

## Russian Deals, No Deals

Aista, Aista, Mr Consul General for Russia. Don't generalise, please. And I promise you, I too won't generalise. Russians, Alexander V Mantyskv-jj, are in no danger in Goa. True to my promise, I will say that it is wrong, absolutely wrong, to describe the Russians descending on Goa in ever-increasing numbers, as some sections of the national media do, and public opinion perceives, as the 'Russian mafia'; Consul General, Sir, you might like to know Goa's hospitality industry &ndash; from multi-star hotels to seedy beach shacks &ndash; love Russians. They have robust appetites. They eat well, drink better and tip generously. To the industry's good luck, Russians celebrate their Christmas in January. When the flow of foreign tourists from elsewhere begins to ebb.

Statistically, Russians may represent just 9 per cent of foreign tourists visiting Goa, but consumption-wise each Russian equals-in my estimate but I could be under estimating- three Britishers and five French.

Our tourist guides love Russians, but our real estate brokers love them better. So do the lawyers that facilitate their land deals and exploit the holes in our laws. On the other hand, there are Russians who are involved in the sale of narcotics, so our cops suspect rightly or wrongly. It happens that Goa has been alerted by no less a personality than the National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister, K R Narayanan that Goa has to be alert to possible terrorist actions. The Mumbai bomb blasts of 2002 were caused by narco-terrorists. It is a precedent we cannot forget.

Perhaps land-buying Russians have begun to cry wolf since our Legislative Assembly enacted an amendment to our Land Registration Act. The Act is not yet watertight. Hopefully the holes will soon be plugged and it will be even more difficult to buy land in Goa. Russians own restaurants and shacks in Pernem and they fly their country's flag. Would Russia allow my grandson - mind you, I don't have one yet &ndash; to set up a restaurant in Moscow and fly the Indian flag?

Our authorities have issued a show cause notice on your compatriot Leonid Beyzer for cancellation of his visa and subsequent deportation.

The cops allege that Leonid was convicted in a drug-traffic case in 1989 in the then USSR and is involved in illegal land deals and setting up two suspect companies, Artibori Resorts Private Ltd and True Axis. Leonid's lawyer, Vikram Varma a Supreme Court advocate who has been practicing in Goa for over two years and has been facilitating land deals, some among them of Russians, told me that Leonid has a very good case. He represented him in another case in the Goa Bench of the Mumbai High Court and succeeded. Our judiciary is among the best in the world in fairness and equanimity.

But the fact is that True Axis Resort Private Ltd has put up a construction on our Morjim beach, which according to our Minister for Environment, Aleixo Sequeira, is one of the 126 violations of our coastal zone management rules. What has been built in contravention of our environmental parameters, it goes without saying, invites demolition.

Varma describes Leonid as very intelligent, which I am sure he is, and from one of modern Russia's wealthiest and well connected families. Lucky man! He also tells me that the drugs case that our cops dug up relates to Leonid's misdemeanour when he was 18. Salazar once said that whoever had not been at 18 a poet or a communist, or both was a fool and foolish would the lad be if a communist he remained after that age. Was he still around, he might have added drugs to his list of pardonable lapses of youthful exuberance.

Anyway, with a good lawyer at his elbow and his country's diplomats on his side, Leonid Breyzer will surely continue to be our guest. What might not be so easy now is to buy more land, or perhaps even retain the land he has acquired if the procedure followed was against 'public policy'. What the Russian authorities might do is issue an advisory to their citizens to follow the law on the land if they have any plans to buy land in Goa.