

## TOURISM AND THE COASTAL ZONE

Human pressures on the coastal ecosystems of Goa started during the 1970s when tourism became a source of revenue. This resulted in 80% of the urban growth being located along the coastal talukas. Since then, there has been a proliferation of hotels, resorts, residential flats, dwellings, small restaurants, beachside bars, roads and beach shacks along the coast. This is because most tourism and associated activities are concentrated along sandy stretches. Over 90% of domestic tourists and 99% of international tourists visit and reside along the beach front.

Although upmarket tourism and related activities have brought in a number of positive benefits in the form of employment-related opportunities, coastal developmental activities have induced notable environmental and social problems. Surveys indicate that several coastal areas are overcrowded due to a haphazard growth of structures, resulting in undesirable overurbanization of coastal regions, loss of biodiversity, deterioration in the quality of life and adverse effects on beaches and dunes, mangroves, water bodies and *khazan* lands.

The major reasons for these problems can be summarized as follows:

*Hostility towards CRZ:* One finds a growing antagonism to the most vital instrument devised to protect the coastal wealth of the country. Although in force since 1991, the notification is not being implemented seriously.

*Sectoral practices:* There is a fragmentation of jurisdiction because several agencies work at cross-purposes due to reluctance to cooperate and coordinate. As a result, conflicting economic and management interests are observed.

*Irregular management policies:* Diverse ecosystems often need sound site-specific management skills. On the contrary, we find a lack of cooperative planning.

*Ignorance about the strategic value of the coastal zone:* Due to lack of awareness and ignorance about the intrinsic value of coastal ecosystems, policy and planning deci-

*Unscrupulous builders dump building debris on Gaspar Dias beach*



sions are based on short-term economic gains. Long-term value of resources is rarely considered.

*Migration of human population towards coasts:* Unchecked movement of people towards sandy areas has caused anthropogenic stress on coastal systems, degradation of coastal environment and unrestrained growth of coastal strips.

*Unbalanced growth of tourism:* Beach tourism is the major activity that is being promoted. This has led to a concentration of resorts and undesirable pressures on coastal strips.

*Lack of political will:* Powerful lobbies of builders and resort owners, who have invested heavily in coastal areas, are mainly responsible for construction of illegal structures and for flouting environmental guidelines.

*Lack of integrated information base:* Information about various ecosystems and processes and inventories of coastal resources and habitats are hard to find. More importantly, we find a missing link between results of scientific research and coastal area planning.

**Consequences of inaction** — Inaction by the authorities has led to the following consequences as exemplified in north Goa:

a. Several coastal villages, once separated by open spaces, are merging into one long continuous strip of hotels and resorts.

b. Existing fishing settlements are struggling for survival as developers have bought most of the coastal strips.

c. This strip of the coast has the maximum number of hotels, guest houses, restaurants, tourism shops and beach shacks.

d. There is no proper access to beaches due to a thick spread of structures.

e. Authorities are keen in promoting international tourism as a prime policy whereas upmarket tourism is unplanned and out of tune with the present structure.

f. Local authorities appear powerless to implement and enforce appropriate plans and policies.

Such unplanned developmental activity makes Baga-Sinquerim the most severely degraded strip of the Goan coast. Thus, the CRZ of Goa is at stake.

For these reasons, courts have intervened in coastal matters following complaints and petitions from citizens and NGOs. Many constructions have been stopped while some have been demolished. Similarly, courts have ordered hotels and the State Government not to allow constructions within 200 m from HTL. Courts have also ruled that disturbing sand dunes threatens coastal ecology and hence sand mining leases had to be cancelled. Stay orders have been imposed in several cases. Hence, timely judicial intervention has, to some extent at least, preserved the sanctity of the coastal zones.

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