

O HERALDO

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Act swiftly to stave off ocean's wrath

It has been happening slowly but surely along the coast for years now. Seawater ingress has been wreaking silent havoc at several places on Goa's shores and all the people can do is just stare in horror as wave after swelling wave race in and sweep away chairs and tables from shacks and in some cases, even eat into the base of the makeshift structures themselves.

The most recent incident of such erosion was reported from the state's southernmost beach, Polem, when the merciless ocean, boosted by gyrating currents and strong winds, pounded the 600-metre-long shore for three days straight and took with it trees and saplings planted in private properties and even manage to destabilize heavy concretized electricity poles and send them crashing down on the sand. With the area plunged in darkness, terrorized villagers have spent sleepless nights wondering whether the next thing the ocean will do is swallow their entire locale - homes, shacks and all - and wipe it off the map.

Up north, in areas like Anjuna, there is hardly any sand left at all as the monsoonal sea has already swallowed even the remaining sliver of coast that the former hippie hub had. A few kilometres away, at Baga, a menacing sight emerges at high tide when the ocean makes light work of the small slice of sand lining the banks of the Baga creek and surges into its mouth, the water level almost meeting the height of the adjoining retaining wall that lines the creek. Residents say they will not be surprised if a few years later, seawater breaches the retaining wall and snakes onto dry land on the banks.

While the villagers at Polem have been time and again requesting the Loliem panchayat - under whose jurisdiction the village lies - for a similar retaining wall to stave off the wrath of the ocean, it is only a matter of time until the sea, emboldened by the increasingly strong monsoon currents and winds, surpasses even the wall, instilling fear into the hapless people all over again.

It is grim situations like these that highlight how important sand dunes are. Recognized as crucial natural barriers against coastal erosion, sand dunes are Nature's own way of protecting life on land from being taken over by the sea. Yet, the warped wisdom of humans coupled with an unending greed has resulted in the flattening of several sand dunes along the length of the state - right from Baga, to Miramar and some beaches in South Goa. Although these ecologically sensitive natural barriers are designated as CRZ I areas, where development is heavily restricted, dunes have been cut willy-nilly at several locations and have been replaced by concrete in the form of plush beach resorts with a view of the ocean and restaurants that offer a close-up tryst with the sea to unsuspecting visitors.

Barely a week ago, a sand dune at Varca was flattened, sparking widespread outrage. Although why this was done is still not clear, the very fact that the barrier is now gone exposes the coastal Salcete village to very serious problems, the most alarming being the ingress of saline water into paddy fields nearby which were, until now, shielded by the dune.

An environmentalist said that someone drove an earthmover over the dune and broke it apart. It is clear that the violator didn't even give a second thought to the fact that unlike a broken building or shack, a sand dune can never be rebuilt or filled back up. Like at Polem, distressed farmers at Varca fear for the future of their farmlands which now face a real threat of being rendered fallow should seawater flood them during high tides and inclement weather in the years to come.

Refreshingly, the Varca panchayat swung into action by taking suo motu cognizance of the deed and lodging written complaints with the police, the Goa Coastal Zone Management Authority, the South Goa district collector and the tourism department. Panch members also visited the site of the destruction to assess the damage and gather evidence to pursue legal and administrative action.

It would be in the best interest of other local bodies along the coast to act like the Varca panchayat has done if they are keen on saving their lands and people from the wrath of the ocean. Else, only time will tell what the sea will unleash.

The period of 1975-77 and the current period shows similarities in the downgrading of rights, a disdain for federal polity, ignoring protest movements and the attack on even research institutions. This amounts to reducing democracy to an anti-people instrument of power



BY INVITATION

Sushila Savant Mendes

Political use of the 1975 emergency?



History cannot be used and abused for political gains. This is what Hitler, Mussolini, General Franco and Salazar did—but they were all fascists! The defeat of the Congress post emergency provides this answer

The dark chapter of emergency in the country's history is the bone of contention today. The type of emergency imposed had no place in a democratic society. The 50th anniversary of the imposition of emergency in 1975 had lessons for posterity. One was that if people are united, emergency can never be sustained and it is the only institutional framework that can withstand the onslaught of authoritarianism. It is not that the emergency was declared for the first time in 1975. During the Sino-Indian war and the Indo-Pakistan War, emergencies were proclaimed but the nation tolerates incursion of their rights when the country is at war. The 1975 emergency came during a non-war period from June 1975 to March 1977 and became caustic due to the collapse of the bodies meant to oversee democracy. Have we learnt from its lessons?

The third Modi government, under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture and Delhi government announced on 12 July 2024, that 25 June would be observed annually as Samvidhan Hatya Diwas (Murder of Constitution Day). The Directorate of Education, of all the BJP ruled States issued a circular that directed educational institutions to observe this Day. This resulted in many political leaders turning history lecturers. The government justified its stand as this was the period when fundamental rights were suspended, press freedom diminished and countless political leaders, social workers, students and ordinary citizens were imprisoned. All of which was true! However if the people of Goa had elected a Congress government, would such a circular have been issued?

