

O HERALDO

The Voice of Goa - since 1900

Who is killing art in a 'culturally rich' Goa?

Goa proudly brands itself as a cradle of culture. Its artistic heritage, rooted in the melodic richness of Konkani and Marathi theatre, music, painting, and performance, has long been celebrated. But today, that claim rings hollow. Behind the tourist brochures and ceremonial speeches lies a painful truth: the state has all but abandoned its artistes.

Two iconic institutions, Panjim's Kala Academy and Margao's Ravindra Bhavan, both once considered temples of art, now stand as glaring monuments to state apathy, mismanagement, and perhaps worse systematic neglect camouflaged as development. While governments boast of flyovers and road networks, the foundations of cultural infrastructure crumble. Literally and figuratively.

The collapse of Goa's premier art hub, Kala Academy, is not sudden. It is the result of deliberate disregard. Shut for years in the name of "renovation," the Academy is a cautionary tale of how corruption and indifference destroy not just buildings but entire creative ecosystems. Lakhs and crores have been spent. What do we have to show for it? A gutted building, rising costs, poor workmanship, and a government shrugging off responsibility.

An expert committee recently flagged serious lapses in the renovation, flaws now conveniently pushed onto contractors. Fines may be levied, but who is accountable for the years lost? Who ensures that what rises from the debris will reflect the vision of artistes, not just the engineering of bureaucrats? Will the recommendations of the very artists this institution is supposed to serve even be considered?

What's more disheartening is the government's lack of remorse. When artists voiced their concerns, they were mocked. Former minister Govind Gaude dismissed them as "suparibaaz" mercenaries. That insult wasn't just directed at a few individuals. It was an assault on an entire community that gives Goa its soul. Instead of acting against Gaude when he trivialised legitimate concerns in the Assembly, the Chief Minister stood by him. Action came only when political convenience demanded it; not when art demanded justice.

This isn't about Gaude alone. The deeper rot lies in a system that refuses to give artistes a seat at the table. The demand by groups like 'Kala Rakhon Maand' to have artistes represented on the Academy's board is not radical. It is common sense. Other institutions like the Tiatr Academy function with non-political management. Why not the Kala Academy?

If Panjim is mourning the Academy, Margao is reeling from a similar betrayal. Ravindra Bhavan, the cultural lifeline of South Goa, has been shut indefinitely. Again, in the name of repairs. Again, just before monsoon. Again, without consulting the artist community.

Crores have reportedly been spent repairing its leaking roof over the years. And yet, auditoriums like Pai Tiatr and the Black Box are closed. Artists have cancelled performances, lost earnings, and still wait for answers. The PWD and Bhavan authorities seem more interested in passing the blame than solving the issue.

Former ESG member Vishal Pai Kakode has rightly called for a complete overhaul; a task force led not by bureaucrats or politicians, but by artistes and cultural thinkers. If not now, when?

Art is not charity. It is work. It is identity. It is also a livelihood. If artistes are left without spaces to create and perform, if their voices are dismissed, if their concerns are met with silence or scorn, then the state must admit that it no longer values art. It is time the government stops treating cultural infrastructure as an afterthought or worse, a vanity project.

Goa cannot become "Swayampoorana" if it crushes the very spirit that makes it unique. Roadways do not make a State proud; its artistes do. A State that builds flyovers but bulldozes theatres is not modern. It is hollow.

This is not about opposition politics. If outrage leads to reform, so be it. If politicians need to be embarrassed into action, let them be. The artistes of Goa are not demanding charity. They are demanding dignity.

And the government must decide: will it preserve the legacy of Goan art, or will it let it decay behind barricades and broken promises?

Twitter World

Pope Leo XIV @Pontifex

Although the earth can produce enough food for all humanity, many of the world's poor still lack their daily bread. This makes the tragedy of hunger and malnutrition even more lamentable and shameful.

comment



VICTOR FERRAO

Social media, often dubbed the 'WhatsApp University', has become a fertile ground for unverified narratives, with viral forwards and selective outrage overshadowing substantive debate



ground for unverified narratives, with viral forwards and selective outrage overshadowing substantive debate. This flood of misinformation erodes public trust and undermines the pursuit of truth, leaving citizens grappling with a fractured understanding of reality, which unfortunately has become the mainstay of our post-truth era.

