

O HERALDO

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Public well-being must take precedence over deadlines

Even as the construction of the elevated corridor along the NH 66 at Porvorim has been progressing at a rapid pace, safety remains a concern. The need for immediate and sustained safety provisions along the length of the highway where work is on even saw a public interest litigation being filed before the high court at Bombay at Goa last year.

The petitioner, who is an advocate by profession, started out by bringing to the court's attention that the work had caused severe congestion, particularly on the road between Guirim junction and the Mall de Goa. He thereafter told the court that trenches along the road had neither been barricaded nor were any warnings erected for the information of motorists, and suggested that barricading be placed between the entire length of the construction and the carriageway to ensure safety. Thereafter, the high court, in December last year, directed the government to submit a list to it of work that had been completed and work that was still pending with regard to the project.

A week before that, the government agencies concerned had met at the

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being set up at prominent spots displaying their location and contact numbers, should an emergency arise.

The petitioner has continued submitting a volley of suggestions to aid the high court in working out a practical solution to the safety concerns revolving around the Porvorim highway project. Among his key suggestions - which he arrived at following site inspections and photographic evidence - were the installation of signage and metal barricading with reflectors at all active work zones and around roadside debris. He also said no pre-cast girder should be lifted or installed over a road on which traffic is in motion. Such work should be carried out only when the stretch concerned is completely shut and vehicles are directed to alternative routes, the petitioner maintained.

While the suggestions put forth before the high court are all valid and desperately needed to ensure that life is protected, it shouldn't have taken a public interest litigation to draw the attention of the government and the agencies concerned to the situation at hand. It is obvious that big-ticket projects, particularly those that could potentially risk the lives of several citizens, need to have all standard safety measures in place before construction work even begins.

Several nations, in fact, lay great emphasis on protecting life during the construction of any project - be it a bridge, a road or even a skyscraper - and if the proponents concerned are found to be neglecting this aspect or doing a half-hearted job where the implementation of safety measures are concerned, they are dealt with with an iron hand by the authorities. This includes anything from being slapped with a hefty fine to the imprisonment of those found to be responsible for exposing the common man to grave risks.

Endangering life while attempting to rapidly complete work before the onset of the monsoon is not an excuse. If the situation at Porvorim is presently uncomfortable along some stretches and downright dangerous at others, the problems will only get amplified once the rains do set in. This makes it all the more crucial for the contractor and all the government agencies concerned to put in place all the necessary safety arrangements - including proper barricading, well-surfaced roads, adequate water drainage facilities and the timely clearance of mounds of mud and debris to avoid the formation of slush on the roads. Most importantly, these measures should be taken automatically, and not only after citizens approach the courts seeking remedies. Having the court intervene only reflects badly on the performance of both, the contractor and the government agencies involved with the project, which in turn reduces the faith of the public in them.

It is hoped that better sense prevails and that public well-being takes precedence over meeting deadlines where the Porvorim elevated corridor project, and every other major project for that matter, is concerned.

comment



BINAYAK DATTA

Global headwinds in terms of demands and prices particularly increased tariff-wars in components and automotive tyres and impacts on exports, price increase of medicines, reduction of GST rates expected, would play their roles in forward Financial Statements



b) Of commitments and targets: I understood from press reports, actions have been initiated on 441 out of 446 budget assurances of last year, five assurances are on hold and around 112 of the 279 different works have been completed so far. I will let the matter rest.

c) The tasks ahead towards a "Viksit Bharat 2047" Of the Viksit Bharat 2047 and deployment of Targets there-in (to recapitulate, \$30 trillion economy against today's \$3 trillion nationally) and per-capita of \$18000 (against today's \$3000 nationally) by 2047; would translate to Rs

