

1.4cr sqm land converted, Pernem green cover cut by 20% for luxury villas, hotels

First Taluka On The Block Under New Zoning Plan

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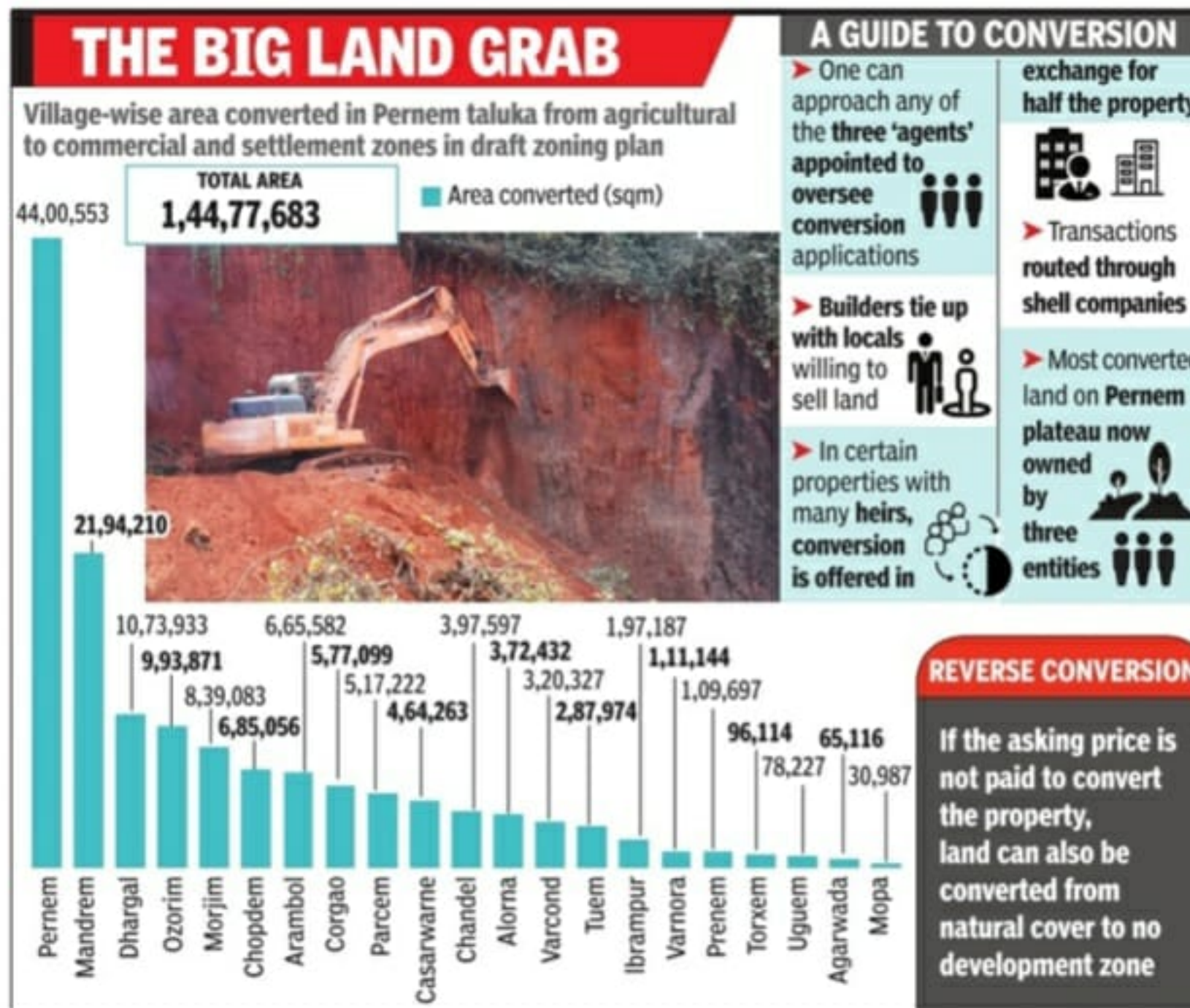
Panaji: Goa's green cover will soon be a thing of the past. And the destruction is starting from the northernmost tip in Pernem. With the new greenfield airport at Mopa has come the demand for the hottest commodity that is most scarce in the tiniest state: Land.

In the name of development, valleys, fields, orchards and hills are all on offer for the right price to build hotels, luxury villas and gated communities.

