

O HERALDO

The Voice of Goa - since 1900

The silent threat of dilapidated buildings

Fifteen days ago, torrential rains lashed our State, leaving behind a trail of destruction. Trees uprooted, homes washed away, streets flooded, and agriculture crippled. In many cities, dug-up roads became channels of stagnant water, halting daily life. Amid this chaos, one truth became glaringly evident: our disaster management system is not just inadequate; it is slow and reactive.

And while we grapple with the aftermath of the first rains; knowing well that over 90% of the rain is yet to arrive, we stand on the brink of another, far deadlier disaster. One that looms not in the skies, but in plain sight: the crumbling, neglected buildings across our cities, especially in Panjim and Margao.

Recent incidents in Margao should serve as a loud wake-up call. In just one week, slabs collapsed from two different buildings. One near Gandhi Market and another in the Cine Lata area. Thankfully, there were no casualties, but damaged vehicles and shattered glass offer only a glimpse of what could easily have been a mass tragedy. In another close call, a boy narrowly escaped injury when a large part of a balcony crashed down near Wardali Road. How many more warnings do we need?

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The old Antao building continues to house active shops and remains a shelter for many during the monsoon. Its condition? Critically unsafe. Yet it stands, occupied and unbarricaded. Another blaze broke out last month in Dawood Chawl, Khareband, forcing residents to flee. Are we seriously waiting for a headline that reads, "Scores buried under rubble"?

Let's be clear: this is not a sudden crisis. It's an old story on repeat. Four years ago, a structure near Gandhi Market partially collapsed and was sealed; demolished only last year. The list of dangerous buildings in Margao alone touches 30 compiled over the last 13 years. Panjim fares no better. Just days ago, the Municipal Corporation issued an emergency evacuation order for the crumbling Falcon building. Even so, legal delays are dragging the process while residents remain in harm's way.

It is no longer enough to blame the rain, or fate, or time. This is a man-made crisis fuelled by bureaucratic inertia, neglectful ownership, and a society that refuses to act before it is too late.

We must ask ourselves some hard questions: Why are people still living and working in structures that could collapse at any moment? Why are court cases and procedural delays prioritised over human lives? Why, despite repeated surveys, notices, and warnings, has so little action been taken? Why is the same outdated list of dangerous buildings still being recycled by civic authorities year after year?

The answer lies in a toxic pattern of complacency. The authorities serve notices, but rarely enforce them. Building owners ignore warnings, betting on time and luck. Meanwhile, citizens, some by necessity, others by habit, occupy these spaces, unaware or desensitised to the risk. It's a collective failure that could cost us dearly.

In cities like Margao, many old buildings from the Portuguese era still stand. While some have been carefully maintained, others have been left to rot. Time bombs ticking in silence. Some are heritage structures, now on the verge of collapse due to years of neglect. And with every passing monsoon, the risks multiply.

Let us be very clear: we are not dealing with hypothetical scenarios. We are staring at a preventable catastrophe. These buildings will not wait for our systems to catch up. The rains will not pause for paperwork or petitions. Unless firm, immediate steps are taken, the next collapse will not be a near-miss; it will be a disaster.

The authorities must act now. Dangerous buildings should be evacuated without delay. Structural audits must be conducted afresh; not based on decade-old data. Owners must be held accountable. And if need be, lives must be prioritised over legacy, legality, or property disputes.

We cannot afford another monsoon of regret. This time, let us not wait for death to shake us out of our apathy. Let us prevent the headline. Let us save lives.

Twitter World

CA Paaras Gangwal @ThetaVegaCap

My definition of middle class is simple. If your sofa is touching the wall with no space in between, you are definitely middle class.

Bernie Sanders @SenSanders

If the working people of the world stand together, there is nothing they cannot accomplish.

comment



RADHARAO F. GRACIAS

Doing Goa proud, abroad

One by one, they came, male and female, young and old. Houses shuttered for years were opened, dusted and aired. They moved in. Among them were Carlos Borromeu Pereira his wife Luisa, Santaninho Godinho his wife Flora and their children, my immediate neighbours. College had a deluge of them, so many from Assolna-Velim-Cuncolim, in particular. We spoke Konkani; they hardly knew any. They spoke English; we struggled with it. We played football; they played hockey. They were the repatriates from East Africa. Not all returned to Goa though; some migrated to UK, Canada, Australia and elsewhere; their success instigated more 'native' Goans to move. It is the beginning of my tryst, with the Goan Diaspora.

