O HERALDO
The Voice of Goa - since 1900

An agenda for Panjim's future

The findings of the study on climate change and the alarming surge in extreme rainfall across Goa should raise alarm bells all over the state, especially in Panjim. Since the research shows that rainfall has almost doubled in about 118 years, there is a need for the setting up of an emergency task force and exceptional planning, so as to take steps to prevent the sinking of the city of Panjim due to rising ocean levels—particularly since the area from Caranzalem to the Panjim waterfront is said to be reclaimed from the sea or river.

However, Panjim requires planning not only to protect the city from flooding and eventual submersion due to rising sea levels, but also a complete revamp of governance. Hence, a 15-point agenda for Panjim is suggested in the form of questions which require studied answers:

1. How can we tackle the development–environment conundrum in Panjim, while protecting its environment and planning for water management, flood risk reduction, disaster management, and pollution control? Since Panjim is a city built on water, we cannot set out on a spree of mega development. We cannot opt for high-rise construction. The city's environment must be safeguarded, and systems for water management, flood control, drainage, and quick-response disaster mechanisms must be put in place.

2. What kind of institutional and governance base is required for Panjim? The traditional systems of administration and governance, now outdated, should be revamped with new institutional and governance frameworks that are in tune with changing technology and responsive to citizens.

3. How can we ensure that local government is accountable and transparent, and works in partnership with civil society, so that local needs and possibilities are reflected in the local government agenda? The state government and its machinery—including the Collector, Mamlatdar, and CCP—should take citizens on board to deliver transparent and accountable governance.

4. How can we learn from other cities, and combine prosperity, good living conditions, and a low ecological or carbon footprint? There is a need to set up research teams or tie up with research institutions to study and implement successful case studies to improve various aspects of city living. Cities such as Singapore, Tokyo, and others have shown the way.

5. What city initiatives should we support, and how can we fund these? Experiments like Smart City have been a total disaster, and evident from the public response, since they are not people-centric, exclude citizen participation, and are project-centric without improving governance.

6. Can we—or should we—engage in participatory planning and budgeting with the local government, and try to initiate citizen-based monitoring of development works? Panjim could take a leaf from Porto Alegre, Brazil, where citizens are involved in decision-making regarding public spending, allocating resources to poorer areas and empowering residents to set priorities—enhancing transparency and community ownership, rather than imposing top-down projects.

7. How can we ensure that information and data about local government and development works are easily accessible? The current system thrives on opacity, making data as difficult to access as possible. If the government, CCP, or Smart City has nothing to hide, they should make data readily available.

8. What agenda should we draw up for upgrading Panjim's infrastructure to ensure aesthetics and retain Goenkarponn and its old-world charm? The sculpture art initiative in Panjim was completely lacking in imagination. We must do better.

9. What agenda should we formulate for addressing the health needs of citizens, preventing disease, and improving health and emergency services? Health and well-being are vital. Instead of erecting elaborate buildings for the Directorate of Panchayats, TCP, or Accounts, the Urban Health Centre should be upgraded into a modern, 100-bed hospital with full amenities.

10. Is there a need to engage with citizens for inputs, and to conduct awareness and education drives?

11. What forums, events, and activities should be initiated to protect and showcase Goa's heritage, culture, traditions, and values?

12. How do we deal with poverty and slum management? The city is plagued by beggars, urchins, and destitute people from other states, which gives Panjim an unpleasant image. How can we tackle this issue effectively?

13. How do we address problems related to housing, transport, traffic safety, and the security of women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities?

14. What partnerships should be forged to achieve our goals for a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient Panjim?

15. What vehicles, slogans, and strategies can we adopt to implement our 'Agenda for Panjim'?

The Smart City should have been conceptualised to provide answers to all the above questions. However, as mentioned earlier, it has been a complete disaster due to the total exclusion of citizens from participatory planning and decision-making. If we do not change the way we plan and implement projects, money will continue to be wasted, contractors will keep reaping profits, and the city and its residents will be left at the mercy of climate change and looming environmental disaster—something, God forbid, that may very well descend upon us if Panjim's future MLA and planners do not take this seriously.

comment

TALLULAH D'SILVA

Let us protect our golden land, now

The rains have arrived with a bang! We were not prepared, were we? We had expected some usual pre-monsoon showers but had never anticipated that it would pour down so unpredictably or so incessantly. With just a few days of rain, flooding and landslides have been reported in so many places across Goa and the visuals have been shocking.

