



Global warming is a threat to coastal areas across the world, Goa's coastline also seems to be threatened by ships being stranded due to negligence on the part of the owners, and especially that of the Goa government. By focusing on the various ways through which the rules are flouted, not just by the private enterprises, but by the authorities who are supposed to be protecting the public good, one comes face-to-face with a clear break down of the rule of law as well as the administrative setup in Goa. Additionally, the inability to check and control the whims and fancies of private business and private individuals suggests that Goa's ecology is seen as having no value, to be disposed off on the whims of the rich and powerful.

On 5 June, 2000, the MV River Princess ran aground on the Candolim-Sinquerim beach stretch. Due to bad weather the anchor snapped and the loaded oil tanker drifted to the beach. It took the Goa government 12 years, and a whopping 120 crores of taxpayer money, to finally move the ship. The environmental degradation due to this accident has been immense. An estimated 30,000 sq. mts. of public beach area is eroded, along with the livelihood opportunities of those Goans who live in this area. While the beach was slowly being eroded with each crashing wave, the government and the ship-owners dilly-dallied over how it was to be removed. The inability of the government to hold the owners of the ship, the Anil Salgaocar group, eventually meant that the people of Goa paid to clear the mess, and that too only after the beach was seriously degraded.

In 2016, four years after the River Princess was dismantled, another vessel - though not as large - washed ashore the Arossim-Cansaulim beach stretch. It turned out that a rich family from India had hired out a pontoon and a tug boat to host a wedding party. What followed this fiasco was a blame game on the part of the authorities. As the Cansaulim-Arossim-Cuelim panchayat and the Tourism Department had issued permissions to host the party, in the event of an accident how was no one held responsible, many asked. This time, thankfully, it did not take 12 years to remove the vessels, and in 71 days Arihant Ship Breakers (ASB), which has previously salvaged the MV River Princess, completed the job. However, no one was held responsible for the accident and the state, once again, displayed its inability to take strict action. Incidentally, the pontoon at Arossim was hired by the owner of ASB. The same company is also hired to salvage the MV Lucky Seven by its owners.

Now 'another River Princess' in the form of a floating casino hotel ran aground on the Miramar coast. The MV Lucky Seven is said to be owned by ex-Haryana home minister, Gopal Kanda, and the Golden Globe Hotels, and would have been the sixth off-shore casino to congest the already crowded Mandovi. The latest fiasco happened under the rule of the BJP | 1

which promised to remove all casinos more than a decade ago. There was also a clear indication that the MV Lucky Seven ignored all sorts of warnings pertaining to the danger of storms from the Captain of Ports and the Coast Guard. Even worse, the MV Lucky Seven was not properly registered according to the laws of the land, and did not even have the necessary permissions to sail up the Mandovi. According to the Captain of Ports, the ship was allowed as a “refuge vessel” to drop anchor at sea. Around the same time, Golden Globe Hotels petitioned the High Court, which apparently ruled in their favor, to allow it entry into the Mandovi as the ship was said to be at risk while anchored. The High Court’s order therefore, needs to be viewed as not a ‘go-ahead’ for another casino – or all casinos in Goa – but as a permission to move to safety.

Armed with a High Court order, but ignoring all sorts of environmental warnings and procedures of the law of the land, the MV Lucky Seven tried to enter the Mandovi despite protests by the Goan people. While this incident once again underscores how the Goa government is unable to uphold the law against the whims of the rich and the mighty, it also brings to light how Goa is exploited as India’s ‘pleasure periphery’. Both the pontoon in Arossim-Cansaulim then and the casino in Miramar now are playthings for the enjoyment of the middle and rich classes from India’s metros. Goa’s coastline and natural beauty are at the service of these Indians, to be abused as they deem fit. If at all there are some problems, such as huge ships running aground and posing an environmental disaster, the people of Goa are expected to foot the bill and clean the mess. Clearly, such a mismanagement of the taxpayers’ money is a big reason why the state requires earnings from such problematic industries like the casinos in the first place.

This puts the people of Goa, especially its marginalized people, in an unequal and exploitative relationship with big business interests. The Goa government equally contributes to this unfortunate situation. Eventually, one needs a political establishment that changes policy decisions to be more people- and environment-friendly and enforces these new policy decisions through the rule of law.

(First published in *O Heraldo*, dt: 2 August, 2017)



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# Grounded Ships in Goa: A Brief History