The Goa Budget came last week, and I thought I'll look at this document from the points of acknowledged competences of the State, duly read in context of tasks and benchmarks. The documents are well in detail. Let's examine:

a) The backgrounds: Global headwinds in terms of demands and prices particularly increased tariff-wars in components and automotive tyres and impacts on exports, price increase of medicines, reduction of GST rates expected, would play their roles in forward Financial Statements. The State Economic Survey 2025 reveals there is plenty of improvement opportunities particularly in areas of Manufacturing where our CAGR for the 5 years 2019-20 to 2023-24 is hardly 1.23% where the corresponding GSV (Constant Prices), increased by 3%. Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing increased by just 2.4%. Hotels and Restaurants by just 2.2%, and Transport by only 0.7%. The chunk of the increase comes from Construction 7.8%, Real Estates 4.1% and Public Administration 12.2% in spite of efforts for digitalisation, efficiency improvements and 'minimum government'!

12 lakh crores of GSDP and Rs 40 lakhs of per capita in Goa at today's prices. In my view, there has to be State-wise targets deployed across States for ownership, reporting and accountability.

The Ruling Party's State manifesto of 2022 promises an economy of \$50 bln by 2032, which translates to Rs 4.25 lakh crores). I didn't find a roadmap in the Budget for 2025-26.

We're never-the-less assured by the government, that the State shall achieve "Viksit Goa" by 2037 itself, 10 years in advance of the Country as a whole! Remarkable!

d) Actual performance of last year (revised estimates) 2024-25: The Budget papers show, Revenue Receipts Revised fall short in Tax and Non-Tax Revenues by a huge sum of 303 crores compounded by lesser Grants-in-Aid from Centre 407 crores and shares in Central Taxes better by 260 crores and an overspending of Revenue Expenditure Budgets by 173 crores. So, Revenue Surplus was short as shown by Rs 623 crores.

Just one word of caution here, there are drops in GST rates this year on the cards, (FM 9th March 2025). I hope this has been factored suitably in the Revenue Budget for the next year we do not want shortfalls in collections once more!

e) The proposals for the Budget year (2025-26) in just three key areas, considering space available in my column): Education, Re-learning and Research; We are well in the Macro, we meet the translated NEP target of 15% (of Budget), we do 15.8%, (Best in Class Bihar 21.4% next to Delhi 24.2%). But in School Education, we propose 8.3% less than last years' spending. In a situation where 61 Government Schools close down last 5 years and mid-day-meals score low on nutrition, (Media report). I think, rather than heftier PWD-allocation its, School Education that's crying!

I'm a bit disheartened that, when we consider staking claims for hosting Football and Sailing for the expected Ahmedabad Olympics 2036, our sports allocations are just 4.5% of the total Education, Culture and Sports activities! The ruling party's manifesto promises Mission "Gold-Coast" to groom an Olympic Gold-Medallist from Goa. Not found anywhere in the Budget priorities only 10 years to go! Skillings is a pit-

iable 2.2% and Scientific and Environmental Research is less than 1%! And we are still to start training and deployment of our large language AI model coming supposedly in "10 months".

Healthcare; In terms of NHP' 2017 recommendations of 8% of Budgets, we did well at 7.3%. I only hope we implement plans well. Best in Class, Puducherry 9.5% (next to Delhi's 13%).

Tourism: The consolidated allocations are at 440 crores which is just 1.5% of the Total Budget. I think we need to do pretty much more here. The Economic Survey states, "Hotels and Restaurants" CAGR (Constant Prices) of 5 years till last year was just a meagre 2.2%! Can such a growth-rate cope with Inflation and then grow? I hope the short-term action plans feature the recommendations of the Vision Document 2030 in terms of "World Class Infrastructure".

One last point, I may sadly mention here that in the Foreign Tourist Arrivals Statement (Union Ministry of Tourism), Goa in 2013 hosted 0.49mln FTAs at 10th rank (Maharashtra with 4.16mln was No.1). In 2019, Goa with 0.94mln (doubled from its previous year) was still No.10. Maharashtra continued at No.1; in 2023, Goa does not figure amongst the top 10 at all, Maharashtra still No.1 with a share of 17.61% and Goa not recognisable in the "Others" who all together host just 2.09 mln (10.86%)! The State Economic Survey talks of cruise-passengers diminishing 70% and number of vessels by 40% same period. It's good that there are mentions on needs in these areas, more as we go ahead.