Why is this happening? Why are we surely and increasingly heading towards such disaster like situations? Are these man made? Are these irreversible?

Today Goa is rapidly getting urbanised and concretised. Look at the extent of construction of massive highways cutting across this tiny state taking away not just land but precious resources like old trees, agrarian lands, wetlands, plateaus, hill slopes and forests. Besides this, we are also witnessing rampant construction of luxury homes, row houses, villas, huge housing colonies and commercial buildings. The Bhutanis, DLF, L&T, Lodhas and many more developers, construction companies with their presence in the metros of India are now here building in Goa. But how are they building with artificial beaches, swimming pools and such unsustainable and completely insensitive ideas that are not at all with the intent to conserve and protect Goa's rich ecology, biodiversity and culture. This urbanisation is propelled by the new settlers from urban cities in India who are seeking Goa as a commodity. All are searching for peace in a piece of Goa. Many of these villas/apartments are second and third homes requiring unsustainable resources like steel, cement and concrete besides stone and sand that is now sourced from neighbouring states! Everywhere we are noticing massive construction sites where the land is excavated nearly 3 floors deep underground disturbing ground water, felling old trees, impacting hill slopes and aiding soil erosion.

With sudden rain, all such locations particularly those on hills are a danger to the settlements or people living at the base of the slope. In the last few days, we have heard and seen horrific images and videos of accounts of residents in despair as silt and rain water has gushed into their homes, neighbourhoods and main streets. We have seen unbelievable videos of bike riders and cars caught in the heavy currents of rain water overflowing from gutters and streets. In this short time with these cloud bursts, we have seen rain water filling up to capacity excavated pits, waterways and nallahs overflowing and roads flooding because there is just too much water everywhere which is not having a chance to drain easily causing destruction and loss of ecology and risk to life.

Can you recall how Goa was just a decade ago? It was still so pristine! Recent reports have confirmed loss of large amount of tree cover, loss of mangroves and biodiversity, massive cutting of hills, huge red gaping pits where soil has been gouged out. Indiscriminate construction near and into fresh water springs, eco sensitive zones, heritage zones, fields, wetlands and even on sand dunes on beaches.

Why are we allowing this? While civil society members and citizens have been vocal about the destruction of Goa, our local representatives seem to have completely sold their souls with no will, empathy and concern to this, our precious motherland.

We talked to children and parents, and everywhere we hear the unanimous lament that Goa is dying, she is bleeding. And we must do everything in our power, drive and sheer will to save her.

What can we do? Let's look around, what do we see? Within our neighbourhoods, we can change so much. Speak to your neighbour, speak to your ward member. Do they care? Are they concerned? Make the connection with them about our land, air and water and how all of these are impacted by each and every action that is destructive, polluting.

Show them how ground water needs conservation and how scarcity is already a problem in many countries on the brink of a water war. Show them how every bit of plastic is coming back to us from soil, water and air and how we are bodies have 95% micro plastics. Show them how supermarkets and processed foods are impacting our immunity, health and connect to our landing its biodiversity.

Show them how local food, local farmers are our security to survival. Show them that the sewage we are letting into our rivers and seepage into our ground water is going to contaminate it and deplete the little that we have. Show them how Goa is getting desertified with scorching temperatures in winter and summer. Show them that living in concrete boxes with synthetic finishes is causing us to become more sick and mentally depressed and the alternative is natural, sustainable and regenerative spaces for simple living, happiness and better well being. Show them that this earth, this land is our gold not to be pillaged and finished but to safe guard and nurture for our children, the future generations. Let's repair, let's salvage what we can of what's left of our fragmented Goa, fragmented of its bounty of green cover, fragmented of it's rivers, lakes and springs, fragmented of its hill slopes and lush fields, fragmented of its coastline. Let's wake up. Let's Save Goa before it gets completely washed away.

(Tallulah D'Silva is an Architect and silver awardee of the Golden Door Award 2020 for truth and integrity.)

Everywhere we are noticing massive construction sites where the land is excavated nearly 3 floors deep underground disturbing ground water, felling old trees, impacting hill slopes and aiding soil erosion

THE STORY OF PRECIOUS METALS
RAGHAV GADGIL

Some people like to measure their financial might by the weight of the precious metals they wear as jewellery: Gold, silver, diamond and platinum. Gemstones are clubbed with these to bring good fortune. However, few have an inkling of how these metals are extracted or where they form. These metals/minerals hold a giant back-story of geology and human muscle.

