

Industrial Estate, that zone could itself be converted into a SEZ within 12-18 months. And so Parrikar directed the Managing Director of the Goa Industrial Development Corporation (GIDC) to earmark land for food parks and biotech parks in the then newly acquired land in Verna at a meeting held on December 29, 2004 (*Goan Observer*, Jan 12-18, 2008, 4). In keeping with this plan, the Goa Government sent 16 applications for setting up SEZs in Goa to the Board of Approvals in 2006. In a short span of time, huge tracts of land had been handed over to companies and more so without taking the local people into consideration. Since the Special Economic Zones Act of 2005 and the Special Economic Zones Rules, 2006 came into effect on February 10, 2006, 7 SEZs were approved, of which 3 were notified. The notified SEZs in Goa are: Cipla's Meditab Specialities Pvt. Ltd. (notified on April 10, 2007), K Raheja Corporation (November 6, 2007) and Peninsula Pharma Research Centre (July 10, 2007). The list of the approved SEZs along with details of the place, area and other requirements is given in Table 1.

Frauds in Land Allocation to SEZs

The information obtained by members of the SEZ Virodi Manch (SVM) is a People's Movement against SEZ, supported by various NGOs like the Council for Social Justice and Peace, Jagrut Goem and Goa Bachao Abhiyan) through RTI reveals that there has been no assessment study conducted by the State government to study the impact of these SEZs on the people living in the villages. Also, no discussion was held in the Legislative Assembly on this issue. The SVM by analysing the information obtained through RTI from GIDC and the Directorate of Industries found several fraudulent allocations of land to different companies who had sent their applications to the government to put up a SEZ. In the case of Peninsula Research Centre Pvt. Ltd. at Sancoale, the company was not even registered at the time of application, but "under formation". Secondly, the company applied for 2 lakhs sq. m, while the GIDC granted it 2.04 lakhs sq. m at the 286th Board Meeting held on March 28, 2006. Even in the case of Planetview Mercantile Company Pvt. Ltd at Verna, the company was not registered at the time of application. Interestingly, page 5 of the application says Gems and Jewellery SEZ but page 7 describes it as a biotech park. In the case of Cipla's Meditab Specialities Pvt. Ltd at Keri, the proforma GIDC application

Table 1: List of approved SEZs in Goa

Name of the Developer	Place	Area in lakh sq.m	Electricity Required MW per day	Water required in lakh litres per day	Employment	Status
Meditab Specialities Pvt. Ltd., Kundaim, Goa	Keri, Ponda	12.32	30	100	100000	Notified SEZ
Peninsula Pharma Research Centre Pvt.Ltd	Sancoale	2.04	20	1.18	25000	Notified SEZ
K. Raheja Corporation Pvt., Mumbai	Verna	7.92	96	40.6	50000	Notified SEZ
Paradigm Logistics & Distribution Pvt. Ltd. Mumbai	Verna	2.65	36	16.61	50000	Approved SEZ
Inox Mercantile Company Pvt. Ltd, Mumbai	Verna	5.52	48	2.79	50000	Approved SEZ
Planetview Mercantile Company Pvt. Ltd. Mumbai	Verna	1.32	13	0.73	25000	Approved SEZ
Maxgrow's Fin lease Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi	Verna	2.04	01	0.5	5000	Approved SEZ

Source: - SEZ Virodi Manch (SVM): *SEZ ki Zameen Ghotala, Atharva*. 22-24.

form was not submitted and so there are no details about the products to be manufactured, daily water and power requirements, etc. in the application submitted on April 3, 2006. The land of 12.32 lakhs sq. m. was allotted to Meditab at the 286th Board Meeting held on March 28, 2006, even before receiving the application. This is without the mandatory 7 days notice to the Board of Directors and without time to study the project and its impact on the area.

