

O HERALDO

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Time to wake up and act

There is an unsettling silence creeping through Goan neighbourhoods, one that masks a growing crisis, threatening the very heart of our society. This silence isn't peace. It's apathy.

Social activist and president of Bailancho Ekvott Auda Viegas has raised a red flag on an issue that we can no longer afford to ignore. Abandoned ancestral homes across Goa are becoming the breeding grounds for an alarming surge in alcoholism, drug abuse, and the exploitation of minors. In one such house, she discovered a 15-year-old girl drinking with older boys. No one had asked how she got there or why. The question she asks isn't about that single incident. It's larger. It's about a community that looks away, a neighbourhood that no longer asks questions, a society that refuses to intervene until a tragedy knocks on its own door.

And that is precisely the danger.

This is no longer about a few isolated cases. These incidents are becoming widespread taking place in derelict buildings, unauthorised slums, and increasingly, within our own backyards. Minors are frequenting these so-

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called 'black spots' where alcohol, drugs, and even contraceptives like I-Pill are available without question. Former Goa State Child Rights Commission chairman Peter Borges warns of the same. He highlights not just the abuse, but the absence of a proactive, preventive strategy. He cites drugs worth Rs 68 crore seized in Goa just in the first four months of 2025, calling it a symptom of deeper systemic neglect.

The facts are grim. Three minor girls aged 11, 13, and 15 were raped at a Calangute guesthouse just weeks ago with a 13-year-old Jharkhand girl missing from Bicholim. Teenagers caught in a spiral of substance abuse, trafficking, and violence. When we begin to accept such stories as mere headlines, we lose not just our children but our collective conscience.

Yes, we can and must hold the State accountable. Laws must be strictly enforced. Police crackdowns must continue. A State-wide anti-drug policy should not just remain on paper but be implemented in every school, college, and community centre. Borges is right in insisting that this policy, which includes steps for intervention, identification, and rehabilitation, needs immediate notification.

But here's the truth we cannot escape: the law alone cannot save our children.

Social change does not begin in courtrooms or police stations. It begins in homes. It begins when a parent notices changes in their child's behaviour and chooses to engage rather than dismiss. It begins when neighbours don't ignore that abandoned bungalow down the lane but demand action from authorities. It begins when schools talk about drugs not just as a criminal issue but as a psychological and social one.

And crucially, it begins with honest reflection.

Are we, as a society, doing enough? Have we normalised wrong to such an extent that we're unwilling to confront it unless it threatens us directly? Are parents, overwhelmed by fast-changing times, surrendering to confusion rather than seeking help or support? As Viegas rightly points out, many first-generation educated parents struggle with parenting in today's complex environment. They fear being too strict, too soft, or simply wrong.

But this fear cannot justify inaction.

Bailancho Ekvott's demand for a three-fold response — enhanced parental involvement, community awareness, and strict institutional enforcement — is not just reasonable; it is necessary. If even one pillar of this triangle fails, the safety net around our children collapses.

Let's not be the society that wakes up only after damage is done. Let us remember: every child we fail is a reflection of our failure as a community.

Goa has always prided itself on its warmth, its community spirit, and its culture. But no culture is worth preserving if its children are unsafe.

This is not just a law-and-order issue. It is a moral one. It is a question of whether we choose to be passive spectators to the downfall of our youth or active participants in their protection and growth.

The choice is ours. And time is running out.



It remains a moot question how democracy has been functioning, especially since 2014, reflected as much in the attitude of the government of the day, as it is in the attitude, ruling and behaviour of presiding officers beholden to the political leader in power



the citizens feel the impact of government diktats with the filtering mercy of these very means of governance, the ill-magnified manifold by the persistence of non-Constitutional persons of authority — some of whom would make the late Sanjay Gandhi, Indira Gandhi's younger son, and his coterie look like a bunch of god-fearing amateurs.

Parliament was knocked out cold in the Emergency, and therefore there was no parliamentary redress, or parliamentary accord in the passing of orders — the few orders that were clothed in the legitimacy

of a law, and not the many orders that can through oral directives of the man who would not be named, Sanjay Gandhi, who became the symbol of all that was evil in the 1975 Emergency.

The Lok Sabha has been democratically elected for the third time under the present dispensation — and no charges of illegality have been levelled against the general elections called by Indira Gandhi in 1977 and by others subsequently, including the ones which brought the BJP's Atal Bihari Vajpayee to power for the first time in 1998.

But it remains a moot question how democratic has been its functioning, especially since 2014, reflected as much in the attitude of the government of the day, as it is in the attitude, ruling and behaviour of presiding officers beholden to the political leader in power. An absent Opposition then, its leaders in jail, is heard as little as the silenced opposition now. Also, moot is the non-constitutional pillar of democracy, the media, print and all its digital and enteral forms including radio and TV. Asked to bend, and eager to prostrate, Lal Krishna Advani described them when he became the Janata Party's first non-Congress minister of Information and Broadcasting. An honest politician, who built the BJP-Sangh muscle as much in politics as in media, Advani would find different words to describe the Godi Media as it is vividly described in the vernacular.

