

## HERALD

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## Why not tour the zilla?

First, it was the councillors of the Margao Municipal Council (MMC). The so-called city fathers wanted both the bidders for the contract to set up the solid waste treatment facility at Sonsodo to take them on a trip to see a successfully working garbage treatment facility. While Hyderabad's Ramky ignored the *firm*, the IL&FS-Fomento combine obliged. In their junket to New Delhi, the councillors seem to have got in a lot of fun, but little enlightenment.

Whatever a city does, the district must do better. And so it came to be that the South Goa Zilla Panchayat (ZP) is now going to follow suit, only on a much larger scale, both numerically and geographically. A jumbo 25-member team of the South Goa ZP is going to be touring not just Delhi, but Rajasthan too, for its so-called annual study tour, from 3 to 13 October.

The 'official' explanation of the official tour is that the central purpose of the outing is facilitating the South Goa ZP members to acquaint themselves with the functioning of the district panchayat bodies in the touring areas, so that they can suggest improvements in the system back home. Considering that Delhi is a large metropolitan city with a municipal corporation, exactly what great insights will that portion of the tour bestow upon our eager-to-learn panchayat members?

Rajasthan is a much better choice, as the state was the launching ground for the three-tier model of the Panchayati Raj system. Former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru inaugurated the country's first Panchayat Samiti (the second tier, which doesn't exist in Goa) at Nagaur on 2 October 1959, on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, whose dream it was that decentralisation of power and grassroots democracy through Panchayati Raj would create an India ruled from its villages.

Pandit Nehru remarked at the function that the three-tier Panchayati Raj structure was introduced as a system of governance and a means of democratic decentralisation, for linking the people "from the Gram Sabha to the Lok Sabha". In fact, the Rajasthan Pradesh Congress Committee (RPCC) has announced that it will celebrate 50 years of Panchayati Raj on 2 October in Jaipur, inviting top party functionaries, including Congress President Sonia Gandhi and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Over one lakh elected representatives from Rajasthan's Panchayati Raj institutions will attend the event. That, indeed, is an event worth attending.

But that is on 2 October, and our South Goa ZP worthies are departing Goa on 3 October – for Delhi – and will proceed to Rajasthan only later. Obviously, this momentous occasion in the life of India's Panchayati Raj is not on their agenda. Then why, pray, are they burdening the state exchequer to the tune of over Rs8 lakh? According to South Goa ZP officials, that covers the air fare, accommodation, food and beverage expenditure and, obviously, *sight seeing* arrangements of the touring ZP functionaries. They include 20 ZP members, one co-opted member, one accounts officer, two engineers and the ZP's chief executive officer.

With no powers and no work, it seems an important task on the ZP's agenda is the body's annual 'study tour'. Last year, they went to Sikim, at a cost of Rs5 lakh. This year, it's Delhi and Rajasthan. It's taxpayers' money they're spending; ours and yours. But ours is not to question why and, it seems, theirs is just to tour and fly!

## Duplicate security?

One does not know exactly what Transport Minister Ramkrishna 'Sudin' Dhavlikar is thinking, since he is seeing conspiracies behind every voice raised in protest, and says that his favourite High Security Registration Plates (HSRP) are being duplicated.

One thought HSRP's basic purpose was to make duplication impossible.

They are supposed to have a 'hot-stamped chromium-based hologram', an 'ingressed IND legend', a 'laser-etched 9 digit code', tamper-proof snap locks, a 'security inscript' on the numbers, which have 'embossed borders', 'superior-grade reflective sheeting', and a 'self-destructing' third licence plate on the windshield.

If all these supposedly high-security features can be 'duplicated' by ordinary Goan technicians, it means they offer no security at all! So why are we wasting our money on them...?

Once again this tragic episode unveils the poor conditions prevailing in most of the schools. Things are being taken for granted and left to the mercy of nature. None is bothered about anticipating any unforeseen events and effecting changes. When there is a shocking calamity, then there is only a high-level enquiry.

In this regard the decision of the Goa government to house some of the city schools in a separate well-planned modern complex is a step in the right direction. The earlier it is implemented, the better would it be for all.

## Love, not sex

R Fernandes, Margao

With reference to the letter titled 'It's all about love' by Dr Biele (*Herald*, 5 Sep), first of all, there has been no scientific research in 'any given country and culture' of the number of homosexual people: studies were done in specific countries. Secondly, the 'research' is mere statistical surveys based on questions wherein 'gay' is not clearly defined.

