

## Left out!

If there is one formation that suffered even more than the BJP-led NDA in the recent election, it was the Left Front. The tally of the Left parties in Parliament plummeted from 61 to 24. The CPI(M) was down from 43 seats to 16. It lost 27 seats, the most for any party in this election. The CPI's strength fell from 10 to four. The RSP and Forward Bloc's three seats each came down to two each.

In both its strongholds – West Bengal and Kerala – the setback is at a scale where political analysts are asking fundamental questions about the Left's continued relevance. Left leaders themselves seem clueless about why 'the people' have abandoned them.

In West Bengal, which they have ruled uninterrupted since 1977, the Left Front meeting on Thursday postponed its discussion on the poll debacle. Instead, it announced an elaborate three-tier 'process of introspection', designed more to take the steam out of the angry rank and file rather than to learn any real lessons. And the government decided to shelve a proposal to acquire 120 acres of land to build an entertainment-cum-residential complex in Kharagpur, a knee-jerk reaction to the now-feared Singur-Nandigram syndrome.

The CPI(M) Politburo, the party's highest body, didn't do much better. Its statement said that voters were unhappy with the 'alliances it had forged in some states' (read: the tie-up with the radical Islamic PDP in Kerala), and that they were not seen as a credible alternative at the national level (read: the disastrous Third Front). It pointed the finger at sundry national and state issues, and claimed that the minorities voted for the Congress to defeat the BJP (?)

The fact is that after 32 years of Left rule, Bengal finds itself lagging on all fronts; on some parameters even behind Bihar states. Education is in a shambles. Healthcare is almost non-existent. Employment opportunities have steadily shrunk. With the sole exception of power, the infrastructure is crumbling.

The government has not properly implemented the Centre's welfare projects, including NREGS, and central funds regularly remain unutilised. From 2004 onwards, it could no longer accuse the Centre of wilful neglect. The public seems to believe that the Left Front has no real interest in people's welfare, because it is practically assured of electoral victory. Whatever few schemes it actually does implement go through the patronage networks of the party, to tighten its vice-like grip over power.

The Kerala story is different. That state's indices are among the highest, except for employment, and the ruling combination there changes almost like clockwork every five years. But an open war between a 'corrupt' party chief and a dogmatic, doctrinaire chief minister, compounded by an openly opportunistic electoral alliance with the Islamist PDP has completely eroded the Left's credibility in the state.

These local issues suffered a huge 'multiplier' effect, thanks to a central leadership that seems to have little touch with the masses. Its arrogance and refusal to engage in dialogue is typical of General Secretary Prakash Karat and his ilk, 'leaders' who have moved into the leadership direct from University, without doing the basic grassroots organising work that used to be the party's real strength.

His disastrous Third Front brought together of some of the most corrupt, opportunistic and unpredictable Indian politicians. There was no real 'alliance' – parties within the Third Front contested against each other. Mayawati's BSP alone put up candidates in over 500 seats – and no clear leader. Is it any surprise that the Left bit the dust?

Both Kerala and West Bengal face Assembly elections in 2011. Before that, there are elections to 19 municipal areas in West Bengal this June, and by-elections for 526 panchayat seats as well as for the Siliguri Sub-Divisional Parishad, and the Left faces a resurgent Congress-Tinamool alliance.

If its 'red forts' are to be saved, the CPI(M) (and the CPI) needs to listen to those angry voices of dissent within its ranks. They are demanding that both Buddhadeb Bhattacharya and Prakash Karat should step down. Ignored, a lot of them will simply vote with their feet and cross the floor to the opposition. Then, we will have a real tragedy on our hands – for this country needs the Left.

## The Political Economy of the Church

Devolution of the Church's temporal responsibilities to the faithful would strengthen the Church, argues TEOTONIO R DE SOUZA

Writing in the *Boletim do Instituto Menezes Bragança* (no 166, 1992) on the topic 'Church Card or People's Card in Goan Politics' [http://bit.ly/Bmdms], I had begun that piece with reference to a controversy in the *Herald* between two Christian ministers of the Central Government, namely, George Fernandes and Eduardo Faleiro. It was about the Konkani Railway Project. I remember George Fernandes stating convincingly that "if where there is will there is a way, there can also be a railway!" He got his way and the railway. Eduardo Faleiro also got his many other ways during the past several decades of his involvement in national politics.

