

O HERALDO

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Transparency, accountability needed with public funds

Union Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari has a special affection for Goa. Whether it's helping the BJP come to power in Goa by securing the support of other MLAs, even when 13 BJP MLAs were elected, or overseeing the construction of multi-crore flyovers and highway projects connecting Goa to South India, Gadkari has been a key figure in the state's development. In his speeches, he often claims that there is no shortage of funds—just decide on a project, and the money is available! Recently, Gadkari visited Goa, inaugurating the Vasco flyover worth Rs 645 crore and laying the foundation for five new projects worth Rs 4,200 crore. It would not be wrong to say that Nitin Gadkari is a major source of funding for Goa. Thousands of crores are being allocated solely for roads and bridges.

There is no doubt that Goa is an international tourism hub, and tourism is the backbone of its economy. For this, it is essential that Goa is equipped with proper infrastructure. However, these six-lane highways and flashy flyovers are not the only measure of development for Goa. It's crucial to examine how much, and in what way, these projects actually benefit the growth of Goa's tourism industry

While large-scale highways and bridges are being constructed, it's important to note that the number of road accidents and fatalities in Goa does not seem to be decreasing. As Transport Minister Mauvin Godinho had requested, Rs 100 crore was immediately sanctioned by Gadkari to address the dangerous 'black spots' on highways that lead to accidents. But how many of these black spots have been removed so far? How much money has been spent? The government has not provided any public accountability on this matter. In fact, Mauvin Godinho has been evading responsibility, citing the absence of Public Works Department officials at road safety committee meetings.

There are plans, and there is funding. But without resistance to poor administration, there will be no proper implementation. The Chief Minister, who claimed that Goa received Rs 40,000 crore in the last 11 years, should be seriously concerned that nearly Rs 150 crore of funds allocated to MLAs in his own state remain unspent by the end of the year. After a review meeting on the implementation of the last budget, it was revealed that 24 government departments spent only 30% of their sanctioned funds, and nearly Rs 1,200 crore remains unutilised. Whose fault is this? Who needs to take control of the administration? Does this not contradict the grand development projects like the Divya Highway and flyovers that cost thousands of crores?

Gadkari has clearly stated that after the completion of these large-scale infrastructure projects, Goa will experience a record increase in tourism. However, Goa does not have a master plan to manage this influx. And he's right. The planning for a master plan is still far from completion. Moreover, the government has failed to follow through on its plan to transform the capital city, Panaji, into a smart city within the proposed timeline. It is a clear government failure that ordinary citizens have had to approach the High Court for this issue. Despite opposition, the government has permitted the EDM festival to take place in the name of tourism development, while the essential app-based taxi service required by tourists is still not operational. This is the state of planning and will under this government.

Former Union Minister Suresh Prabhu, during his last visit to Goa, advised the state to build as many projects as it can afford. However, the current government seems unwilling to take this advice seriously. This is primarily because most of Goa's land has been acquired by large capitalists from Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Haryana. Considering the rich prefer Goa as a second home, these capitalists have invested billions of rupees in Goa through mega projects—multi-million-dollar six- to eight-lane highways, flyovers, casinos, and cheap alcohol all serve as attractions for the wealthy with second homes. Sadly, the original 'Bhumiputra' (sons of the soil) of Goa are fast disappearing from the map.

Twitter World

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Republic is not just the absence of monarchy; it is the rejection of arbitrary power in all forms—political, social, and economic. Radical republicanism is the core philosophy of our constitution.

comment



BY BLAISE COSTABIR

Recently, the electricity department went into overdrive and commenced severing various cables without prior notice or thoughtful consideration. It seemed to revolve around the unilateral decision of a department official, as the Chief Electrical Engineer explicitly stated that cable severing was not a Statewide mandate