Gold is a heavy metal; most of it has been gravity-settled in the molten earth since the earliest times. It forms when hot water races through rock fractures, leaving hair-thin metal threads. Due to weathering and erosion, residual gold can accumulate in the river bed. A 6-gram anniversary gold ring on the finger requires grinding and pulverisation of 20 tonnes of rock. The open pit mines, like the iron ore mines we have in Goa, use massive trucks whose tire diameter is 13 feet and can carry 450 tons of load (45 times the average mining truck in Goa).

The proverb "Faith can move mountains" may not be true, but mining makes it happen! The most enormous open pit for gold, in Uzbekistan, stretches 3.5 km and plunges 600 m deep—two Eiffel Towers one above the other. India's Hutti mine (~900m deep underground) in Karnataka is modest by comparison with those in South Africa, which are 4 km deep. At this depth, the air and rock temperature is 60°C, as hot as water dispensed by household geysers. In 2011, through newspaper articles (with annual reminders), it was declared that in Goa, there is ~10 grams of gold/tonne (yes, you heard that right) in laterites and argillites (sedimentary rocks) lying in the plateaus. Independent researchers have not yet confirmed this audacious finding, which amounts to wild speculation.

Apart from occurring as native, silver partners itself with lead, zinc and copper. Mexico and Peru lead global output; in India, the Zawar and other Rajasthan deposits yield silver while targeting zinc and lead. 60 g of silver, almost half the weight of one butter bar, is extracted from 1000 kg of rock. Half of that silver heads into industry: solar panels, circuit boards, and antibacterial medical gear. The rest end up as jewellery or decoration on sweets like Kaju Katli.

The saying "Diamonds are forever" can be taken literally, and they are at least 1 to 3 billion years old. That sparkling diamond in your finger ring formed in the mantle, (200 km below the ground. That's where 1300°C cooks and) 63000 times atmospheric pressure squeezes graphite (no, not coal!) to diamond. These diamonds get on as a pillion over the fast-moving kimberlite-type magmas moving through carrot-shaped pipes in the crust. On average, a one-carat gem (about one raindrop) requires 250 tonnes of dirt and rock to clean. Until the eighteenth century, India supplied diamonds to the world, but today, it is taken over by Russia and Botswana. Not all diamonds end up as jewellery; some end up as abrasives, as it is the naturally occurring hardest substance.

Platinum is the rarest. It gathers in thin, centimetre-thick layers inside ancient magma chambers, today found abundantly at Merensky, South Africa. Miners there descend more than 2 km underground to follow layers thinner than a dining table top. An amount of rock weighing slightly more than four Indian elephants has to be powdered to make a modest 5-gram platinum wedding ring. Global output seldom tops 200T/year, versus over 3000T of gold. Non-economic amounts are found in rocks at Bondla-Usgao, Goa.

After learning this, I hope you will look at a piece of jewellery or a shiny coin differently. These items are not just symbols of wealth or beauty – they are also symbols of the colossal undertaking that mining industries and their workers perform, and of the environmental tradeoffs society makes to enjoy these materials. Remember the incredible journey from the bowels of the Earth to your hand. Knowing all this sharpens our sense of value and perhaps our respect for the extraordinary geological and human work that brings these treasures to light.

Unhygienic food preparation

A video that has gone viral on Social Media shows food being prepared in a most unhygienic manner. In the video, it was observed that raw chicken was being washed on the floor of a toilet by using water from a toilet faucet. A boy is seen smashing tomatoes placed in a bucket with his bare feet. The boy had several wounds on his feet. The biryani outlet in Calangute was ordered to shut down immediately by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of Goa during a surprise inspection. However, the worst thing is that it may not be a one-off case and food could be prepared in other food outlets too in conditions unfit for human consumption. Unclean food can cause foodborne illnesses like salmonella, and E. coli infections leading to symptoms like vomiting, diarrhea, and fever.