In the case of K. Raheja Corporation Pvt. Ltd at Verna, the application was dated April 12, 2006 while the allotment was made on April 19th without proper time to study the project and without the required 7 days notice to the Board of Directors for the meeting. There is neither inward stamp nor company seal on the application, both of which are required. 7.92 lakhs sq. m. land was allotted at Rs. 600/- per sq. m. and an additional land of 2.75 lakhs sq. m. in the form of open spaces and internal roads was allotted initially free of cost and subsequently at Rs.100 per sq.m at the 295th Board Meeting on March 9, 2007. While several companies in the Verna Industrial Estate are new companies not having any experience at all, K. Raheja is purely a real estate developer. In the case of Reteline Exports Pvt. Ltd at Quitol, Betul as well, several irregularities are found. The government invoked urgency clause to acquire land for Auxiliary Services for Food Park measuring 4.28 lakhs sq. m. under section 17 sub-sections 1 and 4. Of the acquired land, 2.5 lakhs sq.m. belongs to a tribal community in Goa called *Gowdas*. This land has a huge plantation of coconut trees, cashew trees and other fruit bearing trees. For the tribals, the land is the only source of livelihood and it belongs to 40 families. Also, the people of Betul passed a Gram Sabha Resolution on January 26, 2007 stating that no land should be acquired for the Auxiliary Services for Food Park and that the project should be scrapped.

Irregularities in land allocation are seen in the case of M/s Inox Mercantile Company Pvt. Ltd at Verna, where the area allotted to them is 5.52 lakhs square meters which is in excess of the 4.85 lakhs sq. m. which they had applied for. In fact in the application made by this company, the area requested for was 5.52 lakhs sq.m. which was thereafter cancelled and decreased to 4.85 lakhs sq. m. How did the Board officials come to know about the initial figure of 5.52 lakhs sq. m. and allot the same to Inox Company? Financial irregularities are

seen in the case of M/s Paradigm Logistics and Distribution Pvt. Ltd at Verna which had paid an amount of Rs. 3,17,30,228/- vide Receipt No. PNJ-51 dated 17/04/2006, even prior to the approval of the Board Meeting dated 19/04/2006. This raises serious questions about how the payment was made and received for allotment of plot even prior to the Board taking the decision of allotment.

Reasons for People's Opposition

From the above cases the following issues arise. The first is that the allocation of land was done in a hurry and without following proper rules and regulations. The companies mentioned above have been specifically floated for the purpose of grabbing huge tracts of land under the guise of SEZ. The main issue concerning SEZs in Goa is that they appear like nothing but big land scams. Very important questions were raised by the anti-SEZ movement like: On what basis did the GIDC and the Government of India accord approval to applications for SEZs in Goa? Was any detailed socio-economic study done to determine the most suitable location for these industries and their basic requirements? Was any Environment Impact Assessment conducted by the industries? Is there any Master Plan for industrial development of Goa?

The GIDC, being a statutory body, has to advertise in the daily newspapers while disposing of any property belonging to them and the property is required to be sold by auction or tender so that no loss is caused to the revenue of the state. The disposal of the land for SEZ in such a haphazard manner and at prices below the market value has adversely affected the revenue of the state. Also the said land was not acquired for SEZ nor has the same been declared as SEZ area and no resolution has been passed by the Board to change the purpose of acquisition. While the land was originally acquired solely for industrial purposes it has now been allotted for SEZ which will have a land use incorporating industrial, commercial as well as residential purposes. Also the Board resolved to waive off the transfer fee, sub-lease fee, etc to these companies without even a request for the same from the applicants and without the matter being on the agenda, thereby draining out the public exchequer and giving the impression that these private companies are doing a big favour to the economy of Goa by coming to Goa. These issues point to a fraud being played on public revenue and

the people of Goa by government officials and politicians in connivance with these companies.

Another important issue concerning SEZ in Goa is that of the strain on natural resources, especially water. As seen from Table 1, all the companies would require a large amount of water and electricity supply per day and a lot of manpower. Besides, the companies would carry on substantial amount of construction activities. The approval for allotment of land to these companies has been given without the preparation of any feasibility report or for that matter without even taking into consideration the prevailing ground reality as regards water and electricity supply, and what impact the said construction activity would have on the environment. At an awareness programme organised by SEZ Watch and Jagrut Goem on September 27, 2007, the convenor of Jagrut Goem, Aravind Bhatikar warned the people about the ramifications of SEZs on the state's water, land and other resources in the next five years, i.e. till 2011 (*Herald*, September 28, 2007; 4). These SEZs would cause depletion of the water tables and other environmental problems. As it is, people in Goa suffer from the problem of inadequate water supply and the deficit of water is estimated to be 215 MLD.

