

O HERALDO

VOICE OF GOA SINCE 1900

GOA CAFE SPORTS REVIEW EDIT IFFI 2024 VIDEOS Point Counterpoint INSIGHT OBITUARIES

house, rider injured, house occupants safe. Fatal Accident in Agdam: Jeep hits 2-wheeler while overtaking, rider Rajesh Naik (37) dies, two critical, driver in custody. BMC: Cre

Goa

Save Goa's Atma

Blaise Costabir



Herald Team

Published on: 26 Dec 2024, 11:23 pm



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There is a mad rush for settlement land in Goa, as it is a finite quantity, and the pressure is even more. Everyone and their uncle wishes to own a piece of Goa, at any price. One way to acquire settlement land is to buy it, either an existing house or plot that is already classified as settlement in the regional plan. With many Goans living abroad, their houses and lands have become a fertile hunting ground for land grabbers.

Recognizing this alarming situation, the Government of Goa set up a Special Investigation Team (SIT) in 2022 to provide aggrieved parties an easier route to complain or approach the authorities when their land was seemingly grabbed. However, while the task force is operational to date, we have not heard of any official or person being held accountable for land grabbing, despite numerous complaints being filed.

Recently, it was disclosed that a report released by a Commission of Inquiry indicates that the sale of properties based on forged Portuguese-era land documents cannot occur without the active collusion of the Archives Department staff. However, the SIT has yet to investigate this particular aspect despite the report being submitted to the Cabinet in Jan 24. It is hoped that this matter will be investigated expeditiously, as holding those responsible accountable would deter the sale of properties based on falsified documentation.

The alternative approach to acquire settlement land involves the conversion of fields, orchards, and no-development zone (NDZ). Recently it was reported that approx 2 lac sqm is proposed to be converted by the TCP in North Goa. A move that will significantly alter the green character of Goa. Due to the labour-intensive and financially unrewarding nature of agriculture, landowners are often inclined to sell their land at reduced prices. These parcels are frequently obtained by investors who subsequently ensure their conversion to other uses.

A possible way to protect the green cover or slopes would be the issuance of Transferable Developmental Rights (TDR). Assuming the landowner can develop 500 square meters if the 1000 sqm land was converted, he would receive TDR for 500 square meters, which he can sell or utilize in other permissible areas.

Nonetheless, the original 1000 sqm will now be perpetually designated as NDZ. This will save the original designated zone and be environmentally friendly.

The conversions occur within the framework of various sections added in the Town & Country Planning (TCP) Act. Initially, Section 16B was introduced to rectify errors in the regional plan, followed by Section 17(2) and subsequently Section 39A. These regulations have all encountered legal challenges, with pending verdicts. There has been a surge in applications seeking individual approval for change of zone, and strangely, it is the new owners who suddenly realize that the property they purchased was wrongly classified in the Regional Plan.

Another inconsistency pertains to the width of roads, with substantial developments emerging on what appear to be narrow pathways. Previously, a minimum width of 6 meters was obligatory, necessitating the road to already exist. However, in August 23, this requirement was modified to consider a 3.5-meter metalled carriage way as equivalent to a 6-meter road. As these developments become populated, we are likely to witness numerous disputes and instances of road rage. Due to insufficient width for two-way traffic, internal roads are expected to experience congestion and conflicts. Irrespective of legislative provisions, prospective homebuyers should insist on a 6-meter width for their own future benefit. By making such demands, builders will prioritise ensuring adequate road width before initiating any development. It is noteworthy that once these developments materialise, many Goans may find themselves unable to afford a place within them, potentially leading to the marginalization of Goans in Goa.

The 'Cash for Jobs' scandal unveiled what was already widely known. It was the undeniable truth that had been overlooked. Consider the predicament of paying a hefty sum to secure a job - once employment commences, the burden of repayment looms large. In such a scenario, how can we combat corruption effectively? Every 10th of December is marked as Anti-Corruption Day, yet we are failing in the battle against corruption if we turn a blind eye to the practice of exchanging cash for jobs. The Former Chief Minister, Mr. Parsekar, raised a pertinent query, "How is it possible that individuals with a mere 40% in their graduation attain a miraculous 99% in government examinations, and vice versa?"

One potential resolution could entail the simultaneous divulgence of grades for both graduation and government competitive examinations. The persistence of such irregularities would indicate a significant systemic deficiency at the university level. It is imperative for the authorities to address this issue with the seriousness it warrants; presently, all individuals implicated in the "cash for jobs" scam have been granted bail. The emphasis should not solely be on those who failed to secure employment despite financial transactions, but also on those who managed to secure positions through such means. Only by taking decisive measures against the latter cohort can we dissuade prospective job seekers from partaking in such illicit practices; otherwise, corruption will thrive.

The escape of a detained fraudster with the help of his prison guard signified a shameful moment for the law enforcement agency. The episode where a dwelling was demolished without police intervention due to directives from higher authorities remains vivid. The recurring deployment of bouncers by those who perceive their interests to be threatened against individuals who voice concerns regarding noise pollution, unauthorized construction, etc., exemplifies a troubling pattern.

The authorities seem to act as mere onlookers while some powerful citizens resort to taking matters into their own hands. Urgent and resolute action by the senior officials is indispensable to restore public confidence and dispel the notion that politicians hold absolute power.

It is inspiring to witness ordinary citizens resisting and endeavouring to amplify their voices in courts, panchayats, and gram sabhas. It is only through this unwavering 'Never Say Die Attitude' that the authentic essence and spirit of Goa will be preserved. An increasing number of individuals must awaken to the realization that failure to advocate now will diminish any prospect of beholding Goa in its 'bangarachem' or golden state. Instead, it will be tarnished or concretized. Speak out, for the soul of Goa yearns for your vocal resonance.

Merry Christmas and a happy new year 2025.