

Goans will decide allotment of scarce land: Chief Minister Kamat

The battle for precious land between titleholders and prospective investors across the country has made the Congress government in Goa wary of allotting land to industrialists or for special economic zones (SEZs), says Chief Minister Digambar Kamat.

'Goans will decide land allotment to outside investors or industrialists through local bodies (panchayats) as land is scarce and precious. We are with them in protecting their lands, identity and heritage,' Kamat told IANS.

As India's smallest state, with an area of just 3,702 km for a population of 1.4 million, Goa has decided to amend the law to regulate land allotment for setting up industries or SEZs. It has only two districts - north and south.

'We have roped in renowned architect Charles Correa to prepare the draft plan and an amendment bill to regulate land acquisition. The local communities will vet the draft plan through local bodies to decide land utilisation,' Kamat said on the sidelines of a three-day summit on realty sector, which began Thursday in this picturesque western coastal city.

The state government plans to introduce the amendment bill in the next legislative assembly session. The draft plan will be ready by this month-end.

Renowned for its beaches, places of worship and world heritage architecture, Goa is visited by thousands of international and domestic tourists each year.

Once a Portuguese colony, Goa also has rich flora and fauna, owing to its location on the Western Ghats range, which is classified as a biodiversity hotspot.

'Unlike in other states, the government does not own any land for allotment. The entire land across the state is owned by people, especially farmers, fishermen and growers. In cities and towns like Panaji, Vasco and Margao, there has been lot of investment in property by outsiders,' Kamat said.

Mass protests by locals forced the state government to cancel allotment of land for a dozen SEZs. Even a 1.2-million square feet SEZ proposal of pharma major Cipla in the state has been put on hold due to opposition by the people.

'Locals are wary of any demographic change. They prefer the state to be a global tourist destination than an industrial state due to scarce land, natural resources and fragile ecology. They also want to protect their identity, culture and language from being polarised,' Kamat noted.

Endorsing Kamat's standpoint, union Urban Development Minister S. Jaipal Reddy said Goans had the right to have a say in the socio-economic development of the state.

'Goa is a special state with respect to urban or industrial development due to its topography, demography and fragile environment. Economic growth or urbanisation has to be in conformity with its historical, social and cultural factors,' Reddy told about 200 delegates participating in the 'Girem Urban Planning and Real Estate Leadership' summit.

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