The latest concern of the Commissioner for NRI Affairs (Government of Goa) seems to be related to the political economy of the Church in India. The Church of Goa could consider itself fortunate to have Eduardo Faleiro with political experience and capacity of intervention at the national level, but some vested interests and less informed elements in the hierarchy, or some among the more devout laity, may not feel too happy about this seasoned politician's critical ways of looking at the Church functioning in the context of the evolution of the democratic institutions in Goa. But that is precisely why the Church should need him more.

This column is dedicated specially to his concern, following some academic exchanges we had during the past couple of years and as recently as this week. The latest exchange was provoked by the news of the move of the Government of Kerala (V R Krishna Iyer, former Chief Justice of India, chairs a 11-member state commission, which includes two other former judges, two members of the Indian parliament and six other legal experts) to propose a bill that calls for setting up Christian charitable trusts and committees for controlling the resources and finances and for the management of the properties of the churches, and to provide for election to the committees at different levels of the administrative units, namely, Parish/Basic Units, Diocese/Central/Revenue Districts, and State levels.

The state of Madhya Pradesh, known for its anti-foreign missionary and anti-conversion legislation in the early years of independence, seems to have something similar [see http://bit.ly/agzEo] on the anvil for maintenance and protection of properties owned by Christian institutions. The two above-mentioned governments want that the Christian churches should have something similar to the Muslim Waqf Board, which manages properties for religious and charitable purposes in every state. Originating in the Religious Endowment Act of 1863, it passed through various amendments, until its latest formulation of 1995.



## HISTORICAL EXPLORATIONS

"Do not hoard treasures on earth where thieves and moths..." (Lk 12)

There is also a parallel Hindu Religious Charitable Endowment Act. The Tamil Nadu case is the oldest and best known. Under Section 92 of the Civil Procedure Code, the government administration could hear the appeals of different religious endowment boards (a good study of this issue can be consulted online at http://bit.ly/TYuAL). Many private Hindu temple trusts have come out strongly against what they see as government interference and ambitions of politicians to grab their vast income. Whatever the usefulness of these religious boards, there remain some tricky situations, such as what happens if a donor or patron of one religion belongs to a different religion. Would two different boards decide the issue? Or does the civil court become the final arbitrator?

How about Goa? The Church was a willing handmaid of the State under the Portuguese regime. Church-State relations in Portugal blew hot and cold with near-seasonal regularity along its history. Since the liberal regimes in the first quarter of the 19th century, and more so after the Republican legislation of forced separation of the Church and the State in 1911 (made

somewhat milder by moderate politicians like Sidónio Pais, Moura Pinto and Rodrigues Gaspar between 1917 and 1922), the Church of Goa too experienced the political and ideological vandalism of the State. While the liberal regimes confiscated the houses and goods of the religious orders (the Jesuits had fallen victim to Pombal's confiscation much earlier in 1759) and placed them under the administration of the Archdiocese, the republican State took back many of those properties. It only restored some after the signing of the Concordat and the Missionary Accord of 1940, whereby the New State of Salazar chose to make the Church a political ally in defending the Portuguese colonial empire.

There are political and church analysts who have viewed Church behavior as political prostitution. Others, like Manuel Braga da Cruz, presently the first lay vice-chancellor of the Catholic University of Portugal, classified Salazar's position as "Catholicism". Hence, any new State legislation in the post-liberation era should not come as any novelty to the Church of Goa. If the Church believes what it preaches – namely, that it should give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, it

should only be to glad if it is helped to get rid of the over-catch that threatens to sink the boat of Peter or distract it from fulfilling its spiritual mission, unencumbered by excess of worldly baggage.

