

O HERALDO

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Young lives engulfed by lawlessness

Wednesday's arrest of two Porvorim-based men for the alleged sexual assault of three minor girls from Agasaim at a hotel in Calangute, is nothing short of appalling. It highlights failures on so many levels: The failure of the state machinery to put the fear of the law into young people to deter them from hatching and committing the most abhorrent of crimes, the non-adherence to rules by hotel owners and employees regarding the admission of guests, and the lack of parental control over their children's movements and usage of the internet and social media platforms.

According to police reports, three girls aged 11, 13 and 15 years, left their respective homes on June 7. When they failed to return, their parents filed a missing persons complaint at the Agasaim police station. A team of police personnel was immediately put on the job of locating the girls, who were found at a Calangute hotel the following day. Two young men, aged 19 and 21 years, were arrested by the police for allegedly sexually assaulting the minor girls.

Upon the police initiating investigations into the events that led to the alleged crime, they discovered that one of the accused men had befriended the oldest survivor on Instagram and had persuaded her to meet him at Porvorim. As she was hesitant to go alone to meet him, she took her 13-year-old sister and her 11-year-old neighbour along for company. It must be noted here that the three girls clearly left their respective homes without the knowledge of their parents, but had also mustered enough courage to travel around 25 kilometres, from one taluka to another, all alone just because one of them wanted to meet a man she had become acquainted with on social media.

This is where the problem began. Girls of that age are nowhere close to being independent and have yet to hone a sense of discernment, control and responsibility, all while being overtaken by raging hormones and constant peer pressure to keep up or be left out. The advent of social media platforms and the ease with which minors can make accounts for themselves by misrepresenting their ages and without needing parental consent, is also a great cause for concern. If this wasn't serious enough, one of the three survivors had even managed to befriend a man on the social media platform, whom she then chose to meet in person - after he invited her to celebrate Eid with him - without keeping any adult member of her family in the loop. In doing this, she endangered not only herself but also her younger sister and an even younger neighbour by taking them along too.

Once the trio met the man at Porvorim, he allegedly gave them beer to drink. Like any alcoholic drink, beer too, when consumed by children as young as them, will almost instantly intoxicate them and cause them to be disoriented. This is when the man took advantage of the situation and took them further away to a hotel in Calangute, where he was joined by another male friend, both of whom allegedly sexually assaulted the girls in two separate rooms.

The alleged assault highlights the depravity young people in Goa, particularly teenaged boys and young men, are exposed to, thanks to the widespread availability of sexually explicit material on the internet, which not only titillates and tantalises them, but also prods them to try it out for themselves in real life.

Then comes the role of hotels and guest houses that enable such perpetrators to easily rent rooms to commit such dastardly acts. The NGO, Stop Child Abuse Now (SCAN), has come on record to say that its members have come across multiple cases of minors being abused in hotels because such establishments provide easy access to rooms while knowing full well what they are used for. In a letter to the tourism minister and the state police, it has called for strict action against the owners of such hotels "who deliberately or negligently facilitate such heinous acts by providing access to their properties".

Two people associated with the hotel in question at Calangute have been arrested for allegedly allowing the rooms to be booked without verifying the identities of those who booked them or obtaining parental consent for the minor girls. The police are also in the process of sealing the hotel and moving the government for its business licenses to be cancelled.

It would be wise for the government and law enforcement agencies to use the Calangute case as an example to deter others from committing such heinous crimes in the future. It is also imperative that parents step up monitoring efforts, particularly when it comes to internet and mobile phone usage, and that young people be made adequately aware of the dangers that lurk online which often come cloaked as handsome personalities or too-good-to-be-true offers. Not all that glitters is gold.

comment



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American jungles, exposing them to dangerous forests and criminal gangs, only to be arrested as soon as they cross the Mexican border. Yet the flow does not stop. The question is what drives them?

According to the recent Periodic Labour Force survey, a transport worker in India earns about Rs 14,300 a month. In the US, he would earn around Rs 2 lakhs a month. Even allowing for increased living costs, there would still be enough to send home to cover the 'dunki' fees and loans, still leave something to support the family in India. From the employers' point of view, he gets a worker for half the salary he may

Immigrants and immigration

The media has regular reports on various issues related to migration. These emerge predominantly from the US, Europe, mainly UK, and more recently, India. The vast majority of these reports refer to illegal migration and deportations, often highlighting sordid aspects such as deportees from the US being chained and shackled. In India, the reports revolved around the number of people who were rounded up in various states on the grounds of being illegal Bangladeshi immigrants and transported to camps in the border areas with Bangladesh awaiting deportation back to that country. Unfortunately, these often include poor people with no knowledge of their rights, or in some cases people who had a right to be here or whose appeals were in progress in courts.

