

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—underscores 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

Pope Leo XIV @Pontifex
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.

António Guterres @antonio-guterres
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 health-care 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-

Extend fishing ban period

The annual 61-day fishing ban in Goa will come into effect from June 1 and will extend till July 31. During this period, mechanized fishing is prohibited along the sea coast and territorial waters of the state. The ban, imposed annually, aims to facilitate sufficient time for fish breeding along the state's coastal belt, throughout the spawning season. It allows several species of fish to spawn and provides adequate protection. It prevents fishermen from risking their lives in the choppy monsoon seas. Traditional fishermen are exempt from the fishing ban which applies only to mechanized boats.

During the ban, one can see most of the fishing trawlers anchored at the 2 main fishing jetties in Goa. Citing Gujarat's 76-day fishing ban as an example, Goenchea Ramponkaranchi Ekvott (GRE) has demanded an extended ban period of 90 days, as numerous illegal activities reportedly take place at sea.

The fishing ban needs to be strictly enforced as numerous illegal activities reportedly take place at sea during the period

CSR in action: Planting trees, growing incomes

India's Companies Act 2013 mandates that companies meeting specific criteria must spend at least 2% of their average net profit on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities, as outlined in Section 135 and Schedule VII of the Act. "The Board shall ensure that the CSR activities are undertaken by the same company or through companies established for that purpose under certain conditions." It is a practical way of permanently reminding the company's executives about its responsibilities towards all its stakeholders, namely the society around it.

Of course, their primary objectives are making and selling a helpful product or service, employing skilled citizens, and creating wealth.

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. That helps ensure the best allocation of CSR resources to external entities specialised in one or more social activities. If their quality is not up to standard, you give your CSR contribution to other organisations that are doing better, more valuable, and more useful work.

Environmental 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

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."

"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.

(The author is professor at AESE-Business School (Lisbon), at I.L.M. Rohtak (India), author of The Rise of India)

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.

Joseph Savio De Souza, Rajasthan

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

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

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