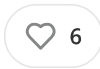


# Bhutani

Has the tide turned against mega projects in Goa? A behind the scenes battle and a book recommendation in this week's edition!



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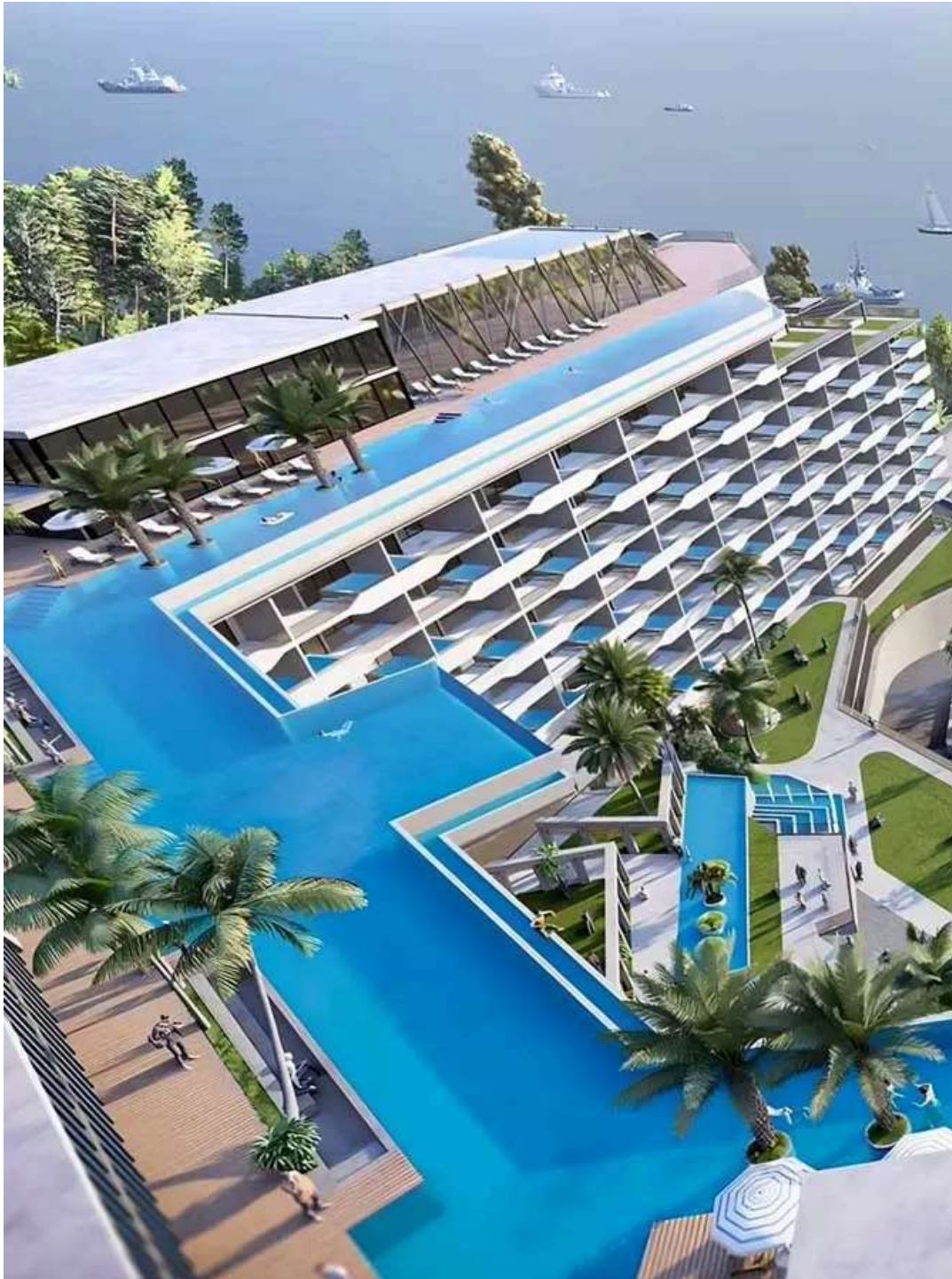
Hi folks,

It's been a long drawn week, and there's only one place to start this week's newsletter...

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# Bhutani



Pic source: bhutaniprojects.in

Or more specifically **Bhutani Acqua Eden Goa**, a 700-unit residential complex that promises buyers with villas and apartments “**thoughtfully crafted as a perfect blend of Portuguese architecture and modern designs**” with individual swimming pools besides a host of other amenities, has been a central talking point in the state this week.