What feeds such migration, illegal or otherwise, involving huge physical risk and considerable costs? In India, this may involve sale of property and other assets in addition to staggering loans often touching crores, to pay dubious "agents" in their desperation to escape caste, religious, political and economic bias, to go through the "dunki routes" seeking a better life. They are often routed through South

have to pay a local for jobs that, in any case, locals are reluctant to do. This eventually reflects in the general cost of services. A 2008 survey showed that a 10% increase in the low skilled immigrants in the labour force resulted in a 2% decrease in the cost of household services. But there are concerns; mainly social and economic. Immigrants generally tend to socialise within their own community and do not integrate with the host community. Economic pressures may come from the strain on public services particularly when dependants like children and elderly relatives follow. One suggestion has been to have a rotational system whereby an immigrant is allowed in legally for a fixed tenure, and returns to make way for the next one on expiry of the visa; somewhat similar to the practice in some of the middle east countries.

This would allow greater regulation and access to welfare programmes, provide employers with low-cost labour for unappealing jobs; whilst making a positive contribution to the local economy. But it would require close co-operation between the source and destination countries involved.

Meanwhile Trump has launched his own version of narcissism by introducing a tax on outward remittances. A proposed 5% tax was mercifully reduced to 3.5% on all outward remittances by immigrants. Even so, this will hit the remittances hard, and even drive expats out of the US., bearing in mind that remittances from the US account for about 28% of the estimated \$120 billion that India receives as foreign remittances. Students would have difficulty repaying loans taken in India, startups depending on foreign funding would be hit, and professionals would undoubtedly look towards alternative destinations like Canada and UK.

Trump has given the term "illegal immigrant" a new definition which is both cruel and insensitive. People are brutally bundled off in large groups to their countries without recourse to justice or appeal. 1080 Indians have been deported since Trump's second swearing in. Yet at the same time, 59 white South Africans were allowed to enter the US as asylum seeking migrants escaping racist per-

secution in SA. The visiting SA President was ambushed in total disregard of all diplomatic norms, with videos purportedly showing evidence of "white genocide" and justifying the white South Africans seeking refuge in the US as legal migrants escaping racism in SA. These videos were found to be recordings from the DRC and not SA, produced by AfriForum, a right-wing Afrikaner organisation, to support false allegations of anti-white racism in SA.

In all this turmoil, there is an opportunity for our government to capitalise on developments in the US where universities have pioneered many research programs particularly in the field of healthcare. Budgets for these projects have been slashed and, in many cases, brought to a halt as a "waste of funds". Trumps budget proposals cut about 26% of funding from the department of Health and Human Services. The National Institute of Health alone faces a cut of \$19 billion. Research projects will be crippled and research priorities re-orientated. This will precipitate a large pool of disillusioned and demotivated researchers resulting in a surfeit of untapped talent and knowledge. Europe and China have been quick to realise this and capitalise on researchers looking for funders. Nearly a quarter of STEM workers and life scientists are of Indian origin and who would welcome the opportunity to return home if given similar opportunities. Our infrastructure is already in place with our IITs, IISCs, private universities and institutions already capable of providing research facilities comparable to what was available in the US. Our industrialists should grab the opportunity as indeed they did for the automobile industry. Our health sector has tremendous problems looming in the near future both in the area of communicable as well as the non-communicable diseases. Our political leadership should rise to the occasion and do what is necessary, eliminate bureaucracy, and bring Indian talent back home.

This must be done before Trump's gas lighting causes irreversible damage.

(The author is the Past IMA Goa State President, founder member and Past President of VHAG, and a past member of the Central Executive

people's edit

DEEPER SCARS THAN FIRE

SATHAPPAN NARAYANAN

Which one you recall faster? Appreciation or negative criticism?

Natural urge in every human is to hear good appreciation for their deeds from others; even after getting several such appreciations, one negative feedback by others is more than sufficient to spoil our peace of mind and the worst part is repeated recall of such negative feedback in our mind.

Thirukkural, an ancient Tamil masterpiece by the sage Thiruvalluvar, offers timeless wisdom on ethics, governance, and human conduct. One of its most profound teachings (Couplet 129, Chapter 13) states:

"Even the wound inflicted by fire will heal, but the one caused by a harsh word never heal"

This simple yet powerful verse underscores a universal truth: physical pain fades, but emotional wounds from cruel words can last a lifetime. In modern terms, verbal violence is a silent crime-one that leaves no visible scars but can destroy confidence, relationships, and mental well-being.

Society often condemns physical aggression but tolerates verbal abuse under the guise of "honesty," "tough love," or "discipline." However, research in psychology confirms that emotional abuse, including insults, humiliation, and harsh criticism can lead to anxiety, depression, and even PTSD. Unlike a burn or a cut, the damage from words does not heal with time alone.

Why harsh words Are worse than physical punishment?

Irreversible damage-once spoken, cruel words cannot be taken back. The memory of them lingers, replaying in the victim's mind long after the incident.

Erosion of self-worth - repeated verbal abuse diminishes a person's self-esteem, making them doubt their abilities and worth.

Broken trust - relationships, whether personal or professional crumble when communication turns toxic.

Does this mean we should never hold people accountable? No, Accountability is necessary, but it must be enforced with dignity.

In the workplace, if an employee underperforms, provide constructive feedback. If termination is necessary, do it professionally, without insults or public shaming. Rather than saying 'you are useless! You're fired!', it is better to say, 'unfortunately, your performance doesn't meet our requirements, so we have to let you go'.

