

O HERALDO

The Voice of Goa - since 1900

Goa cannot afford complacency amid COVID-19 surge

The spectre of COVID-19, which once paralysed the world, demands Goa's urgent action as cases escalate openly across India and globally. Last week, O Heraldo's editorial marked India's breach of 1,000 active cases—a psychological threshold signalling the virus's return. In just seven days, cases have tripled to 3,395 as of 31 May 2025, with 685 new infections and four deaths in a single day, per the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. The World Health Organisation (WHO) reports an 11% test positivity rate across 73 countries, driven by the NB.1.8.1 variant. Goa, with its tourism-driven economy and porous borders, cannot ignore this evident surge.

India's case distribution is stark: Kerala leads with 1,336 cases, followed by Maharashtra (467), Delhi (375), Gujarat (265), Karnataka (234), West Bengal (205), Tamil Nadu (185), and Uttar Pradesh (117). Saturday's four deaths—one each in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu, including a 25-year-old kidney patient in Salem—underscore the virus's threat to vulnerable groups. The NB.1.8.1 variant, a JN.1 descendant, is 1.5 times more transmissible due to a spike protein mutation. Symptoms like fever, cough, sore throat, and gastrointestinal issues reflect its evolving nature, demanding heightened alertness.

Goa's official silence is alarming. O Heraldo first reported the state's initial case this season—a septuagenarian under treatment—based on reliable unofficial sources. Since then, authorities have provided no updates. If no further cases exist, that's heartening, but the open surge in neighbouring Maharashtra and Karnataka, coupled with unrestricted cross-border movement, suggests otherwise. The WHO warns that global surveillance is waning, and COVID-19's lack of seasonality heightens undetected spread risks. Goa's history of clusters, such as the film festival outbreak, highlights its vulnerability in social settings. Transparency is critical to prevent a single case from fuelling a broader crisis.

Globally, the surge is unmistakable. Singapore's cases leapt from 11,100 to 14,200 in a week, while China reports strained hospitals. The WHO confirms vaccines remain effective against severe outcomes, but low booster uptake—only 23% of U.S. adults received the 2024-2025 shot, with similar trends in India—weakens defences. Goa must utilise the Union Health Ministry's Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) to intensify screening at hospitals, airports, bus stands, and public spaces. Testing for influenza-like illnesses (ILI) and severe acute respiratory infections (SARI) is essential to detect and contain cases early.

Citizens must act without awaiting mandates. The pandemic's lessons—forged through lockdowns and loss—are fading. In crowded places or when symptomatic, wearing an N-95 mask is a proven shield. Regular handwashing, sanitiser use, and isolating when unwell are simple yet vital. Karnataka's advisory to keep symptomatic children home from school offers a model for Goa to safeguard communities. Vaccination, particularly boosters, is crucial for the elderly and immunocompromised, who face the greatest risk.

Union Minister Prataprao Jadhav assures the Centre is monitoring the situation, but local action is paramount. Goa's health infrastructure, strengthened by past challenges, must be proactive. Hospitals should enhance monitoring, and the public must embrace precautions. The WHO's call for sustained vaccination and surveillance applies directly to Goa, where tourism and close-knit communities heighten risks but also foster resilience when united. The virus's global spread—evident in South-east Asia's surges—demands we act decisively.

Panic is unnecessary, but preparedness is critical. Goa must respond with transparent communication and robust screening. Citizens should adopt preventive habits—masking, hand hygiene, and vaccination—without delay. The virus evolves, but our resolve must be steadfast. By confronting this evident surge with global lessons and local action, Goa can protect its people and preserve its vibrant spirit. We cannot wait for a single case to become a cluster. Our response today shapes our tomorrow.

Twitter World

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Faith is transmitted in the family together with life, from generation to generation. It is shared like food on the table and the heart's affections.

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Raging wars, a scorching planet, deepening inequality, human rights under siege. Our challenges are global. Our solutions must be too.

comment



EUGENIO VLASSA MONTEIRO

Civil society in India is full of initiatives to help the more vulnerable of its citizens through activities that respond directly to the needs identified. So, the abundance of initiatives makes each of them a competitor for CSR participation



Finding external entities seems much better if they are in a condition to do good things. They will need to show the outcomes and positive effects on those in need, and the will to extend their reach to many more people.

What kind of needs do I refer to?

They may be helping orphanages where tens of children live and grow, receive basic and secondary education, and healthcare with all the required vaccinations to grow healthy.

Several institutions offer a daily meal to schoolchildren in specific areas, and initiatives exist to teach skills to prepare people for entering the job market. Other initiatives are focused on social services, such as maintaining a clean city, free of plastics, dog droppings, and other nuisances, making it enjoyable for citizens.