How have the immigrants and their descendants fared? Exposed to a way of life based on the rule of law and merit, a vast majority are doing far better in every field, than their coequals do in their native land. Here are some who have made a mark in politics in UK and Australia.

Sir Ernesto Soares was the earliest Goan (and in contemporary terms, Indian) to win an election to the House of Commons. He was the son of José Luis Xavier Soares, tracing his roots to Uccassaim village. He predates Shapurji Dorabji Saklatvala generally considered to be the first Indian origin member of the House of Commons, by two decades. The family were originally Gaud Saraswats with the surname Gaitonde of 'Kausik gotra' from Quezlossim. He is a cognate of General S F Rodrigues the only Goan Chief of Staff of the Indian Army, of Vassudev Gaitonde internationally renowned artist, Dr Pundalik Gaitonde the former Member of Portuguese Parliament and Prof Aloysius Soares celebrated professor from St Xavier's College Bombay.

He was educated at St John's College, Cambridge, where he read law. He was elected to the House of Commons in 1900. He served in the government as Junior Lord of the Treasury from 1910 to 1911, before he resigned due to failing health.

Nigel Keith Anthony Standish Vaz served as the Labour Party Member of Parliament for Leicester East for 32 years, from 1987 to 2019, the longest serving British Asian MP. Vaz served as the Minister for Europe between October 1999 and June 2001. He was

appointed a member of the Privy Council in June 2006. He was born in Aden, to Anthony Xavier and Merlyn Verona Vaz. He graduated from Cambridge University with a BA first-class Honours degree, later completed MA. After finishing law studies, he worked as a solicitor.

Valerie Carol Marian Vaz has been the Labour Member of Parliament since 2010. She served as Shadow Leader of the House of Commons from 2016 to 2021. She is the elder sister of Keith Vaz.

Valerie was educated at Twickenham County Grammar School and later Bedford College. She attended the University of London, where she completed a BSc (Hons) degree in Biochemistry in 1978. In 1984 she qualified as a solicitor and subsequently worked on legal issues for local government in London.

Sue-Elle (Suela) Casiana Fernandes was elected to the House of Commons in 2015 on Conservative Party ticket. She was the Home Secretary under Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak. She was later the Attorney General for England and Wales. Her father hails from Assagao. Her mother is Indo-Mauritian.

She read law at Queens' College, Cambridge after which she studied for a master's degree in European and French law at Panthéon-Sorbonne University. Suela was called to the bar at Middle Temple in 2005

Zaneta Felice Antoinetta Mascarenhas was elected to the Australian House of Representatives at the 2022 and re-elected in 2025 Australian federal election for the Division of Swan.

Zaneta was born to parents who migrated from Kenya. She studied science and engineering at Curtin University in Perth and worked as an engineer for 15 years. Zaneta is the first woman to win the seat of Swan in its 101-year history and the first person of Goan origin to be elected to Australia's House of Representatives. She is the daughter of Joe and Ethel Mascarenhas of Mungul Margao.

Leon Rebello is a solicitor who was elected as the Liberal National Party member for the division of McPherson in the 2025 federal election in Australia. Leon is the son of Valeriano and Liddy Rebello of Soddovim Verna.

He has Law and International Relations degrees and has studied in Australia, France and the Netherlands. Rebello earlier worked at King & Wood Mallesons, a major international law firm as a solicitor for six years, focusing on foreign investment.

Each of these MPs is highly qualified unlike their peers back home. Each has won from a constituency where Goans form less than half a percent of the voters. Could any of them have won if the number of Goan voters was higher? Perhaps not, considering the crab mentality historically displayed by Goans!

I believe it is the inherent Goan faculty to merge flawlessly with the local socio-cultural environment that enables them to fit into any jacket, political or otherwise. Today, there are more Goan MPs in the House of Commons than in the Lok Sabha and as many in the Australian Parliament as in the Lok Sabha! And this, when the population of Goans abroad, is far less than the population of Goans at home! Mind you, Goa was not even part of the British Empire! Truly, Goans have to go out, to go on.

