

O HERALDO

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Accountability must after near-disasters with ferry boats

The recent capsizing of a ferry boat called Betim and a close shave between another malfunctioning ferry boat and a barge has brought into focus the need to overhaul the state's fleet of ferries to ensure public safety and prevent riverine accidents, which could very quickly turn into disasters. Earlier this week, Betim, which was docked at the Chorao ferry ramp, got partially submerged after water flooded one of its air tanks that are crucial to maintaining the vessel's buoyancy. Although no casualties were reported, three motorcycles that were parked on the ferry boat sank but were later retrieved.

Subsequently, the director of the river navigation department said that the incident had occurred due to an 'operational oversight', and that water had been accumulating in one of the tanks of the vessel over the course of two days and had not been drained. The director further said that the situation worsened after torrential rainfall the day prior to the ferry boat capsizing, as water began filling the air tank even faster. Despite this, he then went on to say that the ferry possessed a valid fitness certificate and had even undergone routine inspection. "I do not think that the ferry boat had any fault. It is an operational problem," he told the media.

Now, let's assume that this particular ferry boat had started taking in water while a trip was in progress. The aftermath would have been catastrophic as several unsuspecting passengers onboard would have probably lost their lives in the river and the vehicles on board would have plummeted to the river bed along with the sinking vessel. Would the justification of the authorities concerned be as nonchalant then? Or would they pin the blame on the ferry boat's crew in order to save their own skin?

The opposition hit the nail right on the head when it said, "The ferry mishap is not merely an accident — it is the direct consequence of the BJP government's persistent failure to maintain critical infrastructure and its alleged ties to corrupt practices"

If that wasn't shocking enough, there was a close call a couple of days later when a barge came dangerously close to a ferry boat in the Cumbharjua canal. It wasn't the fault of the barge operator, though, because the ferry — which was proceeding from Old Goa to St Estevam — broke down mid-route, leaving the crew with no option but to halt operations and leave the situation to chance. In this instance, the non-functional ferry boat had a few passengers on board when it floated very close to a barge that was passing by, and would have collided into it if the barge's operator hadn't instinctively decided to steer the vessel away from the ferry and direct it into the foliage lining the canal. The sudden manoeuvre sent the barge off course, but fortunately, there wasn't any serious damage and no injuries to anyone on board. It took an hour for the ferry boat to be fixed, after which it continued the journey to its destination.

Two close calls involving the river navigation department's ferry boats occurred in a single week and yet, the government and authorities responsible appear to be dealing with this situation very lightly. All that the RND minister said was that the capsizing of the ferry at Chorao may have been caused by a leak in the air tanks, accompanied by the rhetorical line, "Public safety must not be compromised." He then said that a formal investigation would be launched after the ferry was salvaged, to determine whether the cause was mechanical or due to human error. Not surprisingly, however, he didn't announce any corrective measures for the officials who are concerned with ensuring that all ferry boats are fit for daily commute.

The opposition hit the nail right on the head when it said, "The ferry mishap is not merely an accident — it is the direct consequence of the BJP government's persistent failure to maintain critical infrastructure and its alleged ties to corrupt practices." It also marched to the RND's office at Betim in protest and to demand accountability. Regarding the near miss in the Cumbharjua canal, the opposition rightly said, "A major disaster was narrowly averted, with no thanks to the government's preparedness, but due to sheer luck. This is not an accident. This is criminal negligence."

Yes. These incidents can be recorded as nothing but criminal negligence. And it is high time that the government and the officials concerned own up to the mess that the state's ferry boat fleet is in. Given the decrepit condition of the vessels, the RND should introduce the RoRo ferry service quickly instead of merely conducting test run after test run. It should also bear in mind that safety and protection of lives are paramount, and that there is no excuse for shoddy safety checks and nonchalance when it comes to water transport.



