

## O HERALDO

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## A decade of Panjim's 'Smart City' misadventure

Nearly a decade has passed since the ambitious Smart City project was launched for Panjim, yet today, residents find themselves surrounded not by modern marvels, but by a city in disarray. What began in 2015 with great hope has unravelled into a grim reality of poor planning, delayed execution, and disillusionment.

When Late Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar envisioned Panjim's transformation, particularly with the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) in view, the capital witnessed a commendable facelift. The elegant promenade and the spruced-up avenues spoke of a city rising with purpose and pride. That brief era of efficiency and vision fuelled expectations when Panjim was selected under the central government's Smart City Mission. Goans, who have long admired the systematic planning and infrastructural finesse of European cities and Gulf nations, naturally anticipated a similar transformation at home.

However, fast forward to today, and the promise of a "smart" Panjim seems more like a cruel joke than a civic achievement. While residents endured years of dug-up roads, open manholes, and incomplete pipelines, the result has been underwhelming—at best. Barring a few cosmetic changes, there's little to suggest that Panjim is any closer to being a smart city. To the discerning Goan citizen, who has lived in meticulously planned towns and developed a refined sense of civic infrastructure, laying sewerage lines or installing basic drainage systems doesn't amount to smart development.

Even the much-hyped smart bus transport system, the one seemingly forward-looking initiative under the project, has failed to strike a chord with the public. Lack of outreach, unclear communication and poorly integrated planning have rendered it largely ineffective. This lack of engagement with the citizenry reflects a deep-rooted flaw in the approach of Imagine Panaji

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Smart City Development Ltd (IPSCDL). Locked in their boardrooms and stuck in bureaucratic circles, IPSCDL has functioned in isolation, disconnected from the very people it was meant to serve.

The latest debacle—failure to meet yet another deadline of March 31 despite High Court directives—is merely the latest chapter in this catalogue of inefficiency. With each missed deadline, the credibility of the project nosedives further. The onset of unseasonal showers has already begun to reveal the frailties of Panjim's unfinished infrastructure. With only 14 out of 30 wards reportedly undergoing pre-monsoon drain-cleaning, the city is staring at the grim prospect of flooding. This is not just a planning failure—it is administrative apathy at its worst.

What is most concerning is the silence and helplessness of those in positions of authority. Mayor Rohit Monserrate and MLA Atanasio "Babush" Monserrate, despite being members of the IPSCDL board, have repeatedly expressed their dissatisfaction with the quality and pace of the works. If even elected representatives are unable to rein in the bureaucrats and contractors, one must ask—who is truly in charge? Have the bureaucrats hijacked the project, operating beyond the scope of public accountability?

Furthermore, this is no longer just about development delays or shoddy workmanship. The lethargy and disregard displayed by IPSCDL and its contractors have had fatal consequences—three lives have been lost over the past two years due to their negligence. Yet, no one has been held accountable. There is a deafening silence on the toll taken on the health and safety of citizens, on the financial strain caused by property damage, or the environmental degradation witnessed along the way.

The High Court must now ask tough questions. Can contempt proceedings alone deter such entrenched inefficiency? Or is it time to demand criminal liability for the preventable deaths and civic chaos caused by this mismanaged project?

Ultimately, Panjim deserves more than half-measures and hollow promises. Citizens have been patient, but their patience should not be mistaken for passivity. Responsibility must be fixed—not on sub-contractors alone, but on those in power who have failed in their duty. The IPSCDL board, contractors, and bureaucrats must be held accountable for turning an opportunity for transformation into a tale of ruin.

Only through firm accountability, sincere engagement with the public, and a complete overhaul of the current working style can Panjim rise once again—not just as a city with smart infrastructure, but as one where smart governance prevails. The time for cosmetic fixes is over. What Panjim needs now is a return to visionary leadership, civic empathy, and administrative competence. Nothing less will suffice.