A study done on same-sex unions in Sweden, based on 'accurate National Register data from 1995 to 2002' Gunnar Andersson et al (this is actual concrete data – not a survey) showed that only 5 out of 1000 new partnerships (marriage) were same gender. Therefore, Dr Biele cannot extrapolate the 5 per cent to Goa.

Life should be about relationships and love, not sexuality. Research is required on whether, at a very early age, we are obsessed with sexuality and not love. Isn't this what religion is all about and what is missing today?

## Offensive remarks

Thelma Lobo, Porvorim

What does Mr Annand Madgavkar mean in his letter titled 'Employment justifies all?' (*Herald*, 10 Sep) when he says that "next, people employed in the drug trade, prostitution trade and every possible illegal or undesirable profession ... cite employment as a criterion to be allowed to function"? Is he trying to say that prostitutes should have no rights?

The women's rights groups need to take up this issue. Also, drawing a parallel between young employees at casinos and prostitutes is also unfair. Isn't employment important? It is easy for people who own cruise boats and make

## Praying Doves and Preying Vultures

Ground realities indicate that the Faleiro-Thomas proposition may be the only way out, says TEOTONIO R DE SOUZA

If it is confirmed that Almir de Sousa, who responded (*Herald*, 1 Sep) to my text of 29 August in *Her ald*, is the parish priest of Uccasaim, I wish he had retained his clerical prefix in the press. Priests can benefit from the safety of the pulpit and its captive audience, but the prefix can help when they venture into the secular press where they could get sucked into uncharted and murky waters. He need not pose as a layman defending the Archbishop and a fellow priest.

Almir de Sousa started his harangue accusing me of classifying and dividing the community of faith into servants, slaves and rebels. Had he read Dr F F Noronha's column of the previous week (*Herald*, 22 Aug) he should have known that my text was partly in response to that, and I did not merit the undue credit of inventing the classification. Such distortions of truth to proclaim that "We are the Church" can go unchecked in the pulpit, not in a public debate.

"We are the Church," proclaims Almir de Sousa. Perhaps – if all would admit with humility and without seeking privileges all the consequences of Christ's incarnation. The bishops and the clergy (where are the representatives of a significant percentage of the low castes?) are a special breed of privileged sinners, different from the humble among the laity? The lessons about Pharisaism in Almir de Sousa's text were applied in the Gospels to the clergy of that time, and could be applied to the clergy of our times. An expert in Catechetics should know that better than us.

I would request Almir de Sousa to review and cast aside his modern caste mentality, stop reducing persons to their professional garbs of historians or professors, and stay open to the Holy Spirit who has many other charisms in store for his faithful. Unless, of course, Almir de Sousa is also privy to the Holy Spirit and knows all his hidden stores.

Bishops can and should devolve responsibilities of non-pastoral nature to the laity. We could keep for the pulpit or sacristy the tales about the Church as the fountainhead of all legal systems and freedoms! History is more ambiguous in this respect. There can be no true accountability without responsibility and democratic representation, whatever the charming fiction of "sons and daughters of God" or the church-style dialogue.

Announcing the creation of new Forums, if they are to be like most existing parish and diocesan councils, is no comfort. The concentration of powers is as much harmful in the State as in the Church. Pluralism and devolution of powers is the only way of ensuring responsibility and consequent accountability. But let



## HISTORICAL EXPLORATIONS

us also not re-live the phantasies of age-old caste-riddled confraternities and *fábricas* that flourished with lands expropriated from co-villagers to build a colonial Christianity. That is where lies the chronic source of many present-day woes, worsened by the preying vultures.

Almir de Sousa's idea of reforming the Church of Goa from within Goa (not from Portugal or elsewhere!) also raises questions about the "catholicity" of the Church. And while saying that "brief stays" are not sufficient for any reform, Almir de Sousa seems ignorant of the missionary history which presents at least two stalwarts – St Paul and St Francis Xavier – who were rarely in one place for any long period of time.

A fresh attempt at "deconstruction" (also a neo-colonial discourse of the West?) by two Rachol pundits (*Herald*, 9 Sep) calling me "biased", "hooked on", "captive of", and other derogatory adjectives does not seem to be a good strategy of winning any argument. It reminds me of the days they taught me scholastic phi-

losophy there: state your position, make short shrift of the adversaries, reduce even the brightest of them to the status mentally handicapped (never admit you did not understand them) and pronounce the standard verdict in Latin: *Ergo reiciendum est!* (Therefore it should be rejected!) You have won!