Unsafe food containing harmful bacteria, viruses, parasites or chemical substances causes more than 200 diseases, ranging from diarrhoea to cancer. In India, the government plays a crucial role in ensuring the hygienic preparation of food through regulation and inspection, primarily through bodies like the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). This involves setting standards, implementing licensing and registration systems, and monitoring food safety practices. In Goa, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is doing yeomen service by conducting surprise inspections and raids across the state. But given the number of food outlets, especially along the coastal belt, this is a gargantuan task.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Rain woes - lessons not learnt

The pre monsoon showers have once again exposed the fragile state of many of the regions of the southern states as well as some areas elsewhere.

It has started pouring cats and dogs in the coastal regions of the South especially Kerala, parts of Tamilnadu and Karnataka. Recently, a few hours of heavy downpour in Bengaluru put life at a standstill with most of the areas severely inundated and putting the city's traffic fully out of gear. The three hours of rain in fact paralysed life in the city before getting back to normalcy. The condition is same in many other towns of coastal Kerala, Karnataka, Goa and Maharashtra. The woes of the downpours always end up in verbal conflicts amongst the corporation, the civil bodies, political biggies and others, each one trying to slip off scotch free to show they are not responsible for the plight.

Who's to be blamed then? Is it the rain gods? Heavy rain has lashed in the past too. Reasons are many - lack of foresightedness and faulty plans of the local bodies. In most of our cities, the drainage systems are built without meticulous planning and these get heavily flooded within seconds of a downpour.

Silt and waste matters, especially plastic waste, from sewages connected to the drainage block the flow of water and as it is not checked and cleared before the rain sets in. Aren't we too responsible for carelessly disposing waste into sewages? And coming to our MPs and MLAs, it's really sad that other than their hollow promises of keeping the cities and towns from drowning, nothing materialises. Added to this the lackadaisical attitude of the local body authority make things worse. Systematic construction of drainages, meticulous schedule to clean the same and awareness among public can definitely lessen the woes the public encounter during every rainy season.

M Pradyu, Kannur

It takes courage to stand up

I have always been a fan of the activist Cecille Rodrigues for her outspokenness on important issues concerning the welfare of Goans. Right from the time her dance awareness campaign "Rosto" broke the internet and spotlighted the poor state of Goan roads, she has been a consistent voice that has demanded government action. I've admired her foresight in kicking off a dance programme in schools to encourage children's fitness. However, her most daring act was to speak out vociferously on behalf of the residents of Taleigao whose homes and lives were disrupted in the recent torrential rains due to ill-construed hill-cutting in lieu of real estate construction. It takes courage to stand up to divisive, powerful forces that are driven by greed. I commend her for speaking up for Goan people, when it really matters. Hopefully, people will be inspired, and come together to demand higher accountability from the powers that be.

Merril Diniz, Fatorda

Big honour for Kannada literature

It is a proud moment for Indian literature and the Indian writing community overall that Heart Lamp, a collection of short stories in Kannada, has won the International Booker Prize for 2025. Author Banu Mushtaq's dedication to narrating stories and her strong ties to her origins, and translator Deepa Bhasthi's dynamic English translation of the stories, taking it to a global audience, helped to win the prestigious honour. Ms. Mushtaq's triumph is a testimony to the power of narrative and the necessity for elevating society's silenced voices. Her prize-winning work illustrates that writing can force change and motivate others to dream, resist and create. Banu Mushtaq is a lighthouse for Indian writing, illustrating that themes based on local realities can connect with a global audience when expressed with powerful words and with integrity.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, Chennai

Stopping airport services by Celebi of Türkiye

During the 'Operation Sindoor', India targeted and neutralised nine camps that hosted terrorists in our neighbourhood. This was in retaliation to the killing of 26 people by terrorists on April 22 at Pahalgam (Kashmir). Pakistan deployed Turkish-made drones that caused substantial damages to life and properties along our western border. As the aftermath of the battle, the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security withdrew the security clearance of the Turkish company 'Celebi Airport Services Pvt Ltd,' that provides ground-handling support at nine Indian airports.

The moot points are: Were India's intelligence departments unaware that Türkiye sold drones to our neighbour? Does Celebi manufacture and/or supplies armed drones to our enemy country? Was the company vetted before being appointed to handle the sensitive services at our airports? Of course, we have a prerogative to fire companies when national security is concerned. The contention here is not to support to Celebi or Türkiye but perhaps the issue could have been handled more prudently and carefully as the company has now approached the Delhi High Court claiming that they were neither given a notice or a hearing. As a mark of protest against Türkiye, we should stop using Turkish towels!

Sridhar D'Iyer, Caranzalem