Things came to a head on Thursday, when the Mormugao Planning and Development Authority **issued a show cause notice to the developer** Parmesh Construction Company Ltd (in whose name

permissions have been granted) for asking them to explain why permissions for the project should not be revoked and the Chief Minister said he had instructed the Town and Country Planning Minister to revoke the permissions granted for the project, if they are not in order and that he would "suggest" to the steering committee that he heads, that all files of mega projects would have to be routed through the Chief Minister's Office.

There's a lot to unpack there, so let me attempt to break it down.

## The buildup

Protests against the Bhutani project at Sancoale have been going on for a while. Local villagers who were up in arms against the project had been gathering forces ever since approvals were granted for the project earlier this year.

But the project really came into public attention when the villagers called together a public meeting at the project site during the monsoon session of the Goa Legislative Assembly that was attended by several prominent members of the opposition and later echoed in the legislative assembly.

Since then, the company moved in workers to clear the land with the protection of private security "bouncers" and a small posse of police that only served to inflame anger further.

Since then leaders from the Congress, AAP and several others visited the project site and expressed solidarity and their opposition to the project.

## Protest outside the CM's venue

But it wasn't until earlier this week that the government's attitude towards the project seemed to have changed.

On Sunday, following a call by activist Swapnesh Sherlekar, people from Sancoale and other well meaning protesters gathered outside the venue of a private event that was sponsored by Bhutani, at which the Chief Minister was the Chief Guest and lodged their protest against the project. The resulting videos and imagery that emerged from the venue painted a very unflattering picture of the government and forced the Chief Minister to react to the issue.

It's then that things began to move expeditiously.

## BJP's own goal

Later in the week, the ruling BJP thought they pulled the trump card, when state president Sadanand Shet Tanavade, called on reporters to "find out" who gave the permissions for the project and when. It was a similar line parroted by Chief Minister Pramod Sawant. It was a bad move. Turns out, the construction licence was given in February this year, while the (amended) conversion sanad was given in November last year.

By seeking to put the blame on the Congress government of 2007-12 for giving permissions to the predecessor in title for the said plot, the BJP scored a massive own goal. But then, as the saying goes, never interrupt your enemy when he's making a mistake.

By now, things had begun to change the growing chorus on social media was now being echoed by those aligned with the BJP who were calling for the government to scrap the project, the biggest of whom was Calangute Michael Lobo who said something to the effect that "**Bhutani-like projects were not welcome in Goa**". The sincerity (or lack thereof) of his statement aside, it was a reflection of how the tide had turned within a space of a week that forced the government to act on the issue.

Maybe it's just a tactical retreat by the ruling dispensation in the hope that the opposing forces will ease some of the pressure. The battle is by no means won -- the Government could yet favourably accept the developer's response to the show cause notice and allow the permissions to stand, and there's also the battle in the High Court still to be fought.

But for now at least things appear to have taken a turn for the better.

But it leaves me with one final point I want to make on this issue.

## **The real show cause notice**

There is no doubt that Member Secretary of the Mormugao Planning and Development Authority, Sanjay Halornekar issued a show cause notice to the developer asking why the development permission issued by the MPDA should not be revoked. The show-cause notice, while referring to four complaints received against the project, also pointed out the lack of the necessary 10-metre access road, the presence of hilly gradient and other issues with the construction.

But shouldn't Halornekar himself be served with a show cause notice asking him to explain how he granted the permission in the first place if there wasn't a necessary access road on site? And despite the land being a no development slope? No doubt the MPDA will claim that the project was cleared by the Town and Country Planning Board and its permission was a consequence of that.

But who will ask the government to explain why they gave the permission in violation of its own rules?

## **Something's cooking**



Pic source: Directorate of Information and Publicity.

If you've been following Goa's politics closely, you will know that 'all's not well in the Goa BJP'. If that wasn't already apparent, state BJP president once again said he would instruct ministers in the government not to talk about each other's departments.

From Vishwajit Rane claiming that the TCP ministry was given to him by the "central government" to now Mauvin Godinho complaining about the state of roads in the state it appears that rather than being united, the council of ministers is like a bucket full of crabs, each trying to drag down the other.

But you probably already knew that. What I would instead like to point out to is something that may not be apparent on the surface. For example, allow me to point out to [this video](#) that has been doing the rounds on social media as well as [this news report](#) that appeared in the Pioneer. Both the video and the news article are critical of the ruling government in Goa and highlight a list of failings of the government all of which are true and are issues that have caused and continue to cause controversy in the state, but have been completely ignored by the government.

But here's the catch. Any honest list of failings of the BJP government in the state would list all of the state government's failings and alleged acts of corruption -- not leave out some and highlight others and certainly not conspicuously ignore the biggest and most controversial acts of commission and omission of the state government.