

O HERALDO

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Public hearings or public ignorance?

In the last two days, two significant statements have come from two prominent leaders in Goa. Chief Minister Pramod Sawant and former Railway Minister Suresh Prabhu. Both statements reflect contrasting views on Goa's development trajectory, raising fundamental questions about governance, public participation, and the price of progress.

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, speaking at a programme in Betul, accused certain groups of deliberately opposing development projects and hindering progress. He remarked that while critics are quick to highlight the dust pollution caused by mining, they ignore the financial benefits and employment it generates. According to Sawant, this opposition stems from a reluctance to see the upliftment of ordinary citizens. In contrast, Suresh Prabhu, speaking at the Shigmotsav programme in Quepem, emphasised that Goa's development must be carried out with the consent and involvement of the local population. He reminded the government of its legal obligation to hold public hearings before approving any major project, warning that failure to do so would make such projects vulnerable to legal challenges.

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This stark difference in perspectives underscores the widening gap between the government's development agenda and the people's right to be heard. While Sawant views opposition as a barrier to progress, Prabhu highlights the democratic deficit in the decision-making process. The most critical issue that Prabhu raised—public hearings—exposes a glaring flaw in Goa's development model. How many of the major projects approved in recent years have undergone public scrutiny?

Legally, public hearings and Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) are mandatory for mining, thermal power, and large infrastructure projects such as roads, highways, ports, and airports. Mining projects in Goa have faced public scrutiny, but infrastructure projects are often approved without consulting the affected communities. Why is this happening? Why are public hearings bypassed when projects threaten to alter the social and environmental fabric of the state?

Take the case of the proposed Borim Bridge. Farmers have consistently demanded an EIA and a public hearing, fearing that the project would destroy the centuries-old Khazan land, which serves as the backbone of their agricultural livelihood. Despite this, the government has proceeded with the project without addressing these concerns. The affected farmers have been forced to approach the National Green Tribunal (NGT) for relief. Instead of engaging with the local community, the government has chosen to delay presenting its case in court—effectively stalling the legal process while pushing ahead with the project.

A similar pattern of high-handedness can be seen in the controversial railway double-tracking project. Locals in Velsao claim that the land being used by the Railways for expansion is their ancestral property dating back to the Portuguese era. Their demand is simple: verify the ownership records before proceeding. But instead of addressing this legitimate concern, the railway authorities have gone ahead with landfilling and construction, cutting off access to local roads and damaging the residents' properties. The government's response? A familiar shrug of helplessness—claiming that they cannot interfere with railway work. This abdication of responsibility reflects a deeper governance failure. Public hearings were never held, and local voices were effectively silenced.

Against this backdrop, Sawant's statement that "development comes with dust" reflects a troubling mindset that pollution and environmental degradation are acceptable trade-offs for economic progress. This cavalier attitude toward environmental protection is mirrored in the State's growing legal battles over development projects. Numerous cases have been filed against the government in the High Court, challenging land acquisition, environmental damage, and procedural violations. The recent Bombay High Court ruling, striking down Section 17(2) of the Town Planning Act, is a clear rebuke of the government's tendency to bypass democratic norms to favour vested interests.

If Goa's development is to be truly inclusive, the government must abandon its dismissive stance toward public opposition. Projects that affect people's lives and livelihoods cannot be imposed without meaningful consultation and consensus. Development at the cost of democratic values and environmental stability is not progress—it is regression. Goa deserves better.

comment



AAKAR PATEL

Eleven year phenomenon

Napoleon was crowned in December 1804 and eleven years later, in June 1815, lost at Waterloo. In these

eleven years, he united Europe for the first time since Charlemagne had done so a thousand years before in 804. Napoleon achieved it through battlefield victories against the great military powers of his age, such as Prussia and Austria.

Deng Xiaoping was already an old man of 74 when he took charge in 1978. Eleven years later, he stepped down in 1989, the year of Tiananmen Square. Many people, including Singapore's leader Lee Kuan Yew, thought of him as the greatest man they had ever known, because of what he set out to achieve and then achieved in these eleven years. Deng discarded the Marxist views he had held for more than half a century and reformed China, setting it on the road it is today.

Eleven years is a long time. Or rather let us say it is sufficient time for a leader to make an impact. It is hard to find a person at any place on the planet and indeed at any time in history, who made a difference after his or her first decade. At best they may have continued doing what they were doing, but most often they take on a tired look. And sometimes they produce terrible outcomes. Deng's predecessor Mao is a good example of this phenomenon. After his first decade came famines induced by policy and violence. All of Indira Gandhi's achievements, whether they are classified as being good or bad, were implemented in her initial years. From bank nationalisation and the abolishing

of privy purses to the Bangladesh war. Then came the Emergency and in her last years the violence in Punjab.