## comment



GLADSTONE D'COSTA

Being stranded in space is no longer confined to fictional books and films. Gravitational forces are essential for the normal functioning of our locomotor system. Muscles and bones function best when subjected to stress in the form of work, such as normal activity and exercise. Without gravity, there is less demand and reduced mechanical loading leading to loss of bone density and muscle atrophy



a patient for whatever reason. The turnover and renewal of bone cells is affected, with increased excretion of calcium and risk of kidney stones. The weakening often persists after the astronauts return to earth. They lose around 1-1.5% bone density for every month spent in space. Research in 2022 documented bone loss in 17 ISS astronauts in missions averaging about 5-1/2 months. A year after returning to Earth, there was an average 2.1% reduced bone mineral density of the

## The health hazards of space travel

Sunita Williams and Barry Wilmore were meant to spend eight days in space in what was a routine trip conducting scientific experiments. They splashed down off the coast of Tallahassee a full 286 days later; not a record duration by itself. Valeri Polyakov spent 437 days in the Mir station in 1994; Sergei Avdeyev spent 379 days in 1998-1999. The honour of a record went to Williams for the most time spent space walking; 62 hours and 6 minutes, surpassing Peggy Whiston's previous record. Previous extended stays followed appropriate preparatory training for the astronauts; in this case, neither anticipated or catered for. Yet at no stage in those 286 days did the media forget them; the primary reason being the uncertainty involved. They were stranded there because of repeated technical failures, during the various attempts to rescue them, increasing the element of uncertainty even though food, water, oxygen etc. were regularly serviced by resupply missions.

Being stranded in space is no longer confined to fictional books and films. Gravitational forces are essential for the normal functioning of our locomotor system. Muscles and bones function best when subjected to stress in the form of work, such as normal activity and exercise. Without gravity, there is less demand and reduced mechanical loading leading to loss of bone density and muscle atrophy. On earth, this occurs when there is prolonged immobilisation of

tibia, and 1.3% reduced bone strength. 9 did not recover bone density.

Prolonged exposure to microgravity conditions also affects vestibular function - the inner ear's ability to sense movement and orientation. This is dependent on peripheral sensory feedback which is related to gravity; and without which the body is unable to interpret position, balance and coordination. This explains why astronauts are able to maintain weird positions for prolonged periods; which would otherwise have been impossible on earth.

The heart muscle weakens and coupled with the loss of gravity, the normal distribution of blood in the body, and blood pressure control gets disturbed. Without gravity, bodily fluids shift upward, leading to facial swelling and increased intracranial pressure. More blood reaches the head along with accumulation of fluid. Overall blood volume is reduced and possibilities of clot formation increase. The increased volume in the head gives the feeling of a permanent cold and headaches. Of the 24 astronauts who travelled aboard the ISS for up to 26 weeks, all but two reported headaches. A study in 2023 found that astronauts who travelled on the ISS or NASA space shuttle on missions lasting at least six months experienced expansion of the cerebral ventricles.

Many physiological systems gradually return to normal. But some issues persist, being directly proportionate to the time spent in space. For short-duration missions of a few days in low-Earth orbit, about 95% of the biological damage appears to be reversed upon return.

One example is Spaceflight-Associated Neuro-Ocular Syndrome (SANS), linked to visual impairment due to microgravity-induced fluid shifts and changes in intracranial pressure distorting the shape of the eyes. As a result, many astronauts' experience difficulty in walking, dizziness and visual disturbances. Research suggests that dysfunction in sub-cellular structures called mitochondria plays a role in SANS. Some astronauts experience lasting impairment requiring corrective lenses. Countermeasures based on mitochondrial research to mitigate space-induced damage are being actively pursued. Research published in 2024 detailed changes in the brain, heart, muscles, kidneys, skin, immune regulation, stress levels and a breakdown in the activity of mitochondria among crew members who par-

ticipated in SpaceX's three-day Inspiration4 mission in 2021; the first all-civilian team to orbit Earth.

Relatively little is known about how lung function is affected. While it is known that space radiation elevates cancer risk, accelerates aging and induces cellular damage, the precise biological mechanisms remain elusive. Research has shown that mitochondria play a central role in spaceflight-induced health effects, but the precise mechanism is still unknown. Scientists also lack a comprehensive understanding of how microgravity, radiation exposure and isolation impact cognitive function, mental health and neuroplasticity - the brain's ability to change and adapt - over long durations.

