



By DALE LUIS MENEZES

Power Failures and Power Politics

From April onwards, there have been several power failures in the state; they are not over yet. At the beginning of June, it became crystal clear that the cause of the power failures was not just faulty and aging equipment, but also gross mismanagement by the electricity department. Goans even learnt that to keep a particular big time corporate builder happy, the department had decided that an entire taluka could suffer a day-and-a-half without power.

One can think of the frequent power failures as a metaphor for the sorry state of affairs in Goa. Every year one witnesses a spectacular display of inefficiency in the management of public infrastructure by the administration. At other times, the administration deliberately denies the public services and utilities as it happened when two of the Panjim-Betim ferries were used for the benefit of casinos. There is no accountability and no one has been able to hold the administration accountable for simple and basic services. The result is quite plainly visible - flooded streets, overflowing sewage, leaking roofs of public schools, snapped electric cables, damaged footpaths, and general chaos all around.

One needs to ask why does such chaos, emerging from mismanagement and an unaccountable administration, recur every year? The reason is that the elected representatives - across party and ideological lines - have failed to provide the leadership that the positions they occupy demand. I am not making an argument that perfunctorily blames politicians - or corruption - in general. But what I am suggesting is that there is a particular systemic problem within the administrative system with the elected representatives having abandoned completely the idea of public good. If we would turn the formulation on its head, corruption results because elected representatives have abdicated responsibility, trust, and accountability - or public interest so vital for the system. One could think of elected representatives in the past as crafting the Constitution, or formulating land reform laws in Goa as promoting ideas of public good.

Abandoning ideas of public good has consequences for the administrative machinery. One has to understand that the administration can be divided into two broad sections: the

executive, which is occupied by the elected representatives and the cabinet ministers; and the bureaucrats or the government servants, who are employed to run the administrative machinery, which includes the implementation of the policies and laws that the executive formulates.

If we consider the incident wherein the whole of the Tiswadi taluka was left without power, it appears that certain decisions were made by the Power Minister (the executive) without taking the concerned bureaucracy into confidence (or without informing them properly). Alternately, one can suggest that the bureaucracy did not properly respond to the decisions of the executive. Sample this: when news of the builder being unfairly favored emerged, the Chief Engineer of the Electricity Department admitted that he had no knowledge of the work being carried out. Given the fact that there is a stop work order from 2017, the bureaucracy should not have allowed the workers to go ahead with the work since due process was not followed. In any case, the Department was not prepared to undertake the work of such proportions, and one doesn't know who exactly gave the orders to commence the work.

Goa may have many leaders with thousands of supporters, and who shower them with countless favors, but the fact is that once in power - in ministries, or in legislature/parliament, where it matters the most - they are rarely able to run the affairs of the state efficiently. Contrast this with the spectacular display of promises and popular support during the campaigning for elections. Also, consider the situation immediately after the results are declared, when cutthroat power negotiations take place. All these theatrics give the impression that the political class wields immense power to change the world for the better, but that isn't necessarily the case. Indeed, they do wield very real and tangible power but that is often used (or misused) for private gain and to further the interests of big businesses.

Perhaps, the rot goes deeper considering the fact that the elected representatives are rarely seen conducting the business of the state inside the parliament/legislature, or through the administrative system. It is becoming increasingly clear that more and more politicians spend their time in election rallies than anywhere else. For one reason or the other (legitimately or not) sessions of Parliament or the Legislative Assembly have been wiped out. In Goa, for instance, there wasn't a single cabinet meeting held for the last three months. The important budget session was conducted in an unprecedented rush because the Chief Minister was ill. If

any laws have been passed in the last 4 or 5 years, they are done so without any public discussion. Many of these laws are detrimental for the people and the environment.



It is important that citizens extract accountability from the administration; emphasize that the affairs of the state be conducted through proper channels like the legislature and local governing bodies. One can suggest that if the system is collapsing – or not functioning properly – it is largely because the persons in the administration have not ensured that it runs smoothly. The elected representatives, and to a lesser extent government servants, do not seem interested in upholding public interest. Selling off public resources – and therefore public interest – to the highest bidder today is the norm. The manner in which power is expressed in our society needs to change, one that privileges public interest and not private gain.

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