While in Goa, try to visit fewer places so your holiday is more relaxed. If you want to visit all the top spots in one trip and constantly shuttle between North and South Goa, then please don't complain about high transportation costs. There's no point blaming taxi drivers if your local travel budget shoots up simply because you couldn't resist the urge to gallivant instead of staying put and soaking in the beauty of Goa



Apps do add convenience, and when first introduced, they work like a breeze. But over time, they become cumbersome and complicated, acting more like clickbait, with adverts popping up. Convenience slowly takes a back seat, and the experience becomes a nuisance to the user. A prime example is the Indian Railways — a government entity that even displays advertisements during ticket bookings. God help

you if you need a tatkal ticket — the app or website often malfunctions on high-demand routes. Even if everything goes well and you manage to book a valid ticket, no app will help you if someone else is sitting in your seat. You might even get assaulted if you refuse to vacate your seat for a politician. And just check how much they deduct if you cancel your ticket online.

Indian Railways isn't the only culprit. Even private enterprises have learnt how to game online bookings, since nobody regulates their backend. Recently, many Indian fans of Enrique Iglesias discovered how the app for his Mumbai concert was stage-managed to ensure that low-priced tickets were never actually available for purchase. Prices rose exponentially with every click. Those cookies on your computer are there for a reason.

It is surprising that most Goans have not taken offence to taxi drivers being so freely called the "mafia". So what if we don't own a taxi or have any personal stake in the business? Is it not our duty to speak for these people? Today, it is taxi business owners. Tomorrow, it could be another Goan industry. Incidentally, the term "mafia" is associated with criminal activities — and nobody would complain if the real mafia were exposed: the drug mafia, land mafia, money laundering mafia, honey-trapping mafia, corruption mafia. But unfortunately, only the taxi mafia gets repeatedly mentioned, even though their offence hardly qualifies as criminal activity. Yes, they demand more, and tourists and Goans have a problem with that. But the same tourists and locals will eventually realise they're set to be fleeced and made to pay through their noses once the app becomes common practice. We seem to have a problem when a blue-collar taxi driver asks for more, but we gladly pay when the demand comes from a white-collar individual sitting in an air-conditioned office, calling it "surge pricing" or some other fancy overhead through an app.

Taxi owners and drivers must understand that the entire system is against them if they start making good money. Recently, an auto-rickshaw driver in Mumbai made head-

lines for earning ₹5-8 lakh per month through a side hustle — safekeeping documents and personal items that are not allowed inside the US Embassy for visa applicants. His business grew so much that he had to hire a locker nearby because he ran out of space in his auto. Unfortunately for him, someone with good intentions posted his story on LinkedIn, which was later amplified in the media. Guess what? The police came and shut down his entire operation. There was nothing illegal about what he did. But the moral of the story is that our society cannot digest the idea of an auto-rickshaw driver making that kind of money. And of course, some regressive law will always be invoked to justify such action.

Nobody is against technology if it makes life easier. We were overjoyed and welcomed it when banks and utility companies made transactions online. But India has a record of making life difficult — with or without technology. From filing income tax to banks' cumbersome KYC processes, even so-called faceless and online systems have become more difficult than their offline predecessors. Just because the government is pushing transportation apps does not mean Goa's transportation problems are done and dusted for good.

A message to complaining tourists on a tight budget: if you want to reduce your transportation costs during your stay in Goa, please use the intercity shuttle buses run by the Goa government. They are clean, mostly electric, and air-conditioned. You will still need a taxi or auto for last-mile connectivity, but your overall transportation bill will come down drastically. It will also reduce your carbon footprint. While in Goa, try to visit fewer places so your holiday is more relaxed. If you want to visit all the top spots in one trip and constantly shuttle between North and South Goa, then please don't complain about high transportation costs. There's no point blaming taxi drivers if your local travel budget shoots up simply because you couldn't resist the urge to gallivant instead of staying put and soaking in the beauty of Goa.

