

O HERALDO

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Streamline rental vehicle services

Amid the ongoing tussle between the state government and the taxi unions over the proposed Goa Taxi Aggregator Guidelines 2025, the rental cars domain has been seeing its fair share of upheaval too. A few months ago, members of the North Goa Rent-A-Cab Association threatened to take the law into their own hands if the directorate of transport did not withdraw its notice prohibiting rental cars from operating on airports and railway stations. This came after the directorate, in a notice issued on February 20 this year, prohibited rental cars from operating on airports and railway stations in the state. It directed all rent-a-cab operators to provide their services strictly from their registered main office or designated branch offices, as permitted under the respective licenses issued to them.

Enraged, rent-a-cab association members insisted that the notice was illegal. They said they had the right to operate rental vehicles from any location in the state according to rules that were framed back in 2019. They also told the directorate that the new rules would put them in great distress and that they should have been consulted before the directorate issued its February 20 notice.

The issue has since reached the High Court of Bombay at Goa, when the North Goa Rent-A-Cab Association and others challenged the transport directorate's notice. After the High Court sought the latter's say in the matter, state director of transport, Pravimal Abhishek, submitted to the court that if rent-a-cab operators are permitted to park and operate their rental vehicles from any public spaces and tourists areas in the state, there would be "utter chaos" and that the members of the general public would be deprived of these parking spaces, thereby adding to the overall traffic congestion scenario.

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant himself had subsequently said that such illegal rent-a-bike and car services have been contributing to the rising number of road accidents in the state. Apart from that prime parking spaces have also been scooped up by these vehicles, depriving ordinary citizens of precious slots, particularly in urban areas and tourist hotspots across Goa

Abhishek went on to tell the high court that more than 6,000 members of the North Goa Rent-A-Cab Association rent out more than 6,000 cars, and that the state has a total of 6,762 vehicles registered under this business. "In the event the said 6,000 members are permitted to use every parking space, including public parking spaces, for the purpose of parking their rental cabs, it will result in utter chaos as all parking spaces across the state will be utilised by the members of the association alone," the director submitted to the court while adding that Goa's vehicle density is already way above the national average as it is, with 882 vehicles per 1,000 population as against India's 246.

If this wasn't enough, the traffic police recently declared that the registration of more than 500 private vehicles, which have been operating illegally as rent-a-bike and rent-a-car services in various parts of Goa, would be cancelled. Immediately, thereafter, rent-a-bike operators requested the government to "resolve" the issue, emphasising that the business provides a source of livelihood for local people. This clearly shows that it is largely those registered as rent-a-bike operators with the government who are themselves illegally renting out their private vehicles to tourists too to ensure that there is a steady flow of money into their bank accounts, all while turning a blind eye to the rules in force.

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Non availability of affordable transportation solutions is one of the biggest thorns in Goa's side. And with every passing day, the situation appears to be going from bad to worse as more and more issues crop up — whether they pertain to a weak public transportation system, astronomical taxi fares, the general aversion to app-based cab services, an overdose of rental vehicles, and the proliferation of illegal rent-a-cars and rent-a-bikes. The state risks spiralling into lawlessness if these issues are not resolved rapidly and if the violators are not dealt with with an iron hand.

We are living in India's tiniest state, which is nearing saturation point where vehicular density is concerned. It is also clear that our roads are struggling to keep up with daily traffic movement, thanks to every household having at least two, if not more, vehicles. Something has to be done somewhere before the problem spirals out of control. The government would be wise to start by weeding out all the violators, and to thereafter fine-tune its policies pertaining to taxi and rental services. But most importantly, enforcement should be strict and uniform across the length and breadth of the state.



SAMIR NAZARETH

Neighbours – from people to nations

It is said "one can't choose ones' family, but one can choose ones' neighbours". The importance of selecting neighbours is linked to the desire for peace-of-mind. The assumptions are - life is static and there is harmony when like-minded live together. This may have been the case in pre-modernity when people were tied to their inherited trade, and kings could choose their neighbours by expanding their territories and installing vassals.

Know thy neighbour?

Neighbourliness is based on respect and trust which leads to certainty and predictability. Living in close proximity requires these. Their absence results in fear, and an escalation in the need for protection.

