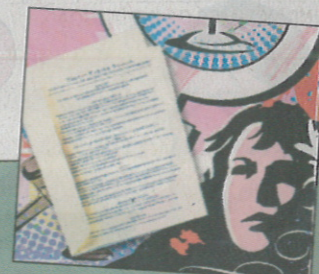




THE MIRAMAR-DONA PAULA PROMENADE HAS CHANGED PART OF PANAJI'S SOCIAL DYNAMICS | 4

TIMES CITY

SUNDAY TIMES OF INDIA, GOA | MAY 23, 2010



LOUTOLIM WOMAN'S STATEMENT MAY BE RECORDED TODAY, SAY POLICE SOURCES | 5

'Only egrets, stray cattle set foot on Advalpal's silted, barren fields'

All hell broke loose on the night of June 6 last year when a huge mining dump collapsed, flooding houses and agricultural fields in Advalpal. In its report, the Regional Controller of Mines noted that the mining dump was not located as per the approved mining plan. It issued directions to shift the dump. However, the dump's still in the same spot and most of the fields are now fallow

Joaquim Fernandes | TNN

Advalpal: A slow, persistent rain fell on the sleepy village of Advalpal on the night of June 6, 2009. It was around 11pm and the lights had failed. Many of the villagers had gone to sleep, some readying for bed. Then all hell broke loose.

A huge mining dump on the southern side of the village collapsed sending torrents of water and mud into the houses, the properties and agricultural fields of Advalpal. Household articles were lost and one small child was almost swept away. The night-long ordeal that followed was just a harsher episode in the troubled saga of Advalpal's struggle against mining.

Advalpal is basically an agricultural village in Bicholim taluka. The inhabitants had long been protesting against mining operations because silt from the mines was ruining their fields. Only a short while before the June 6 catastrophe, nine-year-old Akash Shyamsundar Naik (and environmental NGO, Goa Foundation) had filed a writ petition in the high court of Bombay at Goa. The petition was against the state director of mines and eight others, including the mining company Sesa Goa.

The nine-year-old filed the petition through his "best friend Sharmila Naik" (mother) to challenge the mining operations on the grounds that it severely undermined his and his co-villagers right to life as

guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. The child's prayers came a bit late. The June 6-crash almost obliterated Advalpal's identity as a farming village.

Today, a few egrets and some stray cattle graze on the silted, barren fields of Amrao in Advalpal village. The farmers used to take two crops annually from the field; now they buy their rice from shops.

But the fields of Amrao are not the only ones in Advalpal rendered useless by mining. Farmers say the other fields that are ruined include 'Voliechem bhatlem', 'Santanache bhatlem', 'Main', 'Ghattian', 'Bhatlem' and 'Maddacho Kungo'. Advalpal village had over 70 families surviving on agriculture, farmers say.

Neither is Sesa Goa the only company doing mining in Advalpal. The villagers blame all miners for their woes. The siltation of the fields is one problem. The other is that the two natural water springs near Varchawada at the foot of the hill that used to flow "12 months a year" through the storm water drain to nurture the fields, have dried. There is still water flowing through the *vall*,

but it is greatly reduced.

Shashikant Palkar used to harvest 12 *khandi* of paddy (one *khandi* is approx. 100 kilos) from both his fields at Nagvenkar Bhatlem and Ravanath Namas. With his fields uncultivable for the last four years, last year Palkar applied to the miners for compensation like many other farmers. He says he was paid Rs 2,500 in March this year. Sneering at the meagre



amount, Palkar says, "What can I do? The company says that is the amount evaluated by the agriculture department. We have made so many trips to the office of the mamlatdar in Bicholim. He keeps giving us dates for hearings."

Seventy-six-year-old Kashinath Vithal Gad from Varchawada says he never got any compensation. Apart from the 12 *khandi* paddy, Gad also has cashew, areca nut and coconut plantations, all of which have suffered due to mining dust. Gad alleges the miners did not pay all the villagers affected by the mining dump catastrophe. Only a few

families were paid to buy their silence and the others forgotten, he claims.

Says Gurudas Gadekar of Gaonkarwada, "People accepted money and kept quiet because most people here are poor. Even Rs 5,000 is a lot of money for our people. Otherwise, they will not get even that and the mine will run anyway."

Gadekar says that when the mine was operating, the entire village, its houses and vegetation were full of red mining dust. Also, the mining machinery created loud noise from dawn to dusk. "It is difficult to live here with the noise," says Gadekar.

Meanwhile, Akash's plea moved the high court to grant a stay on mining in Advalpal. The court also asked an expert committee of the government to visit and give its report. The committee said all protective measures on the lease were totally inadequate. The Regional Controller of Mines noted that the mining dump was not located as per the approved mining plan and issued directions to shift the dump.

On January 6, 2010, the court rejected a proposal to allow the dump to remain in its place. In part, the court or-



JUST A SMATTERING OF GREEN: Although there are a few green spots in Advalpal, several fields have been rendered useless by siltation from mines. (Right) The dump which partly collapsed in June last year



der stated, "We are of the view that the dump accumulated in Face 1 has to be removed by the respondent company. We therefore order that the exercise of the removal of the dump from Face 1 shall be completed by end of April 2010."

Till date the dump has not been removed. It is learnt that Sesa Goa has obtained an extension of time limit to remove the dump. When approached, the company spokesperson, insisting on anonymity, declined to comment saying the matter is in court.

The Advalpal farmers dismissed the charge that they are no longer interested in agriculture and are only trying to "extort money". The Advalpal farmers insist that agriculture is the only work they know and love and that if their fields are rehabilitated, they will cultivate them.

Whether or not the miners rehabilitate the fields of Advalpal, the village does not seem lost altogether. When TOI visited Advalpal in April this year, the village was green with fruit-laden trees of jackfruit, cashew, mango and

others. The most pleasant site was on the eastern side of the village at Gaonkarwada. In front of the Shri Sateri Shantadurga Prasanna temple, village women washed clothes at a spring that flowed fast and furious.

But pointing to the green hills above, Gadekar warned, "These hills are in a mining lease. If they start mining here, this spring will also go like the others."

TIMES APPOINTMENTS

MEDICAL TRANSCRIPTION

The quintessential blend of spiritualism and commercialism

In keeping with the

23 MAY, 2010, TOI, GOA