(The author is a business consultant)

Save young minds

The recent tragic suicide of a 15-year-old student in Mumbai's Bhandup area, reportedly due to study pressure, is a stark reminder of the silent crisis our youth face today. This is not just a personal loss; it reflects deep flaws in our education system, parenting approaches, and societal expectations. In chasing grades and success, we often neglect the emotional and mental well-being of our children. It's time we create safe, understanding spaces at home and in schools, where students feel heard, valued, and supported. Young minds must be taught that failure is not the end, but a step toward growth. Suicide is never a solution; it's a painful question society must answer with empathy, awareness, and meaningful action.

Mohammad Asad, Mumbai

Fraudulent social welfare beneficiaries

The candid revelation by Social Welfare Minister Subhash Phaladessai that 10% of the beneficiaries under the Dayanand Social Security Scheme (DSSS) are bogus including those ineligible comes as no surprise. The very proactive Subhash Phaladessai must clear the rot that over the years has crept into the system, obviously with political blessings.

In 2001, when the Dayanand Social Security Scheme (DSSS) was launched, very high-handedly, the application forms were available only with Ministers and ruling MLAs who started distributing them on their birthdays. As this was a public scheme, I

was constrained to immediately move the High Court, which directed that the application forms be made available to the public at the offices of all the Mamlatdars. It is imperative that the certifying of eligibility for any social welfare schemes should be by revenue authorities and not by an MLA or MP. It is on account of this that hundreds of fraudulent and ineligible persons managed to get themselves enrolled as beneficiaries of public schemes they were not entitled to. Welfare schemes are meant to benefit the truly poor and needy while not being misconstrued as largesse of the political party in power.

Aires Rodrigues, London

Unhygienic conditions outside S Goa hospital

A hospital is a place where citizens come in the hope of a cure for their ailments. But what if the unhygienic condition in the surrounding areas of the medical institute can become the reason for the spread of diseases? This appears to be the case with the South Goa District Hospital (SGDH) in Margao. Overflowing sewage drains near the premiere hospital which caters to thousands of citizens of South Goa have reportedly triggered alarm as untreated wastewater has flooded the roads.

The overflowing drains have raised concerns about the safety and hygiene of the hospital premises. It is learnt that stagnant

sewage is collecting dangerously close to the hospital entrance. This can spread diseases, especially during the monsoon season when the sewage water mixes with the rainwater. Imagine patients visiting the hospital to seek treatment for an ailment going back home being struck with another malady. Elderly persons and children are more vulnerable to water-borne diseases.

It is learnt that there is no proper drainage system in place in the vicinity of the hospital which reflects the problems in urban infrastructure planning and sewage management in the state. The stagnant water can become a breeding spot for mosquitoes which can also spread vector-borne disease among the visitors to the hospital. Necessary steps need to be taken by the authorities concerned to address the problem on a war footing. The health of the citizens is of utmost importance and if hospitals can become a source of diseases, then God save us.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Saudi Arabia, the tide is turning

The process of Saudi Arabia modernizing itself under the rule of Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, ugly warts notwithstanding, is one of the most positive outcomes of recent times and a welcome change that will influence each one of the states in the Middle East. KSA's easing of centuries of barbaric control over women's

lives, the easy issue of tourist visas, liberalisation of residence rules, changes in educational content, the sidelining of the theocratic extremists and the overall opening up to the rest of the world, can only have a positive influence, in culturally integrating largely medieval Middle Eastern society with the rest of the world. The tide is turning for the better. It will still take many decades to reach its logical outcome, but the process that has begun should be welcomed by the rest of the world.

Rekha Sarin Trehan, Benaulim

Thought provoking editorial

This has reference to the edit 'Time to wake up and act' (Herald June 26, 2025). That was a thought provoking, frightening Editorial on the scenario in Goa today. Abandoned ancestral homes being misused by young girls on drugs and alcohol is certainly cause for worry. Our younger generation needs to be more responsible. Yes, the Law alone cannot save our children. The Editorial rightly exhorts us to wake up and act before it is too late. It is a challenge we need to take up earnestly. When our ancestors built those homes with their toil and sweat they had certain aspirations, a vision. We need to save our youth from the dangers of this world. The grass may seem greener on the other side and so, a section of the younger generation embark onto