Claire Coryl Julia Coutinho has been the Conservative Party Member of Parliament since 2019. Coutinho was under Secretary of State in both the Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak Ministry later promoted to the Cabinet as Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero.

Claire is the daughter of Dr Winston and Dr Maria Coutinho who had emigrated from Goa in the 1970's. Coutinho graduated with MA in mathematics and philosophy from Exeter College, Oxford.

Rabi Martins (son of a doctor from Varca) served as a councillor for nine terms and a mayor for two at the Watford Council and contested for Parliament several times on Liberal Party ticket, without success. More recently, Wisdom da Costa (from Cansaulim) a green activist

joined the fray as an independent, but voters found no wisdom in his decision to contest!



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(Radhharao F Gracias is a senior Trial Court Advocate, a former Independent MLA, a political activist, with a reputation for oratory and interests in history and ornithology.)

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Road cave-ins can lead to accidents

We are all too familiar with potholed roads in the State. But in the years-gone-by, one seldom heard of roads caving-in. This has become a somewhat recent phenomenon and is occurring across the State.

A section of the main road at Conshem-Nirankal in Ponda caved in following heavy rains thereby creating a serious hazard for motorists. A crater has also formed at the affected location, further endangering commuters. Panjim saw several instances of road cave-ins with the Smart City project in progress even before the onset of monsoon. Wheels of cars and heavy vehicles like trucks and buses invariably get stuck in the roads when they cave-in leading to accidents.

Haphazard and unscientific digging of roads for underground cabling and other works has been the prime reason for roads caving-in. When roads are dug up they need to be filled up properly with mud before the tarring work. If the mud is loosely dumped, rainwater seeps in. Poor drainage and wrong gradient of the road are among the other reasons for frequent cave-ins. Both factors lead to waterlogging which destroys the bituminous surface of the road

and leads to water seepage. Seepage over a prolonged period will weaken the soil under the road. In this case, the soil particles are not held together, creating less density, thus losing its stability and forcing the road to cave in. Certain soil types are more susceptible to erosion by water, making them more prone to cave-ins. Safety audit of roads that have been dug for various underground work and of faulty road-engineering is the need of the hour.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

The price of progress

Why are we surprised that Mumbai floods each year during monsoon, when the city has been built by reclaiming land from the sea? In the late 18th century, when William Hornby, the Governor of Bombay, initiated the city's first reclamation in the Worli creek, little would he have imagined how Mumbai's geographical contours would change over time. And recently, over 10 million tonnes of rock cleaved from quarries in Navi Mumbai have been dumped into the sea to reclaim 111 hectares of land on stretches between Marine Drive,

Breach Candy and Worli for the new coastal road.

The natural water channels, mangroves, and wetlands that once absorbed monsoon rains were gradually replaced by concrete structures and roads thus impacting the city's flood resilience. The original creek systems and tidal inlets served as natural drainage channels, allowing rainwater to flow unhindered into the Arabian Sea. Modern 'development' has obstructed these pathways, the city's storm-water drainage system, designed during the British era, struggles to cope with intense rainfall, particularly during high tides. This pattern continues today, with many areas experiencing severe waterlogging during heavy rains. This is the price we are paying for the chimera called 'progress'.

Misha, Varca

letterstotheeditor

For letters to the editor contact us at editor@herald-goa.com.

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

like to have a tennis racquet yet could not afford one. He never forgot the lesson that he had a greater responsibility being a good person than being a champion.

In a farewell from Roland Garros graced by fellow legends Roger Federer, Novak Djokovic and Andy Murray, Nadal was brought to tears by the presence of some unsung heroes of tennis. While Nadal was adored on centre court winning those 14 French Open titles, he was also loved by the tournament officials and the ball kids.

"They are able to see you every single day, to see how you react after losing, after winning and how you behave during all these moments, the drivers, the waterboys, the ball kids. They have contributed to my blood, toil sweat and tears, in a way they were the wind beneath my wings," he said.