In India, this commemoration has to be viewed with the attempt to rewrite certain aspects of history, particularly in school textbooks, often framed as a "rewriting of history" or "historical revisionism". This process is linked to majoritarian nationalist ideologies and aims to present a specific narrative of India's past, sometimes emphasising a unified majoritarian identity and downplaying the contributions or presence of other religious and cultural groups. Events from history like the declaration of emergency or the demolition of the Babri Masjid were certainly black days in the histo-

ry of our nation. Arguments are however made for and against depending on which side of the political spectrum one supports. The present generation has not lived through these events and many of them whom I interviewed know nothing about both these events. It is okay for the leaders of both BJP and the Congress, to criticise these events as it suits both their vote banks, but for the views of political parties to enter the school campuses and that too impose their understanding of a historical event as being good or bad is a new and unhealthy trend. This generation will look upon it as a day when the Constitution was murdered, without knowing anything about the event itself. Does each political party have a right to interpret events in history according to their own ideological moorings?

During this period from 1975 to 1977, the country faced many problems and steps were taken to solve these problems through constitutional means by the declaration of emergency. That these efforts led to larger problems like the need to promote family planning led to many times forced sterilisations and efforts to strengthen national security and political stability led to many political opponents being imprisoned. Under- standing Emergency must begin with 1971 when Mrs Gandhi won a handsome victory. The slogan Garibi Hatao was favourable for a country whose economic growth had stagnated. But following that victory and more so after the Bangladesh War, Mrs Gandhi must have concluded that the voters looked upon her

as a saviour. This feeling was at odds with the protests that erupted in Bihar and Gujarat. Combining party interests with the national interest, pushing the judiciary to fall in line and above all, converting the police and the bureaucracy into weapons against citizens are the trends copied from the 1975-77 period, even today. The background, the course of the event and the result needs to be taught of any historical event, without passing any judgments on it. Historical events cannot be oversimplified without understanding the historical context. History cannot be used and abused for political gains. This is what Hitler, Mussolini, General Franco and Salazar did—but they were all fascists! The defeat of the Congress post emergency provides this answer.

Can a Congress government when in power issue a circular calling 6th December a "Loktantra Hatya Diwas" or "Democracy murder Day". As this was the day when the 16th century Babri Masjid was demolished in 1992 in Ayodhya, when a large group of Hindu kar sevaks of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and allied organisations destroyed the structure of the masjid. The demolition of a 16th century masjid, that too by a group belonging to the majority sent shivers down the spines of not only the Muslims but all other minority communities that such an act of vandalism on a sacred space could happen in a free, democratic and secular nation like ours. Sajeda Momin, a young journalist, an eye witness, has written in an article published by the Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy, that she saw the frightened faces of Ayodhya's Muslim men, women and children who had taken refuge in a police station in their own town. These events need accountable closures like the Emergency.

Just because the government is funding these educational institutions does not mean, the ruling party whether the Congress or the BJP or any other political party

can impose its political viewpoints in schools and colleges. The act of "remembering the Emergency" should go beyond criticism of the past to introspection about the present. For one, we should ask what made the Emergency possible - how was it possible to persecute citizens? We should also consider the possibility of democracy being suspended again. There are striking similarities between then and now. The over-reading of election outcomes - not just in 2014 but subsequently, too is similar. There is no doubt the outcome was a clear rejection of Congress and that each election since 2014, was a spectacular victory for Narendra Modi.

The Home Minister in his speech noted that the Prime Minister decided to observe this day every year. Today, as the Emergency is being remembered, the name and image of the Leader is as widespread as 50 years ago. From vikas to the well-being of cheetahs, everything happens thanks to the Leader. This concentration of power in the office of the Prime Minister had once facilitated the declaration of emergency.

In a recent speech at the Delhi University, the Home Minister declared that since 2014, a 'New India' is being crafted. This New India needs a new history. But these facts are understood as the dawn of Amrit Kaal. However - all protests are labelled anti-national or urban naxal. These labels are used to invoke laws, particularly the UAPA which have stringent bail provisions. As they did during the Emergency, the bureaucracy and the police also toe the line. The period of 1975-77 and the current period shows similarities in the downgrading of rights, a disdain for federal polity, ignoring protest movements and the attack on even research institutions. This amounts to reducing democracy to an anti-people instrument of power.

The past has many different layers. One such layer is memory but historiography is based on a much more rigorous study and has its own methodology. Therefore history speaks truthfully only when it speaks in its entirety and not based on politically convenient interpretations.

