

O HERALDO

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Sincere reform or selective scapegoating?

The suspension of Rajesh Naik, Goa's Chief Town Planner, has stirred more than just administrative circles. It has reignited a simmering debate on accountability and the rot festering within public institutions. Accused of deliberately undervaluing land in zoning approvals and causing a staggering Rs 7.16 crore loss to the state exchequer, Naik's fall from grace is not just about one man's misconduct. It's a cautionary tale of systemic failure, bureaucratic impunity, and the long, hard road citizens must tread to demand justice.

Naik's case did not unravel overnight. It took months of persistent civil action, spearheaded by environmentalists and social activists, including Goa Foundation Director Claude Alvares, to bring the issue into the spotlight. On Gandhi Jayanti last year, a symbolic 'broom march' was carried out outside the Town Planning Office, highlighting not only Naik's questionable reappointment after retirement but his blatant misuse of Section 17(2) of the Town Planning Act. He allegedly converted over 4.5 lakh square metres of land; most of it forested or under cultivation into developable plots. This was not town planning; this was legalised environmental vandalism.

The relationship between elected leaders and the bureaucrats who implement policy is supposed to be one of mutual respect and accountability. In practice, however, many senior officials become pawns in a larger political game. Empowered by their proximity to political patrons, they function with impunity, knowing they are shielded. Corruption, in such an ecosystem, becomes institutional rather than incidental

The Vigilance Directorate finally took note and moved to suspend Naik in April 2025. Seven months after the public outcry is both a relief and a revelation. The question now reverberating through civil society and across social media is simple: Why did it take so long? The Vigilance Department falls directly under the Chief Minister's jurisdiction.

Worryingly, this is not an isolated incident. Over the past few weeks, a series of disciplinary actions against high-ranking officials from negligent Chief Conservator of Forest to errant medical officers, suggests that something is finally shaking the complacency that has long plagued our administrative machinery. But is it sincere reform or selective scapegoating?

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High Court has recently stepped up where the government hesitated. In Bardez, 14 Revenue Department officials were summoned for failing to demolish illegal constructions in the CRZ zone despite a High Court order. It took a contempt petition to force the administration into action, a troubling indicator of how court orders can be ignored unless legally enforced. In another case in Bicholim, following a complaint of illegal sand mining, government authorities only inspected the site seven days later. The delay drew sharp criticism from the court, which directed the District Collector to issue show-cause notices to the responsible parties.

But perhaps the most striking example of administrative negligence came in the Tillari project. Despite completing land acquisition in 2011, one affected family had still not received compensation. The High Court was left with no choice but to direct the government to recover Rs 9.36 lakh, with interest, from 12 land acquisition officers, an extraordinary move that laid bare the callousness of those meant to serve the public.

Why, then, do these officials forget that their role is to serve the people, not themselves? In a well-functioning democracy, public representatives must lead with character, and officials must act with competence. Today, citizens are confronted with the bitter reality that both are often missing in action. Instead of complementing each other in governance, they often unite in collusion. Shielding one another in a web of favouritism, neglect, and corruption.



RONALD D'SOUSA

I excitedly shared the story with my co-author, who burst into laughter and mentioned that he had just faced his own series of sticker shocks! His barber had raised his fees by 50%, and his car wash guy took it up a notch with a whopping 60% increase!



Isn't it fascinating how human psychology works? We tend to push back against change, especially when it surprises us. And you know what? Money is surprisingly emotional! It's about so much more than simple transactions; it's tied to our feelings about fairness, the value we receive, a sense of predictability, and even who we are. So, when prices suddenly jump, it really makes us question everything we believe about these things.

Sticker shock: The surprising psychology of rising prices

Recently, I treated myself to a delightful tall glass of urrak, a refreshing local drink from Goa. Made from the first distillation of juicy, ripe cashew apples, urrak is wonderfully light and aromatic—so much smoother than its more potent cousin, feni.

