atmosphere, stirring the soul and beckoning exploration.

Now discussions about the possible closure of Dabolim Airport have garnered significant attention among the public, elic-

Killing Dabolim Airport softly

Dabolim Airport, officially designated as Goa International Airport, has proudly served as the principal aerodrome for the illustrious state of Goa, India, until January 2023.

Situated in Dabolim, this pivotal transport hub has played an indispensable role in linking the region to a myriad of domestic and international destinations. Over the decades, it has evolved into a crucial gateway for millions of travellers eager to immerse themselves in the breathtaking allure of Goa's natural splendour.

In January 2023, the Mopa Airport, officially designated as Manohar International Airport (Mopa), an ambitious endeavour aimed at enhancing the connectivity of India's smallest state, Goa, was inaugurated in North Goa. This greenfield airport is expected to revolutionise the travel experience for both domestic and international travellers. This is to be operated by GMR International.

Goa being a premier tourist destination, the Mopa Airport is heralded as strategically vital for enhancing tourism and bolstering the state's economy. Anticipated to accommodate approximately 13 million passengers annually, the airport is meticulously designed to alleviate congestion at the existing Dabolim Airport and to offer a contemporary facility for travellers.

The current capacity of Dabolim stands at 11.3 million passengers and is projected to reach 13.3 million upon the completion of its latest ongoing expansion. Thus, one may question the necessity of constructing a new airport when the existing facility possesses the projected capacity. A parallel taxiway was undoubtedly essential, and the infrastructure at Mopa is more closely aligned with global standards for air travel. Could not Dabolim be upgraded, as is currently being undertaken?

iting a tapestry of opinions that reflect the diverse interests of stakeholders, which include local residents, tourism operators, taxi-men and environmental advocates.

The decision to transition operations to Mopa reflects more on the fact that other considerations were at play rather than a forward-thinking approach that is anchored in the pursuit of creating a more spacious, efficient and environmentally-friendly airport infrastructure.

From April 2024 to March 2025, Dabolim Airport accommodated 7.3 million passengers, contrasting sharply with a peak of 8.46 million in 2018-19. In comparison, Mopa Airport managed a total of 4.6 million passengers. Notably, this aggregate does not surpass Dabolim's capacity of 13 million passengers. This indicates that Dabolim processed nearly twice the number of passengers as Mopa, despite airlines reallocating their operations. Thus, contrary to prevailing notions, Dabolim remains vibrant and operational, notwithstanding what seem to be covert endeavours to undermine its viability and facilitate its closure. Furthermore, the administration's assurances regarding its continued operation appear more as mere platitudes than substantive commitments.

The landing charges at Dabolim are comparatively lower; however, airlines are increasingly gravitating towards Mopa. Can the AAI officials effectively compete with the private sector in selling landing slots and wooing airlines? This presents an inequitable advantage. There exists a substantial amount of underutilised space at Dabolim that could be capitalised, transforming it into shopping and dining experiences akin to those at Mopa.

Yet, who possesses the ability to initiate such change? It is evident that AAI officials, encumbered by bureaucratic constraints, lack the operational flexibility enjoyed by private operators. The data indicates that passengers exhibit a preference for Dabolim, despite the limited airline options, as carriers continue their migration to Mopa. It is imperative to communicate to airlines that Dabolim holds greater allure for travellers from Goa, given that Mopa is perceived as inconvenient, costly, and time-consuming.

Then there is the troubling scenario in which the Government of Goa, through a perplexing cabinet resolution, granted GMR International—operators of Mopa—an extension in remitting the revenue share of 36.99% under the pretext of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact.

Such leniency was not afforded to any other business in Goa. Despite this, Dabolim has consistently generated profits annually without any form of subsidy. Is this not a glaring instance of preferential treatment towards Mopa?

