



Goa: The land of defections, now land of scams?

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We are in the midst of the most festive season of the year. After Diwali, when we celebrated the festival of lights, signifying the victory of light over darkness, good over evil and knowledge over ignorance, we are now approaching Christmas, heralding the birth of Jesus, the messenger of love, justice, forgiveness and peace. We commemorate these annual events with great gaiety and enthusiasm, which bring families and friends in a celebration of joy, merriment and love.

However, does the present overall scenario in Goa reflect the true mood of the people and the principles, which we need to imbibe from these two Festivals? Does it look, by any stretch of imagination, that we are in the festive season – with Diwali marking the eradication of dark shadows, negativity and doubts from our lives and the birth of Jesus dawning a new era of love, peace and justice?

Are really dark shadows and doubts disappearing or increasing and can we see love and peace anywhere, leave alone in the country, but in Goa itself?

Is justice being seen as done when the government flouts audaciously Court decisions and the latter struggles to have its orders implemented, including the Tiger Reserve and noise pollution issues, cautioning about appointing special panels to ensure execution, because those in authority do not do their job efficiently?

People across Goa are fighting for their survival and safeguarding their rights. They are crying their lungs out, pleading that the environment and their health be protected. No one has any doubt that coal is detrimental to people's health and that those affected by coal pollution have developed lung ailments.

In Velsao, residents are vigorously and tenaciously opposing the audacious and aggressive behaviour of RVNL over double tracking, due to risk to their age-old houses and in Assolda, the gram sabha, in a rare gesture of unity, resolved to oppose a proposed jetty, which they rightly feel is a veiled attempt to facilitate coal transportation in the area.

It is anticipated that a NOC given to a mining company in 2011, may now be used for a jetty to unload coal at Xelvon. It is also learnt that this will involve felling of approximately 5000 trees. But potential health issues do not seem to bother our insensitive central and State government, who are not mending their ways despite all the scams which are coming to light under their watch. Why do have

these pompous gram sabhas, when voices of dissent are ignored? The genuine fears of the people are disregarded and labelled as anti-development stance by a government that claims to be part of the world's greatest democracy.

Let this government list out what benefits it has provided to the people of Goa, except for some connectivity infrastructure, which is meant for coal and which only time will tell whether it has been properly executed or whether they will have the fate of so many roads, bridges and retaining walls in the country.

Even DSSS – the scheme for poor widows and senior citizens was, sometime back, delayed for months, when Ministers and MLAs were drawing their salaries regularly.

The hallmark of this government's rule has been the destruction of Goa and marginalisation of Goans. People are fuming and angry at mega projects in their villages, conversion of even agricultural and forest land into settlement, through infamous sections 17 (2) and 39 A, aimed at satisfying the greed of a minister and his associates. The government will surely pay the price for it in due time.

We went through a long period of shame and notoriety when governments became unstable due to defections. These have not stopped, as the number of greedy persons is on the rise. But this government has added more feathers to its cap – unfazed corruption and shameful scams after scams. Corruption is not new to Goa or the country. But, the “party, with a difference” convinced us that the “difference” is a higher level of corruption.

Leave alone the charge that no work can be done in government offices without paying bribes, we have reached the ignominy of selling jobs for a price, with alleged involvement of functionaries of the ruling party. The only way out for proving the allegation of corruption against the government would be to order an impartial inquiry by a retired high court or Supreme Court judge.

The ED cannot instil any trust in us through its investigation, as its selective targeting of Opposition leaders is fresh in our minds.

Traffic cops, apparently rightly suspended for demanding bribes, are perhaps recovering what they shelled out to get their jobs, whereas the bigger offenders, who received the money, are roaming scot-free.

Scams galore on conversion and sale of land to outsiders, on slopes and low-lying areas, scams in foreign jobs, forged certificates, dozens of illegal structures in Old Goa heritage zone, including one of BJP's spokesperson, etc, the list is unending.

Goa is turning into a land of scams, with a thick-skinned government remaining unfazed. Let us be convinced that no large scale illegalities happen without the protection or patronage of people at the top. Some have now discovered the truth and how brazen this government can be.

A nervous ruling establishment is now targeting some of them, as they apprehend that more skeletons may tumble out.

The end of the year is a time for introspection, but the powers to be will remain unrepentant, as they firmly believe in making hay while the sun shines.

(The author is a retired banker)