It's best enjoyed during the sultry months of March to May, and this seasonal delight offers so much more than just a beverage; it really is an experience and a taste of Goa's earthy simplicity. However, my enjoyment took a brief pause when the bill arrived. I noticed that the price had surged by 25%. While it wasn't a huge amount in absolute terms, it certainly caught me by surprise! That sudden jolt—a mix of surprise and recalibration—was what economists and marketers call "sticker shock."

I excitedly shared the story with my co-author, who burst into laughter and mentioned that he had just faced his own series of sticker shocks! His barber had raised his fees by 50%, and his car wash guy took it up a notch with a whopping 60% increase! While these expenses usually don't throw our monthly budgets off track, it's really not just about the money; it's about the surprise. There's that moment of disbelief when what we thought was true suddenly flips on its head.

At the heart of sticker shock lies our natural habit of holding onto past prices, routines, and expectations. Behavioural economists term this the "anchoring effect". When we fixate on a specific reference point—like Rs 150 for a haircut—it can be quite challenging to adapt if that anchor changes. Even though we might recognise, on an intellectual level, that inflation is a real factor or that Covid impacted many service businesses, emotionally, we still find ourselves connected to the "old price".

Surprises can be delightful! Life is full of them, and we love the ones that work in our favour—a bonus at work, a fantastic discount at checkout, or a lovely spontaneous compliment. But it's natural to feel hesitant about surprises that might come with losses or extra costs. This difference in how we respond is what Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahneman called "loss aversion"—our tendency to feel the sting of a loss more deeply than the happiness we get from an equivalent gain.

So, what lies behind these rising prices?

There's a story there too! Many small businesses—like barbers, car washers, and local drink vendors—have held their prices steady for years, quietly absorbing the pressures of inflation. For some, the pandemic brought on a wave of rising costs that they could no longer overlook. The expenses for raw materials, utilities, and rent have all gradually increased. Sooner or later, those prices needed to go up. However, because these price increases happen all at once instead of little by little, they can really catch people off guard!

Let's not forget the emotional tightrope that so many service providers navigate. Raising prices can be a tough decision; it often brings the possibility of losing customers, trust, and goodwill. Many providers take their time with this decision, hoping that their customers' loyalty will balance out any concerns about pricing. When the change finally happens, it might feel sudden to consumers, but it's usually been a thought-out process on the provider's side for quite some time.

Interestingly, some price increases reflect not only cost pressures but also a growing sense of confidence. After navigating through a challenging period like the pandemic, a business owner might feel it's finally their moment to value their work more assertively. For instance, a barber who has dedicated years without a raise may now feel empowered to ask for what they truly believe their services are worth. These decisions go beyond financial aspects; they symbolise important emotional shifts and affirmations of self-worth.

With these changes happening around us, we have a wonderful opportunity to adjust not just our budgets but also our mindsets. Price increases encourage us to take a moment and think about what truly matters to us. Are we ready to invest a little more in relationships built on trust and familiarity? Do we value consistency, or do we find ourselves eager to jump to the next best deal?

And beyond the personal, there's also a social and systemic aspect to sticker shock that we should consider together.

Sudden changes in cost can sometimes be taken advantage of—either cynically or strategically—by politicians, companies, or influencers who want to create a sense of urgency. A steep fuel price hike? That's when the outrage comes pouring in. A rise in property taxes? You can bet the media will be called in to cover it. These situations are often manipulated to evoke quick, emotional reactions that usually serve those in power. By understanding this pattern, we can take a moment to pause and really think about our responses before jumping in to react.

Sticker shock can sometimes catch us off guard, but it often relates to how we adjust to the changes happening all around us. Our world is evolving so rapidly! Climate events are impacting supply chains, global conflicts are driving commodity prices up, artificial intelligence is transforming our work dynamics, and social media plays a big role in shaping people's desires. In this unpredictable landscape, price increases are not just likely; they're almost certain to occur. The real challenge isn't in dodging surprises, but in fostering the flexibility to respond effectively to whatever comes our way.