If a relationship turns toxic, walking away is healthier than engaging in verbal battles. Instead of screaming, you'll never amount to anything! say, this isn't working for me anymore. I think we should part ways.

In parenting, correcting a child's mistakes with patience yields better results than shouting or belittling. Instead of, you're so stupid!, say, mistakes happen; let's figure it out how to do better next time.

Thiruvalluvar's wisdom reminds us that how we speak to others defines our own character, not theirs. Words are weapons, use them wisely. Silence is better than using harsh words, if you can't speak kindly, act instead (e.g., end a job or relationship respectfully).

Healing verbal wounds takes years, prevent them by choosing empathy.

In a world where social media, workplaces, and even personal relationships are rife with verbal aggression, the Thirukkural's message is more relevant than ever. Harsh words are a crime, one that justice cannot undo. Whether in leadership, love, or daily interactions, we must remember, fire burns the skin, but cruel words scar the soul.

Before speaking, ask: Will my words build or destroy? If the answer is 'destroy', silence is the wiser choice'.

to run on the roads if they are non polluting and don't pose a danger to public safety. Why should things in India be any different? Vinay Dwivedi, Benaulim

Connecting minds through trains

After the current NDA government assumed office in 2014, there has been a sea-change in the overall attitude of the authorities towards the hopes and aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, particularly the latter via infrastructure.

The latest is the completion of the Udhampur -Srinagar-Baramulla railway Link in general and the commencement of the Katra-Srinagar Vande Bharat train. Among all modes of transport, trains are the ones that connect people of different hues.

Commuting between Jammu and Srinagar is a pain in the neck considering the weather vagaries and mind boggling cost. The new train will substantially reduce the travel time and thereby augment efficiency and comfort at all levels. Establishment of the railway link will immensely benefit tourism and economy of the region.

It goes without saying that employment generation is a huge offshoot of the above two. At the same time, the government should leave no stone unturned in ensuring safety and security of trains and passengers traversing the beautiful valley through the world's highest railway arch bridge above the Chenab river.

Ganapathi Bhat, Akola

letterstotheeditor

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dia and the worldwide aviation industry. This shocking incident has created deep uncertainty among frequent flyers everywhere. Innocent lives were lost in an instant.

Heartfelt condolences to the families and loved ones of the victims who said goodbye that day, unaware it would be their last farewell. We trust that the authorities will act on it and prevent such disaster from happening again.

Lynn Rodrigues, Mercedes

Empowering the child's safety!

Ongoing child abuse cases are making headlines on the local dailies, which is certainly a matter of grave concern. However, constant vigilance is highly recommended from the parents' side. Subsequently, it's crucial for the parents to get well acquainted with their child's peer groups/friends/classmates; and also receive well informed information pertaining to the public places which he/she usually visit.

Evidently, it's a step in the right direction, that when the child grows, the parents ought to reverse their role to that of a best friend. Henceforth, the child confides in them and share certain sensitive insights pertaining to his/her personal life.

In the current age, there are ample opportunities wherein malicious individuals can be-

friend the child while he/she is regularly interacting on social media. However, social media is not inherently bad, but adult oversight is necessary while the child is indulged in any sort of mobile activity. Furthermore, cases wherein the minor girls are permitted rented rooms in hotels with unknown individuals/adults is an eye opener to such type of atrocities.

Section 8(10) of the Goa Children's Act, 2003 prohibits such type of malevolent conduct; wherein it prohibits any child from entering a hotel room with strangers/adults or individuals rather than their blood relatives. This is to ensure the child's safety and can be also considered beneficial for the fabric of our civilized society.

Joseph Savio Desouza, Rajasthan

Respect for the 'empty chair'

We have seen in the Parliament and in most formal meetings the person sitting in the speaker's seat also known as the 'chair' is given due respect.

However, we have never seen the case where an 'empty chair' is given the same respect and even offered an apology! I am referring to the apology given to the 'chair' of the GMC CMO Rudresh Kuttkar.

This is the story of the absurd like the emperor without clothes. Instead of showing remorse and

respect to the CMO for the public insult, the CM has put dust in the eyes of the doctors by giving apology to an 'empty chair'.

Matias Lobo, Tivim

Automobile cartel behind vehicle scrapping policy

It is the automobile cartel that is pushing for scrapping of perfectly servicable vehicles. It is high time this policy was revisited and annulled.

Take for example the case of a car that is being run under OLA/Uber ride hailing service.

In a city like Bombay, such a vehicle does 1,00,000 kilometers in nine to twelve months. In just two to three years, these vehicles look and feel like junk. Yet, they can stay on the road for another five years (as eight years is the limit for a commercial vehicle inside the municipal limits of Bombay). Now compare that with a normal vehicle which does 38,000 kilometers in four years ie. less than 10,000 kms. per year.

In the next twelve years, it will do 1,20,000 kilometers, if the average continues the way it has. There are seldom used vehicles that clock 4,000 to 6,000 kms.per year, ie they will run @ 60,000 to 90,000 kilometers in a period of 15 years.

Question is, do we need to blindly scrap such vehicles? In advanced nations like the US, vehicles which have a million miles on the odometer are still allowed