



Don't politicise the floods; the people won't forgive you. This was the warning of the Maharashtra Chief Minister, Devendra Fadnavis, to opposition parties, even as the death toll in the monsoons reached 49 in Maharashtra and nearly 250 across the country.

Goa's condition is perhaps better-off than other states, in that there have been fewer fatalities. But entire villages in Pernem, Bicholim, and Sattari have been flooded, more than a thousand hectares of newly-sown crops drowned, roads and bridges washed away, and large numbers of people either marooned or evacuated. The resultant mental stress and physical illness can only be imagined. And there is more to deal with in the aftermath of the flood, when those who return home will be faced by damage, dirt, and disease, all adding up to a vast loss.

Fadnavis would like the world to believe that it's only the opposition parties who politicise the floods, not the people. The people, he implies, see the floods as a natural disaster, which they are ready to quietly accept, or maybe pray to the gods and feed brahmins like him, to ensure that they don't happen again. But people are not so foolish. And Fadnavis himself knows this very well, for soon after making the declaration above, and in what even the press reported as an unprecedented step, he made a second declaration, banning protests in the marooned and almost-drowned city of Kolhapur. The clampdown showed the increasing autocracy in the functioning of our governments, but is also proof that the beleaguered people of Kolhapur were angry with the government; proof that they saw the floods not as a natural disaster but a political one.

And few would believe otherwise today, for there is enough scientific evidence all around us that reveals exactly what's behind the increasing 'natural disasters'. For example, the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel, in its 2011 report, had predicted severe consequences of the environmental destruction in Kerala, caused primarily by quarrying, mining, and real estate development; its recommendations, that eco-sensitive zones be demarcated and protected, were rejected by the Kerala government. Similar recommendations were made for Goa, which were rejected by the government here as well. Last year, when Kerala was battered by torrential rains similar to this year's, ecologist Madhav Gadgil had predicted that Goa could be in line for a similar disaster. Why? Because of the same short-sighted and profit-driven 'development' model of the Goa government, where the environment counts for nothing. Who's going to pay for the hills and trees cut wholesale, the plateaux lost to empty towers, the roads gigantically widened, the disappearing marshes, streams and even rivers, the tons of sands dredged out of the riverbeds - who else is going to pay for all this 'development' but us, while the developers and their political minions laugh all the way to

their overseas bank accounts.



The political establishment is responsible, period. And not just for the big natural disasters but even for the smaller tragedies and the most personal of losses. An example is of just ten days ago, when we lost one of Goa's treasures, Alito Siqueira, to complications following surgery for cancer. The death of this much-loved teacher, scholar, activist, and inveterate questioner made me wonder: how many cancer-afflicted people do I know in Goa today? A lot, and I imagine that this is true for every reader as well. As a neighbour recently said, trying to sound light-hearted after losing his sister to the disease: "It's fashionable nowadays". Indeed it is. In fact, cancer rates in Goa are going through the roof. According to a study published in *The Lancet* last September, the incidence of cancer in Goa has almost doubled over two and half decades, from 52.5 per lakh in 1990 to 97 per lakh in 2016.

What is the cause for upward spiral? Could it be the formalin being put into our fish, which according to MLA Churchill Alemao, has been going on for more than a decade, and still continues despite being exposed last year? The government did not arrest even one person for the crime of adding a known carcinogen into the basic food of Goans, nor did it hold any of its own officers or ministers responsible for allowing this wholesale poisoning racket. Instead it took the chance to announce a new building project - a state-of-the-art centre for detecting such poisons! Even the report of the huge increase in cancer incidence did not get the government bothered about the state of our food, whether steroids in chicken or chemicals on the fields. What about the growing air pollution? The poisons used to maintain the lush golf courses of Goa's many star resorts? The mining and other wastes seeping into our water? Forget it. All that falls under 'development' - how can you even think of interfering with it? The government's response to the cancer boom is as expected: another great new building project. This time it's a cancer treatment centre. Prevention is better than cure, you say? But there's no money in prevention!

What's happening in Goa is not unique - it's part of the 'development' being fostered all over India. A development claimed to be in the national interest, but which actually benefits only the investors, while leaving everybody else with losses of various kinds, to be borne alone. An example is the 'cancer train' running between Bhatinda and Bikaner every night. It is so christened because most of its passengers are cancer-afflicted farmers travelling to Bikaner's government cancer hospital for treatment, from their home in 'green revolution' Punjab, where chemical usage on crops has been strong and unregulated for decades now, contaminating not just the ground, the water, and the food they eat, but even breast-milk fed to infants.

What's the way out? I don't know, Alito would have typically answered, you tell me. I don't

know either, but a start might be to politicise everything. Meaning, to not take anything at face value but to question; to search for the causes (both direct and indirect), the interests involved (especially those who benefit), and the role played by those in power. Disasters are never disasters for all, and exposing this, as Fadnavis proves, would make our political establishment very uncomfortable.

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