Recent reports indicate that Indian CSR spending increased significantly in FY23, with total expenditure rising to Rs 29,986.92 crore and the number of CSR projects increasing to 51,966. Education and en-

vironmental sustainability are priorities, and companies are increasingly favouring long-term projects and collaborations.

Some years back, I knew the founder of the Global Vikas Trust, which helps marginal farmers with small landholdings discover ways of earning much more than they used to. More than 27,000 marginal farmers are already following GVT, having multiplied their earnings per acre per year more than tenfold. It was an authentic miracle. How is it done?

In straightforward terms, he makes people think about what they are planting and what they earn; then comes the suggestion to instead plant trees of 25 different varieties, in specific proportions according to the farmer's will. Of the trees planted, some produce fruit very soon; others take some years. In the first attempts, people listened attentively, but no one acted. Then, one or two decided to try, and after some time, seeing those who had embarked on the adventure, many more became convinced that it was a good move.

However, water is needed to plant and substitute some crops. When GVT started in an arid place in April/May, there was no water for animals or vegetables. It was a great challenge to overcome the situation.

Mayank Gandhi, the founder and president of GVT, explains:

"To immediately address the water shortage issue in the region, as an emergency measure, water tankers were supplied to 56 parched villages, financed through crowd-funding until the monsoon arrived.

"The climate crisis was making every year worse. This was no longer academic knowledge for me; it was real, palpable and unfolding in front of my own eyes. It was clear that the worsening climate and geographical conditions were majorly impacting the poorest and the most vulnerable in India's villages. It was time to roll up one's sleeves and start working.

"The two biggest problems needing to be tackled head-on are poverty and the climate crisis. I started living in the villages. The aim was to generate an initial interest in the possibility of transforming lives through collective action among the stakeholders. The underlying hope was that this would eventually lead to people's participation in a pro-development and non-confrontational movement. The Global Vikas Trust (founded in 2016) was thus born, aiming to stir a mass movement to enhance farmer incomes and enrich the natural environment through the extensive plantation of millions of fruit-bearing trees."

Fighting the drought
"In the sweltering days

CSR in action: Planting trees, growing incomes

from 15 April to 31 May 2018 (...), we rented machines, and men and women worked as if possessed. The outcome was a 70 km deepening and widening of the Paapanashi River and its tributaries. 162 farm ponds, 62 check dams, 5 KT weirs, hundreds of trenches and 2,220 million litres of water storage were created in just 45 days. Change was happening. Many of these basic solutions were implemented with the contributions of CSR.

"It was time for the biggest gamble. And this is how it unfolded. Farmers cultivated cotton and soya crops in the usual course, yielding an annual income of approximately Rs 25,000 per acre. Despite establishing trust and affection within the village communities over the years, the farmers somehow remained reluctant to depart from their traditional cropping patterns."

Planting fruit trees

"In 2019, we convinced only 1,700 farmers to change their crops to horticulture and plant 1.18 million fruit trees. In 2020 and 2021, despite COVID-19, farmers planted 1.9 million and 7.8 million trees, respectively. In 2022, farmers planted 21 million trees; in 2023, we planted 35 million trees.

Short-term trees like banana and papaya, medium-term fruit trees like custard apple, guava, pomegranate, lemon, sweet lime, mosambi, and longer-life trees like mango increased farmer annual incomes from Rs 25,000–50,000 per acre to an average of Rs 2,50,000 – a 4–10 times increase.

This initiative and the resulting change have led to the plantation of 55 million trees, benefiting 27,000 families in 4,600 villages, with 400 crore litres of water harvested – and work continues to do much more.

"The increase in green cover through large-scale tree plantations induced remarkable rainfall and transformed a once-drought-hit arid area into a flourishing expanse of greenery. A significant outcome has also been the enhanced participation of all stakeholders involved in the endeavour, fostering a sense of collective responsibility."

The imagination and practicability of new ideas must make life easier for those who used to work hard and often with little compensation. That implies some disruptive innovation, thinking broadly out of the box. CSR contributions can be fundamental in supporting innovative ideas like the Global Vikas Trust, as many times there are good ideas and capable people to implement them, but there are no available resources. And CSR can be a solution.

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letterstotheeditor

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of the ban. During the fishing ban period fishermen need to be compensated by the government considering the economic impact the ban can have on their livelihoods.

An extension of the fishing ban period will also allow the fish to grow to their normal size as adults. It is usually observed that at the end of the 61-day ban period juvenile fish are sold in the market. A 90-day fishing ban period will mean that marine life is not exploited for petty gains.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

'Fully literate State of India' – Goa

Time and again, Goa has been crushing it and achieving new heights of applause across the globe. That's amazing! This time too it's pertaining to an educational landmark. Obviously, it's a matter of great pride that Goa has achieved the 2nd position in India and conferred the title of 'Fully Literate State Of

India" in comparison to Mizoram, which is at the first level. However, in the arena of educational landmark, Goa's literacy rate is at 99.72 percent, a quite remarkable achievement though!