The most saddening feature in this entire debate is that the Church in Goa, instead of transmitting the image of kingdom of God, of Jesus who emptied himself (*kenosis*) and was crucified with nothing that he could call his own ("rights") is increasingly revealing a spiritual bankruptcy. Obviously, the mystical body does not feed on mystical rice and curry. A mere suggestion of State legislation to check the transparency and accountability of the temporal goods of the Church was sufficient to raise the hackles of the rich and the powerful who need the Church, but present themselves as its faithful servants, who can ensure that the more humble sons and daughters of the Church benefit from crumbs of their charity.

*Spiritus ubi vult spirat* – the Spirit blows where it wills, and the history of the Church has umpteen illustrations of this. As the saying goes, "The road to Hell is paved with good intentions". Only the kicks of history have brought about most significant reforms. Almir de Sousa is still peddling a pedantic distinction of reform from inside and outside. The Church cannot limit the freedom of the Holy Spirit to work his reforms from any one side!

The kicks of history have brought us far beyond the medieval perceptions of divine power transmitted through and controlled by the Hildebrandian Church that sought to construct Christendom in Europe over and above the heads of the States. The *midrashik*-homiletic history saw its glorious days through Crusades and Inquisition. Unfortunately it survives till date through Islamic republics and their more radical Taliban promoters. Those who wish us to believe that we owe that all that is modern in thought and practice to the Catholic Church fail to distinguish the chasm that divides the fundamentalists and the rebels in any society.

Church collaboration with builders under the garb of necessary diocesan projects, or in extending parish residences, may not be a gift, but only a curse of the Holy Spirit, despite the snide defence by the sociologist Jason Fernandes that the "diffused misappropriation" by old Goan elites, wedded to the Church which preaches the fiction of united and undivided community, is preferable to the danger represented by the real estate-political lobby of national-imperial forces in swindling the Church.

Watch out the vultures hovering over Valpoi. Another Soutomayor type of operation in the making? Over 65,000 sq m of prime agricultural land seems to be involved. Only the ground realities, not pre-fabricated sociological models, can tell us if the Faleiro-Thomas proposition is not the only way out against the cannily manoeuvred "diffused misappropriations".

We could look forward to a Goan version of the Oscar-winner *The Name of the Rose*, with a plot based in a secret archive of *legados* and *pensões*, the blind librarian Borges replaced with a sharp-eyed priest who dallies in the land market. He carries a deadly poison of Konkani herbs in his sleeves, ensuring that no opponent of his deals survives to tell the story. His collateral interest, also a cover-up strategy, is to aid a job colleague in his favourite pastime about the etymology of the Church in European languages and the contribution of the Canon Law to world civilisations.

We too may never know the name of the Rose. They tell us it was a Golden Rose...

## Tongue in Cheek

## Don't Sneeze, Please!

By Adelmo Fernandes

In the past no one gave you even a second glance if you happened to sneeze. But nowadays even a stifled sneeze is sufficient for those around to look at you with suspicion. All of a sudden you realise that a simple cold is enough for people to look down upon you. An everyday cold with all its symptoms – like a cough, a running nose and, worst of all, a sneeze – is sufficient for you to feel like an outcaste or an untouchable.

As children we are taught to cover our mouths whenever we cough or sneeze. Somewhere down the line we have probably forgotten this etiquette and now cough and sneeze without caring a damn about the spray of tiny germs that we let out in the air. Now we are made to learn this basic etiquette all over again. The reason is that H1N1 flu is, literally speaking, in the air.

The H1N1 virus has become the most talked about virus after the one that affects your computer. Unfortunately, tackling it is not as simple as installing anti-virus software in your PC. Whenever you are about to sneeze, you are supposed to cover your mouth and your nose, come what may.

I learnt this the hard way the other day when I was travelling by bus. I had a moderate dose of the common cold. The sudden shower after a long gap could probably be the reason the influenza virus decided to make my respiratory tract its home. The problem was that whenever I happen to

sneeze it is not just one single burst, but a series of sneezes which just goes on and on, seemingly without ending. So when I began to sneeze in the bus, the chap sitting next to me vacated his seat after giving me a scornful look. I heard him murmur something about me carrying the H1N1 virus. The news spread like wildfire among the passengers in the bus. Some were talking of stopping the bus and forcing me to get out. But fortunately for me, better sense prevailed and I was allowed to continue with the journey. But for obvious reasons, none of the other passengers was willing to sit next to me. No one was willing to take a chance. So I travelled sitting alone on the seat made for two.

