



As 2018 begins, a major challenge facing those standing for Goa is to ensure the reversal of the laws, and legislative and executive moves that have resulted in the continued dispossessing of Goa and its people of its land and resources. Throughout 2017, the Centre and the State have legislated or moved in ways that have posed alarming threats. The attitude of the state and its enforcement mechanisms has been My Way the Highway.

Taking Highways literally, we can see that there have been no consultations with the people – lands have been forcibly acquired, trees have been brazenly felled, hills cut for earth to be dumped on the blossoming fields – on the ready-for-harvest vegetables – all for four and six lane highways and bridges. It is an irony that bridges are being built this way. Building bridges has always been a metaphor for filling a communication gap, a connecting gap. But whom is the State connecting with these bridges? The investors in the aerotropolis township at Mopa? The coal business magnates? And who is losing with these bridges?

Another example one could take could be the handling of coal by the MPT and O. P. Jindal Group's Jindal SW Group's SWPL, not only has the base project been initiated without the necessary concurrences, but it has also been reported to have exceeded the specified limits of coal handling. While the Goa State Pollution Control Board did file a complaint, it did so belatedly. But one wonders whether in the manner the State has proceeded, it will go the Francis Pereira way. It may be recalled that the cases filed against Francis Pereira (BOY) for desecration of crosses in Goa, were a product of lack of professional police investigation with confessional statements. This booking of Francis Pereira was to have a scapegoat, simply meant to assuage the feelings of people who were agitated about the desecration of crosses, obviously engineered to simultaneously attack the Catholic community *and* to distract people from the unity around issues at hand. Will this sort of complaint by the Goa State Pollution Control Board follow suit? They know the people of Vasco are agitated because of the consequences the coal handling is having on their health and more importantly that of their children. So they must make people feel good that they are doing something about it.

The coal corridor is essentially intended to be a highway through a road, rail and river

network, to open up another avenue through which to ship the excess cargo envisaged with the port berth expansions, and to make it cheaper for the coal magnates to ship the cargo. The National Waterways Act, 2016, was enacted on the plank that river transport is a cheaper form of transport and that those waterways that are declared as National Waterways would be made accessible for transport with funds from the Centre.

Considering the way in which the sentiments and livelihoods of the people have been bypassed, there is absolutely no reason to be ecstatic about reaching Margao from Panjim and vice versa, for instance, in half the time. The present Highway to Margao was for precisely fast forwarding the traffic. But what happened? So many players have laid claims to transport over the route. What we forget is that Goa is small and we have just so much carrying capacity. With these six lane highways, that is exactly what will happen. More transport, wider highways will again emerge as a solution from the State's technocrats. From six lane highways, they will start talking of eight lane and ten lane highways. And again, wider highways for whom? For what? At whose cost? The perennial question to be asked.

All this is only affirming how the Centre treats Goa – as a corridor for its raw materials to be transported for trade. We would do well to remember the historical figure of Timoja. The man who provided Albuquerque the support and information required for the conquest of the city of Goa in exchange for the hundred thousand cruzados and a lease of all lands of Goa but Tiswadi. The State Government is proving to be the new Timoja. In partnership and acquiescing in the deeds of the Central Government.

It is my way or the Highway. Strangely, what is considered as national and what is considered as anti-national is being framed by Hindutva forces for whom nationalism and liberalization are two sides of the same coin, to suit their vested interests. It may be noted that the corridor projects involve crores of rupees.

If people resist, the bogey of 'foreign hand' is used to divide. Otherwise, the Hindutva forces dub it as a 'Catholic' movement, to stoke fires between communities. Or simply call the protests anti-national. These forces, with active support of the State, thrive on diversion (*parivartan* diversion style) through labelling. They conveniently do not address the issues

raised by the people of the consequences of the acts involved in developing these bridges, corridors - these highways. They do not address the concerns about the Damocles' sword of My Way - the Highway dispossession from land and resources, the loss of livelihoods, the threats to housing, the dismantling of inter-generational equity.

In so labelling, the present dispensation is seeking to drive through the wedge, the corridor, the bridge, the Highway, after playing divide and rule.

(First published in *Goa Today*, dt: January, 2018)



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