



By Albertina Almeida

## What Will be the Next New Bottle for the 'Development' Wine?

When the news first broke out about proposed amendments to the Goa Land Development and Building Regulation, 2010, it seemed like a Déjà vu: one because much of the so-called development envisaged through those amendments had already been resisted many years ago, and therefore not carried out. This time around it had come in a new bottle that was called Proposed Amendments to the Goa Land and Building Constructions Regulations, 2010.

In the late 1990's, the Tourism Department of the Government of Goa, had proposed to acquire land under the then Land Acquisition Act for golf courses. This had been spotted by way of an advertisement in national newspapers. It must be noted that at that time, none of the national newspapers had a Goa edition. When an application for information was made to the Department of Tourism, Government of Goa, asking what is the area of land proposed to be acquired for each of the golf courses proposed to be set up, how the water requirements of each of the golf courses was to be met, a copy of the environment impact assessment report as regard each of the proposed golf courses, the response was 6.40 lakhs at Verna Plateau and 10 lakh square metres at Naqueri and Quittol villages in Betul, and that the promoters were supposed to make their own arrangements for water, and further that the golf courses would be 'improving' the sites which are both rocky and barren.

Inherent in this reply of June 1993, was a vision of development that did not look at people's participation in decision making processes, or at the actualisation of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments to the Constitution of India, or at development from the perspective of the people and the users and uses such as land grazing that the land had been put to over long long years. For the struggle to fructify, it then took several actions and lobbying, drawing lessons from other Asian countries like Thailand, where such golf courses had already been set up, and solidarities with and from movements at the international level, to enable an understanding of just how golf courses were disastrous for the environment, apart from the local issues of land use and availability.

The water bodies, with the toxic chemicals that would be ingested for the lawns, and the water-guzzlers that golf courses were, was critical knowledge for rejecting the golf courses. The Village Panchayat of Verna and its gram sabha, at that time, strongly resisted the golf course at Verna, based on information of environmental impacts of golf courses which was provided to them, and the knowledge that a golf course was coming up in their area (from information given by the Tourism Department to Bailancho Saad). The entire momentum with an all-Goa movement against golf courses, finally compelled the Government to retreat on its golf course plan. Yet in 2022, the Government seems to have come around a full circle, and



proposed golf courses, which means that they would now descend into the fields, as the fields are almost the only big flatlands left, or were they thinking of flattening the rocky areas? Further, they now said they would only use organic fertilizer, without explaining that a 6-inch thick layer is required during the period of one year, which would mean 75000 to 112500 cubic metres of organic manure each year. Would they have been importing this quantum of manure? Pray, what will be the next new avatar of the golf course in the name of development?

Similarly, the Goa SEZ policy 2006, provided that the State Government will take appropriate steps to declare the SEZs as Industrial Townships to enable the SEZs to function as self-governing, autonomous municipal bodies. Hence the Government visualised industrial townships in which the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments would be given a go by, and the townships were in fact like gated areas, whose operation could not be questioned by the people or the local self-government bodies, and would/could, in effect, have become the preserve of the elite descending in Goa from India and abroad. Apart from the fact that the employment it would generate would require importing of labour from other parts of India seriously resulting in breach of Goa's carrying capacity in terms of land, water and other natural resources, and amenities. Therefore, again civil society groups banded together to oppose the SEZs, as a result of which the Government of the day led by then Chief Minister Digambar Kamat assured that the SEZ policy would be withdrawn and eventually his cabinet formerly withdrew the same in June 2009. There was also a bio-technology policy under which the biotechnology parks were supposed to be SEZ like. Presumably that also stood withdrawn to the extent of being SEZ like?

Prior to that, the industrial estates, which are also outside the bounds of Village Panchayats, were also set up on the pretext of providing employment and generating revenue. Is there any study of how much employment these industrial estates have generated and for whom, considering that the fields that were forcibly acquired were under cultivation by the local tribal community? Again, now in 2022, in respect of the proposed amendments to the Land and Building Regulations, the Chief Town Planner was quoted in the press as saying that the amendment would have helped create a lot of employment opportunities for Goans. This time in 2022, the proposal had assumed the garb of film cities, film studios and golf courses, and mega-farmhouses (obviously in fields, silly as it may sound) to prepare for mega industry read as huge corporates, to now take over the last bastion of Goa's environment, the fields.

How long will the successive Governments keep rehashing the same plans and the same development model? How long the same wine in a different bottle? The Government must get the message loud and clear that people's voices have to be heard through gram sabhas and local self Government bodies, when going to the drawing board, and that the technical

experts (such as architects, economists, lawyers, environmental engineers), and representatives of civil society must be aids in this process. At no stage, must anyone be in contravention of the Constitution of India as is, according to which diversity of genders, of profession of religion, of abilities, of occupations and professions, must be able to reside and live shoulder to shoulder with equality and with dignity, while maintaining inter-generational equity. Not simply the most recent movement has been called Goenchea Fudlea Pidge Khatir (For the Future Generation of Goa).

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