



By ALBERTINA ALMEIDA

Goa: A Poster State for BRICS

When BRICS leaders will converge in Goa mid-October, it is believed that they will be discussing industrialisation, counter-terrorism, tourism, banking, bio-technology, cooperation... And typical to summits such as these, broadening of roads and 'connectivity' have preceded.

Naturally, people are asking what are these summits for, who are the broad roads for and who is the connectivity for? The irony of this cannot be lost, given that Goa is a poster host for such summits and also a poster state of the very kind of BRICS-perpetrated development, and, yet, is also a case in evidence that this development model is not working. It would be important therefore for the BRICS leaders to take a peep into how this 'development' is panning out in the host state.

The nature of industrialisation that the BRICS leaders are talking about has however also pushed a lot of people towards migration because the industries that were set up did not match or harness the skills of the people in Goa who most needed the jobs. Even as this industrialisation displaced people from the only livelihoods they knew and had. For instance, around 4050 hectares of land under de facto tribal occupation in the central belt of Sancoale, Loutolim, and Cansaulim, was forcibly acquired for an industrial estate in which the community found little space. The other side of this coin is the in-migration of poor non Goans, who votebank politics has bred illwill against while distracting from the colonisation by the big corporates from within and without.

Tourism development has also been the cover for casinos, golf courses, and the like. These make Goa the playground of the Indian and foreign rich at the cost of water resources, lengthening of women's work days, and hikes in land and food prices, among other things. The kind of support, for instance, that the corporate Leading Hotels has enjoyed from the State to set up a golf course at Goa's Northern tip of Tiracol, in the face of stiff opposition from local people is unparalleled.

Land for homes and livelihoods goes beyond the reach of even the average Goan. Staple food is taken away from the plates of Goans. The proposed IT Parks and biotechnology Parks have been decoded to show that they are nothing but real estate scams that seek to sneak in townships and gated communities where the rule of law is specially dismantled in the guise of 'development'.

As for the proposed BRICS New Development Bank, who will be the beneficiaries of such a Bank? Will it again be wealth-begets-wealth with the kind of acceptable collaterals that only the super-rich and the big transnational corporates possess? Will it be for only those kinds of activities and on that kind of scale that simple local people and their cooperatives do not and cannot engage in? In other words, old wine in a new bottle?

Counter-terrorism laws? Behind each time the National Security Act or the TADA was invoked or threatened to be invoked in Goa, there is a story of economic and political dissent that the ruling party wanted to quell by hook or by crook.

And broad roads? They have meant displacement from the livelihoods of people who occupied the land that the roads took over. Huge trees have been cut. Thus they have meant inroads into Goa to make it beyond recognition, environmentally and politically.

Connectivity? It is about doctors roped in by the ruling party to connect their dots by addressing a press conference about the safety of mobile towers, no prizes for guessing which company, in the run up to BRICS to ensure connectivity for the Official BRICS delegates in South Goa. One such oncologist was known to be a super-Dean of the Goa Medical College as far back as 2001, and never brought this up then. That says it all!

As for REAL cooperation, it seems more about cooperation between or with big corporates. Smart cities, model villages are being founded on the backs of marginalised communities. The recently announced MOU of Environment Ministers to cooperate, to conserve ponds rivers and ponds seems more like greenwashing the extractive mining policies and mega environmentally destructive projects actively facilitated by these Governments. While

necessary, it is akin to planting trees, while sanctioning tree-slaughter of entire groves.



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Why not cooperation to address trafficking of women? Or to ensure that local labour is gainfully employed and not rendered vulnerable by the kind of trade agreements the countries' leaders sign, waiving off even minimum labour guarantees? Even Goa's approximately 35% organised labour force has reason to be concerned.

Ever so many questions, as the Summit nears, straight out of people's mouths, or mediated through civil society groups, a couple of whom have constituted themselves into a People's Forum on BRICS. If BRICS was formed as a counter to a certain power hegemony that sought to exclude certain countries, shouldn't it challenge that kind of hegemony even within?

Goa is a poster case for the BRICS summit for foregrounding the pangs of the present development model. It poses a challenge to interrogate democracy, justice and development, from the yardsticks of equity, people's participation, decent wages and dignity for all. Goa wants development that is people-centric and is rooted in a creative engagement with its land and its resources. Goa wants peace. And so do BRICS countries and peoples the world over.

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