The SVM put an advertisement in the newspaper with the caption 'SEZ- Selling Goa and Goans' (*Herald*, December 1, 2007; 7). In this, they put forth the reasons why Goans are opposing SEZs. The SEZ developers have stated in their applications that a work force of around 3 lakh people will come to Goa along with their families. Our roads, water and power supply, garbage management facilities are already crumbling and will not be able to sustain around 8-10 lakh people who will come to Goa on account of SEZ. Since the laws of Goa do not apply to SEZs, it will be difficult for Goans to stop manufacturing processes from all over the world being undertaken in these SEZs, which might pollute water, air and environment and destroy Goa for the future generations. SEZs were conceptualized for bigger states having plenty of cheap labour and barren land. Goa has neither.

In the same advertisement, the SVM questioned the "government's argument that the SEZs would deliver a bonanza of jobs to the Goan youth. The central attraction of the SEZ scheme has been the facile assumption that handing over thousands of hectares of land cheaply to promoters of industry and relaxing the laws of the land, including those

that relate to the welfare of industrial workers, protection of environment, taxation, etc, would automatically promote industrialization and solve the unemployment problem overnight. The SVM questioned this assumption by asking: 'Despite the government's promises, have Goans got decent employment from industrial estates? Why are Goan villages filled with migrant workers? Why have Goans become a minority in their own land? The SVM cautioned the Goans to learn from their experiences in the past. We have lost our land to industrial estates, but our children still have to go out of Goa for jobs. SEZs will not be different' (*ibid*). In a hard-hitting editorial in one of the local newspapers, Avertanus L. D'Souza refuted the position of the government and various business houses that SEZ will lead to creation of massive job opportunities (*Herald*, December 11, 2007; 6). In another article, 'Continuing SEZures' (*Herald*, December 24, 2007; 8), Avertanus brings out the arbitrary manner in which the land, natural resources and environment of Goa are getting decimated due to the ad-hoc and completely unscientific basis on which the Government of Goa has been allocating land for various uses. He argues that though about 400,000 jobs are estimated to be created by the different SEZs, there is no indication what kind of jobs will be created and what education and skills are required. Local information indicates that about 90,000 persons are listed on the rolls of the Employment Exchange. According to him, even if all these 90,000 people are absorbed in the SEZs, they will still require around 3 lakh workers, who will have to be brought from outside the state. By estimating on an average four dependents per person, Goa will have to cater to the needs of approximately 1,200,000 more persons who will take up residence in Goa (this would almost double Goa's population in the next five years). This will put an enormous strain on the infrastructure as these workers will have to be provided with houses and all basic amenities like water, electricity, garbage disposal, transportation, etc. Avertanus predicts a complete breakdown of all basic infrastructure services within the next five years if the government goes forward with the programme of setting up the SEZs.

The Success of the Anti-SEZ Movement

While the people's struggle against SEZ in Goa gained momentum and grew in numbers and intensity only in the later part of 2007, there was opposition to the SEZ much before that. When information of the

intention of the Government of India to approve SEZs in Goa was made known (even before the Goa government had received any SEZ proposals), in July 2005, the Council For Social Justice and Peace had organised a symposium in collaboration with other local bodies (Fernandes, 2007/ This symposium was a realistic balance sheet on SEZs in Goa and the government was forcefully cautioned against approving any SEZ in Goa. While there were a few scattered articles in the local dailies warning about the possible implications of SEZs in Goa right from 2005 when the SEZ policy was accepted by politicians in Goa, a general awareness came among the people only in 2007 when villagers and concerned citizens began agitating against the SEZs in various parts of Goa like Keri, Pernem, Sancoale, Loutolim, Verna and Quitol. This struggle of the villagers gained momentum when it got support from various NGOs like the Council for Social Justice, 85 Peace Jagrut Goem, Swadesh and Goa Bachao Abhiyan, when they came together under the banner of SVM. Formed in mid-2007, the SVM is an apolitical issue-based movement which drew its strength from different people's movements at the grass root level against SEZs across the state. Most of the members of SVM are from the middle class. Some of the members painstakingly gathered a lot of information on the SEZ projects by filing hundreds of RTIs from early 2007 and used that information to file an FIR against the chairman and the directors of the GIDC Board on October 22, 2007. This complaint has not yet been registered by the Goa police. Details and proof of the alleged illegalities of the GIDC regarding the land scam in the prime industrial area of the Verna Plateau were given to the police in the FIR that had been filed.

