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A costly lesson in free water

When Chief Minister Pramod Sawant recently revealed that the Goa government had to shut down its free water scheme due to rampant misuse including instances of households acquiring up to four meters each, the admission struck deeper than it first appeared. While the statement might seem like a routine explanation for a failed welfare scheme, it actually unearths a far more disturbing pattern: the dangerous intersection of poor planning, political opportunism, and entrenched corruption.

The scheme in question was designed to provide 16,000 litres of water free to every household. On paper, it looked like a progressive step toward easing the financial burden on citizens. But like many such populist announcements, it crumbled under the weight of its own contradictions. According to the Chief Minister himself, it costs the government Rs 40 to deliver one cubic litre of water, while consumers were being charged only Rs 4. This meant the government was bearing a staggering 90% of the cost. Worse, it was doing so without ensuring any guardrails to prevent misuse. In this financial mismatch, who thought it feasible to offer such a massive volume of water for free? And what kind of governance model considers a scheme viable when it's bleeding money from day one?

The answer, sadly, is politics. The free water scheme seems to be yet another entry in the long list of electoral temptations

Sawant's claim that people installed multiple water meters to exploit the scheme should prompt a more uncomfortable question: how was this even allowed?

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The installation of multiple meters in a single household is not something that happens in the shadows. It requires paperwork, approvals, and inspections. All of which, point squarely at systemic administrative corruption. If multiple meters were approved illegally, isn't the bureaucracy complicit? Isn't this a failure not just of policy, but of governance?

This isn't a one-off case. Consider the Dayanand Social Security Scheme

(DSSS), which was supposed to be a lifeline for Goa's needy and destitute. Due to years of administrative neglect and lack of scrutiny, it became a fertile ground for bogus beneficiaries. In March 2025 alone, 12,000 fraudulent recipients were weeded out. Some were found to be deceased, some had left the State, and some had never even existed in the first place. These aren't just clerical oversights. They are clear signs of corruption and collusion where officials either look the other way or actively participate in siphoning off public funds meant for the truly needy.

Let's not pretend that this rot is confined to Goa. Maharashtra's 'Laadki Bahin Yojana' offers a textbook example. Pitched as a transformative scheme to deposit Rs 1,500 a month into the accounts of poor women, it played a pivotal role in helping the Shinde-Fadnavis government secure power. Post-election reality, however, was very different. Over 2.6 crore women enrolled, far more than anticipated. Now, with the State exchequer reeling, the government is trimming the list down to 1.2 crore. Shockingly, even government employees were drawing benefits from this supposedly targeted scheme.

These patterns reveal a larger, more dangerous truth: schemes meant to uplift the poor are being weaponised for votes and then drowned in inefficiency and corruption. The tragedy is that the poor, who these schemes are ostensibly meant to serve, suffer the most. Not just from the eventual collapse of such programmes, but from the erosion of public trust they cause. When a genuinely needed scheme is announced tomorrow, people will scoff, skeptical that it will ever deliver what it promises.

If the government's intention is genuinely to help the underprivileged, then planning must precede announcement. Financial sustainability, clear eligibility norms, real-time monitoring, and a zero-tolerance stance on corruption are non-negotiable. The 16,000 litres free water scheme, in retrospect, never stood a chance. Not in a State with a Rs 30,000 crore budget and no mechanism to prevent abuse.

Instead of blaming the people for "misusing" the scheme, the State must reflect on its own failure. Failure to plan, failure to regulate and failure to lead. Because ultimately, it is not the people who failed the scheme, but the government that failed its people.

Twitter World

António Guterres @antonioGuterres

I am very concerned by announcements by several @ UN member countries to withdraw from the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. We must uphold humanitarian norms & accelerate mine action. The protection of innocent lives depends on our collective action & commitment.

comment



This column is not a critique of India's foreign policy under Narendra Modi; it is an attempt to explain it. The BJP's manifestoes from the very beginning, in its Jana Sangh avatar in the 1950s, have little to offer in terms of foreign policy doctrine



minister S Jaishankar has laid out his thesis in his writings and this will help us appreciate what India is attempting to do in the world. Jaishankar assumes that in our time the United States and Europe will look inward (his first book of essays was published just before Trump lost in 2020), while China would continue to rise. This would open the

India's foreign policy under PM Modi

On June 12, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution demanding an immediate, unconditional and lasting ceasefire in Gaza.