In our time consider Turkey's Erdogan who has been in power since 2003, and Russia's Putin who has hung around for 25 years. Russia's per capita GDP when Putin took over was \$1700. Eleven years later, in 2011, it had risen to \$14,300. Today, another 14 years after that, it has fallen to \$13,800 according to the World Bank's data. Putin remains in office having presided over no economic growth for a decade and a half, and a war which has already eaten up the flower of Russia's youth and its future. Erdogan took over an economy that was at \$4600 per person in 2003 and took it to \$12,500 by 2013. Today it is still more or less at the same place. He hangs on nonetheless.

Jawaharlal Nehru spent his first decade building institutions which we still have around us. The Indian Institutes of Technology came in 1950 starting with Kharagpur, Bhabha Atomic Research Centre in 1954, the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in 1956, Indian Institutes of Management in 1961. In this period Nehru put up a string of public sector enterprises that still live. The steel giant SAIL (1954), ONGC (1956), NMDCL (1958), Indian Oil (1959) and so on and on. His contributions to world affairs were also in this period from Panchsheel (1954) to Bandung (1955).

Whether you admire Nehru, as people my age were compelled to do when we were young, or you dislike him, as is fashionable today, his legacy is alive and breathing in the institutions that he conceived and built. All of it more or less finished in eleven years.

Pakistan's Gen Ayub Khan was likened by Samuel Huntington of 'Clash of Civilisations' fame to the lawgivers of Ancient Greece. Ayub seized power in 1958 and lost it eleven years later in 1969. His initial years were promising in

terms of economic growth, leading to that praise from Huntington, even though the numbers were modest by the standards of Japan and South Korea and Taiwan. But the war against India in 1965 and the agitations that were stirring in the east finished him off.

Even the wicked leaders of history completed their arc in this period. Hitler came to office in 1933 and by 1944 was in his bunker awaiting the forces of Gen Zhukov, who had defeated the Germans in Stalingrad the year before. All of the achievements that history lists for the German tyrant, from what he did to the economy and the Autobahn, to the persecutions of minorities, to the manhandling of the French and British forces with the conception of 'blitzkrieg', to the development of the first modern rocket the V2, all of these came in eleven years.

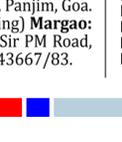
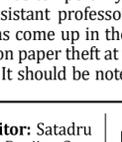
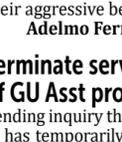
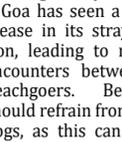
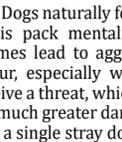
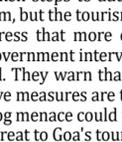
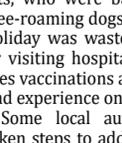
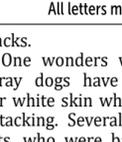
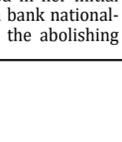
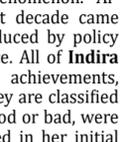
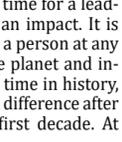
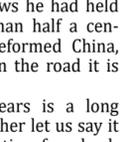
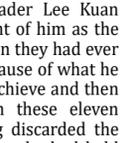
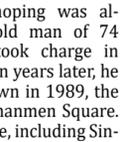
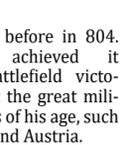
There is a reason this eleven year phenomenon is a rule as much as it is an observation. It speaks to the nature of man and what humans are like. We have a limited number of original ideas to offer and that limit exhausts itself with time. Most of us do not have much power or agency over the world. The few who do have power show the rest of us what is possible and for how long.

In his book 'The 10 Rules of Successful Nations', Ruchir Sharma writes under the subhead of 'Stale leaders' that 'one simple way to think about this rule is that high impact reform is most likely in a leader's first term, and less likely in the second term and beyond, as a leader runs out of ideas or support for reform and turns to securing a grand legacy'.

As Ralph Waldo Emerson said 'In the end every hero becomes a bore'.

(Aakar Patel is a writer and columnist)

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Upgrade Railways' parcel section

A few days back 500 kg of decomposed beef worth Rs 1.5 lakh was seized at Margao Railway Station in parcels that had arrived from Delhi.

The smugglers were caught since because of the unusually warm weather the meat prematurely spoiled and raised a stink. This chance finding reportedly indicates the possibility of widespread smuggling of beef since years.

According to the cops, this was not a one-time affair but perhaps a regular one. In the absence of State-of-art technology, the smugglers exploited gaps in the Railways' parcel inspection system and also listed the contents as 'chicken'.

It is surprising that though the Railways run sophisticated trains and have beautified stations in the country, but seems to have not upgraded their parcel section.

