

O HERALDO

The Voice of Goa - since 1900

High tide of crime, low tide of law

There was a time when Goa was known only for its beaches, music and liberation spirit. But today, it is earning a darker reputation that of a thriving hub for drug trafficking, a safe haven for criminals and a blackhole where law enforcement's resolve gets swallowed.

A few days ago, the Anti-Narcotics Cell of the Goa Police made headlines by seizing cocaine worth Rs 43 crore. Before that, hydroponic cannabis valued at Rs 11.5 crore was recovered. The public was momentarily led to believe the tide was finally turning against the drug cartels. But that illusion was shattered when Telangana Police, operating independently, swooped into Goa and uncovered a deep-rooted racket run by Nigerian nationals. Not only had these criminals been operating out of Goa for months undetected, but they also used it as a launchpad to peddle high-grade narcotics to Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Kochi.

A washing machine stuffed with Rs 50 lakh in cash, shipments of drugs rerouted across southern India, and 40-plus customer addresses recovered all while Goa Police failed to even suspect the operation. If that doesn't raise questions about the efficiency or complicity of our investigative machinery, what will?

Nigerian nationals have been frequenting Goa for over two decades, some becoming permanent fixtures in the drug chain. In this recent case alone, four Nigerians and one Indian were arrested, with hawala trans-

fers of over Rs 150 crore suspected in just the past year. They weren't hiding; they were living in plain sight across Anjuna, Calangute, Parra, and Siolim, areas long plagued by drug activity. It begs a troubling question: how are they so confident of impunity?

In 2022, Hyderabad Police Commissioner C V Anand publicly accused Goa Police of non-cooperation in drug investigations. Requests for information were met with silence. Accused traffickers were mysteriously "unavailable" whenever

Hyderabad Police needed Goa's help. Despite denials from Goa's then DGP, the actions or lack thereof spoke louder.

Commissioner Anand's words are damning: "Whenever we contact Goa Police, the results come negative... We openly tell them they are not cooperating." One of those very accused, Pritesh Narayan Borkar alias Babu Boss, was arrested in Goa by Hyderabad Police not by Goa's own forces, who knew of his existence for years. In fact, Borkar was first arrested in 2014 in Anjuna. Since then, he graduated to an inter-state cartel boss, tied to over 600 customers and even connected to the Sonali Phogat murder case.

That nexus extends to Goa's hospitality industry as well. Edwin Nunes, owner of the infamous Curlies shack and arrested under NDPS charges, has been named in multiple drug cases. His staff, including a waiter at another popular restaurant, was allegedly caught supplying drugs.

What we're seeing isn't just a lapse in policing, it's a breakdown of accountability. If external agencies can operate more effectively on Goan soil than our own police, it indicates a failure of not just law enforcement but governance. Where are the elected representatives when foreign mafias take root? Why are inter-state investigations exposing what our own police can't or won't?

The lack of proper monitoring of foreign students, the unchecked inflow of tourists with dubious intent, the ease with which money is funnelled via hawala networks all of it underscores a colossal failure in inter-agency coordination. How many of these so-called students are actually studying? How many foreign nationals enter Goa on tourist visas and vanish into illegal enterprises?

We must stop pretending this is just a "tourism issue." This is organised crime. This is a security threat. Every gram of hash sold on Anjuna beach, every rupee routed to Nigeria, every teenager falling prey to drug abuse - it all chips away at the Goa we claim to love.

The solutions aren't complicated, they just require will. Strengthen inter-state and international coordination, enforce strict visa monitoring, inspect foreign student credentials, root out corruption in the police force, clamp down on repeat offenders and hospitality venues facilitating drug trade. Launch awareness campaigns in schools and colleges not just lectures, but real, targeted interventions.