Usually, wealth, aesthetics and personal requirements become a social sieve and cause different people to become neighbours. Unfortunately, selection of neighbours, and as a consequence the creation of neighbourhoods, has been weaponised. In India, there are reports of homes not being rented or sold to citizens of other caste and religion. The premise being, people of other castes and religions cannot be trusted, they are deemed to have incompatible and unacceptable ways of living. Consequently, it is common for religious and caste minorities to live among their own. This reflects the pithy 'birds of a feather flock together'. Hereto is another of man's monochromatic presumptive view of behaviour.

More differences in sameness

When animals and birds of the same species fight between themselves, then why would humans espousing the same beliefs be any different? In fact, the only way homo-sapiens differ from other animals is they have split the main causes of strife - territory, reproductive opportunities, and dominance - while simultaneously manufacturing myriad forms of conflict.

All resulting in various forms of scrimmages. Dominance is expressed through words and behaviour, muscles, displays of wealth and, by joining, and participating, in groups including those espousing right-wing ethno-religious beliefs.

This delicate, but dangerous, man-made landscape of tension and potential for disputes requires government interventions to encourage neighbourliness. People harmoniously living together forms a stable country.

Nations as good neighbours

The idea of neighbourliness extends to countries with common borders. What makes for good country neighbours? Is it sharing a religion or ethnicity? Maybe, countries with similar political philosophies who share a border make for good neighbours. Or do neighbouring countries whose economies are intertwined have a reason to maintain equanimity? When stronger countries take small neighbours under their wing does peace reign between them?

Even today these factors don't guarantee good neighbours.

Though Qatar and Saudi Arabia are Sunni-Muslim countries, and are ruled by Sunni kings, their relationship is rocky. Mexico, America and Canada are democracies and their economies are interdependent. Today, thanks to President Trump, Mexico and Canada have a nightmarish relationship with America. India has taken smaller neighbouring countries under its wing. However, any Chinese investment in them unsettles India. China and Pakistan keep their political and religious differences aside and have more than a cordial relationship. Pakistan even maintains silence about the atrocities committed by the Chinese government on their Muslim Uyghur population.

Bad neighbours - human and nations

What makes for a bad neighbour? Ambition, jealousy, ignoring the welfare of those around, and historical bias are seeds of discord and distrust. These distort perception and entrench existing beliefs making for fertile grounds for creation of bad neighbours. This is a truth be it among people living next to each other or nations with shared boundaries.

For example, in apartments many residents use the common-area outside their door as their private space. This encroachment may please their eye but can be an eyesore for the neighbour, worse is if the neighbours feel their space is being usurped. This could result in tit-for-tat or relations cooling.

A neighbour becoming affable with one that the other is

not friendly with can lead to a breakdown in existing relations. This also happens between countries.

Often one neighbour dispossesses another by encroaching into their property. This greed is actioned when the covetous neighbour is more powerful and others choose to look away. Israel's continuing land grab of Palestine is an example.

Russia's attack on Ukraine is a mix of Ukraine getting friendly with Europe, Russian ambition, and Europe circuitously buying embargoed Russian oil.

From tolerance to shared humanity

One philosophy to living with neighbours is 'live and let live'. Neighbours ignore each-others existence. Such tolerance is cold and isolating. It makes for an awkward and uneasy life especially when neighbours inadvertently come face-to-face.

The tenet of 'Live and Let's Thrive' is possible when neighbours see the benefit of creating a common-good and a shared future. The European Union (EU) is an experiment which may be the way of the future. Retaining national, cultural and lingual identities, the EU still finds basic commonality, and therefore has been able to link neighbouring countries into one socio-economic neighbourhood. There are challenges, of having divergent political views like right-wing Euro-sceptic governments, rightwing-pro-Euro governments, coalition governments all sitting together and discussing what is best for their country and Europe. However, currently there is agreement that 'together is better than alone'. Consequences of going it alone are stark in the case of Britain post Brexit. The solidarity in the EU does not come by focusing on inherited divisions or by glossing over differences but by seeking and creating new connections.

For some time now, the world is being buffeted by the global scale of chaos and humanitarian disaster caused by nations trying to become isolationist instead of working as a collaborative eco-system. Even nature has lessons on the weakness of monocultures.