Visions of space colonisation are no longer confined to fiction; but the effects on human fertility, reproduction and embryonic development remain unknown. Research has been largely confined to limited studies mainly on mice. Astronauts are required to live in confined and isolated environments with limited social interaction and exposure to natural stimuli. This can lead to psychological stress, sleep disturbances, cognitive performance declines and mood disorders. Interpersonal conflicts could get aggravated further impacting mental well-being and mission performance.

Questions remain about prolonged exposure to radiation on longer missions. Without effective countermeasures, recovery could be problematic. Exposure to high-energy radiation can lead to DNA damage, increased cancer risk, neurodegenerative effects, cardiovascular issues and immune system dysregulation. Earth's magnetosphere - the region of space dominated by the planetary magnetic field - provides some protection for astronauts in low-Earth orbits. But astronauts traveling beyond that would experience much higher radiation doses. "It's going to be space radiation exposure that's going to be the big limiting factor for how well astronauts do or how long they're going to be able to actually be in space," said Susan Bailey, a radiation biologist from Colorado State University.

We are a long way from home in resolving the health hazards of space travel.

(The author is the Past IMA Goa State President, founder member and Past President of VHAG, and a past member of the Central Executive Committee of VHAI.)

## Why are foreigners overcharged?

In India, tickets are needed to enter several archaeological and historical places, monuments, museums, parks and other tourist sites. The collection, may not be large as compared to the money spent on the staff and upkeep of the place but, helps significantly. There are different rates for adults, children (either free up to a certain age or half rate beyond an age) and for groups. Ironically, at most of the above places, the foreign tourists pay more. Organisers of seminars and conferences hike the registration fees for foreign participants. Even the hotels have different tariffs for foreigners.

It does not make sense to have differential rates for 'us' (locals) and 'them' (foreigners) and such a system is present in many countries. At the touristic places, the latter do not get any additional benefits or facilities. During seminars and conferences, all the delegates are treated equally and at the hotels all have access to the same services. Then why are foreigners charged more? Is it because of the presumption that they can afford to pay and a part of a country's economics depend on tourists?

India could take a lead and follow the saying, "Atithi Devo Bhava," (Guest are gods) in letter and spirit. The foreigners should not be overcharged for entry tickets while hotels and event organisers should not fleece them. Remember Uncle Sam is watching and there could be

## Goan diaspora win accolades in UK

In probably an unprecedented acclaim for the Goan diaspora in the United Kingdom, the House of Commons bestowed upon Goans in the UK lavish praise for the contributions made towards various aspects of life which in particular as my friends from the UK told this writer that Swindon has become a throbbing and pulsating little cameo as an area inhabited mainly by Goans and now thriving through their sheer dint of hard work, a credit that was achieved through years of diligent service by Goans.

This writer remembers having worked with a Notary Public and has fond memories of having contributed by providing services to Goans aspiring to obtain Portuguese nationality, a grace that the Portuguese government provided for three generations of Goans beginning from those born before the liberation of Goa, which was instrumental in providing avenues for those seeking to find employment especially in the United Kingdom.

It should be the endeavour of the Goans in UK to further build on this commendation in a manner that will benefit both Goa

and the United Kingdom, and thus become a shining example of mutual co-operation wherein Goans achieve greater share in nation building, an integration more beneficial especially with respect to the United Kingdom with the Goan diaspora acting as a role model for others to follow.

Elvidio Miranda, Panjim

## letterstotheeditor

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Sridhar D'Iyer, Caranzalem

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## Show concern for stray animals

As the summer season has set in, it is necessary for humans to stay hydrated, seek shade, and avoid strenuous activities during the hottest parts of the day to prevent heat-related illnesses like heat exhaustion and heatstroke. However, spare a thought for the stray animals and the birds. Sadly humans have taken away the natural water sources from these animals and birds. It may not be possible to restore these water sources but we humans can give them some relief. The District Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has reportedly urged citizens to provide water for stray animals and birds by placing water bowls outside homes and business establishments while at the same time ensuring that the water is kept clean.