The agitation against SEZ projects in Goa gained momentum in the months of November and December, 2007 through several awareness meetings in different parts of Goa, attended by people in large numbers. One such solidarity meeting organised by the SVM at the historic Lohia Maidan, Margao on December 14, 2007 was attended by thousands of people. Well-known social activist, Medha Patkar's letter expressing support to the people of Goa in their fight against SEZs was also read out in that meeting (*Herald*, December 15, 2007; 1, 3). The anti-SEZ movement was also boosted by the support of political parties like the BJP and the NCP (*Herald*, November 13, 2007; 3), college youth under the banner Youth for Goa (*Herald*, December 1, 2007; 3) and

some politically backed groups like Goa's Movement against SEZs (GMAS) who put lot of pressure on the government to scrap all SEZs in Goa. The opportunism of the politicians to grab the limelight in this people's struggle is described by Ervell E. Menezes who says: "Meanwhile the politicians are all jumping on the anti-SEZ bandwagon because they only wait for a platform from which to derive mileage" (*Herald*, December 14, 2007; 6). The differences between the political and apolitical organisations opposing the SEZs came to the fore at a public meeting held at Verna by Youth for Goa (*Herald*, December 21, 2007; 3). The position held by non-political organisations like SVM was that most of the politicians in Goa, irrespective of which party they belonged to, had vested interests and stood to benefit from the development of SEZs and so taking the support of politicians in the anti-SEZ struggle would damage the integrity of the struggle (*Goan Observer*, 4-6).

The snowballing of the anti-SEZ movement forced the Congress government to constitute on November 14, 2007 a Cabinet Sub-Committee to examine and arrive at a decision on SEZs (*Herald*, November 16, 2007; 1; *Herald*, November 15, 2007; 3). The growing opposition to SEZs in Goa also forced the Goa Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI) to recommend to the government to set up a SEZ review committee wherein all the concerned parties/stakeholders would be allowed to make a detailed presentation of their positions (*Herald*, November 21, 2007; 4). The GCCCI also urged the government to take appropriate steps following the outcome of the review committee.

All along, the anti-SEZ agitation was supported by knowledgeable, challenging and thought-provoking articles, editorials and regular features in the local newspapers. The media gave a lot of publicity to the struggle and that kept the pressure on the Goa Government. The active involvement of the Goan intellectuals and the Goan middle class in the anti-SEZ movement was one of the main reasons for the success of the movement.

Finally on December 31, 2007, the Goa Government decided to scrap all the SEZs in their present form (*Herald*, January 1, 2008; 1). This decision was reached at a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on infrastructure after taking into consideration the White Paper on SEZ in Goa (*Herald*, December 30, 2007; 1) and the Task Force

recommendations (*Herald*, December 31, 2007; 1). December 31, 2007 will go down as a special day in the history of people's movements in Goa since people's power dared the political establishment and succeeded in ensuring that development is for the benefit of the people and not for a few elites. Many reasons can be attributed to the success of the anti-SEZ movement in Goa like the role of the middle class intellectuals, the extensive use of RTI to get information and expose the land frauds, the collaboration and working together of different NGOs, the linking of SEZ to the loss of Goan identity due to huge influx of migrant workers, the linking of SEZ to the control and use of natural resources like land, water and forests, etc. What needs to be highlighted is the strength and resilience of the civil society seen in the spirited struggle and the never say die approach of the villagers of the affected areas, who fearlessly stormed into police stations, government offices and the Chief Minister's Office and who were even prepared to take on the SEZ developers by physically stopping the development work on the SEZ sites. They are the real heroes of the anti-SEZ struggle and one of the outcomes of this movement is the general awareness and activism among the villagers of Goa against any form of land grab, especially against big real estate developers.

