



By DALE LUIS MENEZES

National Interests and Local Interests

Goa Forward's (GF) recent views on the expansion of coal handling at the Mormugao Port Trust (MPT) should be evaluated with the party's rhetoric of being a 'regional party'. Surprising, some might say, that a party that stood for *Goemkarponn* is at odds with those who are desperately working to save Goa's ecology. If regional interests or *Goemkarponn* are to be secured for the benefit of the local people, can national interests be served at the same time? Though the backlash to the statements led to a retraction as far as coal handling is concerned, nonetheless GF's recent statements and their compromises on the issue of nationalization of rivers should make us to introspect and interrogate how national and regional interests operate.

Apart from the fact that national interests have a flip side of making those who do not conform to these interests as 'anti-nationals', terms like national interest are a curious way through which protests are muzzled, especially those against the draconian policies of the state. Often policies and projects carried out for the express purpose of securing national interest benefit multinational corporations. National interest further benefit persons of dominant caste and class groups or those who enjoy the power given unto them by the state and the media, while the land and resources of the poor and bahujan groups are appropriated wholesale.

Large-scale projects are not the only way to observe the operation of national interests against regional ones. In a curious way, we can see it operating in Goa's language politics as well. By making Nagri-scripted Konkani as one of the official languages of Goa, a certain nationalist politics was put into play. The Roman-scripted Konkani and those who demanded that it too be recognized as official were left out. Within this nationalist politics it was not possible to recognize the Roman script because the Roman script is allegedly foreign. Anything foreign is not Indian, and therefore would not serve any national interests. Portuguese-inflected or -derived words in Konkani had to be purged in favor of Sanskrit-derived vocabulary to make Konkani more Indian and more national.

Linked to the politics of the Konkani language and its official script is the Medium of

Instruction (Mol) issue. The demand for English, so the argument went, was anti-thetical to Indian culture. Forcing children to study only in “regional languages”, some believe, would instill national pride in the children of Goa. Vile propaganda suggested that the Mol in English was a conspiracy to serve ‘Catholic interests’. It is, however, a different matter that those who are demanding English as Mol are fed-up of the parochial language politics in Goa, and see no future in the manner in which ‘regional languages’ are forced onto the Goan public, more especially, on the poorer and bahujan sections who cannot afford private English education. The bottom line is that through a narrow and parochial politics, Goa’s elite classes are serving national interests that do not see any merits in including all forms of cultures and linguistic expressions. In fact one is expected to give up on certain practices if they do not conform to the national standard.

During the press conference which received a huge backlash, GF’s spokesperson Prashant Naik also made a sarcastic comment, arguing that if there is an opposition to all development projects then all Goans will have to “make the passport” and leave. Notwithstanding the blatant illegalities of such development projects as well as the manner in which such projects rob the people of Goa of their land and water, Naik’s seemingly off-the-cuff statement reveals a deep-seated bias. Those who opt for a Portuguese passport in order to have access to better employment opportunities, and in many ways to escape the increasingly vitiated and stifling political atmosphere in Goa, are seen as betraying the nation. They are viewed as having no loyalty to the nation. By suggesting that there is a link between those who opt for Portuguese citizenship and those who oppose mega-projects, Naik’s statement precisely draws from a ‘nationalist’ discourse that has no regard for the problems and difficulties of the people that drive migration.

Goa’s recent history is witness to several protests that opposed the large-scale takeover by the central governmental agencies and multinational corporations. At least from the 1980s there have been protests against such polluting industries like the Zuari Agro Chemicals, Nylon 6,6, Du Pont, Meta-Strips, the agitation against the Konkan Railway, as well as the agitation against the setting up of the Special Economic Zone, or the agitation led by the Ramponnkars, the traditional fishermen to safeguard the interests of people in traditional occupations. The agitation against evictions in Baina (in the garb of ‘cleaning’ the beaches of prostitution and migrants) amongst several others should also be remembered while the issue of MPT’s expansion is discussed. What this suggests is that in its recent history Goa has witnessed spirited opposition against a form of ‘development’ that is a direct assault on the

lives of people.



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Claims of national interest should be examined if they secure or deny rights to people, whether these rights are legal, cultural, environmental or in any other sphere. The discussion of *Goemkarponn*, local interests, and national interests should focus on the struggles in Goa's recent history that has somewhat restricted the march of developmental projects. This and other instances such as the MoI issue wherein a large section of the people of Goa mobilized to fulfill certain demands tell us that the people of Goa have put local interests above so-called national ones. This is an important lesson to remember.

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