Changing the water from the bowls regularly is vital also to address concerns over mosquito

breeding. This has to be a people's movement. Article 51A(g) of the Indian Constitution, mandates that every citizen of India has a duty to "protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife and to have compassion for living creatures". Another important aspect that needs to be kept in mind is that before starting to drive a four-wheeler or a heavy vehicle, it is absolutely necessary to see if there are any stray animals resting under the vehicle. In order to protect from the scorching heat, stray animals could be sleeping under the vehicles since we humans have cut most of the trees that provide shade.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

## SC ruling sends strong message

That the Supreme Court slamming Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi for his "prolonged inaction" and sitting on the ten key Bills re-passed by the State Assembly, is not only a blow to his smack of arrogance, but a slap on the face of the ruling BJP as well.

The landmark judgment reinforces the constitutional principle that governors, especially those in the non-ruling BJP states, cannot arbitrarily withhold legislative assent. The SC's ruling sends a strong message

## people's edit

## ON LOAN FROM OUR CHILDREN

K S S PILLAI

The poet W H Auden said, "Thousands have lived without love, not one without water." He was repeating the truth that one could survive without food for months but only a few days without drinking water.

Water has become so valuable that World Water Day was observed recently under the auspices of the United Nations. The emphasis was on the sustainable management of freshwater resources to enable living beings to survive. Conserving water has become a life-and-death issue. Man's greed is the focal cause of air, earth, and water pollution.

Rivers flowed in the past as they were not restrained by dams. Some became flooded even in the summer with water from melted ice at their origin. Water was drunk directly from wells, rivers, and canals without ill effects. Aqua creatures, most of which ended up on the dining tables, were the source of livelihood for many.

Climate change has been worrying several people. Global heating has resulted in large-scale melting of glaciers, resulting in landslides that caused loss of lives and properties. As farmers complained of lack of water, and women and children lugged long distances carrying pots for water, dams were built in rivers, making them stagnant. The growing population encroached upon canals and rivers, making them narrow and home to water weeds. Buildings have come up on the banks of those water bodies. Fish and other living beings started disappearing. Drinking water without being purified mechanically or boiled became dangerous. It is high time we removed encroachments on water bodies and revived them.

Modern agriculture based on chemicals and untreated discharge from factories, houses, and every human habitation has worsened the situation. Water has become salty near the seas, making it unsuitable for drinking. People in the Gulf countries with deserts around have been using purified seawater from the nearby sea at enormous cost.

The extreme heat has resulted in excessive melting of glaciers, resulting in unseasonal floods and destruction. Many rivers that depended on melted glaciers are now shallow.

As water has become scarce, local governments have frequently increased the water charges. It has become the practice for many political parties to lure votes by offering free water in various quantities.

Rivers have become bones of contention between States within a country and also between nations, sometimes leading to armed conflicts. Seas have become dumping grounds for polluting materials, affecting sea animals.

Though we are fortunate to have a long and heavy rainy season, most of the rainwater flows away. Some governments have asked people to harvest rainwater for use, but few do so.

The government has tried to inculcate the habit of cleanliness by providing free toilets with water connections, but the water supply is often disrupted. When the supply is free, there is a wastage of water from faulty pipelines, but when people are required to pay, they avoid the wastage, and pipelines are repaired quickly.

The prime minister has taken steps to ensure that each house has pure drinking water through pipelines and that the toilets have water.

As Gandhiji said, we have no right to pollute water, as it is a loan from our children, not an inheritance.

about maintaining democratic processes and respecting the will of elected representatives.

The historic judgment is likely to have broader implications on the role of governors across Indian states, especially in cases where relations between the Raj Bhavan and elected governments are strained. It also marks a significant assertion of judicial oversight in preserving constitutional propriety and democratic processes.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, Chennai

## Govt needs to wake up to reality

This has reference to the report 'Proposed US bill threatens to scrap post-study work permit' (Herald April 10, 2025).

So, the American dream further seems to remain just a dream with US tightening the rules for foreign students with regard to work programme. The new bill is likely to affect lakhs of Indian students presently in the US. Now coming down to the basics. Why are Indians students going abroad, especially to the US for further studies? How about creating suitable infrastructure and providing quality, affordable education within our country? Where is our focus, is it only on irrelevant issues?

It's time the government wakes up to reality and take corrective measures in right earnest. Let's forget about the American dream!

Melville X D'Souza, Mumbai