The Catholic Church of Goa under the Portuguese colonial regime enjoyed a privileged status, but was required to exercise self-censorship in political matters. The Portuguese civil code required the identification and registration of the Christian church *fábricas* and the Hindu temple *mazanas* which had to have their statutes endorsed by the State administration to benefit from legal and fiscal benefits as "pessoa colectiva religiosa". Curiously, this sort of fair treatment to other religions (though still with some discriminations) was granted in Portugal recently, following the restoration of democracy in 1974, and particularly with the introduction of the Freedom of Religions Act of 2001.

Whatever the merits or demerits of the new democratic structures that are sought to be put in place, it is important that the local parish priests in Goa, or the Church authorities at the Paço, should manage the properties and income of the Church with transparency and accountability to the faithful who contribute with their hard-earned money. The parish *fábricas* should not consist of members hand-picked by the parish priests. A dedicated Goan has written in his blog this week [http://bit.ly/qGK2n] about the way many priests tend to extort hefty gifts when they are transferred from a parish by bullying the parishioners through their willing friends in the parish. There are allegedly cases of valuable Church art pieces being sold without proper consultation under pretext of finding money for urgent repairs or other needs of maintenance.

Any new legislation should be welcome to introduce fair practices to constitute boards that supervise the management of the Church finances and properties. If one opens the web page of the archdiocese of Goa [http://tinyurl.com/ok4as2] it is painfully striking to see only priests in charge of all the diocesan bodies. One wonders if there are no competent, responsible and willing lay people who could be trusted to undertake some of those tasks and relieve the dwindling number of priests for pastoral priestly ministries? Why has the Church failed to devolve its temporal responsibilities to the faithful at all levels? Does not the Gospel command "Go and teach" also include "Go and learn"? It would only make the Church more credible in our times and times to come. We will not have to hear the gruesome tales such as those that are coming out these days in the world media about the traditionally pious church hierarchy of Ireland.

## Tongue in Cheek

With the elections over, and the people having given their mandate, the task of government formation was now at hand. A jubilant Sonia Gandhi and the ever-smiling Manmohan Singh (the soft-spoken Prime Minister has not stopped smiling ever since the poll results were declared) jointly chaired the meeting called to form the next government.

It is believed that both Sonijai and Manmohanji take every decision jointly – one of the hallmarks of an alliance, even if they belong to the same party. All the leaders of the various political parties were invited for the meet. These included those which formed the pre-poll alliance as well as those who want to be included in the post-poll alliance. Each leader was given two minutes to speak.

**Sharad Pawar:** I never wanted to be the Prime Minister of the country. The press has misquoted me. Indeed Singh is King! Being in the pre-poll alliance my party will give all the support to the Congress to form the Government. But then if Sonijai feels that there is need for a change, I am always there to become the Prime Minister. I am always at her service and the service of the country.

**Lalu Prasad Yadav:** Sorry, Manmohanji and Sonijai. I listened to my wife Rabri Devi and spoke against the Congress Party before the elections. I

take back my words. I have only three MPs from my party apart from myself. They want me to become the Railway Minister. Actually I am not in the least interested. But if Sonijai wishes me to become the Railway Minister, I won't say no. Otherwise I will go back to my farm and tend to my buffaloes. They need me.

The two Singhs, Amar Singh and Mulayam Singh, were nowhere to be seen.

**Sonia Gandhi:** Where are Amar Singh and Mulayam Singh?  
**Manmohan Singh:** They are outside the conference hall. They say that they will give outside support to the government.

Mayawati was peeping in through the window.  
**Sonijai:** What is Mayawati doing there?

**Manmohanji:** She has also pledged outside support to the government. These leaders have done so badly in the elections that they do not want to show their faces in public.

Deve Gowda was seen dozing in his chair. Someone woke him up. He got up from his chair while still almost half asleep.

**Deve Gowda:** I want to become the Prime Minister, I want to become the Prime Minister!  
He went back to sleep.

## Forming an Alliance

By Adelmo Fernandes

A wheelchair was brought into the hall. In it was seated the DMK supreme Karunanidhi. He was hiding his emotions behind dark glasses. He spoke in chaste Tamil. Neither Sonijai nor Manmohanji could make head or tail of what he was saying. An interpreter was called in.

**Karunanidhi:** I do not want to become the next Prime Minister. But for my party's support I want seven ministerial berths for my MPs.