Away from the rarified intellectual debates in parliament and media, the Emergency needs to be felt in its continued impact on the poor and the deprived, and particularly in how it impacts minorities, especially the Muslims. Particularly on their freedom and security.

MISA, the Maintenance of Internal Security Act, has gone a name change though Lalu Yadav has immortalised it by naming his first child, a daughter, Misa as she was born when he was in jail under this law during the Emergency as an activist with Jayaprakash Narayan. Yadav is in and out of jail even now on charges of corruption, his daughter is a Member of Parliament. The law is now called Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

UAPA, many will tell you, is far worse than MISA, or at least as bad. It should not have been so. Democracy should have ensured that there was no place for UAPA on the statute books,

and the courts, including the Supreme Court could outlaw it, instead of supporting it every time they refuse bail to a political prisoner.

Stan Swamy, the Catholic priest in Jharkhand, was one touchstone for this segment of freedom and justice. He is dead. He died a prisoner of the State which presumed the 84-year-old Jesuit, suffering from several old age debilitating illnesses, was a kingpin in a conspiracy against the Prime minister of India. His medical bail was never granted.

The Jawaharlal University scholar Umar Khaled is a living touchstone. He has been in jail for five years now. Khalid's detention highlights the stringent nature of UAPA, a law criticized for its low bail threshold, often leading to prolonged pretrial incarceration. Despite multiple bail pleas, courts have consistently denied relief, citing "prima facie" evidence of his involvement in a conspiracy. No trial has begun, and charges remain unframed, raising questions about due process.

Khalid's detention reflects a broader clampdown on dissent, particularly targeting Muslim activists. Amnesty International called the bail denial a "blow to free expression." Senior advocate Prashant Bhushan decried the case as a "travesty of justice" and a test of democratic principles.

In her editorial note to the monumental India Justice Report 2025, convenor and barrister Maja Daruwala, decried what she calls a "perma-crisis" which cries out for urgent repair, and from which justice seekers have little expectation, providing access to justice

In its international commitments under Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals, India is committed to promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all and building effective and inclusive institutions at all levels by 2030.

A just society governed by the rule of law not hindered by barriers of money and caste, religion and region, remains a work in progress 50 years after the wake-up call of 25 June 2025, marked more by backslides than by steps forward.

Shadows of the Emergency still hang as so many ghosts even as an Indian steps into space for the second time in the same 50 years.

(John Dayal is an author, Editor, occasional documentary film maker and activist)

people's *edit*

THE DEVIL IN DISGUISE: RAGGING

JOSEPH LEWIS D'SILVA

Most people mistakenly believe that ragging is just harmless fun — practical jokes or teasing to amuse others. But mocking others for pleasure hurts the feelings of innocent individuals. The perpetrators often derive sadistic satisfaction by exerting power or superiority over others. These persecutors seem to have a serpent's heart encased in a human body as they harass the defenceless.

The Apex Court defines ragging as: "Any disorderly conduct whether by words spoken or written, or by an act, which has the effect of teasing, treating or handling with rudeness any other student; indulging in rowdy or undisciplined activities which cause or are likely to cause annoyance, hardship, or psychological harm, or to raise fear or apprehension thereof in a fresher or a junior ..."

Newspapers are filled with disturbing accounts of students suffering due to ragging: One reported being hit on the head with a steel bottle and whipped with a belt by a senior.

Another collapsed after being forced to stand for hours as part of a 'ritual', sustaining head injuries.

Yet another was publicly humiliated by being forced to cut his hair.

The urge to dominate has ancient roots -- from animals following the law of survival of the fittest to early humans asserting power through tools, weapons, and status. Even in modern institutions, including colleges, domination often takes the form of fear, insult, and brute force --- the very basis of ragging. Such behaviour of taking advantage of another innocent individual and seeing the victim in pain shows the evil nature of the persecutor. This is due to, many say, a very bad quality of upbringing in a family.

Ragging is a serious violation of human rights. When someone is mentally or physically harassed, the tormentor is liable to be arrested, expelled from the institution, and denied future admissions. In the words of Confucius: "Do not do to others, what you do not wish done to yourself. Wish for others what you desire and wish for yourself."

Not all students have the emotional or psychological resilience to endure ragging. It often leads to anxiety, depression, and even suicide. Ragging cannot be justified as 'just fun' --- any pleasure derived from the suffering of others is not just immoral but demonic. The road walked by tormentors is indeed satanic.

Ragging has evolved into a dangerous and cruel practice. Each year, tormentors devise new methods of physical torture and psychological abuse. Institutions must take firm steps: (i) Anti-ragging committees should be formed from the time of admission, (ii) Vigilance and preventive measures must be ongoing and (iii) The prospectus and admission forms must declare that ragging is banned and punishable --- including suspension or expulsion.

