

# Panchawadi gears up to drag govt to court

## Land Acquisition For Mining Road Irks Citizens, NGOs

Joaquim Fernandes | TNN

**Panchawadi:** The tiny agricultural village of Panchawadi in Ponda taluka already has one road for transportation of mining ore. The villagers are now faced with the prospect of two more roads for ore transportation which villagers fear will ruin their agriculture, bring in dust pollution, noise pollution and accompanying health hazards.

Now the Panchawadi Bachao Samiti (PBS) along with some NGOs and citizens is gearing to drag the state government to court over alleged irregularities in acquisition of land for construction of one of the roads for mining company Sesa Goa.

Christev D'Costa, PBS president, told TOI that the proposed road is meant for transportation of mining ore from the mining area of Codli to a new proposed riverside terminal for stacking/loading of mineral ore into barges in the Zuaririver.

According to D'Costa, the problem is that the road and riverside terminal project, termed as the



LOSING GREEN COVER

Panchawadi Bunder project, is right in the middle of the village. The PBS fears the road and the stacking and loading of the ore will ruin their agricultural fields, coconut plantations, cashew groves and also cause dust pollution, noise pollution and health hazards.

D'Costa said, "We know what is happening in Sanvordem and Curchorem, just four kilometres from our village. The dust, noise, traffic

congestion and accidents will come to Panchawadi if this road is built in the middle of the village."

The government has already acquired the land for the road under the pretext of "public purpose." But PBS points out that the road is meant exclusively for Sesa Goa to transport their mining ore. "How can this be a public purpose?" questions Durgesh Shisani, Panchawadi farmer and landowner.

PBS has been wanting to file a

public interest petition before the high court for some time now. But they are awaiting information from the land acquisition office, which they have applied under right to information.

According to Shisani, there are several irregularities in the land acquisition, which the PBS is keeping close to its chest right now. But Shisani says there are misrepresentations in the evaluation report by the forest department which wrongly claims there are no trees in the mangroves area. "We asked for the file of land acquisition proceedings under RTI in February 2010. They have still not given it to us. So we have appealed to the first appellate authority. They are playing games with us," Shisani said.

Residents have repeatedly petitioned authorities to cancel permissions to the roads. One joint representation by Panchawadi parish pastoral council of St Anthony's church and the Shri Santeri Devasthan Committee to the governor, chief minister and others, states, "The destruction of paddy fields, khazan lands, mangroves, orchards and forests due to the proposed mining related activities, if allowed, is inescapable. The sustainable lives and economies of the Panchawadi residents are sure to be destroyed causing mass displacement of the entire society, if the project is not stopped."

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