people's *edit*

WELCOME THE TRAVEL BUG

SANDHYA VASUDEV

The world is a beautiful canvas painted by the creator. When this beauty is captured by a camera or the paint and brush of an artist, we drool over it. But to see the original, the travel bug has to bite, and it does not bite everyone. Unlike other infections, here, only the lucky ones get infected. A few decades back, one would see both the travel prone and the frog-in-the-pond types in equal proportions. Travel for the latter was only out of sheer necessity, and for the stingy, travel meant nothing but needless expenses, whereas for the local businessman travel was not even an option. But with the passage of time, travel has become a way of life, with holiday packages and attractive holiday destinations beckoning one from every conceivable media portal.

The lethargic are as yet avid armchair travellers, content in absorbing stories from others or the television. But for the majority, travel has become a must do, like celebration of festivals. Many visit a particular scenic destination repeatedly for the sheer charisma of the place. Yet others travel only on pilgrimages as a means of redemption of the soul. At times, the pilgrimage destination may be repeated umpteen times, depending on the devotee's faith.

My young friend Seema, has been doing the annual trip to Badrinath in the Himalayas, for the past two decades, not a mean feat! Much earlier, a trip to Badrinath - the temple of Lord Narayana - meant that people would manage their possessions and bid a final goodbye to relatives, as the path to Badrinath was treacherous. And if they returned safe, a feast would be organised for near and dear. With the government's intervention, roads are better nowadays, even though the vagaries of climate and terrain continue. Badrinath is to Hindus what Bethlehem/Jerusalem is to Christian, or Mecca is to Muslim brethren.

During my career stint, there was leave travel/fare concession, whereby an employee could travel as per his eligibility and the journey fare would be borne by the organization. A few employees would opt to encash their leave instead, without travelling. It puzzled me that they had no interest in setting sights on new places, when the organisation motivated them by reimbursing the journey fare.

Their poor explanation was that they had to spend for the stay and food. But I saw only the benefit of the fare being reimbursed, saving me that much amount, although I would spend vast amounts on the stay and food, not forgetting the inevitable shopping of souvenirs for friends. But it was a break from routine and gave us family time, as the husband, who was posted elsewhere, would also join. So every two years, we had this experience, thanks to both our organisations. Apart from this, travel kept happening for many reasons.

Travel provides one with insights about the culture of people elsewhere, as also the history nestling there. Travel teaches resilience with the capacities to adapt and adjust. Sometimes the journey itself is awesome, like my recent experience of driving through the Malnad region amidst the pristine beauty of nature. Many times, we end up exploring the unexpected. As G K Chesterton said, "A traveller sees what he sees, a tourist sees what he has come to see". Become a traveller.

those shores with a Portuguese Passport in hand. We must face the reality rather than run away from it. The choice is ours, yes!

Melville X. D'Souza, Mumbai

Election Commission has now become HMV

There is no second opinion that credibility, transparency and accuracy which were the ingredients of the Election Commission of India (ECI) headed by stalwarts like T.N.Seshan, M.S Gill, J.M. Lyngdoh and the like stand martyred at the altar of the ruling dispensation today, allegedly for varied reasons. This is the state of the ECI today and the general elections conducted ever since the BJP came to power at the centre, have come for severe criticism and people have lost faith in the conduct of the ECI which stands totally compromised now. Right from fixing the dates and phases of elections to the date of counting of votes have been allegedly done to suit the convenience of the saffron party.

The opposition leader Rahul Gandhi is the sole crusader trying to expose the commissions and omissions and partisan attitude and deliveries of the ECI but till date, they have not come forward to give any valid and convincing replies to various pertinent questions raised by him. One really wonders when the ECI which has become the voice of its master, will realise it's folly and perform it's duty properly, as a constitutional body entrusted with the sacred duty of conducting elections honestly and without giving room for suspicions in their conduct.

Tharcus S. Fernando, Chennai