The GTI policy, among other facets, mandated that Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and Local Cable Operators (LCO) register and remit an annual fee of Rs 3 per meter of fiber installed on electricity poles. The primary aim was to streamline operations; however, due to the financial burden imposed, many operators opted not to register or conceal their networks. With no subsequent evaluations conducted, this led to the current chaotic situation of cables entangled on electrical poles. Consequently, there are numerous inactive cables either due to operators ceasing operations or consumers transitioning to alternative networks. The absence of a cable identification system linked to the operators results in a lack of incentive to remove these inactive cables, as it entails

Provide underground ducts for internet cables

In a significant ruling on Wednesday, the High Court of Bombay at Goa reportedly dismissed a Civil Application filed by the Goa Cable TV Networking and Service Providers Association, thereby allowing the Electricity Department to proceed with the removal of illegally strung cables on electricity poles across the state.

It is a fact the cables hanging from the poles posed a threat to public safety especially to vehicular traffic and the linesmen who have to climb the electricity poles for maintenance work besides providing an ugly site. Cable operators play a crucial role in providing reliable access to television channels.

However, Internet Service Providers (ISPs) are important because they allow people to access the internet and other services. ISPs allow people to access information online, such as news, entertainment, and educational resources. Customers can surf the web, shop online, conduct business, and connect with family and friends.

These services can encompass healthcare, finance, corporate world and more. It seems prudent to have underground ducts for the internet cables as has been done in the city of Vasco. When underground cabling is being carried out for electricity wires across the state, a separate duct could also be provided for the internet cables.

Underground cables are less susceptible to weather-related

Whose cable, what goes?

We have become accustomed to waking up and finding our internet connection dysfunctional. There are numerous technical factors at play, but recently, the issue seems to stem from a lack of coordination between the IT, Electricity departments and Internet Service Providers (ISP). One might even describe it as a display of one-upmanship. Consequently, it is the general populace and commercial sector that are adversely affected, though no fault of their own. In today's world, an internet connection is akin to salt – its presence may go unnoticed, but its absence is immediately felt. The internet connection has rightfully earned the status of an indispensable service. The Modi Government is advocating for a cashless economy, and without a reliable internet connection, this objective cannot be realized. Therefore, it is imperative for the government to take decisive action and prioritize resolving this issue. It is important to separate cable TV operations from internet service providers, as the latter is declared an essential service.

The most recent incident involved the severing of all cables by the electricity department, again. Earlier, in July 2024, the cables were inadvertently cut while the electricity department officials were trimming trees around the electric infrastructure. This issue sparked a significant outcry, leading the ISP's to be instructed to adhere to the Goa Telecom Infrastructure (GTI) Policy of 2020 by September 2024.

additional costs, which the policy does not account for.

Recently, the electricity department went into overdrive and commenced severing various cables without prior notice or thoughtful consideration. It seemed to revolve around the unilateral decision of a department official, as the Chief Electrical Engineer explicitly stated that cable severing was not a Statewide mandate. This action of cutting cables not only led to financial losses for the operators but also disrupted an essential service - the internet.

The department's rationale for severing the cables appeared justified initially. Firstly, certain service providers had neglected payment to the department for over three years. Secondly, the haphazard installation of cables on the poles posed safety risks to electricity department personnel, potentially causing pole collapse. Unbeknownst to many in the department, the responsibility of fee collection had been outsourced to Vincent Graphics, as a revenue sharing model. This agency was tasked with collecting rent for the pole usage by operators. Therefore, if an operator failed to remit the rent, their cables could be subject to action. However, the indiscriminate cutting of all cables was deemed unacceptable as it disrupted an essential service and included those who had paid. The department should show similar zeal when it comes to illegal connections.