I don't know why, but I do recall Goethe and his unforgettable... "Things that matter most, must never be at the mercy of things which matter least".

And before I part: On the Tax Holidays on Investments above Rs 5000 crores, I'm not sure whether the benefits after impacts of input-tax-credit stays as attractive to a start-up as it looks like. The Hinterland GST-sops could be a good idea though, if the roads dug up are filled up fast!

I always felt, when an entrepreneur puts money on his project, he looks more at the smoothness of the start and at ease of operations as he progresses, but that's a different story!

(Binayak Datta is a finance professional)

people's edit

MILK OF HUMAN KINDNESS OF GENERATIONS, THEN AND NOW

NARAYANAN HARIHARASASTRY

It was in the late 1940s when as a boy, all of twelve, I was returning home from our school playground at the gloaming hour, I noticed an incident of sorts happening on one of the roads in the Salem District where traffic was thin with cycles and a few (Tangaas) single-horse-drawn carts, the one and only mode of conveyance for the general public let alone, motor cars that were quite few and far between.

As darkness began descending, I stirred up my stumps only to chance upon an incident where a single-horse-drawn cart also moving in the same direction as mine lurching with the occupants in it jostling against each other and shouting at the cart driver to stop.. In next to no time, the horse got detached from the cart that tumbled down the edge of the road with its harness unfastening itself. The animal stood steady on the road with its blinkers in place.

A few good Samaritans from the handful of pedestrians around, rushed to the men and women lying at the edge of the road and helped them to rise and stand. They were lucky to have come out unscathed but for a slight bruise on the elbow of one of them. When the cart-driver who also escaped unhurt was harnessing the animal to the cart, one from among the skit of people around them hurried to a nearby house, returned soon with a jugful of water for the victims of the mishap to drink. Thanking every one of those around, they got back into the cart and proceeded their way. With the jaws of darkness devouring the brightness of the day, I traced my steps back home.

Years later, once when I was riding my bike on a national highway at the crepuscular hour in the northeast, I alighted on an incident where a private bus that was running ahead of me, turning aside suddenly and rolling down the damp, muddy edge of the road and lying careened with the whole caboodle of passengers, the conductor and the man at the wheel, together with the personal belongings of everyone thrown out and lying scattered, noticed or unnoticed by the passengers in the other speeding vehicles running at a rate of knots.

Standing my bike beside me, on the layby, I stood watching the bloodcurdling incident, hair standing on end. Tour de suite, a crowd of people from the rural areas I saw rushing to the scene of the accident, for -----hold your breath! -----not rescuing the victims but plundering whatever they could get their hands on, even amidst the wails and groans of those writhing between life and death that were falling into their deaf ears. The cries of some of those in the throes of death failed to evoke pity in them. Given the nightfall growing fast, I rode back to my house that I was renting as a technical supervisor in a private company.

Commiserating with those hapless, helpless victims of the accident, I imagined how miserable the situation would have been, had it occurred in this cellphone era when onlookers rush to the scenes of accident to click photos of such sights on their cellphones and post them on the numerous social media.

Quality of water used in eateries

A widely circulated social media video shows fish vendors drawing water from a storm water drain at Davorlim, transferring it into containers and using it to wash the fish. This has reportedly sparked public outrage with citizens demanding strict action against those responsible for endangering public health. These illegal fish vendors not only create a nuisance but also operate without any check on hygiene. It is common knowledge that fish is preserved in the market by using powdered ice.

Has a check been kept on the kind of water being used to make this ice? Use of unhygienic water to make ice can have a detrimental effect on the health of the general public. Be that as it may, it is learnt that the Food and Drugs Administration (FDA) has sealed nine food outlets in Bardez for operating in unhygienic conditions. It is learnt that several well-known restaurants and tea stalls were raided as part of the crack-down. Besides keeping a check on food being prepared in unhygienic conditions, the authorities concerned also need to monitor the quality of water that is being used for preparing the eatables.