**Mamata Banerjee:** who till now had kept a low profile suddenly got up. **Mamata Banerjee:** This is ridiculous. If Karunanidhi wants seven ministerial berths for his party, I want fourteen. I want double of what he is getting.

Mamata got up and left the meeting in a huff.

**Mamta Banerjee:** I am going back home. If Sonijai wants my support, let her send a chartered plane for all my MPs and not just for me.

There were two unfamiliar faces in the meeting. Sonijai inquired as to who they were. She was told by Pranab Mukherjee that they were from the BJP and had deserted their party.

In the corner was a tall handsome man who was raising his hand, trying to draw the attention of Sonijai.

**Unknown man:** Madam, madam, I am here. Please make me a minister. The tall and handsome man was our very own MP Francisco Sardinha.

## Letters to the Editor

## Double standards?

Sudhakar Naik, Taleigao

With reference to statements made by the Goa Government Employees Association (GGEA), regarding extensions/contractual appointments of retired government servants, we agree totally with the Association that there should not be extensions or contract appointments.

But is this applicable in all cases? If yes, then why did the Association not agitate when the brother of an office bearer of the Association was given extension of service last year, in the Directorate of Land Survey? Does the Association have different rules when it comes to the kin of office bearers? We are not against this extension, but the principle demands that the Association should have agitated last year and denied extension to him. Similarly, why has the Association

gone all out this year to agitate? Are they targeting somebody on a communal basis? So many contract appointments are given in GSIDC and that too, to non-Goans. Why did the Association not agitate all these years?

Our government, under Shri Digambar Kamat, is doing fine work, and giving extension and contract appointments only in rare and deserving cases. Most of the cases are rejected by our Chief Minister. It is completely the discretion of the government to grant extensions in the rarest cases (in public interest) and we should not challenge it.

We, therefore request M.L. Shetkar, President of the Association, who is basically a good person, to examine case by case, instead of agitating first, why the government has granted extensions/contract appointments to a deserving few. We think the Association should concentrate on better issues and take up the cause of 58000 employees, to give them benefit, rather than wasting time and energy to fight against 20-odd retired employees.

## Ill-trained police

Julius Carvalho, Dubai

Your news report titled 'Journos Aids Police in locating Clue' (*Herald*, 21 May) is an eye-opener to the Home Minister, the DGP and IGP that most Goa police personnel, at all levels, do not have knowledge how to conduct *panchanamas* at crime or accident sites.

Recently one of my neighbours was killed under a Konkani Railway train at Canacona, and his body was badly mutilated to such an extent that it was unrecognisable. The Goa Police personnel who came to conduct the *panchanama* collected the body parts and transferred them to the Panjim morgue, presuming he was a migrant. They failed to collect his T-shirt, sandals and other personal items, which were the only things by which he could have been identified.

After a tiring search for their missing relative, the next morning his kin went to the incident site after hearing that a person had been killed under the Konkani Railway. There they found his T-shirt and sandals, which helped end their search, and enabled them to give an immediate decent burial to his mutilated body.

Is this the way the Goa Police personnel are

## Letter of the Day

## Benefiting the builders' lobby

Orlando S A Da Silva, Carmona

With reference to your interesting editorial 'A bitter harvest' (*Herald*, 22 May), I would like to make some points.

Nature has bestowed Goa with thousands of lakes and ponds, which were for centuries repaired and maintained by the comunidades and the governments of the time, successfully maintaining the water tables of this wonderful land. Most of the villages in Goa used to grow more than two crops of paddy and meet the food needs of the residents. Moreover, coconuts production was at its highest during those times. There was no water shortage and the local wells provided the drinking water requirements all the year round.

Since Liberation, successive elected governments of the state thought to ignore the necessity of maintenance of these lakes and ponds. Today, the result is the water table is in a very precarious condition, and people are not getting enough water for drinking, leave alone for agriculture. Today our command areas are destroyed by mindless construction and mining.

To me, the idea of the present Government to have a subsidy scheme for individual households and commercial complexes to harvest rain water is another way to help the *khaas admi* and not the *aam admi*.