It is common knowledge that whenever you sneeze you are expected to cover your mouth and nose. But then the Oxford English Dictionary describes a sneeze as a sudden, audible involuntary expulsion of air through the nose. The important word in the description is the word 'sudden'. Yes, indeed a sneeze can happen so suddenly that you hardly have any time to react. Forget about reaching your pocket for the handkerchief. You may not be able to cover your mouth and nose even with your bare hand. Covering your mouth with a handkerchief should be more of a reflex action. But it rarely is.

The only probable solution to the problem is to wear a mask at all times

– not just any old mask, but the N95. That way you can keep all the germs to yourself without giving sharing them with others.. It is understood that you involuntarily close your eyes whenever you sneeze. This way you actually do not see the damage you do by spreading the germs.

Be that as it may, don't be surprised if in the near future you find a board that says 'No Sneezing' alongside the notice which reads 'No Spitting' and 'No Smoking'. Also, do not be surprised if a notice springs up, which goes somewhat like this: 'Sneezing in public is punishable by law'.

In the near future, the restriction may even be extended to the act of coughing. But then you cannot blame the general public for such behaviour. More than the H1N1 virus, it is panic that is in the air. Even a simple cough is enough for some to scurry to the nearest hospital and ask for a swab test. Nobody wants to take a chance with the virus. Some most unfortunate deaths in the country, which have been attributed to the virus, have contributed to the panic. More than the pandemic, it is the panic associated with the disease that is worrisome.

Indeed never in the past has anyone looked upon a casual sneeze which such disdain. The best way out from this mess is to stay indoors whenever you have even a simple common cold. Within the four walls of your house you can sneeze to your heart's delight.

## Letters to the Editor

## Lessons from stampede

Michael Vaz, Merces

Your loving child, the apple of your eye, bids farewell to you in the morning with a beaming smile on her way to school. But you are eagerly waiting for her return at the end of the day, the news reach you that the child has died in a reckless stampede in the school staircase. What would be the horror a parent would go through in this situation is difficult to imagine. This is exactly what happened in Delhi during the school stampede in which 5 girls lost their lives and over 30 were injured, some critically.

## 100 Years Ago

O Herald

PRIMEIRO DIARIO NAS COLONIAS PORTUGUEZAS

12 September 1909

## Freedom of religion

The Government Gazette in its edition dated 19 August published the petition filed by Goan Hindus requesting the government to issue the guarantee of freedom to practice and worship their religion.

## Wife-killer sentenced

Roque Gonsalves, natural of Goa, 40 years of age, who had slain his wife and was attempting to slay two more women, was condemned to forced labour.

## Prodigious feat

An 18-year-old American inventor, Charles Willard, accomplished a fabulous feat at Minneapolis by covering a distance of 20 km in 19.5 minutes in a self-designed biplane.

## Lefebvre killed

Mr Lefebvre, the aeronaut, was killed when flying in an air show at Rheims.

Except for the editorial above, articles and letters in Herald represent the views of the concerned authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Herald editor, publisher, and/or owners.

## Letter of the Day

## Special or spatial?

Soter D'Souza, Porvorim

I thank *Herald* for raising the most pertinent question on the term 'special planning' through the news report 'DPCs mandated special planning' (*Herald*, 11 Sep). Considering the pathetic political, social and economic condition of the Zilla and Village Panchayats in Goa, the government is probably treating Panchayat Raj as a special case requiring special planning, just like special education for special children.

The people are not fools to believe that the Director of Panchayats, who is responsible for constituting the DPCs, has not noticed this term which is out of place, considering that the entire Section 239 in the GPR Act has been reproduced word-for-word from article 243ZD of the Constitution of India.

This typographical error or otherwise in Section 239 appears to have been deliberately introduced and preserved in the Goa Panchayat Raj Act since 1994 to allow the Town and Country Planning Department to plan its nuisance in Goa's pristine villages.

This error has been pointed out at several public workshops in the wake of the controversy on the Regional Plan. Will the government, which likes amending the Panchayat Raj Act "in the interest of the common man", now urgently introduce this justified amendment to substitute the word 'special' with the word 'spatial'?

lakhs of money out of the business to pass judgement on the less fortunate. Casinos are a legitimate business in Goa and people have every right to be employed in them and ask for their rights.