Railways could install baggage scanners and also employ sniffer dogs in the parcel section which is vulnerable and is/can be misused by vested interest to send illegal goods including arms, ammunition and drugs.

Sridhar D'Yer, Caranzalem

Stray dog menace

Stray dog menace continues to trouble visitors to the beaches, especially at the South Goa beaches. It is learnt that over the weekend a Russian woman tourist at Benaulum beach was chased by a pack of six dogs and bitten by one, while strolling on the beach in the evening.

It is observed that most of the time it is the foreign tourists who are attacked by dogs roaming in

packs. One wonders whether these stray dogs have a preference for white skin when it comes to attacking. Several foreign tourists, who were badly bitten by free-roaming dogs, rue that their holiday was wasted in recovery or visiting hospitals for anti-rabies vaccinations and share their bad experience on social media.

Some local authorities have taken steps to address the problem, but the tourism stakeholders stress that more comprehensive government intervention is needed. They warn that unless proactive measures are taken, the stray dog menace could pose a growing threat to Goa's tourism.

Dogs naturally form packs, and this pack mentality can sometimes lead to aggressive behaviour, especially when they perceive a threat, which makes them a much greater danger compared to a single stray dog.

Goa has seen a significant increase in its stray dog population, leading to more frequent encounters between dogs and beachgoers. Beach visitors should refrain from feeding stray dogs, as this can contribute to their aggressive behaviour.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Terminate services of GU Asst prof

Pending inquiry the Goa University has temporarily suspended an assistant professor whose name has come up in the alleged question paper theft at the varsity.

It should be noted that a group

of social activists, along with members of National Students Union of India (NSUI) on Sunday had lodged a formal complaint at the Agassaim Police Station against the said assistant professor for allegedly stealing a question paper to help a second-year postgraduate female student secure high marks in an examination.

A protest was then held on Monday outside the Vice Chancellor's office by the BJP-affiliated Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) activists to demand for an inquiry into the above incident and for the professor's immediate suspension.

Of course, Vice Chancellor Harilal B Menon has now confirmed that a two-member fact-finding committee has been constituted to investigate the above matter and submit a report within 48 hours. He has also promised to take further action based on the committee's findings.

Well, I personally feel that nothing will really come out from the two-member fact-finding committee as the report will finally say that the said assistant professor is fully innocent and with this he will slowly be reinstated back in the Goa University.

I therefore think that the university administration, instead of bluffing Goans by constituting a two-member fact-finding committee for time-pass should permanently terminate the services of the above accused professor immediately who has been caught red-handed breaking academic integrity and strict legal

letterstotheeditor

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



action should be taken against those involved to ensure fair education for all in Goa in future.

Hope better sense prevails.

Jerry Fernandes, Saligao

When will Railways learn?

Railway Minister Ashwini

Vaishnav has been holding forth on the powerful locomotives that trains will start using shortly and how the Integral Coach Factory (ICF) will be manufacturing parts for the Hyperloop system that IIT, Madras is trying to develop.

While doing all this, he does not probably get time to look at the pictures published in the newspapers over the last few days wherein the Patna division people were seen spilling over from the compartments that were full and hanging on to the coaches from outside in whatever manner they could and also travelling on the roofs of the coaches.

This was on the occasion of Holi where people were going home. Imagine if one of these trains were to meet with an accident, the number of people who would be dead.

Since most tracks are electrified, people dangerously travelling on the top of the coaches could be electrocuted.

Why is the Railways not focusing on anticipating the rush and providing additional trains so that the crowding is more manageable?

These pictures published in the newspapers as mentioned above are indicative that more disasters like the stampede at New Del-

hi Railway Station are likely to happen since the Railways never seem to learn anything.

Srinivas Kamat, Mysore

Govt should link hygiene, tourism

It is rather ironic that fundamental necessities like cleanliness and hygiene are treated as a mission whereby we take up brooms on Gandhi Jayanti on October 2 and Swachh Bharat Mission once a year.

Can we clean all the filth and dirt in one day? Why not every day? A mission, is one day a mission for advertisement or propaganda for votes? It's a debatable question. We need to begin cleanliness at home and school, workplace and even markets and individual level, yet we continue to see people casually tossing wrappers, bottles, and even peeled fruits out of the moving vehicles and even spitting after eating paan and tobacco and the sight of paan - stained walls in public buildings and markets remains a concern for cleanliness.

For India to establish itself as a premier global tourism destination the Government of India should enforce laws like Singapore by implementing strict regulations to maintain cleanliness starting with one city each, the results will be there to see in years to come. There should be a link between hygiene and tourism. It would not only enhance food safety, but also attract international tourists.

Likewise, accessibility is the key for the tourism sector to flourish, and we need well maintained roads, not potholes that resemble lunar surface.

Diomedes Pereira, Corlim