The Struggle Continues

The decision of the Goa Government on December 31, 2007 to scrap all the 15 SEZs does not mean that the anti-SEZ struggle is over. A very important follow-up is bringing the guilty to book. The leader of the opposition Manohar Parrikar and the alliance partners have demanded investigation against those who have violated the process of land allocation to the SEZ projects and also a white paper on land allocated for SEZs (*Herald*, January 4, 2008; 6 and January 16, 2008; 1). The SVM which spearheaded the people's movement against SEZ has demanded that the government order a CBI inquiry into the whole SEZ imbroglio and the illegal functioning of the GIDC regarding the land scam in Verna Plateau (*Herald*, January 26, 2008; 12). Regarding the demand of taking back the land allocated for SEZs, Chief Minister Digambar Kamat had said "I will cross the bridge when I come to it" (*Herald*, January 12, 2008; 1), but the GIDC in a board meeting on June 13, 2008 decided to revoke the land allotted by it to seven companies for setting up SEZs in Goa (*The Times of India*, June 14, 2008; 1). The GIDC also decided to refund the money paid by SEZ promoters to the

Corporation roughly around Rs 100 crores. The people's movement will have to pursue this matter further and ensure that the guilty in the SEZ land scam are punished. Charles Fernandes, the convenor of SVM, said that while the decision of the government to take back land from the SEZ promoters is good, their battle is to see that those responsible for the fraudulent land allotments are brought to book and the land recovered handed over to its original owners and not to the GIDC (*Herald*, June 14, 2008; 1).

The matter of scrapping the three notified SEZs is still pending and the battle has now shifted to the legal arena. The State government realised that it has no legal authority to de-notify the three notified SEZs, which have already become legal entities and so referred the matter to the Central Government. But after dilly-dallying on the issue for several months the Union Ministry of Commerce recently refused to denotify them (*Herald*, June 3, 2008; 1). According to them, the developers of the three notified SEZs have already made investments and therefore the issue of compensation of investments made and the refund of fiscal benefits would arise. Therefore, they decided that it would not be possible for the Central Government to withdraw the notifications declaring them as SEZs. The major challenge before the SVM and other anti-SEZ organisations is to be a watch dog and put pressure on the government to de-notify the three notified SEZs. According to legal experts, if the government denotifies these zones, they will probably have to compensate the developers (*Herald*, February 29, 2008; 1). On the other hand, the SVM has directed the Goa government to flatly refuse to pay compensation to the SEZ promoters and on the contrary ask them to pay heavily for rampant hill cutting and other works carried out on the allotted land that have led to wells and springs drying up (*Herald*, March 5, 2008; 2). While three SEZ promoters - Cipla's Meditab, K Raheja and Panchabhumi are fighting a legal battle in the High Court against the Goa Government, the villagers of Loutolim, Verna, etc have filed three separate petitions before the High Court challenging the impropriety of the Goa government and the GIDC in allotting land to set up SEZs in Goa (*Herald*, May 2, 2008; 1). The petitioners have asked the High Court to issue a writ quashing the land allotments made to the SEZ developers. So the battle against the SEZ promoters is only half won and will have to be pursued to its logical end.

The anti-SEZ struggle in Goa was neither an anti-development movement nor was it against industries. The anti-SEZ stir has grown and broadened into a struggle for the control and proper utilisation of natural resources, especially land, and a general awareness and activism are visible in many parts of Goa, seen particularly in the stand taken by some Gram Sabhas against big real estate developers. But the challenge before the civil society movements in Goa is to find alternatives to the development model that promotes big projects like SEZs. Otherwise, the danger is that the government and big business interests will reintroduce the SEZs in other forms like food parks, IT parks, etc. Dr. Marian Pinheiro in an editorial article "SEZ: How many more?" suggested alternatives to SEZs such as inviting the world's best educational institutes and universities to set up shop in Goa so that Goa could become the world's Special Education Zone (*Herald*, Jan 22, 2008; 6). He also proposes making Goa a Special Healthcare Zone and a Special Tourist Zone. Whatever the alternative models, the intellectuals in the SVM and other people's organisations need to come up with development models that are ecologically sustainable, people-friendly and take into consideration the socio-economic and cultural status of Goa. Otherwise the widespread awareness and activism will eventually escalate further.