

Whenever I meet Goans whose kids have just completed either high school or graduation, and ask about what they hoped to do now, the response is pretty standard: a government job would be best, but who can afford it? We don't have the money to pay for a government job. Who is Vishwajit?

So, who is surprised by the cash-for-jobs scam that is all over the media these days? No Goan, for sure. The sale of government jobs for hefty prices has been common knowledge all over Goa for ages. The only reason why it came out into the news now seems to be that the jobs are drying up, so that people who pay good money are getting nothing in return. And also, perhaps, because the numbers of people directly involved in either the buying or the sale of the proposed jobs has grown so humongous, that the failure of the racket had to happen, sooner or later. In other words, from a racket of selling actual jobs, i.e. the old problem of the middleman, it has become a scam selling fake jobs and on a vast scale, involving multiple players, aides, and sub-aides, and running into crores.

And who believes that this racket was only limited to these arrested nobodies? Given the gigantic scale of operations, the huge amounts of money crossing hands, and the number of government employees involved, there is no way that the highest echelons of power could be unaware of what was happening. Already some of the scamsters have turned out to be prominent members or former members of the ruling BJP. There is now a complaint against BJP MLA Ganesh Gaonkar, accusing him of asking for money for a job. More such complaints are surely in the offing. But the biggest name showed up early, with the Congress party has asked for an investigation into the identity of the 'Vishwajit' allegedly mentioned by one of the arrested scamsters. This last news sent former Chief Minister (CM) Digambar Kamat scurrying to give a clean chit to Vishwajit Rane, claiming that he had never heard any complaint against the latter when he himself was CM. Rane incidentally presides over, not one, but three of the departments (Town and Country Planning, Health, and Forests) embroiled in the scam, with false appointment letters purportedly from these departments supplied by the scamsters to their victims. But how interesting to see Digambar Kamat, himself an accused in the multi-crore Louis Berger corruption case, playing this fire-fighting role - if a scandal-ridden political turncoat like him is considered the best person to hand out certificates of honesty and integrity, one knows what kind of government we are dealing with.

The issue at the heart of the scam, however, is that of jobs. Goa happens to have one of the highest rates of unemployment among Indian states: 8.9% against the national rate of 4.5%, according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey 2023-24 report brought out by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, National Sample Survey Office. Goa also happens to be a state with a government which, far from trying to create jobs, always tries to trash the data about unemployment. The government is on record for stating that Goans registered

in the employment exchange are actually working in the private sector – i.e. they are not unemployed but just want government jobs.

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So, basically, the government expects that people registered at the employment exchange should be just sitting and twiddling their thumbs? Doesn't everybody have to work somewhere or the other, to keep themselves and their families afloat? This society has no shortage of horribly paid and hugely disrespected jobs – this is something the government can take credit for — but the point of an employment exchange is to supply decent jobs that at least follow the law when it comes to salary and working conditions.

People like Goa's CM Pramod Sawant regularly try to shame those seeking government jobs, despite himself benefiting from all the comforts that come from holding high government position. And, as I have pointed out before, there is actually nothing wrong in wanting a government job, especially in a country like India, and a state like Goa, where private-sector employment is another term for intensive exploitation, unless you are at some very high-level post. Otherwise – whether it is a big company, or a new 'start-up', or some form of personal service – all private jobs tend to be insecure, miserably paid, and without any benefits, leave aside comforts. Why should anyone be satisfied with such jobs? And isn't it the job of the government to see that people are well-employed?

But doing their job is not something that our governments are good at. And so Goans naturally vie for the only decent jobs going, which are government ones. The only other way to earn a respectable income and in respectable conditions is to vote with one's feet, which again is derided by the powers-that-be as the 'Portuguese passport mentality'. Who can forget former CM Pratapsingh Rane mocking Goans for 'cleaning toilets' abroad? Someone should inform Rane Senior that cleaning toilets is not just a decently-paid job in civilised societies, but an honourable one – certainly far more honourable than extracting a hefty pension from the public, that too after enjoying the perks and privileges of power for decades.

As for this cash-for-jobs scam, it is just one more in the host of gigantic illegalities that this government has been presiding over. After all, it was no less than Goa's Governor, the constitutional head of the government, who declared some years ago that Goa's government under Pramod Sawant was the most corrupt one he had ever encountered. With a certificate like that, we need not be surprised at anything.

So, who is Vishwajit? Do we really care? No, because it doesn't matter. Because this is really not about one or two villains lining their pockets without anybody knowing. This is about an entire government busy selling, not just jobs, but each and every last bit of Goa.

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