It also seems necessary to keep an eye on the water that is used to wash the utensils, plates, glasses, cups, etc. With there being scarcity of water during the summer season, there is every possibility of roadside food-out-

lets using drain water to wash the plates and glasses. This can lead to spread of various water borne diseases. Keeping a check on the quality of water that is being used in food outlets is of vital importance.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Uphold minority rights, integrity

The Wafq (Amendment) Bill passed by the Lok Sabha is nothing less than an invasion of Muslim Personal Law (Sharia) and an attempt to interfere with the religious and cultural autonomy of the community. The Bill represents more than a legal amendment; it signals an erosion of India's secular framework. By diminishing minority rights and enabling majoritarian control, the Bill contradicts the constitutional principles of equality and religious freedom. Perhaps, the most contentious aspect of the bill is the change to ownership rules, and Muslim groups claim that this will put many historical dargahs and masjids at risk. The Wafq (Amendment) Bill is unconstitutional, undemocratic and unfair as it goes against the freedom of religion guaranteed by the constitution. The Union government must withdraw this Bill immediately and the judiciary must fulfill its duty to uphold minority rights

and integrity.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, Chennai

Youth need jobs, not doles

For a large number of youths in the state, unemployment was the biggest factor. The libraries are full with job aspirants and most of them are becoming frustrated as they are crossing the age limit for government jobs.

Employment, specifically unemployment, is an issue that affects most nations, rich or poor; advanced or developing; only the magnitude of the problem changes. It should focus on jobs creation, not freebies. The government needs to realise that the best way to uplift people is to facilitate job creation.

Create jobs and incomes, the need for freebies will disappear. The Indian government has initiated various schemes like Skill India, Startup India, and Stand-up India, which represent a strategic investment in building a more resilient and innovative economy by equipping the youth with the skills, resources, and opportunities needed to succeed.

Youth think that, the way out of this life is to get a government job and get good benefits. That will also help them to get married and start a family. Moreover, the higher educated young people are more likely to be unem-

ployed than those without any schooling.

K G Vilop, Chorao

Protest sends clear message to offenders

This has reference to the report 'Angry Gogol locals clean up drains....' (Herald April 2, 2025).

Desperate situations call for desperate action and that is apparently what the angry locals of Amrutnagar, Gogol did when they removed the garbage from the drains and dumped it in front of the housing societies responsible.

Nice form of protest which should send a clear message to offenders and the civic authorities to enforce the rules. Dumping garbage and littering anywhere and everywhere stems from the lack of basic civic responsibility of citizens. Indiscriminate dumping of garbage is rampant mostly in all cities, even villages, on beaches on the streets.

In short, the whole place is a dumping place even for the so-called educated literate class of society. Recalling my earlier working days, while getting off the bus a passenger just dropped the ticket on the street. When I brought it to his attention, he replied that it was just the bus ticket. I did reprimand him of course!

Melville X D'Souza, Mumbai

Boosting maritime capacity

In hindsight, India is yet to fully realise its maritime potential. Every April 5 is observed as National Maritime day to defend, shield and preserve India's maritime zone. For a country with a long coastline of over 7,500 km, this only reflects a lack of robust political will. Maritime development can act as an engine of growth and development besides boosting a country's economic growth.

The "waterways trade", or the inland waterway, can supplement and ease the road and rail trade load. As of now, the seaports are important cargo carriers in India. No effort should be spared in linking seaports with road and rail.

It is not known whether the government's plan of doubling the port capacity by the end of 2025 will materialise. Similarly, the need to upgrade the existing ports should occupy its attention. There should also be important infrastructural changes at seaports. Ports should be able to embrace larger ships and must be in a position to host fresh terminals for vessel-occupancy.

Old and worn out ships must make way for newer ones. If the seaport capacity is enhanced, necessary changes will follow. Prudent utilisation of funds and effective implementation of decisions will go a long way in carrying our maritime strength to exalted levels apart from generating thousands of jobs.

Ganapathi Bhat, Akola