Moreover, Goa has always maintained its unique identity, along with its etiquettes, exquisite cuisines, and deep rooted scenic beauty in the form of beaches/waterfalls/Museums/Historical Forts etc.

Evidently, we Goans are blessed with these basic amenities by Almighty God, and need to preserve it for the sustainable development pertaining to our future generation.

Joseph Savio De Souza, Rajasthan

Traffic chaos on Sangolda road

The Sangolda-Porvorim road is practically seen giving nightmares (especially in the mornings and evenings) to motorists

as people are seen parking their cars right across this road while dropping/picking up their children to a school here and in the bargain causing massive traffic jams on a daily basis.

Due to the above problem, almost everyone, from office goers, school children, local taxi drivers, people going to catch their flights at the Dabolim Airport etc are seen getting stranded for hours together.

The management of the school should take a very serious note of the problem and decide to have their extended parking space within their own property rather than creating nuisance to the public.

Jerry Fernandes, Saligao

New norms for gold loans

It is really unfortunate that Reserve Bank of India, read the BJP government, has imposed additional conditions for the Banks and other financial institutions

people'sedit

POWER OF CHANGING ONESELF FROM WITHIN

JOSEPH LEWIS D'SILVA

Change is an inseparable part of human life. Unlike any other species, human beings possess the unique capacity to shape their lives and consciously choose what they want to be. This ability to make choices by cultivating new qualities in life, adopting new ways of thinking to master one's mind by discipline and direction without allowing the mind to master self. This change begins from within. It is not merely about altering circumstances, but about transforming who we are in our heart and soul.

But there is usually resistance to change and improve, because we hold on to familiar habitual pattern, anything new can make us feel threatening. This resistance is a psychological defense mechanism but we should know that any resistance to personal improvement --- only hinders personal growth.

Some changes are gradual and expected; for the better, others, for the worse. Expected changes are like aging of our bodies, the growth of our children, minor illness.

Other changes are sudden; just drop from the blue; unexpected -- like losing a job, end of relationship or death of a loved one. A few changes are conquerable; others are hard as rock, so that one has to give up; admit defeat and quit.

These changes, whether joyful or painful, move us out of our comfort zone.

True change, is not imposed from outside but from within; by self-efforts, by adopting intelligible values of humility, service, love, spirit of sharing and patience; then only, we are entitled to be called 'human beings'.

Forced change is made compulsory for us by others. Such obligatory change over, is a name-sake transformation; it may create temporary behaviour shifts.

But, only real transformation or a true, lasting change over, comes through conscious effort.

Mahatma Gandhi said, "Be the change you want to see in the world." The serenity prayer of St. Francis of Assisi or it may have been Reinhold Niebur, I am not sure, says it all: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

"Without change, nothing in this world would ever grow or blossom and no one in this world would ever move forward to become the person they are meant to be." (Anonymous).

Therefore, all changes that we want to bring about have to begin from within. If change is not from inside it turns out to be namesake change that many are unable to continue like the forced change.

In order to change, we have to 'look within'. Shift our gaze from the world to ourselves with noticeable facts; then alone, we see the demons within; then only, we begin to change the way we think, feel and act and the results are magical. There is a saying that all saints had a past, which might not be so saintly. But they have changed in life.

When our hearts are filled with devotion, these changes appear, as though the Lord is garlanding, showering us with a divine gift, guiding us towards greater peace and purpose.

Change is reality. It takes place not only to the physical sphere, but also on emotional and intellectual levels also. Whether expected or unexpected, pleasant or painful, changing flexibility shapes our character. While we cannot always control what happens to us, we can choose how to respond. Real transformation begins with self-awareness and the willingness to grow. By accepting inner change, we not only lift ourselves up but add to a better world. Every positive change, no matter how small, starts with a single step from within. While we cannot change the past, we can ruin a perfectly good present with negative adjustment by fearing about the future.

to grant gold loans most of which are quite impracticable and unwarranted. The new norms will only affect the poor and the middle income group who depend on gold loans to tide over their urgent needs. Insisting that the borrower should give proof for the ownership of jewels / bills for the purchase of the ornaments to be pledged, is as good as denying gold loans. In many cases, the ornaments owned by the people will be ancestral gifts for which they may not have any proof. Farmers in rural and semi urban centres depend only on gold loans to commence farming and take back the jewels after the harvest. It would be ridiculous to impose such conditions to the farmers because refusal of funds through gold loans to the farmers would result in short production of agricultural products - food crops like rice, wheat, pulses etc and even cash crops.

The refusal of gold loans by the banks will only push the people to approach heartless money lenders and pawn brokers for gold loans who charge exorbitant rates of interest and zero security for the jewels pledged.

Tharcus S. Fernando, Chennai