In my opinion, there is a black cat in the bag of the Government. They want to benefit the builders' lobby that fills its coffers at the time of obtaining licenses. I will appreciate it if the government comes out with a scheme to de-silt and maintain each and every lake and pond existing in the state through the local Panchayats by providing special finances to bring up the depleted water tables.

A scheme of rainwater harvesting subsidy, if required, should be only for the individual households who are harvesting water to upgrade the existing inefficient water supply scheme of the government, and not for the commercial complexes. Under no circumstances, should commercial builders be beneficiaries of the scheme, thus diverting taxpayers' money.

In Panjim pork sausages which were sold for Rs 220 per kg two months ago are now being sold for Rs 250 per kg.

Obviously there is no slackening in demand.

## Cellphone etiquette

Christina Pinto, Calangute

Reading the letter by Errol D'Souza titled 'Cell-phone Courtesy' (*Herald*, 22 May), I have reached the conclusion that there should be an etiquette manual for cell phone users. There are guidelines for social greetings, conversations and table manners. Humans need guidelines by which they may go about their lives without offending others.

The case of cellphone interruptions in church is not only annoying but appalling. Any place, where people have gathered – be it for a play, a movie or a lecture – is a space that should be

respected and one should avoid disturbing others. Owning a cellphone does not entitle anyone to exercise free speech whenever and wherever they feel like it, and disturb others in their activities.

Just the other day, I was 'serenaded' by some teenage boys who were singing along with their mobile headphones stuck into their ears. They got to hear the presumably good music beat while all I got was the badly mangled version of the words. Then, there are those who carry on conversations while travelling on the bus.

An urgent request to all cell phone users: until an etiquette manual becomes available, try to set your own neighbor-friendly standards for yourself.

## Corruption understood

Paul Fernandes, Chimbel

These days, every single petty matter is taken up before the courts. If the courts have become administrative offices for the government officials, then what is the sense of having such uneducated officials? The Court should come down heavily on such officials, to the extent of terminating their services, if found to be negligent. The government can entrust the inefficient departments to private stakeholders, whereby all the inefficient and unqualified staff will be thrown out.

The law and order situation is deteriorating in Goa. The politicians behave as if they are above the law. The police have shown that they are capable of bending the law. Corruption has become common place, and common citizens are suffering.

The Police Department should be taken away from the Home Department and handed over to the Governor of Goa. That is the only way in which some order can be brought about in the current chaotic situation.

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

## On Tolerance

By E M Forster (1941)

The world is very full of people – appallingly full: it has never been so full before, and they are all tumbling over each other. Most of these people one doesn't know and some of them one doesn't like; doesn't like the colour of their skins, say, or the shapes of their noses, or the way they blow them or don't blow them, or the way they talk, or their smell, or their clothes, or their fondness for jazz or their dislike of jazz, and so on. Well, what is one to do? There are two solutions. One of them is the Nazi solution. If you don't like people, kill them, banish them, segregate them, and then strut up and down proclaiming that you are the salt of the earth. The other way is much less thrilling, but it is on the whole the way of the democracies, and I prefer it. If you don't like people, put up with them as well as you can. Don't try to love them: you can't, you'll only strain yourself. But try to tolerate them. On the basis of that tolerance a civilized future may be built. Certainly I can see no other foundation for the post-war world. [...]

I don't then regard tolerance as a great eternally established divine principle, though I might perhaps quote "In my Father's house are many mansions" in support of such a view. It is just a makeshift, suitable for an overcrowded and overheated planet. It carries on when love gives out, and love generally gives out as soon as we move away from our home and our friends and stand among strangers in a queue for potatoes. Tolerance is wanted in the queue; otherwise we think, "Why will people be so slow?"; it is wanted in the tube, or "Why will people be so fat?"; it is wanted at the telephone, or "Why are they so deaf?"; or conversely, "Why do they mumble?" It is wanted in the street, in the office, at the factory, and it is wanted above all between classes, races, and nations. It's dull. And yet it entails imagination. For you have all the time to be putting yourself in someone else's place. Which is a desirable spiritual exercise....