Opacity: Governance behind closed doors

The second element, Opacity, highlights a lack of transparen-

The Modi syndrome: A lens on India's political illusion

In a scathing critique of contemporary Indian politics, journalist Sagarika Ghose has coined the term "MODI Syndrome" to describe what she perceives as a troubling approach to governance. The acronym MODI—standing for Misinformation, Opacity, Distraction, and Incompetence and offers a framework to analyse the strategies that, according to critics, have come to define the current administration's playbook. Far from aligning with India's national motto, Satyameva Jayate ("Truth will triumph"), the MODI Syndrome suggests a governance model that prioritises headline management over transparency, incites division rather than unity, and wields media as a tool to craft a politics of illusion.

This article explores the components of the MODI Syndrome and its implications for India's democratic fabric.

Misinformation: The fog of half-truths

The first pillar of the MODI Syndrome, Misinformation, points to the deliberate or negligent spread of distorted facts to shape public perception. In an era where information travels at lightning speed, the government's communication machinery has been accused of selectively presenting data or amplifying unverified claims to bolster its image. From economic statistics to social issues, critics argue that official narratives often gloss over inconvenient truths. For instance, rosy projections of economic growth or unemployment figures have frequently been challenged by independent analysts, who point to discrepancies between government claims and ground realities. Social media, often dubbed the "WhatsApp University", has become a fertile

cy in decision-making processes. Major policy decisions—such as demonetisation in 2016 or the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019—have often been announced with little prior consultation or public debate. Critics argue that this top-down approach sidesteps accountability, leaving citizens and even elected representatives in the dark. The Right to Information (RTI) Act, once a cornerstone of democratic transparency, has faced allegations of being weakened through amendments and delays in appointing information commissioners. Opacity extends to financial dealings as well, with concerns raised about the lack of clarity in funding mechanisms like electoral bonds or PM care fund. When governance operates behind a veil, it risks alienating the very people it claims to serve, fostering distrust and disengagement.

Distraction: The art of deflection

Distraction, the third component, refers to the strategic use of divisive issues to shift focus from pressing challenges. Critics point to the government's emphasis on emotive issues—such as religious polarization, nationalism, or high-profile cultural debates—as a means to divert attention from economic woes, unemployment, or administrative failures. For instance, while inflation and joblessness dominate public concerns, media cycles are often dominated by polarising debates that inflame communal tensions. This tactic, critics argue, keeps the public engaged in manufactured controversies, sidelining substantive discussions on policy failures or systemic issues. The result is a fractured society, where unity is sacrificed at the altar of political expediency, and the government's accountability is diluted.

Incompetence: The cost of mismanagement

The final pillar, Incompetence, underscores perceived failures in policy execution and governance. From the chaotic rollout of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) to the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the sudden halt of Operation Sindoor, critics argue that the government has repeatedly stumbled in translating ambitious promises into effective outcomes. The agrarian crisis, persistent unemployment, and uneven crumbling built infrastructure development are often cited as evidence of administrative shortcomings. While bold announcements grab headlines, the lack of meticulous planning and follow-through has left many initiatives incomplete or ineffective. This pattern of over-promising and under-delivering has fuelled disillusionment, particularly among the youth, who face an uncertain econom-

ic future.

The politics of illusion and the role of media

At the heart of the MODI Syndrome lies what Ghose calls the "politics of illusion"—a governance style that prioritises perception over substance. The media, often described as the fourth pillar of democracy, has become a chief tool in this endeavour. A significant section of India's media landscape, critics argue, has transformed into a mouthpiece for the government, amplifying its narrative while sidelining dissent. Sensationalist headlines, selective reporting, and the marginalisation of critical voices have created an echo chamber where truth struggles to surface. Instead of fostering informed debate, this media environment often incites hate, pitting communities against each other and deepening social divides. The national motto, Satyameva Jayate, feels increasingly distant when public discourse is shaped by division rather than dialogue.