## Rude men in khaki

Babluis Pereira, Pomburpa

India ranks as the largest democracy in the world and we citizens supposedly enjoy the Fundamental Rights granted under Article (19) (1) (a) of the Constitution of India. But, in reality, if we speak a word or two in self defence, we are slapped and even put behind bars.

Recently, a traffic policeman accosted me in Mapusa, claiming I was in a no-entry road. When I was explaining the facts, he roughly told me to shut up or he would take me to the police station. The arrogant behaviour of the police lowered my dignity in public.

In contrast, when I was in Bahrain, a false complaint was filed against me for selling black market tickets and I was hauled up before the Manama Police Chief. The law there is very strict and if anyone is found guilty, heavy fine and imprisonment is certain.

But the Police Chief, instead of threatening

me, told me to state the facts. When I did so, he was satisfied with my innocence and promptly ordered the police to drop me to back to the cinema. I was amazed at the gentle behaviour of the people-friendly police.

Is it not an irony that while we are expatriates in foreign lands, we are treated with due respect by their authorities, but back in our own sacred land, our sense of dignity is shattered by our own men in khaki?

## Millionaires' austerity

Pachu Menon, Margao

Is one to believe that if not for the reports in a leading national daily, the five-star sojourn of the External Affairs Minister and his deputy would have remained secret, affording them the comforts of working from a temporary residence that is far preferable to the amenities – or lack of them – offered in the official bungalows designated for them?

It would seem that if the influence of a Governor's office charmed one minister, a long stint as the nation's representative in the UN made the other a stellar example of diplomatic finesse. If they bemoan a lack of privacy, what they now ought to realise is that they are no longer on

gubernatorial or diplomatic postings, but are elected representatives responsible to their electorate. Is receiving and entertaining guests, including foreign dignitaries, on the lawns of starred-hotels a perk that suits their current assignments?

It is indeed ironic that when the best of efforts have failed to move out ex-PMs from bungalows allotted to them during their tenure, the present lot finds it hard-pressed to get an accommodation of their choice forcing them to make their own arrangements. But then, for a party that boasts of the maximum number of millionaires in its fold, an emphasis on simplicity and maintaining austerity measures appears to more easily said than done!

## Dangerous turn

Pravin U Sardessai, Adpai

A sharp turn exists at Daag (near PWD, Water Division) in Ponda. Vehicles on either side of the road proceed with maximum speed. Hence, the possibility of a major mishap at this spot. Not only motorists but even pedestrians face great risks. The road here is also narrow. Existence of bushes, exactly at the sharp turn, add to the existing problem.

It is a pity that there is no signboard of Traffic Cell to instruct the travellers about existence of a turn. A rusted signboard with the words, 'Dead slow', which was existing some months back, is presently missing from the scene. In the interest of travellers and pedestrians alike, it is necessary for the Traffic cell to install one signboard each, on either side of this dangerous turn, with necessary arrow marked in red colour over it. This will ultimately enable the travellers, to be cautious while proceeding through this route. Precious human lives need protection and hence, it would be appropriate to ensure an early positive action in this regard, before the situation goes out of control. Safety needs to be assured at all costs.

Letters should be 150 words or less in length, and should have the writer's name, address and telephone number. The editor reserves the right to edit letters for size and readability, and to delete any personal attacks or libellous/objectionable matter.

## Paths of Wisdom



## The Importance of Swadeshi

"I would urge that Swadeshi is the only doctrine consistent with the law of humility and love. It is arrogance to think of launching out to serve the whole of India when I am hardly able to serve even my own family. It were better to concentrate my effort upon the family and consider that through them I was serving the whole nation and, if you will, the whole of humanity. This is humility and it is love.

"The motive will determine the quality of the act. I may serve my family regardless of the sufferings I may cause to theirs. As, for instance, I may accept an employment which enables me to extort money from people. I enrich myself thereby and then satisfy many unlawful demands of the family. Here I am neither serving the family nor the State.

"Or I may recognize that God has given me hands and feet only to work with for my sustenance and for that of those who may be dependent upon me. I would then at once simplify my life and that of those whom I can directly reach. In this instance, I would have served the family without causing injury to anyone else. Supposing that every one followed this mode of life, we should have at once an ideal state. All will no reach that state at the same time. But those of us who, realizing its truth, enforce it in practice, will clearly anticipate and accelerate the coming of that happy day."