Navigating our experiences with grace truly shines when we cultivate an attitude of awareness and adaptability. Instead of viewing sticker shock as a setback, we can embrace it as an opportunity for insight—clues that guide us to recognise changes around us. Perhaps that urrak vendor is subtly indicating a new economic landscape in Goa. Maybe my barber is just sharing that his rent has increased. And who knows, the car wash attendant might be looking to invest in better tools or simply hopes to feel acknowledged, appreciated, and respected for all the effort they put in.

In all these stories, the heart of our journey is change. It's not merely about resisting or accepting change; it's about genuinely understanding it. While feeling sticker shock can catch us off guard, it can ultimately lead us to a richer place of empathy.

Next time you notice a price increase—whether for your favourite drink, a new haircut, or your go-to car wash—take a moment to pause. Let that initial surprise wash over you, and then take a little time to think about what's behind that change. You might uncover a much richer story filled with resilience, fairness, and the delicate balance between our expectations and the experiences we have.

(Steve Correa is an Executive Coach and Author of The Indian Boss at Work, Thinking Global, Acting Indian. Ronald D'Souza has Corporate and Consulting Experience and mentors new startups)

people's edit

TAKE A PLEDGE ON MAY DAY

SUIJT DE

International Workers' Day, or May Day, is observed on May 1 to commemorate the eight-hour workday movement in Chicago in 1886. Now, welfare states embrace a 40-hour work week because more than 40 hours of occupational work per week creates health hazards for workers and hampers innovation, creativity, and productivity.

The labour movements against exploitation can also be called the movements for human rights. Such movements took many countries to the highway of welfare economics and human development.

Unfortunately, the daily limit of 8-hour work has gone for a toss in the large unorganised sector in India and even in the government sectors like railways where loco pilots are forced to do extra shifts risking their own lives as well as the lives of the passengers. We need labour movements in India more than before as we are heading towards privatisation and contractual employment raj.

Informal workers are highly vulnerable to exploitative practices. They are always between the devil and the deep blue sea, or in other words, between exploitation and unemployment.

Some business persons, who bear the primitive mindset before it has been established by scientific evidence that the overwork destroys health and productivity of a worker, are advocating for a 70-hour or 90-hour work week for their employees.

A 70-hour work week means that a worker has to toil 14 hours every day on average in a 5-day week job. This is like taking us from the constitutional guarantee of becoming a welfare country to the days of brute capitalism in the nineteenth century when poor children had to die young after working as chimney sweepers.

Infosys co-founder Narayana Murthy, who suggested that young Indians should work 70 hours a week, said when his kids were school students, he and his wife Sudha Murthy dedicated more than three hours to reading with their kids Akshata and Rohan. What does it mean? The employers should spend time with their children. But a worker is not supposed to do it! It is like advocating for a slave society where slaves toil hard to free up time for leisure for their masters.

Car and train accidents have become a routine affair now as app cab drivers, loco pilots, and gig workers have to work for long hours. Not only does it make their lives vulnerable, but also it endangers the lives of others.

The government needs to ensure that no worker has to work more than 8 hours daily to where she or he has been employed. On International Workers' Day, the government also needs to take a pledge that it will ensure workers' safety at work place.

A callous attitude to safeguard the lives of labourers has become the new normal. In spite of snowfall and avalanche alerts since February 24 this year, labourers working on a stretch of the road to Badrinath Dham had not been evacuated in time. As a result, eight labourers were killed when an avalanche hit the area after four days on February 28.

I always become a bundle of nerves when I see a worker doing his job standing on scaffolding with almost zero safety equipment. Or when I see a pandal worker erecting or decorating a big pandal without any safety net underneath and without a safety rope tied to his body.