Ragging is not a harmless tradition, but a violation of human dignity. It causes lasting psychological trauma, erodes trust, and destroys the sanctity of educational spaces. Institutions must enforce strict anti-ragging measures, educate students, and create a safe environment for all. Let us not normalise cruelty under the guise of fun. Let us raise our voices, report abuse, and support those who suffer in silence. Authorities should not neglect to check the wrong with carelessness. Satan starts dancing with glee as tormentors take advantage of mildness to harass juniors.

Ending ragging begins with each one of us.

mindfulness and care.

Joseph Savio Desouza, Rajasthan

Bias in PWD promotions

Even though the post doesn't exist, there has been massive promotions in the PWD.

Among 98 officials, JEs and TAs were promoted to AEs with 49 from regular service and another 49 from ad-hoc service.

Ad-hoc promotions should be made only in rare cases and for exigencies of work. Such ad-hoc service cannot be counted for fixation of the seniority of this employee. On the other hand there is also a voice on allegations of bias against promotions of AEs in PWD, accusing it of favouritism and illegal promotions. The State government should investigate this matter and give justice to those who were excluded even after they had completed more than 13 years in regular service.

It seems that this massive promotion may be another big scam. The promotions must be free from bias and must respect the principles of fairness and transparency as mandated by Articles 14 and 16 of the Constitution of India. The government employees in other departments are also indeed facing delays and frustration in their pursuit of promotions, despite their eagerness to advance.

K G Vilop, Choraio

letterstotheeditor

For letters to the editor contact us at editor@herald-goa.com.

All letters must contain correct postal address and telephone number. Letters are liable to be edited for brevity.

Drinking water crisis

It is painful that globally two billion people don't have access to safe drinking water. The crisis of drinking water has become a serious and growing challenge worldwide.

The issue is worsening due to several factors, like climate change, population explosion, urbanisation, industrialisation, and imbalanced water usage. While the world population grows at a steady pace, the amount of water in the world remains the same. Not only does the amount of water not increase while the demand grows, societies are also facing increased water scarcity in many parts of the world due to drought and degraded quality brought on by floods, pollution and other forms of contamination.

The need of the hour is that all stakeholders - governments, organisations and civil societies - focus on sustainable water management and ensure everyone on the planet is accessible to safe and adequate water resources for drinking, sanitation purposes, and for other vital uses for sustaining life.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, Chennai

Well played England

England have scored a sensational victory against India in the Headingley Test. Needing 371 runs to win, they won by 5

wickets. All credit to the Englishmen for their fight-back, but India must feel devastated to lose the Test after five of their batsmen had scored centuries. The reasons are not far to seek, after Pant, the rest of Indian batsmen that followed hardly contributed to the total. In the first innings, the last 6 wickets could only add 24 runs and in the second, the final six wickets collapsed for a measly 31 runs. In both innings, a decent effort by the lower order batsmen would have made it impossible for India to lose. The other problem was the number of catches that were dropped by India in both innings. Yashasvi Jaiswal alone floored 4 catches, and as they say "catches win matches". After this pathetic performance India didn't deserve to win, we snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. Well played England!!

Misha, Varca

Audit of outdoor hoardings needed

A large advertisement hoarding reportedly collapsed early Tuesday morning at the Calangute-Arpora-Nagoa border blocking the road and halting all vehicular movement for several hours. For-

tunately, no one was injured in the incident as the iron-frame structure made of thick pipes and bars crashed on the road during heavy rain and wind at a time when the traffic was minimal. However, the incident has raised questions about dangerous hoardings many of which could be unauthorised and should serve as a wake-up call.

It is learnt that the hoarding spanned the width of the road. There needs to be stricter regulations on the installation and monitoring of large hoardings. It also raises the question of whether hoarding that spans the breadth of the road should be allowed. Roadside hoardings present several dangers, including obstructing driver visibility and distracting drivers. Unauthorised hoardings often lack proper safety measures and may be more prone to collapse, especially during adverse weather conditions leading to injuries and even fatalities.

"The Goa Outdoor Advertisement (Regulations & Control) Bill, 2025", recently tabled in the Legislative Assembly, seeks to impose a streamlined regulatory framework over the erection, placement, and display of all outdoor advertisements across the State.

The Goa Assembly Select Committee has reportedly renamed the Bill as 'Outdoor Hoardings Bill'. An audit of outdoor hoardings in the State seems necessary. The audit would involve verifying permissions, inspecting hoarding locations for road safety and ensuring adherence to heritage and cultural considerations.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Refrain from venturing into danger zones

It's monsoon time and naturally the water bodies in Goa exhibit aggressive behaviour. It would be a prudent decision from the tourists as well as the local populace to refrain from venturing into danger zones especially the water bodies, such as sea/ponds/rivers/waterfalls/quarries etc.

Unfortunately, a significant number of fatalities pertaining to watery graves have occurred during the past. However, it's a great move from the State Government to issue a ban under section 163 of Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita 2023 for 60 days. Evidently, it will foster a safe environment. Enjoyment is perfectly fine and a part of our life, but it ought to be done with