

Communities should see reason. So said Minister Mauvin Godinho, criticising the opposition of many comunidades to the Goa Government's plan to 'regularise illegal structures' built on government and comunidade lands. There are illegal structures all over Goa, he says, and so, "Can you demolish all the houses and put people on the streets?"

Doesn't it make you feel all warm and fuzzy, that you have a government which is actually concerned about people losing their homes and being dumped on the streets? Except that we know that the reality is a little different. Mauvin Godinho need not ask us how people can be put on the streets, when it is the government in which he is a minister which constantly does precisely this.

Just look at the building demolitions across Goa in recent times. 22 houses demolished in Sangolda in this very month of July 2025; 23 houses demolished in Tivim in April; 22 huts demolished in Bandora in March; in Arambol, 14 houses belonging to the traditional fishing community were destroyed for being in the Coastal Regulatory Zone (CRZ). In Cunchelim, 30 houses were demolished in November 2024. In Anjuna-Vagator, 20-25 small commercial structures (shops and food carts) were demolished in September 2024. In Sancoale, 64 huts were demolished in November 2023.

In short, Goa could well be renamed Demolition Central. And many of the demolished buildings were homes, leaving their residents, including the aged, the infants, and the infirm, all stranded in the open without even a roof above, since our government – which keeps finding land for more five-star resorts – has never seen fit to provide any spaces, even temporary, for homeless or disaster-hit people. It is notable that none of the demolished buildings were recent constructions; some were decades old. The residents claimed that they had paid through the nose to various persons, including police, local comunidade members, and local politicians, for the right to live there, along with payments for various essential services, all with the complete knowledge of other sections of the government, including utility departments, election commission, local MLAs, and even, in one case, Chief Minister Parrikar (whose election promise to the Tivim people, that their houses would be legalised, turned out to be like everything else he promised).

But they were the only ones punished, while the officials who presided over these illegalities – some of whom have definitely made a killing through graft in the process – all go scot-free.

So, demolitions of illegal buildings is nothing new in Goa. The question, then, is why this new and very compassionate bill? And that also when Goa already has a fairly compassionate old law, passed in 2016, allowing the regularization of illegal constructions. Regularisation can be done, according to the old law, if the illegal construction is built on your own land, or you are a mundkar and it is built on mundkarial land, or there is no objection from the owner of the



land, and if it is not in any no-development zone like forest or CRZ; and if it is within 200 square metres for personal residence, 100 for commercial purpose, 250 for residential plus commercial, and 400 for institutional. Legalising illegal structures... for whose benefit?

How many people have 200 square metres for their personal residence? Most legal village homes as well as urban apartments in Goa are smaller than this. And despite this very generous law being in place, one has had so many demolitions of homes – most of them probably one-tenth the allowed size, and belonging to working class communities – instead of regularization.

So, is this new bill trying to plug this hole and protect the vulnerable, as Godinho would have us believe? Not by a long shot. It is true that it has expanded the scope of the earlier law by including illegal structures built on government and comunidade land, which seems to enhance the chance of poor migrant communities getting legal homes. But that's not the focus at all. Because a big change is in the figures, which, as we saw above, were already generous. According to Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, the illegal structures that can be legalized in the new bill include personal residences of up to 1000 square metres in urban areas and 600 square metres in rural. 1000 square metres? Who can afford – and who is likely to build – an illegal personal residence of a 1000 square metres in Goa? Nobody except, perhaps, our ministers and their hotshot friends. Yes, the new bill is clearly for them, to further foster all their land-grabbing activities across Goa. Totally ignoring the needs of ordinary Goans.

Ordinary Goans do not need laws that regularize illegal construction. What they need is a mass housing policy, which will ensure affordable quality housing for Goans as well as people who come to work here. Why do migrant labourers have to live in illegal shanties at the mercy of slumlords and politicians? If employers in Goa want to employ labourers from outside Goa (or even inside), they have to ensure that they are legally housed. At the same time, officials under whose watch illegal constructions take place should be punished, severely and right till the top. This will ensure that none come up in the first place.

As for the illegal constructions that already exist, we do not need cut-off dates. What kind of sense do cut-off dates make, when it comes to life and sustenance? What we need is a cut-off income. A second home or a palatial home breaking the law should be demolished, but not the only home of a poor family. A big commercial establishment near the water's edge should be demolished – even if it is old – but not the fisherman's hut on which a family's survival is based. Why should age make a crime acceptable? How can age make the absolutely outrageous bungalow in the heritage precinct of Old Goa acceptable? Though it is clearly not just acceptable but very beloved to our government, since it remains untouched even years

after the huge illegality was pointed out.



Legalising illegal structures... for whose benefit?  
According to the law, the reason for committing a crime has to be taken into account - so breaking the law for fun or greed must be stopped, and even punished, while doing this for basic survival has to be treated differently.

*A shorter version of this article was first published in O Herald, Goa, in July 2025.*

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