It spoke of ending Israel's use of starvation as a weapon of war. A total of 149 nations voted in favour, with America and Israel opposing. India abstained from voting, repeating a pattern it has adopted in the Modi era.

This has upset some Indians because it is a break from India's longstanding position on Palestine and Palestinians, but it is in keeping with the thrust of the BJP's Hindutva ideology.

On the other hand the government's supporters have been upset by the even-handedness with which the world has approached our recent conflict with Pakistan. We cannot get nations to take our side.

This column is not a critique of India's foreign policy under Narendra Modi; it is an attempt to explain it. The BJP's manifestoes from the very beginning, in its Jana Sangh avatar in the 1950s, have little to offer in terms of foreign policy doctrine. However, foreign

space for countries like India to be opportunistic in their engagements with the world and for this they did not need consistency.

What India wanted was a 'multi-polar Asia'—meaning one in which India could claim parity with China. Many balls would need to be kept in the air, Jaishankar writes and India would handle them with dexterity. This was opportunistic but that was all right because opportunism, he tells us, was in India's culture. We should understand our abstention from voting against genocide and starvation of children by Israel in this light.

The Mahabharata's lessons, Jaishankar says, are that deceit and immorality are merely to 'not play by the rules'. Drona's demanding of Eklavya's thumb, Indra's appropriation of Karna's armour, Arjuna using Shikhandi as a human shield, these were but 'practices and traditions'.

Inconsistency in policy was not only fine but required because 'obsessing about consistency' made little sense in changing circumstances. So what was such a doctrine to be called? In a speech he made where he first laid out this doctrine of opportunism and inconsistency, Jaishankar said it is hard to think of a name. He takes up and discards the phrases — 'multi-alignment' ('sounds too opportunistic') and 'India first' ('sounds self centred'). He settles at 'advancing prosperity and influence', which he says is accurate but thinks is not catchy. He believes some name for it will eventually come if it is pursued long enough, because part of the challenge is that we are still in the early phase of a major transition.

The opponent will point out that this was no real foreign policy at all. This was a cover on top of what was already going on. What interested Modi, and what was inconsistent, but made for pageant and ceremony, was

being passed off as something meaningful. The opponent will also ask why Jaishankar's doctrine is detached from the rhetoric offered by the BJP. There is no role for India, the civilisational entity, which nationalists from Nehru to the BJP have made much of. There is no Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam-style romanticism or Vishwaguru-type bombast here, and Jaishankar's nameless doctrine is stripped of all forms of morality and ethics. This is not India engaging with the world on the strength of Indian pluralism. The world is a transactional place and India must be dexterous enough to be able to take advantage of it. One important element of this line of thinking was to take advantage of the war in Ukraine and buy cheap Russian oil. Europe, dependent on Russian gas for energy, could hardly press other nations for buying from Russia. India did so, along with China. How much cheaper was it? The average landed price of imported crude for April-December 2022 was \$99.2 per barrel. If oil from Russia was excluded, the average price was \$101.2, meaning a saving of \$2 per barrel. And this money did not come back to the Indian citizens as we have seen in the price of fuel; instead it enriched private refiners.

Jaishankar does not appear to have anticipated that this theory of his worked both ways. In such a world as he imagined, others would also seek to take advantage of India, and treat it in opportunistic fashion. This might help explain why our global outreach has received such a tepid response. We have chosen to be transactional with the world, as our UN votes reveal. The major powers understand and accept this and they will in turn be transactional with us. Whether this is good, bad or indifferent foreign policy is for the reader to decide.

(Aakar Patel is a writer and columnist)

people's edit

BREAKING THE PANIC CYCLE

VINOD CHANDRASHEKHAR DIXIT

World Panic Day on June 18 is an initiative aimed at increasing awareness about panic disorders. It serves as a day to provide education on the signs and symptoms, offer resources and support to those affected, and challenge the societal stigma surrounding mental health disorders.