TIMES Special

With the town and country planning (TCP) department junking a planned development process and opting for zoning plan for each taluka, Pernem — the first of the 12 talukas to go under the hammer — has seen 1.4 crore sqm of land or 21% of the green cover converted for luxury projects.

Through the draft zoning plan 2023, a systematic devastation of the state's fragile green cover is on, with regulations being tossed aside to hand over orchards and agri-



cultural fields for development. Forests in private lands have fallen victim to the mindless exploitation and Pernem is the latest battle ground between environment and the real estate boom. And environment is losing.

These parcels exclude the industrial and transport zones, IPB, the area that comes under the Mopa airport development authority, notified forest land and those conver-

ted under Section 17 (2).

Sample this: Of the 25.2 crore sqm area in Pernem taluka, the Regional Plan 2021 classified 2.9 crore sqm as settlement area with 6.8 crore sqm preserved as green cover. The TCP department's GIS-backed zoning planning has now carved out 1.4 crore sqm from this green cover for construction activities, which is 21% of what RP 2021 had protected.

So brazen has been the pursuit of unbridled construction that the total agricultural and orchard lands in Pernem town in the draft zoning plan 2023 have been reduced to just 15%.

If the Regional Plan 2021 showed 1.3 crore sqm of agricultural and orchard lands, under the draft GIS-backed zoning plan, the TCP department has slashed it by 80% to just 24.5 lakh sqm.

"There is no consultative process. One just needs to approach the department and ask for land to be converted. This process is in violation of the town planning law," said an official.

If the villages have been ravaged for construction activities, Pernem municipal area has been equally blighted by conversion. After conversion, the total settlement and commercial areas under Pernem municipality have shot up to 52%, or 84.1 lakh sqm, as against 16% earlier.

The Manohar International Airport at Mopa plays a key role in fuelling the demand for real estate in Pernem, as it has triggered demand for hospitality projects, premium homes and wellness resorts with investments pouring in from Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Bengaluru, Chennai and Punjab.

Research conducted by the real estate advisory firm, 360 Realtors, suggests that average property prices in North Goa and the nearby Konkan region in Maharashtra will shoot up in the range of 25-30% annually. The firm reckons that the greenfield airport has brought North Goa's Morjim, Mandrem, Arambol, and Vagator beaches into greater focus, which are already "highly desirable" amongst domestic and international tourists.

Pernem draft zoning plan released in August has done vanishing act

Design: Sharmila Coutinho

► From P 1

TCP's data shows that after the Pernem municipal area, Mandrem, Dhargal, Ozorim, Morjim and Arambol have seen the largest chunks of agricultural land converted to commercial and settlement areas.

Though the Pernem draft zoning plan was released in August and was supposed to be put in the public domain, the plan itself has done a vanishing act. The zoning plan comes along with the TCP department's new norms that ease the construction of farmhouses, film cities and wellness resorts.

"You have to address the aspirations of the people. With the new airport, Deltin city, AYUSH hospital and hotels coming up, the zoning plan cannot stick entirely to the Regional Plan. But you cannot deviate entirely from the Regional Plan of 2021," said a government officer.

Though TCP minister Vishwajit Rane tasked the consultant Sky Group to help draft the GIS-based zoning plan, officials say that the zoning process has been done based on individual requests. Rane had earlier said that the government would no longer draft a new Regional Plan for the state and would instead rely on zoning plans for each taluka.

Locals from Pernem have got a whiff of the developments and have begun to protest, particularly against the huge amount of land that is being converted at the behest of builders and property owners from other states.

The latest onslaught on Goa's verdant hills and fields comes on the heels of Section 17(2) that Rane introduced in the Goa Town and Country Planning Act, 1974. Section 17(2), which has been challenged before the Bombay high court at Goa, gives the department unbridled powers to rectify any "inadvertent error that has occurred in the regional plan".