The Goa Cable TV Networking and Service Providers Association petitioned the High Court for intervention. In response, the High Court directed the members to submit individual applications in accordance with "The Telecommunications (Right of Way) Rules 2024," which were enforced nationwide starting January 1, 2025. These regulations were officially published in the Gazette of India in September 2024 and are an integral part of the Telecommunication Act of 2023. Consequently, they override the Goa Government's GTI Policy and render the revenue sharing agreement with Vincent Graphics ineffective. The "right of way" rules clearly delineate permissible charges, set at a modest rate of just Rs 100 per pole per year. Significantly, the High Court questioned the Department regarding the prolonged delay in dismantling the existing above-ground cable network, which remains unregistered. The department faces a daunting task of ensuring judicious compliance due to the lack of cable identification. Moving forward, it will be imperative to mandate service providers to label their cables, and those that are unused must be removed under penalty of fines.

Yours truly was in China recently and despite having a

robust internet network, it is very clear that they are doing it without the ugly mess of overhead cables we see out here. It would be nice if our policymakers studied the Chinese model so that our cities and villages do not become eyesores with cables hanging haphazardly from every pole with joints encased inside a makeshift plastic water bottle used as a protection against rain. The Information Technology Department, Electricity Department, and Service providers must collaborate effectively to prevent Goa from being marred by unsightly cables haphazardly strewn about. It may be imperative to engage the Public Works Department in the endeavour to bury cables underground and incorporate ducts into new road constructions. It is disconcerting that despite the development of a smart city in Panaji, there is a glaring absence of provisions for cable ducts.

A major network remained unaffected by the cable-cutting incident due to their strategic placement of cables underground. Their towers, although sometimes erroneously positioned such as the one adjacent to the South Goa district hospital, are strategically erected in key locations. Is there any regulatory body overseeing the placement of these towers? The government could potentially solicit bids for an agency to replicate infrastructure similar to theirs, allowing for rental on a revenue-sharing basis to other ISPs lacking the capacity for such development. The concern arises that if another financially robust provider initiates operations in Goa and undertakes underground cabling, the lack of cable markers embedded in the roads could lead to inadvertent cutting of cables already embedded, leaving the Public Works Department, responsible for granting permission, in a state of perplexity. Hence, this too needs to be addressed now, rather than later.

On one hand, there is an operator who has positioned their cables at their discretion, while on the other hand, cable operators are facing penalties for the same actions. It is imperative for the Government to establish a level playing field to ensure uninterrupted service for the consumers and an environment that allows the business to grow and flourish in an organised manner. A task force comprising representatives from the Electricity Department, the IT Department, PWD, and relevant industry organizations should convene for a collaborative session to ensure seamless and coordinated operations moving forward.

(The author prefers to write rather than chat in a balcao)

letterstotheeditor

For letters to the editor contact us at editor@herald-goa.com.

All letters must contain correct postal address and telephone number. Letters are liable to be edited for brevity.

Release funds for DSSS beneficiaries

The Dayanand Social Security Scheme beneficiaries such as senior citizens and widows are complaining that they have not received their dues for several months and this delay truly reflects on the careless attitude of the government that claims to be doing everything in the interest of the Goans.

Having said that, I hope the concerned authorities will immediately release these funds to the DSSS beneficiaries accounts as early as possible.

Alexandrina Soares, Margao

Historic triumph for Indian PD Cricket Team

Kudos to the Indian physical disability men's cricket team who won the PD T20 champions trophy cup defeating England in the final. These cricketers by winning the cup despite their physical disability have shown us that there is nothing that is impossible in this world. They are in fact role models to the new generation proving the saying "where there is a will there is a way".

The team's exceptional preparation and excellent performance in the final has helped them clinch the trophy. The team under the guidance of the Differently Abled Cricket Council

of India rose to every challenge and all the members played with heart, determination, and spirit throughout the tournament winning everyone's heart.

M Pradyu, Kannur

Ensure adequate education to all

There are lakhs of children for whom education is a luxury. Gender equality and poverty eradication are possible through equitable and quality distribution of education. Almost 250 million youngsters are unable to attend schools. Empowering people and fostering peace through "education and learning" cannot be overstressed.

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations (UN) has called for free and compulsory elementary education to all. Right to education is one of the seventeen sustainable development goals (SDG) that the top humanitarian body of the world—the UN—hopes to achieve by the year 2030.