If Goa is to reclaim its soul, the state must act now not with token seizures and PR stunts, but with sustained, coordinated, and fearless action.

comment



BLAISE COSTABIR

The government, with the noblest intentions, has undertaken a delicate balancing act to appease the taxi-driving community on one hand and the public, including Goans for the first time, on the other



Consider the plight of a local resident; they have no recourse to secure a taxi apart from negotiating with a neighbourhood taxi owner. One taxi driver lamented that, if he were to receive a fare to Valpoi, was he then expected to remain overnight, in hopes of securing a return fare? The answer matters, first the amount that is being charged on the app is very high compared

Transport solution with Goans in mind

The government resolved to bite the proverbial bullet; "Goa Transport Aggregator Guidelines 2025" were officially promulgated. The ill-conceived implementation of "Taxi Meters" was predicated on a judicial decree, technological advancements had already rendered it obsolete. While "apps" were available, the government clung to antiquated metres. These devices, never utilised, imposed a financial burden on the taxi industry and increased the trust deficit.

The government, with the noblest intentions, has undertaken a delicate balancing act to appease the taxi-driving community on one hand and the public, including Goans for the first time, on the other. Taxi applications have become a necessity, and the government has introduced various incentives while also addressing potential challenges to ensure taxi owners' co-operation.

A "taxi app" presents a compelling business proposition. It addresses the fundamental challenge that every enterprise faces: how to connect with customers. Exiting a factory in Bangalore, in need of a cab during the nascent stages of app technology. A taxi was stationed just around the corner out of sight. The driver required a patron, and I sought transportation; thus, we seamlessly engaged through the app, resulting in mutual benefit. Such applications possess immense potential to broaden market accessibility. No more sitting outside a hotel gate playing cards waiting for a tourist.

to the fact that diesel and petrol are cheapest in Goa. A trip from Pune station to Mumbai airport costs Rs 2500, a distance of 160 km. While a 70 km trip (Panaji to Palolem) in Goa will set you back Rs 2520 (wrongly mentioned in guidelines as 57 km). So even if he drives back empty, he will not lose, but given the fact that there is an app backup, he will be able to pick up a pax enroute and make more money.

The incentives are generous; should a driver complete three trips every two days, they will qualify for incentives, including a subsidy for insurance. Given the anticipated surge in demand for taxi services once the apps roll out, this target will be achieved. Female drivers will be particularly incentivised. This will be funded from the GST that the aggregators will pay, to date the Government was losing crores as the taxi business was running as a cash business.

The Government has often asked the taxi unions to start their own app, however given the Rs 5 lakh registration fee and Rs 10 lakh deposit as preconditions, this will act as a damper.

The taxi unions pride themselves as the last bastion of a truly Goan business. Not true, most drivers at the airport are outsiders. Would Goans stop you from travelling to a destination of your choice by any vehicle? What is so special that this business has to be protected at the cost of the consumer? The reason for handling the taxi app issue with kid gloves is the fact that most local politicians believe they will lose the election if the taxi families vote against them.

In cities, various app-based solutions coexist alongside private taxi services that operate independently of these platforms. Customers can choose either an app-based option or a private taxi, indicating that, even in Goa, it is not imperative for every taxi to be affiliated with an app. In fact, registering with one or more apps can be advantageous; when one desires to undertake a private journey, one can simply switch off the app. This arrangement offers the best of both worlds.

Aggregators have faltered, such as blusmart; however, there is no question of an enrolled driver facing unemployment, as they can simply register with another application.

This is what the Goa Government has implemented; In the event that one service experiences a downturn for any reason, others will continue to operate, given the substantial demand for taxi services, particularly from the local populace, whose voices have remained unheard until now. A huge demand will come from party-goers who would not like to drink and drive.

The Government, has established the rate for each kilometre. Any fees levied by the aggregator, such as commissions, GST must be borne by the customer in addition to this rate. This effectively addresses the issue recently tackled by the Competition Commission of India (CCI). The practice of advance tipping to incentivise drivers for accepting rides has been curtailed. Aggregators had been reducing the payments to drivers and subsequently attempting to augment these amounts through the "tip" mechanism. This manoeuvre was effectively countered by the CCI and is correctly addressed in Goa.

What is conspicuously absent from the policy is the issue of ride cancellations executed by drivers after they have accepted a request. A significant concern with app-based taxi services is the tendency for drivers to cancel rides upon realising that the payment is being processed through the app rather than in cash. While the payment dilemma is ostensibly mitigated by the stipulation that the app must remit payment to the driver within a 72-hour timeframe, both driver and customer should pay a penalty for cancellation.