In the end, Nadal wanted to be remembered as a player who people would always be happy to see when he comes back on court even when not playing. That is the important thing and that is his legacy cast in stone. Rarely has a player dominated the arena the way Nadal has, thank you Rafa for all those

Jubel D'Cruz, Dombivli

people'sedit

TOURISM REVIVAL IN J & K

VINOD DIXIT

Jammu and Kashmir remains one of the most iconic, scenic and culturally significant destinations in India and globally. Tourism is the lifeline of Kashmir's economy. Tourism in Jammu and Kashmir is one of the most important sectors of the economy. Jammu and Kashmir, often referred to as "Paradise on Earth", has long been one of India's most picturesque and culturally rich destinations. Jammu & Kashmir has been through difficult times since the last few years.

In response to concerns over tourism following the Pahalgam terror attack on April 22, the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) has launched the "Let's Visit J&K" or "Chalo Kashmir" campaign to encourage travel to the region. TAAI, the oldest and largest association representing the travel, tourism and hospitality industry in India's campaign aims to restore the region's vibrancy and support tourism revival.

Pahalgam is one of the most popular destinations in Kashmir, attracting lakhs of travellers due to its scenic locales. The town is also significant as one of the two routes to the Amarnath cave, a major pilgrimage site. According to the Pahalgam Hotels and Owners Association, the occupancy rate at the more than 1,500 hotels in Pahalgam has dipped to a mere 10%. Travel agents, transporters, hotel and restaurant owners are all bearing the brunt of the aftermath of the attack.

Tourism is the main business of Jammu & Kashmir, which gives employment & business to lakhs and crores of local people. This business can only flourish if there is peace and tranquillity. Today Srinagar's most popular tourist destination, Nishat Mughal Garden, where many Hindi films have been shot over the years, bears a completely deserted look. We live in such a country that others dream of visiting and becoming wiser by the experience.

In order to revive tourism in Jammu and Kashmir, a multi-faceted and strategic approach is essential, one that ensures the safety of tourists, revitalises the economy, and puts an end to terrorism through strict and intelligent measures.

After PM Narendra Modi's government scrapped the disputed region's semi-autonomy in 2019 the tourism was aggressively pushed. As per the data, more than 3 million tourists visited the region in 2024, a rise from 2.71 million visitors in 2023 and 2.67 million in 2022. The Narendra Modi-led government's Kashmir outreach is based on ending its socio-economic alienation, with infrastructure being the core strategy. Countries across the world must unite to fight terror so that the innocent people of Kashmir can live alone in peace and not in pieces. It should also be the responsibility of every citizen to cooperate with the government as well as our armed forces in the way of making terror free and peaceful Jammu & Kashmir. Good governance and good policy will address the problem to a very large extent.

To boost the inflow of tourists and revive tourism, the government had initiated measures such as road shows, promotional campaigns, and festivals to attract visitors.

These concerted efforts by the government will significantly alleviate public fears, foster a renewed sense of security and trust, and ultimately pave the way for the revival of tourism in the Kashmir valley, bringing much-needed economic relief and a return to normalcy. Tourism can be revived specially by curated events and activities such as the Pahalgam Winter Carnival, the Gulmarg Snow Festival, white water rafting, and skiing.

We need to hold parliamentary consultative committee and parliamentary standing committee meetings in Jammu and Kashmir to discuss strong strategies. We should also consider engaging artists for cultural performances, restarting the laser fountain shows, and introducing other attractions to enhance the tourist experience.

Amarnath Yatra is a good opportunity to spread a message to the rest of the country that Kashmir is peaceful and ready to welcome tourists with warmth and brotherhood and this will bring hope, confidence and tears down the threat of unemployment for locals who mostly depend on tourism.

matches and the goodwill that you leave behind. There can be no greater role model for sport and for human beings in general. Adios.

Vinay Dwivedi, Benaulim

Ensure animal welfare

The ethical treatment of animals in Indian agriculture is a pressing issue. The use of antibiotics and hormones in livestock farming enhances productivity, but it raises serious concerns. The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) warns that antibiotic resistance could cause 10 million deaths annually worldwide by the year 2050.

On our dairy farms, growth hormones are widely used. A study reveals the presence of antibiotic residues in 10% of milk samples, highlighting the health risks. Environmental impacts are equally troubling, with farm runoff contaminating water sources and harming ecosystems. Inconsistent regulations further complicate the issue, affecting trade and standards.

Are these practices necessary for food security, or do they represent a modern-day sin against ethical and sustainable farming? It is crucial to advocate for humane, environmentally-friendly practices that ensure animal welfare and protect public health.

Jubel D'Cruz, Dombivli