According to the UN, education has the power to reduce inequalities, improve health and protect and promote sustainable environment. Hate speech, xenophobia and intolerance can be fought with the powerful tool called education. Education and knowledge can do a world of difference to men and women in oppressed

people'sedit

WE ALL PAY TAXES

BY CHANDER GUPTA

Few years ago, I bought new tyres for my modest old sedan. I had bought this car in 2008 and got the tyres replaced with new ones for the first time after 12 years. Expensive? You decide for yourself as I had to shell out Rs 3400/- a piece (inclusive of GST). When I looked at the invoice, I felt a bit of shock. The GST rate was 28%. The cost of the tyre was Rs2656/- and the amount of GST thereon Rs744/-. For the cost of 5 car tyres, I had to shell out Rs3720/- as GST! I never thought that car tyres were a luxury item to warrant a GST rate of 28%.

This particular experience of buying tyres evoked the memory of 18% GST that salons charge on haircuts. Another GST memory came to the fore. Around 6 years back I booked a hotel room online for my outstation travel. The room tariff was Rs 6999/- per night plus GST of 18%. I was a bit intrigued by this rate of 6999/- My enquiries revealed that it was to circumvent GST rate of 28% which was levied on room tariffs of Rs 7000/- and above. Goods and Services Tax (GST) is an indirect tax. Indirectly every citizen is contributing to national exchequer.

Once I bought soda bottles from a grocery store alongside other items. I made the payment with my card and without perusing the bill on the spot, I headed home with my merchandise and the printed invoice. At ease once home, I perused the invoice as I generally do. The soda was taxed at 40%. Aghast, I called the store for clarification as the maximum slab of GST was 28%. The store owner patiently enlightened me that there was 12% additional cess besides 28% GST on aerated drinks.

Unlike Income Tax, which is a Direct Tax, GST does not reflect in our PAN. We know how much Income Tax we pay in a fiscal year, but there is no mechanism to take credit for indirect taxes. Most of the Indians who pay more of indirect taxes than direct tax are oblivious of their contribution. Our telephone bills, both landline and mobile, are GSTed at 18%. GST is added to prices of almost all goods that we buy and services we avail. The average will come to around 20%. Mind you, liquor and petrol/diesel are outside the purview of GST. Taxes on petrol/diesel are actually much more than even the highest slab of GST i.e., 28%. These indirect taxes, which are levied when we go to spend, are in addition to the Income Tax that we pay on our income. The rate of income tax on taxable income from Rs 300001 to Rs 1500000 is upto 20% and the tax rate for income beyond Rs15 lacs is 30%. Middle class persons earning Rs. 100000 or more per month are paying approximately 50% of their income in taxes, direct and indirect. Even those whose incomes are low and not subject to income tax are contributing to tax kitty by way of GST/VAT.

Generally, only those who pay income tax are called taxpayers. This is a misconception. All those who might be paying taxes through GST/VAT, not to forget toll-taxes, are also taxpayers.

areas of the globe.

They can be the "difference" their forefathers could not be. Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), International Day of Education on January 24, therefore, assumes great significance.

Ganapathi Bhat, Akola

Draft regulations are outside UGC's dominion

Education, being a subject in the Concurrent List of the Constitution implies shared responsibility between the Centre and the States. But the latest UGC draft regulations appear to centralize authority by giving Governors, as Chancellors of most State universities, greater control over the selection of VCs. This seems to be an unprecedented move and such endeavours smack of a sinister political intervention by the ruling dispensation in the recruitment process and career advancement of teachers.

Needless to say it also undermines the federal principles in education. Draft regulations are outside UGC's jurisdiction, especially in so far as the appointment of Vice Chancellors of public universities are concerned. In fact, UGC is only a regulatory body, which also should have been wound up by now going by the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 guidelines. That the same has not happened speaks volumes of the clout of the UGC's bureaucracy aided and abetted by the ruling BJP.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, Chennai