The aspect that is not clear and hopefully considered is the fact that a TAXI is an asset that can be sweated, i.e. used 24x7. So an owner should be able to register a vehicle and at least three eligible drivers so each can drive the TAXI in 8-hour shifts.

Any entrepreneur or patron of taxi services will believe that these "Goa Transport Aggregator Guidelines 2025" will ultimately furnish substantial benefits to all stakeholders, including taxi proprietors, tourists, Goans, and the Government. Eagerly anticipating the prompt transformation of these guidelines into formal policy—better late than never.

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

VIP culture prevalent in most govt depts

Doctors from GMC Hospital, Bambolim including resident doctors and medical students gathered in large numbers outside the office of the Dean of GMC on Monday seeking justice for their colleague, CMO of Casualty department who was allegedly insulted by the Health Minister in full view of the patients, staff and the media.

A written appeal has reportedly been presented to the Dean of GMC by the doctors. It is learnt that one of the demands is to stop the VIP culture that exists at the premiere hospital. Such a VIP culture is visible in many places including government offices, on the roads, hospitals and public events. However in several instances, this VIP culture extends even to the supporters of the politicians. The unwritten rule is that one gets preferential treatment at the hospital if connected to a Minister. As a matter of fact, this VIP culture is prevalent in most government departments and not just at GMC. This culture is in existence in the TCP department, PWD, etc and even at the panchayat level. But more importantly, VIP culture is seen in the police department. Common citizens have got used to the fact that one can get the work done if only one has the right connections. Even those who are

responsible for fatal accidents or commits a serious crime can get away with political patronage. A complaint of the common man may or may not be registered at the police station depending on the instruction of the minister. The common man is thereby denied justice. This VIP culture has to end in all government departments. There has to be a level playing field for the citizens of the state.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Goa must rise to save our beloved land

The massive protest at GMC should serve as a wake-up call for all Goans.

We are witnessing increasing dissent across every aspect of life in Goa. Poor governance, corruption and the arrogance of those in power have led to the destruction of our environment, disastrous development projects, a breakdown in law and order, blatant abuse of authority, intimidation, harassment of peace-loving citizens, and an overall climate of fear that suppresses the truth.

This is not the Goa we once knew. Its image, both nationally and internationally, has been tarnished.

If we, as Goans, truly wish to save our beloved land from this moral decay and relentless abuse, the time to act is now. We must raise our voices, protest, and stop this rot before it is too late.

And to those responsible for this destruction—beware the wrath of God.

Alan Rodrigues, Carmona

Panchas must apply laws wisely

While there is no doubt that the Town and Country Planning Department and other government agencies in Goa are allegedly granting blind approvals for mega housing and commercial projects, what is increasingly disturbing is the role of local panchayats—often our last line of defence.

It is disheartening to see specific panchas actively facilitating the destruction of their own villages. Their common excuse is that once the TCP grants approval, they have no choice. Another is the tired justification that "Goans are selling land."

Yes, it is true that some Goans are selling land to profit-driven developers who have no regard for the village, its people, or its envi-

ronment. But does the sale of land automatically justify projects that deplete local resources, strain infrastructure, and lead to pollution and environmental degradation?

I urge these panchas to stop hiding behind these excuses. They must apply the law wisely and act in the true interest of their villagers and future generations. Selling the village for a price is nothing short of betrayal.

Arwin Mesquita, Colva

Leave the doctors alone

GMC, one of Asia's oldest and most reputed medical institutions, has long stood as a pillar of public health in Goa. However, the recent so-called "surprise visit" by the Minister to the Casualty Ward has left many citizens shocked. What unfolded, resembled a scene from a scripted film—complete with cameras, confrontation, and controversy. Sadly, it was real, and its implications were disturbing.

First and foremost, the presence of media and cameras in a sensitive hospital zone, particularly the Casualty Ward, was an outright violation of patients' privacy and dignity. The suffering of individuals and their families should never be turned into a public spectacle,

people'sedit

DECLINING READING HABITS

CEDRIC SILVEIRA

It was in the news a month ago, that Bestseller-Kashmir's oldest and most cherished bookstore had officially shut down. The reason, people began ordering books online at huge discounts with delivery at home too. However bookstores are shutting down for other reasons too, among them is lack of readership.