However, the most audacious manoeuvre was thwarted by Retd Cdr Atul Pant and Sanjay

Redkar when they petitioned the High Court and secured a stay on the unlawful Dabolim flyover. This flyover, initiated by the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI), necessitated a mandatory No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Navy, given that it comes under the Obstacle Limitation Surfaces (OLS). The structure contravened the height restrictions stipulated in the notification of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), which delineates the maximum permissible surface heights for each airport. Noncompliance with these regulations would preclude the operation of commercial flights. The consent of the Navy is imperative, as outlined in the Ministry of Civil Aviation Notification dated September 30, 2015, which asserts: "The following steps shall be taken for calculating the maximum permissible heights for cases where there is a requirement of NOC from AAI or from Defence authorities."

It appears that a significant oversight has occurred, as evidenced by a response to an unstarred question, number 1655, in Parliament in August 2024. The Union Minister of Surface Transport asserted that the height of the flyover, being constructed at a cost of 368 crores, was within permissible limits. However, in May 2025, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) obtained a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Navy after reducing the proposed flyover's height, indicating that someone undoubtedly misled the Minister.

The elevation of 17 columns necessitates a reduction; many of these have already been constructed. How will the height be diminished, and in what manner will the new design be superimposed upon the existing framework? Will the underpasses have the mandatory 5.5 mt height? If a reduction in height is feasible, why was the flyover not initially designed in accordance with ICAO standards? Furthermore, why did the flyover commence without the requisite approvals? Had it not been for the intervention of the petitioners, once completed, no commercial flights would have been authorised, potentially resulting in the closure of Dabolim Airport.

Will those accountable for misleading Parliament, thereby incurring a detriment to the Exchequer through the illicit commencement of the flyover and alterations to its design, be held to account and face repercussions, or will this matter be conveniently obscured? Will the Government respond as it did in the instance involving the Chief Town Planner of the TCP Department?

Dabolim has served Goa admirably and continues to possess the potential for further contributions; however, it requires the unwavering support and vigilant oversight of all well-meaning citizens. Long live Dabolim Airport.

(The author prefers to write rather than chat in a balcao)

people's edit

MEMORABLE ENCOUNTER

SATHAPPAN NARAYANAN

Last month, I had the wonderful opportunity to visit Japan as part of a tour group consisting of 34 members. Japan, with its rich culture, breathtaking scenery, and unparalleled cleanliness, is a destination that had long been on my travel list. While the entire journey was filled with unforgettable moments, one simple yet profound incident at a bus terminus left a lasting impression on me—a moment that taught me more about humility, discipline, and gratitude.

It was a pleasantly cool day as our group arrived at a local bus terminus. There was no one waiting for the bus we supposed to board. As is customary in Japan, we formed an orderly queue for the incoming bus.

As we waited, a Japanese mother arrived with her two young school-going children. She walked up to the queue and, without saying a word, made her way to the very end of the line. Her quiet demeanour, combined with the two children in tow, immediately caught our attention. Moved by a collective sense of courtesy and concern, we began to invite her to come to the front of the line. We explained, through gestures and simple English, that since she had children with her, she could take our place. However, she politely refused, shaking her head and smiling gently. In her eyes, arriving late meant she had no right to jump the line, regardless of her circumstances. It was not just about rules; it was a matter of principle for her.

Despite our repeated and sincere requests, she remained firm initially. But after many of us insisted, she eventually agreed—reluctantly—and stepped forward with her children. What happened next, however, was the true highlight of the encounter.

As soon as they moved up the line, the mother and her children turned around to face all of us. In perfect unison, they bowed deeply and thanked us multiple times. It wasn't a quick, casual gesture. It was sincere, heartfelt, and repeated several times. The children followed their mother's lead, bowing with a level of grace and respect that was both touching and humbling.

This simple exchange moved us all. It wasn't about letting someone go ahead in line—it was about the values that underpin everyday life in Japan. The mother's initial refusal reflected a deep-rooted cultural respect for fairness and order. Her children mirrored her behaviour with effortless discipline, showing that such values are not just taught but lived. And when they did accept our gesture, they expressed gratitude in a way that made us feel honoured, not inconvenienced.