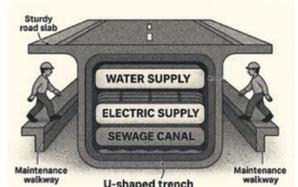
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Building smarter villages through layered utility corridors

A quick look at the salient points of the Goa Regional Plan 2021 reveals broad recommendations such as the need to upgrade essential services like water supply, sewage, electricity, and transportation to meet increasing demands. However, the plan stops short of offering any concrete strategies or execution frameworks. The real challenge lies in the lack of coordination between key departments, particularly the Public Works Department (covering water, roads, and sewage) and the Electricity Department. If the ministers heading these portfolios work in collaboration and actively engage local panchayats and Village Development Committee (VDC) members for ground-level insights many of these persistent issues could be resolved efficiently. Infrastructural development must extend beyond urban centers aspiring to become 'smart cities' it should encompass every village that forms the backbone of the state. Villagers contribute through taxes just like urban residents and deserve the same quality of services. Strengthening rural infrastructure not only supports equitable development but also makes it easy to plan due to controlled population. Well-planned village infrastructure is also easier and more cost-effective to maintain in the long run. One significant shortcoming of the Goa Regional Plan is its lack of concrete design frameworks for

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infrastructure both in cities and villages and insufficient foresight about how these systems will endure over a 20-year horizon.



For a village like Santo Estevam, the need is both immediate and deeply personal: how can we build roads, water networks, optional sewage systems, and power supply that are not only functional today but remain robust, safe, and future-ready for generations to come? Enter a visionary approach: multi-layered utility road infrastructure. While this may sound like something reserved for big cities, the concept is surprisingly practical and transformative for a vibrant village like ours.

In Santo Estevam, the ongoing installation of underground electric cables has worsened the condition of already aging roads some over 20-years-old leaving them riddled with potholes and unsafe for daily use. During excavation, the absence

UPFRONT

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of a comprehensive master plan for the village's water infrastructure has led to frequent damage of 40-year-old pipelines. This uncoordinated approach has triggered a cycle of temporary repairs, inconvenience for residents, and escalating costs, all of which could have been avoided with thoughtful planning and integrated design.

Traditional systems, where utilities are buried wherever space allows create a spider web of disorganised services that are difficult to maintain. A fault in one layer can disrupt the entire village. Worse, repeated trenching of roads damages them, creates traffic hazards, and consumes precious funds that could be better utilised.

Imagine a village road that's more than just a path for cars and bikes, it becomes a backbone of public services, a system where each utility has a designated place, protected and accessible.

The concept? Think of the road as a capital "T" sitting inside a "U." The top slab of the "T" carries daily traffic. The vertical stem houses the layered

utilities, with sewage at the base, electric conduits above it, and drinking water pipelines on top, just below the surface. On either side of this utility shaft are walkways wide enough for a person to stand and perform maintenance safely and comfortably no need to dig, disrupt, or detour.

How It Works—And Why It's Better

This kind of integrated infrastructure draws inspiration from successful models in cities like Tokyo and Singapore, but it is scaled for a village. Here's why it would work beautifully in Santo Estevam:

- **Improved health and sanitation:** By placing the sewage pipes at the base, gravity helps with flow, and keeping them sealed off prevents contamination of water lines and surrounding soil.
- **Safe and reliable electric supply:** Elevated above the sewage and securely insulated, electric conduits can be accessed easily without risk during repairs.
- **Protected drinking water:** Our water is too precious to risk contamination. Elevated placement,

away from sewage and within a sealed environment, ensures safety and quality.

- **No more road digging:** Maintenance crews can enter from side hatches, walk along built-in corridors, and fix leaks or faults without ever touching the road surface.

- **Faster response times:** In case of pipe bursts or electric failures, the layout allows easy inspection, reducing delays and guesswork.

- **Earthquake resilience:** With flexible joints and modular segments just 1.5 to 2 meters long, the system can absorb tremors and settle safely without collapsing.

Yes, the initial investment is higher than conventional trench-and-fill techniques. However, when we consider the life cycle cost including repeated repairs, public health crises, road repaving, and missed opportunities due to unreliable utilities the multi-layered design proves far more economical over time.

Moreover, the design allows for future expansion, such as fibre optic internet, smart sensors, or chilled water-cooling systems, without cutting the road.

Santo Estevam has the potential to lead the way in Goa by embracing this forward-thinking infrastructure model. With our strong cultural roots, and commitment to environmental stewardship, we're

uniquely positioned to become a model village that seamlessly blends tradition with innovation. No village becomes future-ready in a day but every meaningful transformation starts with dialogue, evolves into a plan, and ultimately depends on a united community effort. Too often, it is the 'solution' itself that becomes the barrier, especially when it's disconnected from local realities. Grounded in the principles of the circular economy and sustainable village development, this concept invites fresh thinking. With the hope that innovative ideas from engaged citizens are genuinely considered by the Government of Goa. If implemented successfully here, the approach could be scaled and replicated across the state. Furthermore, the local Member of Parliament has the opportunity to support this initiative through the MPLAD scheme, channeling funds into infrastructure that will serve generations to come. The road ahead literally can be cleaner, stronger, and smarter. And it starts beneath our feet.

(Dr. (Mrs.) Cheryl Venan Dias is a renowned academician, dedicated researcher, and committed environmentalist Mr. Venan Bonaventure Dias is an Educational and social entrepreneur vocal on issues related to governance, poverty, education, healthcare, and environmental conservation.)