Reading books in general died some time ago. You can call it a generation shift or by any other name. The number of libraries which have shut down in Goa is mind-boggling. As a child, I recall rushing after school every Saturday to the nearest library in Panjim which was called Sainath to take a book or two home to read over the weekend. There would even be fights among us as to who would be first to reach the library and who would be the first to locate the book in demand. I don't see this behavior among youngsters any longer. The reading habits of today's youth have dropped drastically as voices Sani, owner of Bestseller bookstore. He continues, "If earlier people read for knowledge and peace, today it is more for gathering information".

Good books are like good food for the brain. There was a time when there was a dearth of good reading material in Goa, but this was nullified with a number of bookstores springing up, each one catering to a select class. In Panjim itself, a number of bookstores had started, each bringing with it, its own uniqueness and class of books. From general books to educational books, right to self improvement and yoga, you got them all, almost anywhere.

Broadway Book Centre, Goa's biggest bookstore, Singbal's bookstore near Panjim church, Varsha Bookstall opposite Azad Maidan, Bookworld opposite Hotel Neptune, Sirur Enterprises Book Shop at Hotel Fidalgo Mandovi's Book Fair at Hotel Mandovi were a few bookstores to name in Panjim. Not all have survived the test of time. There was a time when Mr Khalil of Broadway sold well over 1000 copies of the book "The God of small things". How things have changed from then to now. However it was way back in 1977, that the first organised book store was started at Hotel Mandovi in Panjim. Prior to that the only book shops were Singbal's and Varsha Bookstall where mainly school text books or newspapers were to be found.

Bookstores are not only places where books are found and bought, but also become cultural landmarks. One can spend hours together at a bookstore simply going through the titles and reading the prologues.

Reading habits have declined for various reasons. More and more time is spent today on digital devices. The internet and social media including online games occupy a vast amount of our time. Information is easily and readily available on the internet resulting in one not feeling the need to open books and read. Busy work schedules, family obligations and other commitments leave little or no time for one to pick up a book of his/her choice to read. Earlier there were no videos or home theatres to lure one away from reading. Then it is the chicken and the egg story. Limited access to bookstores and libraries can be a cause of less people reading. Yet is the lack of readership which is causing bookstores and libraries to shut down.

Reading improves one's vocabulary and diction. Earlier people even though less educated were highly advanced when it came to reading and writing skills. Ask a student today to even construct a sentence without using the help of chatgpt and he or she will struggle. We have graduates passing out who are not in a position to speak or write flawlessly. All of this comes from a lack of good reading. A new addiction is watching reels. One can spend hours altogether simply watching something which keeps you entrapped and enticed. Students may argue that AI or Artificial intelligence is technology and when we have technology we must use it. But it has its drawbacks too. It lacks big-picture context and a logical structure, without which the writing lacks flow. Creativity is lost and with that since it does not produce any new ideas or information it is merely copying someone else's work.

Getting people to read is big task, and with digitalization, paper free offices and deadlines to meet, the day when bookstores and libraries cease to exist may not be too far.

least of all for political mileage.

Secondly, the manner in which a doctor was confronted, asked to remove his protective mask, and berated in public, was not only unbecoming of a public representative but also dangerous in the context of ongoing health concerns like COVID-19. At a time when healthcare workers are overburdened and under-appreciated, such treatment is demoralising and unacceptable.

Most troubling of all was the symbolic and literal overreach—when the Minister took the doctor's chair to scold him. Such behaviour raises serious questions: If we are dissatisfied with the judiciary, would we expect the Law Minister to walk into a courtroom and sit in a judge's chair to deliver a public reprimand? Our democracy rests on institutional respect, and this event sets a dangerous precedent of disregard.

Public officials must lead by example—not by creating fear or engaging in theatrical stunts. I urge fellow citizens and concerned authorities to reflect on this incident and stand in solidarity with our medical professionals, who deserve our support, not humiliation. A Minister today, may be nobody tomorrow but a Doctor will remain a Doctor until the last day of his or her life.

Saturnino Rodrigues, Per-Seraulim