It is a day to sit back, relax and try to let some of that stress and panic melt away. People with panic disorder have frequent and unexpected panic attacks. These attacks are characterised by a sudden wave of fear or discomfort or a sense of losing control even when there is no clear danger or trigger. Panic disorder often begins in the late teens or early adulthood. Women are more likely than men to develop panic disorder. Panic disorder sometimes runs in families, but no one knows for sure why some family members have it while others don't. According to researchers several parts of the brain and certain biological processes may play a crucial role in fear and anxiety.

In fact, panic disorder is a mental health issue that may affect up to 2% of the population in certain countries. Women are more likely to succumb to panic than men, and the condition is very treatable, particularly when the person affected is armed with self-care tactics while sticking to a healthful diet. Panic attacks often include physical symptoms that might feel like a heart attack, such as trembling, tingling, or rapid heart rate. Panic attacks can occur at any time. Many people with panic disorder worry about the possibility of having another attack and may significantly change their life to avoid having another attack.

Panic attacks can occur as frequently as several times a day or as rarely as a few times a year.

People with panic disorder may have sudden and repeated panic attacks of overwhelming anxiety and fear and have a feeling of being out of control, or a fear of death or impending doom during a panic attack and also an intense worry about when the next panic attack will happen.

Whether simply incorporating a few slow breathing exercises for a few minutes or engaging in an entire hour of full-blown meditation, these types of activities can have a huge impact on mental as well as physical health.

Those who are really struggling with panic as a stress response would be wise to seek help before it gets worse. Calling a counsellor seems like too big of a first step, check in with a trusted friend or family member first to see if they'll help call a counsellor or doctor. It is very important to remember that there is no shame attached to mental health issues, and getting help from a professional is the bravest thing a person can do on the road toward recovery. Let us encourage people to slow down, relax and get the help they might need if they are, indeed, struggling with panic. The best measures, however, are preventative.

letterstotheeditor

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

Hold no grudge

For every story that makes news, there will be more untold stories about the passengers who perished on the Ahmedabad-London Air India flight.

Life is precious, but also fragile. Death comes looking out for its victims from the unlikeliest sources. Little must have those who took the flight expected that this would be their last journey. Worse is the fate of those doctors, who died while having lunch in the hostel canteen.

Let this be a lesson to us those who are fighting over trivial matters. Nobody knows when the call will come. So let us make our peace immediately because nobody knows when death will snatch us away!

Anthony Henriques, Mumbai

Students at the receiving end

It must be said the student community in Goa has been at the receiving end of several decisions of the government and shortcomings of the authorities concerned.

It may be recalled that for the first time, schools in Goa had advanced the new academic year to April from June for classes VI to XII as part of the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP).

Some parents had protested the change due to concerns about the hot weather. When schools commenced in June several schools in Goa, particularly government primary schools, were reported to be without proper roofing.

Some schools have had their roofs removed for repairs, leaving them vulnerable to rain, while others have had incomplete or delayed repair work. Now it is learnt that there is a serious shortage of textbooks and that the Goa Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education has directed printers to publish additional copies of Class XI Psychology and Class IX English Text books.

It is learnt that there is shortage of textbooks in several other

subjects as well including Science, Hindi, English and Konkani for Classes IX and X besides textbooks of French and Portuguese. The Education Department needs to assess the number of textbooks that will be needed by the students well in advance and inform the printers accordingly.

Studies of students should not be affected for no fault of theirs and the matter is beyond the control of parents. Incidentally, Goa has officially been declared 100 percent literate by the Union Government.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Improve life of fire-fighters

It is shocking to read about the sordid conditions of the Margao Fire Brigade in which the brave fire-fighters are forced to reside. Some have described it as "inhumane and neglected" accommodations (O Herald June 13).

Reportedly, the infrastructures leave much to be desired because of insufficient sanitation, absence of clean water, poor ventilation and no pest control. The ceilings leak, toilets are unhygienic and there is a lack of maintenance. Clothes and beds get soaked due to water seepage and most importantly the electrical system is faulty that has resulted in frequent short circuits.