DIFFERENT SECTIONS OF TCP ACT

WHAT IS SECTION 17D

- Since Section 17(2) process is slow, TCP minister Vishwajit Rane introduced Section 17D in the TCP Act
- The provisions of Section 17D allow the TCP department to select any area in Goa and change the zones at any time without an outline development plan. Pernem is the first
- This provision is similar to planning and development authorities, which can decide on zone changes at least once in 10 years
- Before Regional Plan 2021, 8% of the land was settlement area. RP 2021 added 3.6% more as settlement land



WHAT IS SECTION 17 (2)

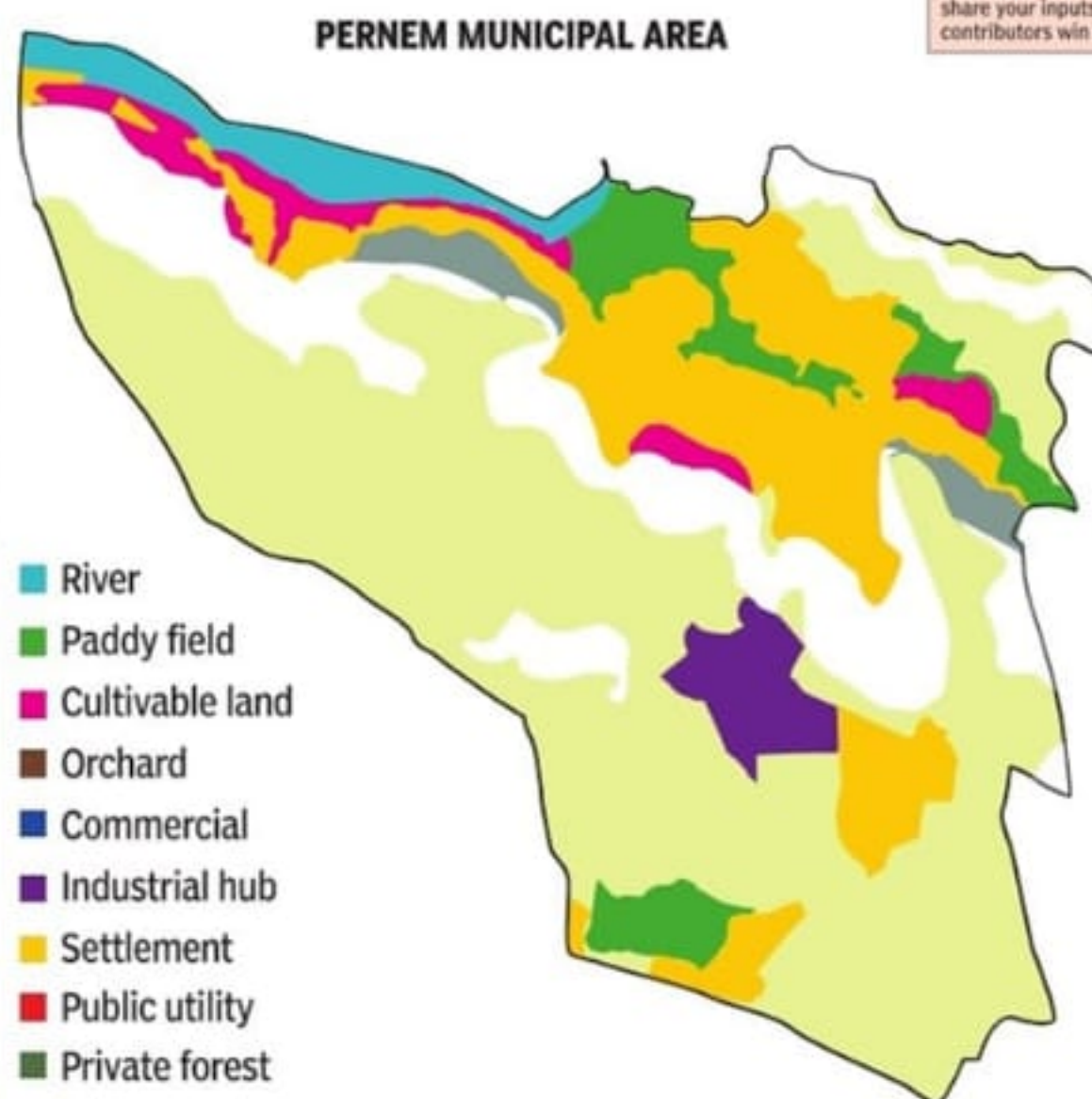
Rane, who earlier announced that all applications received under Section 16B were scrapped, introduced Section 17(2) which allows the chief town planner to carry out alteration/modification in the regional plan in bits and parts if the department finds "inadvertent errors"

WHAT IS SECTION 16B

Former TCP minister Vijai Sardesai had amended the TCP Act in 2018 to add Section 16B, which allowed the department to make changes in the regional plan by correcting typographical or cartographical errors based on applications received from people



Zoning as per RP 2021



Draft Zone Plan 2023