That moment at the bus terminus became a defining experience of our trip. It was a powerful reminder that true courtesy isn't about grand gestures but about small, everyday actions guided by respect for others. In many places, rushing to the front with children might be expected or even demanded. But in Japan, even a mother with young kids felt it inappropriate to claim a right she hadn't earned.

Travel, at its best, opens our eyes to new ways of thinking and living. That day, I didn't just witness Japanese culture—I experienced it. And in doing so, I brought back more than photos and souvenirs. I returned with a quiet lesson in humility, discipline, and the kind of respect that transcends language.

It's these small, human moments that often define a journey—and this one, I'll carry with me always

Suicide cases high among farmers

It is really sad that a 43-year-old farmer Kailash Arjun Nagare from Vidarbha, who was the recipient of the 'Young Farmer Award' from the Maharashtra government, has taken his own life a couple of months ago, citing unaddressed irrigation demands. Painfully, more than 700 farmers died by suicide in Vidarbha in 2024 alone, an alarming truth that failed to gain traction in Parliamentary debates. It is strange that while the Niti Aayog report says that Indian agriculture uses 2 to 3 times more water per tonne of crop compared with several developed nations, access to water for irrigation by farmers in our country remains a combative issue. The pain of a farmer's suicide isn't just a statistic — it is a family shattered, dreams buried with the soil, and a silent cry that never reaches the halls of power. How many more lives of farmers must be lost before we wake up? The hands that feed us are trembling

letterstotheeditor

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with despair, yet our politicians continue to look the other way. This is not just a fight of farmers, but ours too. Government of a country that lets its farmers die is a country that has lost its soul.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, Chennai

Are we coming to terms with job scams?

This has reference to the report 'Job scam alert.....' (Herald May 15, 2025). The unemployment scenario in our country is indeed frightening. This case of a 27-year old youth struggling for an overseas job, spending lakhs of rupees in the process is perhaps one more instance of job seekers fleeing the country in search of jobs, greener pastures. So, what do the authorities have to say about the job scenario in our country? Are they going to come to terms with the reality

or are we going to continue living in a world of make belief? Unemployment is just of the issues among others issues which needs attention rather than focusing on irrelevant issues.

Melville X. D'Souza, Mumbai

Right to life of stateless persons

Recent reports in the media suggest that 43 Rohingya refugees escaping the brutal Myanmar military junta and wanting to seek shelter in our country were dumped into the sea by Indian authorities near the Myanmar coastline. If these reports are true then they indicate a new threshold of inhumanity that the Indian state has successfully crossed. It is reported that 40 Rohingya refugees managed to reach the coastline. If that is the case, the question arises as to what happened to the three who

did not make it.

If the reports of 43 Rohingya being abandoned in distant waters by Indian officials are not true then they indicate that even the just cause of defending the right to life of stateless persons needs to be exercised with caution. Embroidering the truth in the direction of exaggeration does not serve the cause of justice.

Vinay Dwivedi, Benaulim

Time to thank our jawans

Now that the heat has cooled down post India's definitive and strong response to the covert acts of violence by our neighbour, it is time to really thank our jawans and combat personnel from the Army and Navy. Every Indian will surely want to express their gratitude to all those were in the front line to defend our nation and congratulate the

administration for a befitting and courageous reply to the heinous act that took place in Pahalgam, where we lost our dear countrymen and women for no fault of theirs.

At the same time the one most important question that remains unanswered is, "How did the cowards reach Pahalgam — deep into our territory to kill so many of our dear ones? Did we fail as a nation to protect our borders and our people? Why and how were we caught napping?"

While taking credit for the response to the attack, the government should also take the blame for the lapse that claimed so many innocent lives. A high-level investigation should be initiated to find the real reasons. Or should we concede that the reply we gave Pakistan was a cover up for our lapse? Years ago, a great Indian leader resigned from his designation of minister after a train accident that killed many. Will someone follow suit, or keep finding excuses?

Jaret de Silva Chandrapurkar, Chandor