The path forward: Reclaiming truth

The MODI Syndrome, as articulated by Ghose, serves as a provocative critique of a governance model that appears to prioritise control over freedom and trust. To counter this syndrome, India's democratic institutions must reclaim their role as guardians of truth. Strengthening transparency through robust RTI mechanisms, fostering independent journalism, and encouraging inclusive policy-making are critical steps. Civil society, too, has a role to play—by demanding accountability, rejecting divisive narratives, and championing fact-based discourse. Only by realigning with the principle of Satyameva Jayate can our country move beyond the politics of illusion toward a future where truth truly triumphs.

In conclusion, the MODI Syndrome offers a lens to examine the challenges facing Indian democracy today. Whether one agrees with Ghose's critique or not, it underscores the urgent need for governance that is transparent, accountable, and rooted in the pursuit of truth. As India navigates its complex socio-political landscape, the question remains: will the nation rise above the fog of misinformation, opacity, distraction, and incompetence to keep its democratic promise? The answer lies in the hands of its people, its leaders, and the institutions that bind them together. We have the challenge to work to shun aside the (M)olitics and work to reign in Politics that will save our democracy.

(Fr Victor Ferrao is an independent researcher attached to St Francis Xavier Church, Borim, Ponda.)

people's edit

EMERGENCY EXPERIENCES

CHANDER GUPTA

I was all of 16 years old when the infamous Emergency was promulgated on 25th June 1975. I lived in a sleepy town, Kaithal in Haryana. Before recounting from my memory personal tales of that era, let me first narrate the event which triggered the imposition of Emergency by Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister.

Indira first became the Prime Minister of India in 1966 after the sudden demise of the incumbent PM Lal Bahadur Shastri on foreign soil. She won the public mandate in the next General Elections held in 1967 to continue in office. Self-assured and confident, she carried out Banks Nationalisation in 1969 which proved to be a milestone in the history of Independent India.

To deal with political instability arising out of the split in the Congress Party, Madam Gandhi called an early election in March 1971 to seek a fresh mandate directly from the people. Indira Gandhi's call for "Garibi Hatao" (remove poverty) resonated with the masses. Mrs Gandhi returned to power with a comfortable majority.

Raj Narain, a losing candidate in the Rae Bareilly parliamentary constituency in the 1971 General Elections, had challenged in the Allahabad High Court the electoral victory of Mrs Gandhi levelling allegations of malpractices. At the conclusion of the legal battle, the Single-Bench of Justice Sinha allowed the election petition unseating Mrs Gandhi from her parliamentary seat.

Sensing conspiracy to oust her from power, Mrs Gandhi invoked a provision of the Constitution to impose Emergency during the reprieve period for filing appeal. There was an immediate crackdown on all the key political opponents who were put behind the bars. Censorship was imposed on dissemination of news. Simultaneously Mrs Gandhi approached the Supreme Court which initially stayed and eventually reversed the HC verdict.

My father was a leading lawyer at Kaithal at that time. He had been actively associated with the RSS during his youth days, before he plunged into the legal profession embracing domesticity. Though he no longer attended RSS shakhas (assemblies), he had kept the framed photos of Guru Golwalkar and Hedgewar on the mantelpiece of the Drawing Room. As the crackdown on perceived opponents was percolating down at all levels, my father discreetly removed the photos of Golwalkar and Hedgewar from the mantelpiece and hid them in a closet. I could discern vibes of trepidation in the mind of my father.

The fear emanating from rigorous provisions of Emergency yielded positive outcomes also as there was more discipline and punctuality in government offices and banks, etc. Trains ran on time. However, the Emergency became infamous for its excesses. The most talked-about excesses were in the field of family planning. Couples, especially the men, who had more than 2-3 kids, were forced to undergo sterilisation. Targets were given at the grassroots levels. Overzealous officials, as the folklore goes, sometimes sterilised people forcibly against their wishes. Some odd case of an unwed man being sterilised might also have happened. But uneasiness was writ large on the faces of men already having three kids and more. My father had had four kids before the Emergency was imposed. I am sure he didn't intend to have any more. But due to the fear generated by overzealous implementation of the family planning drive, my father voluntarily opted for my mother to undergo tubectomy.