The moment they finish their duties and return to the barracks the fire-fighters have a different fire-fighting to do before preparing their food and taking rest. It is a shame that neither the Directorate of Fire and Emergency Services nor the government seem to care for the fire-fighters who put their lives at risk for others and are on call 24x7. The government has money to squander on unnecessary events and functions, but apparently unwilling to clear the squalor in the barracks and make the life of

the fire-fighters better and comfortable.

Sridhar D'Iyer, Caranzalem

Tragedies continue to claim lives

Pahalgam terror attack, Bengaluru stampede, Mumbai suburban trains accident, Ahmedabad air-crash, helicopter crash in Uttarakhand and now the Pune bridge collapse — all happened in a space of just two months.

One really wonders what ails the country as tragedies continue to claim lives relentlessly. However, in the specific case of the bridge disintegration in Pune, it is people who were chiefly responsible for the catastrophe. Turning in large numbers, they threw caution to the wind and simply ignored the warning signs against using the dilapidated bridge.

The bridge, which is only four-feet wide, was said to be structurally incapable of supporting more than a few pedestrians at a time, and yet at the time of falling down, it was reportedly crowded with scores of people and with some motorcycles. But it also begs a question as to why no efforts were made by the local administration to build a new bridge in the last two years despite repeated complaints.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, Chennai

Goa among coastal States prone to landslide

The people keep living under stress and tension whilst those responsible carry on with impunity!

Goa has dangerously become one of the most landslide prone coastal States in India due rapid urban expansion. This is scientifically confirmed by a study by the ICAR, Old Goa. Their findings were published in January 2025 using Geospatial techniques and

AI, so am not making false accusations. There are perennial monsoon woes of flooding and road accidents, some of which I have been witness to, due potholes, stray cattle, careless construction material or pavement slabs that give way, etc, causing grave trauma and injuries and even death which their families have to suffer with no accountability from the authorities responsible!

It appears the casino industry and land mafia with powerful builder lobbies have been allowed to take over. It is all very well to plan moon landings, without down to earth priority, needing doles to make people dependent on government to get elected and control citizens' lives without prioritising their basics like jobs, increasing high prices, garbage clearance, stopping free water scheme instead of punishing those misusing it, generally not consulting the citizens/stakeholders first before deciding.

John Eric Gomes, Porvorim

One day at a time

These days our social media and news channels have been flooded with tragic news of an Air India plane crashing into a doctors hostel when we barely recovered from the RCB celebration that turned into a horrible stampede. A lot of lives have been lost, dreams have been shattered, and hopes to spend time with family built a brand new life turned into darkness.

People say that the sky is mourning the lives of crew, the pilots and people who captured their last selfie before they could say bye. I don't think any of them thought it would be their last day or last moment.

Because the dream was in their minds they were waiting to turn those dreams into reality. What is worse is that we only think about the future, we even stress

it out so much that we think God isn't answering our prayers. How long will we struggle? We see other people's Instagram posts and wish we had their lives not appreciating the one which you already have.

These tragic incidents show us that life is unpredictable...we may plan for tomorrow but we don't know what tomorrow will bring us, whether we will still be breathing or having our last breath.

It's time we surrender our lives to God and let His plans be done, not ours... I think it's time we live one day at a time and give more time to family and less to our stress.

Reena Maria, Divar

Mitigate monsoon woes

Even as some parts of India are reeling under the onslaught of heatwaves, southwest monsoon has crippled lives in several parts of coastal Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala.

Rivers are filling fast and the threat of flood looms large over numerous sensitive areas. Since these are the days of accurate IMD forecasts, it is high time State governments identify flood prone areas well in advance before the situation goes out of hand.

Based on the weather forecasts people, especially those in the low-lying regions, should be warned about the impending danger of massive water logging and floods. Methods of warning should be immaculate, repeated and reachable taking care to placate the people so that they do not panic.

Safe evacuation of people should be another major priority for any State government. Relief and rehabilitation cannot suffer due to oversight. Centres of rehabilitation should be well stocked with all essential commodities. Volunteers should be set in place to help the needy. Additionally, landslide prevention mechanisms should not escape the attention of governments.

Ganapathi Bhat, Akola