I feel annoyed when I frequently come across reports of their deaths after falling from scaffolding. Reports, like "Adwaita Hatua (44), a pandal worker, died after falling from a height of 28ft while trying to tie a bamboo pole of a pandal", or "Manishankar Mondal (45) died after he fell from a three-storey building while painting its outer walls", though published in brief, should make us put our hand on our conscience.

continue its public outreach initiatives, assuring that Kashmir remains safe and resilient. Special focus must be placed on rebuilding international tourist confidence with the Ministry of Tourism and State agencies jointly, promoting positive stories of Kashmir's courage and communal harmony.

In the end, Kashmir's soul lies in its people, its meadows, its rivers, and its spirit of compassion. By ensuring security, vigilance, and communal solidarity, the valley can overcome this darkest hour, emerging much stronger, united, and ever more beautiful in the eyes of the world.

Meanwhile, India must act decisively to deliver a strong retaliation against the attackers, ensuring justice for the Pahalgam tragedy. But at the same time, it must equally prioritise unity with Kashmiris to prevent further division. Rather than fueling Hindu-Muslim polarisation, which risks deepening communal tensions, the focus should be on inclusive measures that affirm Kashmiris' place within India.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, Chennai

May Day: Inequities in workforce

International Labour Day, observed on May 1, serves as a reminder of the ongoing struggles and contributions of workers worldwide. In India, while the day commemorates hard-won labour rights, millions of workers in the unorganised sector, gig economy, and among migrant populations continue to face precarious conditions. These workers often lack job security, health benefits, social protection, and the right to collective bargaining.

The gig economy, though providing flexible employment, often leaves workers without formal contracts or legal safeguards. Similarly, migrant labourers—integral to construction, agriculture, and urban services—face exploitation, low wages, and poor living conditions. The Covid-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerability of these groups, prompting calls for inclusive labour reforms.

Despite policies like the Code on Social Security, implementation remains weak. Labour unions and civil society are urging

the government to ensure minimum wage standards, accessible welfare schemes, and legal recognition for all categories of workers. As the nation celebrates Labour Day, it must also confront the deep inequities in its workforce and strive for a labour system that values dignity, fairness, and protection for every worker, regardless of their employment status.

N Sadhasiva Reddy, Bengaluru

Promoting alcoholic drinks

It is learnt that the Tourism Department is organising a three-day 'Spirit of Goa' festival at the SAG ground in Colva from May 2-4.

The sixth edition of the festival will reportedly showcase a wide spectrum of locally brewed beverages right from the traditional and GI-tagged cashew Feni to innovative Feni infusions.

The question that arises is

letterstotheeditor

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whether it is absolutely necessary for Goa to promote alcoholic drinks. It is a fact that many visitors are drawn to Goa by the prospect of enjoying alcoholic drinks. There have been efforts to restrict its open use in public places to address issues like littering and nuisance. It is true that alcohol consumption is a part of Goan culture, and the availability of alcoholic drinks contributes to the State's tourism. However, on the flip side it is learnt that three to four new cases of chronic alcoholism are being recorded every day in government run de-addiction facilities across the State.

The Institute of Psychiatry and Human Behaviour (IPHB) has also been treating a steady influx of chronic alcohol addiction cases. Alcohol consumption is having a bad impact on Goan youth. There has also been a steady rise in incidents of drunken-driving resulting in road accidents which at times end in fatalities.

Goa needs to strike a balance between its identity as a prime tourist destination and the health and well-being of its residents. Tackling this complex issue will be crucial.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Govt must assure Kashmir remains safe

The Pahalgam terror attack has left an indelible mark on Kashmir's journey towards peace and prosperity.

It served as a grim reminder that while violence can temporarily disrupt life, it cannot be allowed to derail the valley's dreams of normalcy.

The need of the hour is building a robust security ecosystem, ensuring safety without casting a shadow over the valley's famed hospitality. This will build confidence among both tourists and local residents.

The government must also