




The decision by the state and central governments to expand the coal handling capacity of the Mormugao port is cause for alarm. From very real and obvious dangers of environment and health to the equally real threat to the livelihoods of traditional fishermen, the government seems least bothered about the citizens. On the contrary they are making haste to promote the interests of the big corporations. Indeed, plans to build the National Highway 17-B and the dredging of the Mormugao port are geared to facilitate the transport of large volumes of coal to industries in neighboring Karnataka.

According to news reports, the plans to dredge the port and build a new highway will benefit Indian companies like Adani, JSW, and Vedanta. Nihar Gokhale, a journalist who reports on environmental and policy issues, wrote some time back that clearances for the Mormugao expansion flagrantly violated rules and due procedure. If the plans materialize as per the wishes of the corporations and the government, Mormugao's coal handling will rise to 26 million tonnes per annum from the current five million tonnes; the port town of Vasco and surrounding areas, therefore, are poised to choke on coal dust.

That the government is riding roughshod over the lives and livelihoods of the people is not surprising. In Goa, we have the instance of the Investment Promotion Board that circumvents all checks and balances to bring in the 'mega-project development'. Case in point was the sale of a village in Tiracol to construct a golf course for the rich, while the villagers engaged in traditional occupations were manhandled to vacate the land. Through the partnership of corporations and government we see a process of 'colonization' wherein local resources are senselessly extracted or destroyed while the local people either get peanuts in return or nothing at all.

Thinking of large-scale processes of development as 'process of colonialism' – wherein shifts in political power does not necessarily alter oppressive relations – allows us to see that the nation-state of today operates in similar ways as the colonial-state of the past. As many scholars have pointed out, the neo-liberal development shares a link with past colonialism and imperialism in places like Asia and Africa in the manner in which it extracts resources



and mounts wars against indigenous peoples. There is, however, a difference between the neo-liberal development of today and the colonial development of the past, chiefly in terms of the volume of resources extracted or exploited. Activists and lay citizens need to consider this history in order to mount strong resistance against the destructions of lives and livelihoods.

Mormugao port provides us an excellent opportunity to reflect on such processes and their long history. The port, in fact, can be considered to be at the centre of colonial and neo-liberal development. There is the curious case of British India investing in the construction of the West of India Portuguese Guaranteed Railway (WIP) that had linked Mormugao to the Southern Mahratta Railway (SMR) at Londa, via Castle Rock towards the end of the nineteenth century. Looking for a cheaper and convenient point for exporting the products from the hinterlands of British India, the British Raj entered into a treaty - the Anglo-Portuguese Treaty of 1878 - with Portuguese India. The cost of building the railway line, in true colonial fashion, was borne by the Goan exchequer.

The Portuguese were looking for investments that would revitalize the weakened economic situation, create jobs, and boost the almost non-existent industry in Goa. The Portuguese government hoped that collaboration with the economically and politically powerful British empire would modernize Portuguese India. That it did not work was due to many factors and there is no space here to elaborate why these plans failed. However, what needs to be highlighted is that many in Goa at that time felt that the Portuguese had effectively given the control of the economy into British hands. The British too wanted political and economic control over Portuguese India. They did achieve this goal to a certain extent with the control of the port and railways, and taxes on the production of salt, amongst other things.

In a sense, the developmental politics around Mormugao port in contemporary times follows this old pattern; of massive investments coming with a promise of jobs and growth of the economy. It also necessitates the investment of public money without substantial returns to the same public. Whereas in the past the flow of goods was from the hinterlands of India to other places of the world, in the present times the government-corporate nexus wants to use Mormugao as a importing and exporting node for goods (like coal and iron ore) to feed the industries in various parts of the country and abroad. The case is curious not just because of the reverse flow of goods, but also because Indian companies are extracting natural

resources like coal from distant Australia (and also in places like Mozambique in Africa) and transporting it in India. Many in Australia, including indigenous leaders, and cricketers like Ian Greg and Greg Chappell, have supported campaigns against Indian companies like Adani to halt coal extraction. These Australian activists have argued that the proposed mine in Carmichael, Australia - said to be the largest in the world which can produce 60 million tonnes of coal every year for the next 60 years - would threaten not just the indigenous communities there but also the eco-sensitive Great Barrier Reef.

From facts available on the ground, this present neo-liberal expansion - following roughly patterns of past colonial interventions in the economy and politics - appears eventually to benefit only giant corporations. Colonial relations thrive amidst us, destroying the environment and the lives of people. And it is not just the white men who are propagating such exploitative business practices.

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