At last, Mrs Gandhi thought it prudent to lift the Emergency on March 21, 1977.

Act decisively against crime

In recent days, Goa has seen a disturbing rise in unlawful activity — from increasing violence against women to shocking cases of abuse involving minors, and even crimes committed by minors. These incidents are not isolated anymore; they point to a growing and dangerous trend.

What is even more troubling is the apparent lack of swift or strict enforcement of laws. When people begin to lose faith in the legal system, they take matters into their own hands — a dangerous direction for any society.

When will the government step up and act decisively against crime? What good is rapid infrastructure development or boosting tourism if the people of Goa no longer feel safe in their own neighbourhoods — whether in broad daylight or at night?

We need more than just smart cities! We need accountability, safety, and a justice system that actually works.

Goa deserves better.
Lynn Rodrigues, Mercedes

Acid is freely available

In a shocking incident, a 17-year-

old boy was seriously injured after he was reportedly attacked with what appears to be "acid" on the highway at Dhargalim, while proceeding to college on Monday morning.

The incident has once again brought to focus the fact that acid is freely available in the State. It may be recalled that a decade ago the Supreme Court imposed strict restrictions on the sale of acid. It is learnt that before 2013 there was no specific provision in the Indian Penal Code to deal with acid attacks. But now acid attacks have been declared a cognisable offence, punishable with up to ten years imprisonment along with a fine. Acid attacks can lead to permanent disfigurement. Survivors of attacks not only undergo severe physical pain but also mental trauma that changes the way they feel and think.

There have rarely been incidents of acid attacks reported in Goa. However, acid attacks could become a dangerous trend in order to take revenge due to its easy availability. One

can simply visit a hardware store and buy a bottle of acid that is used as a 'toilet cleaner' or 'floor cleaner'.

These products primarily contain Hydrochloric Acid which is highly corrosive. There needs to be a restriction or even a total ban on the sale of acid which is used as 'floor cleaner'.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

World War III?

World War III is no longer a far-fetched scenario, but a genuine concern echoed by experts and citizens alike.

At the centre of this storm is the growing rivalry between the US, China and Russia. This development, along with volatile conflicts in the Middle East and Africa, create a powder keg where a single spark could ignite widespread hostilities. There is also the swift erosion of strategic restraint. The growing willingness of States, and the proxy actors operating on their behalf, to transgress established red lines and engage in conflict, is pro-

foundly troubling.

The global community must act with urgency, revitalising diplomatic efforts and restoring systems of coordination before we drift toward a catastrophe.

Jubel D'Cruz, Mumbai

Mhaji Bus: A landmark initiative

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant and his government's Mhaji Bus Scheme is a landmark initiative that deserves immense praise for its forward-thinking approach to revolutionising Goa's public transport system, echoing the vision long advocated by then GCCI President Shrinivas Dempo for seamless, inclusive mobility.

This scheme is poised to deliver far-reaching benefits, transforming how Goans commute while fostering social and economic progress.

A standout feature is the travel concessions for women in the workforce, particularly those in private sectors. By making public transport affordable, the scheme

empowers women to access job opportunities across urban and rural Goa, breaking financial and logistical barriers.

This aligns with Dempo's emphasis on equitable economic growth, enabling women to contribute more actively to Goa's economy, fostering financial independence, and promoting gender equity in workplaces. Women employees in tourism, retail, and small businesses will particularly benefit, as affordable commutes enhance their mobility and job retention.

Realistically, the scheme will alleviate Goa's traffic burden by encouraging a shift from private vehicles to reliable public buses. This will decongest roads in tourist-heavy areas like Panjim, Margao, and Calangute, reducing travel times and fuel consumption. Environmentally, it supports sustainability goals by lowering carbon emissions. Enhanced connectivity will boost tourism, local commerce, and rural economies, creating a vibrant, accessible Goa. Sawant's visionary leadership ensures a sustainable, inclusive future, and we applaud his unwavering commitment.

Vaman S Sankhalkar, Harvalem

letterstotheeditor

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