There are enough reasons to build, maintain and foster neighbourliness. Now if only people could realise that neighbourliness is less about sameness and more about acceptance, respect and finding the common — each other's innate humanity — instead of differences that bring out the worst.

(Samir Nazareth is an author and writes on socio-economic and environmental issues)

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For example, disputes over territory range from fisticuffs over parking to legal battles over property. Conflicts over reproductive opportunities appear in the complexities of romantic relationships - one-night stands to infidelities to open relationships, mixed caste and religion weddings.

Surge in chain snatching incidents

Residents of Salcete, especially senior citizens are alarmed over the reoccurring chain snatching incidents across the taluka. Three days back, a woman on a morning walk was targeted in Davorlim in broad daylight when her mangalsutra was snatched by a scooter rider wearing a raincoat and a helmet. It appears that there is a gang of chain-snatchers operating in the state. The modus operandi in majority of the cases is that these bike-borne thieves engage the women in a dialogue while keeping the engine of the vehicle on.

The pillion rider all of a sudden snatches the chain from the woman as the rider races the bike away and in the process even throwing the woman on the ground. As a result, the lady has very little time to react, leave alone noting down the registration number of the two-wheeler. In order to prevent such incidents it would be advisable for women to avoid talking to strangers riding a bike. If the woman senses something fishy, she should immediately raise an alarm so that the thieves are apprehended by the people around. Man-a-

times, stolen vehicles are used to commit such crimes. Hence cracking cases of vehicular theft by the police can go a long way in preventing other crimes like chain-snatching. Women need to avoid wearing flashy jewelry and walking in isolated places or have it covered with a saree or a dupatta. They should avoid wearing jewelry during morning or evening walks.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Wake up call for every parent

Two weeks have passed since the Bengaluru tragedy that shook the entire nation. The catastrophe, which resulted in loss of eleven precious lives and many injured, spotlights the perils of celebrations organized in haste without adequate safety checks, effective coordination and proper crowd management. But, in a sense, fans were also equally responsible for the tragedy as they threw caution to the wind, putting themselves and others

in danger by climbing on trees, scaling walls and clinging to even electric poles - totally unmindful of the imminent threat. These eleven persons died because too many people, in moments of madness, completely forgot that human life is more precious than a glimpse of their favourite cricketers. The Bengaluru tragedy is a wake-up call for every Indian parent. The parents should not fail their sons and daughters the way the system failed these eleven souls.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, Chennai

Advertise teachers' vacancies in colleges

At the end of every academic year, most colleges in Goa ascertain the workload and number of students in a particular stream/subject for the next year. Subsequently, clearance is obtained from the Directorate of Higher Education (DHE) Porvorim to appoint assistant professors on contract or lecture basis and leave vacancy. A formal advertisement is released and 7/15 days or walk-in interview notices given to apply for the posts. Some colleges advertise by May, some in the first week of June and a few before the colleges re-open in the 3rd week of June. Herein lies the crux of the matter. The first two categories of colleges screen, interview and appoint the successful candidates once the DHE clears the selection list. Colleges that advertise late, complete the processes and select the candidates in late July. By then the classes would have commenced leading to pressure on the permanent staff but sometimes, prior to receiving the DHE's permission, the selected candidates are asked to teach without any remunerations.

The DHE could have an SOP for the colleges to hire the teaching staff: early advertisement (April-May), walk-in interview or otherwise, and new teachers to be appointed by mid-June after DHE gives the go-ahead. This would also help the permanent staff to plan the lectures and other activities. Colleges that do not abide

should not be permitted to recruit teachers and have to manage with the existing ones for a semester.

Sridhar D'Iyer, Caranzalem

Surrender to the Lord!

That was an in-depth, insightful Editorial on the recent Ahmedabad Boeing plane crash and India's air safety crisis. The number of people taking to the skies as the preferred mode of travel has been on the rise for quite some time now. The recent plane crash seems to have sent fear into the hearts of people now. The issue of safety is beyond the purview of the passengers, though. The cartoon on the front page says it all: check-in later. Show the Flight Safety Report first. However, what option do we have when it comes to international travel? So, there seems to be no alternative other than fly blind and surrender our fears to the Lord.

During earlier times, there was this dialogue: Train crash, here you are, Plane crash, where you are? We do not really know where we shall be the next moment. Life has become fragile.

Melville X. D'Souza, Mumbai