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## Why Rajesh Naik, Chief Town Planner Goa, needs to go

Rajesh Naik approved the zone changes for a record number of 49 lakh sq mts; (95%) of the zone changes converted eco- sensitive zones like fields, no- development hill slopes, orchard and private forest to settlement zones

GUEST ARTICLE

Claude Alvares, a renowned environmentalist, is the director of Goa Foundation, an environmental monitoring action group that has filed successful public interest litigation cases

01/10/2024

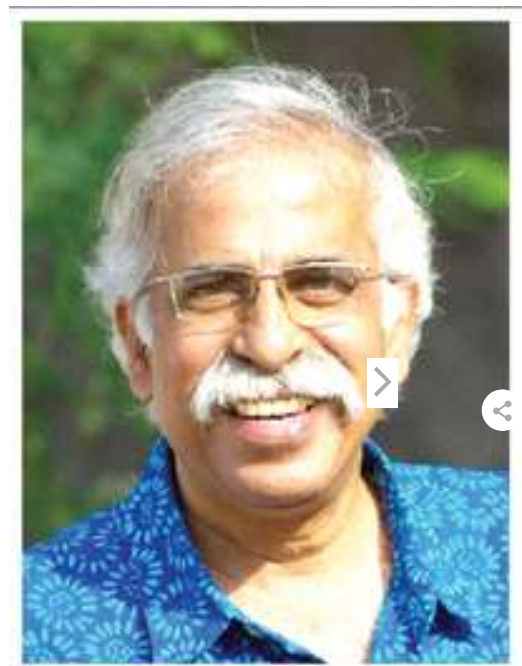
CLAUDE ALVARES

Today, large numbers of ordinary Goan citizens, young and old, will be attending the event scheduled for this evening at 3 pm at the Town and Country Planning office at Dempo Towers, Patto, Panaji, to collectively ask Rajesh Naik, Goa’s Chief Town Planner (Planning) who is on unwarranted extension since April 2024, to retire/resign from the office of the CTP, because of the tremendous damage he has caused to the ecology of the State by his various approvals of projects under the infamous sections 16B and now 17(2) and 39A of the TCP Act.

Rebellion and resistance have been welling up in various corners of the state over the past few months as a large- scale **nit** against the outrageous and audacious acts of the TCP department and its head honcho, Chief **wn** Planner Naik.

Large numbers of social activists from villages under assault by the real estate mafia from Delhi, Hyderabad, Pune and Mumbai are converging at Panjim at the office of the Town Planning Department with brooms and dustpans, to literally clean it up under the Prime Minister’s directive: Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.

The principal call for the clean- up event has been issued by Swapnesh Sherlekar, the most prominent and vocal environmental activist and blogger of them all. He has been supported by a large number of activists from across Goa, including Dhiren Phadte, Judith Almeida, Sanjay Naik, Xencor Polgi, Ramakant Kankonkar, Mayur Shetgaonkar, Pravin Shetgaonkar, Anthony D’Silva, Anthony D’Souza and several others, too numerous to mention. Their call is endorsed by villagers and village- level groups from south to north, all facing “real estate abuse”, a new pejorative term and offence. We are after all talking of nothing less than the rape of Goa.



Cont on Pg 11 >>

### Excerpts from the article

- March 15, 2024, two days before the LS Election Code of Conduct came into force, the term of Rajesh Naik who was due to retire end April 2024, was extended from 1.5.2024 to 31.10.2024
- In the week preceding the extension on retirement, Rajesh Naik approved the conversion of 8,25,648 sq metres of lands in Goa for real estate
- By today’s date, Naik has signed the files approving the conversion of 22,14,719 sq mts of land under section 17(2). In not one of these files has he provided a dissenting note on 22.2.2024, the Town Planning Minister opened another window
- Section 39A: Under this provision, Rajesh Naik signed the death warrant of another 3,82,589 sq metres of ecozones.
- Before ecozones amounting to 23,16.572 sq metres under Section 16B, were converted to settlement

## Why Rajesh Naik, Chief Town Planner Goa, needs to go

We may note that tomorrow, October 2, this real estate lobby, is having a major Expo in New Delhi, welcoming all real estate investors and moneybags of the country, to the feast of concrete that the Expo is offering in the form of villas and farmhouses, from DLF's Rs 50 crore villa extravaganza at Verem, to Bhutani's and DLF's concrete jungles planned at Sancoale and Dabolim. The list of projects in the expanding concrete jungle is, of course, quite endless.

In 2006-07, the entire state got under the umbrella of the Goa Bachao Abhiyan, to compel government to cancel and then denotify the Regional Plan 2011 which had been sold to the previous generation of the same real estate cabal we face today by then Town Planning Minister Monserrate. The proposed destruction was halted just in time.

But today, despite having a Regional Plan in hand, whose objective is ecological protection, the scale of the sale of Goa to real estate is simply mind-boggling. No ordinary Goan - no, correct that - not even reasonably well-off Goans, can afford the homes and villas now mushrooming across the Goan landscape, especially its hills and plateaus.

Details of Rajesh Naik's role in the town planning perfidy are contained in a three page letter that has been composed as the demand for his resignation which is being signed by hundreds of Goans.


Let me reposition the facts in that letter from another angle for the reader to gauge for herself what havoc this one single individual has wrought by his "inadvertent and incoherent actions" on the natural fabric of the state. Larger states might absorb such gross physical damage. Goa simply cannot.

The Chief Town Planner (CTP) is a public servant, paid by our taxes, to do a service to the state. He is not a domestic servant of the Minister. No decision can be taken by the Town and Country Planning Board without consulting him.

On March 15, 2024, two days before the LS Election Code of Conduct came into force, a small notice appeared in the Goa gazette, extending the term of Rajesh Naik as the state's Chief Town Planner (who was due to retire end April 2024) from 1.5.2024 to 31.10.2024 (a period of 6 months). Why was his term extended? Goa now has three Chief Town Planners, so there is no dearth of CTPs! The reasons can be found in what you will read below.

During the week preceding the extension on retirement, Rajesh Naik approved the conversion of 8,25,648 sq metres of lands in Goa for real estate. This was the single biggest week of conversions ever seen in the state. The extension order came as a reward.

By today's date, Naik has signed the files approving the conversion of 22,14,719 sq mts of land under section 17(2). In not one of these files has he provided a dissenting note, or questioned the need for the conversion. The Chief Secretary, who is also Town Planning Secretary, and who is not a town planning expert, has objected sometimes. But never Rajesh Naik, who always signed with an ingratiating smile.

On 22.2.2024 < e Town Planning Minister opened another window- section 39A. Under this provision, Rajesh Naik signed the death warrant of: > ther 3,82,589 sq metres of ecozones. 

Before the conversions of Section 17(2) and 39A, Rajesh Naik had already sacrificed ecozones amounting to 23,16,572 sq metres under Section 16B, converting them to settlement

Rajesh Naik signed every single file approving the zone changes for a record number of  $22,14,719 + 23,16,572 + 3,82,589 = 49,13,880$  sq mts (49 lakh sq mts). We can safely assume he did no other work during his tenure as CTP, since he was only signing files for the dismantling of the Regional Plan 2021, whose primary objective is protection of Goa's ecozones.

(95%) of the zone changes converted Eco sensitive zones like fields, no-development hill slopes, orchards and private forests to settlement zones. Of the huge number of zone changes under section 17(2), over 6,67,288 sq mts are located on No-Development Slopes (NDS). Thus, over 30% of conversions involved hill slopes.