



In Goa the answer to the question would be: to facilitate the building-construction industry any which way possible, including allowing building on agricultural lands and coasts, killing every river for dredging sand, and planning to rebuild supposedly-destroyed temples of which it has no proof. Is there anything else?

No. Goans are, in fact, habituated to accusing the government of being useless, especially during the monsoons. The rains that arrive in Goa every year have always been celebrated by inhabitants of this land, probably from times immemorial. These days, in the era of climate change and unpredictable weather conditions, they are still a joy, not to mention a gigantic relief from the increasing powerful heat of summer. But the rains also increasingly mean a lot of small and large disasters. Flooded roads, overflowing drains, leaking roofs, collapsing buildings (both public and private), falling trees, electricity outages, vehicle crashes, individual falls, the list can go on. All of this is caused by the rains – so we are told – but almost everybody knows that it is also because of neglect of our public and private infrastructure, by the authorities.

It is now routine: we complain and we curse, but the neglect continues and at a fundamental level. The result is not just inconvenience but a collapse in the quality of life, in what is supposed to be the richest per capita state of India.

For example, schools. The recent national evaluation of education across states, shows that Goa's position is falling. And this cannot surprise anyone; the ongoing survey by O Heraldo across Goa reveals that school infrastructure is literally crumbling. Schools in Pernem have been leaking for years. Canacona schools are not just leaking; many are so dangerously dilapidated that they are being abandoned. The latter is also true for Bardez which reportedly has 35 deserted schools.

Isn't it the job of the state's education department to maintain and protect school buildings, and, in fact, to improve and upgrade their facilities? Where are the funds of these departments being used? How can so many school-buildings actually crumble without complete, sustained, and deliberate negligence by the government? And that too a government which spends crores on building statues of Parshuram and other worthies, for tourists to take selfies with? What we clearly have is a state policy of letting schools fall to pieces.

Another school issue which was in the news recently, was about the midday meal scheme. The Self-Help Groups (SHGs), comprising mainly village women, whose services were engaged to make healthy meals for school students, have reportedly not been paid for six

months – yes, six whole months. Meanwhile, kids in Pernem are now being given processed junk foods like biscuits as their so-called midday meal.

Do we really need a government?

The quality of buildings and meals are not of course the only complaints one can make about Goan schools, and the whole schooling system of India. There are also substandard facilities, insufficient teachers, increasing grip of Hindutva ideas, and caste biases of teachers, parents, and institutions. But surely the very minimum is to have a functional building? And students who are not hungry? But the Goan government is not interested.

Like schools, so also public transport, another area critical to public well-being which should be one of the top concerns of even any halfway-decent government. But while the government expends crores on road-widening, and even more on bridges, flyovers, and bypasses, it appears to have zero interest in public transport. In fact, services in many places – like the Panjim ferryboat to Betim – are on the decline.

The recent news was about the drivers of electric buses of the state Kadamba bus service, who are on strike for better wages – Rs 15,000 a month instead of the Rs 12,000 they currently get. One cannot help but ask: is even 15,000 a reasonable monthly salary? Given the fact that top officers in the Goa government take home much more than one lakh a month, we can safely say that it is not. Rs 15,000 a month is a very humble salary, but the government's response is to warn the drivers against striking, and to declare that the issue of pay is not a government issue at all. Why not? Because these drivers are supposedly employed by a private contractor, in order to drive government buses. This is the norm nowadays, so that the government can save money, presumably for the fat salaries and perks of its own top officers, along with more statues.

Let us come back to the bus drivers, who have justified their demand for better pay by reminding the government that they regularly do double shifts. But why? Because there are insufficient drivers, clearly again to save money. In the process, what we get are drivers who have a high chance of falling asleep at the wheel. After all, this is a driver who is not in the best shape, given that his household survives on 12,000 a month – which makes the chance of sleeping on the job even more likely. This last month saw exactly this kind of 'accident', though outside Goa, in which 24 passengers died. In other countries, such an incident would bring the government, or at least a minister or two, down; here it is immediately blamed on 'human error', viz. the driver.

Are these ministers and bureaucrats all so stupid that they do not understand that asking bus-drivers to do double-shifts means risking the lives of the driver himself along with all his passengers, not to mention everybody else on the road, every single time? But it is like the collapsing schools: they don't care.

This attitude can be seen all across Goa, in the case of every essential public facility. So Health Minister Rane may autocratically suspend a rude nurse or two for the cameras, but he completely ignores the crippling and systemic problems of seriously insufficient staff and substandard infrastructure at every Goan public health centre. Goa has become a good example of a failed state - a government that does nothing that democratically-elected governments are supposed to do for the welfare of the people, but exists for the sole purpose of profiting its own personnel and their cronies, even fostering a culture of government employment solely for personal benefits. But, if fundamental public welfare issues, such as food, mass education, public transport, public health, and decent earnings are ignored, why does the ordinary Goan need a government at all? To see crores spent on more statues?

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