All hell broke lose on the night of June 6 last year when a huge mining dump collapsed. Floating 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.

Joaoquin Fernandez | Times

Advalpal: A slow, persistent rain fell on the sleepy village of Advalpal on the night of June 6, 2000. It was around 11 pm and the lights had failed. Many of the villagers had gone to bed, 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 harrier 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 of the mining dump from the village was ruining their fields. Only a short while before the June 6 catastrophe, a nine-year-old Akash Shyamundur 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 mining and others, including the mining company Sesa Goa.

Neither is Sesa Goa or any company doing mining in Advalpal. The villagers learned about the mining dump only through newspapers. The situation of the village is no problem. The other is that the natural water springs near Varchhawada, 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 culvert, but it is greatly reduced. Shabir Khan Pathak used to harvest 12 kilos of paddy (one knhent is approx. 100 kilos) from both his fields at Seraikudl Bhatam and Ruvashun Nana. With his fields unutilizable for the last four years, last year Pathak applied to the miners for compensation like many other villagers. He says he was paid Rs 2,500 in March this year. Sealing at the meager families were paid to buy their silence and the others, forgot they, he claims.

Says Gurudas Gadekar of Gagalkovda. "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 would not return any.

Gadekar says that when the mining 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 all 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 site 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 move the dump to a nearby location. In fact, the court ordered the company to stop mining from June 16, 2010. The court also gave the company 15 days to file an appeal against the order.

The Advalpal farmers dismissed the charges 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 farmers rehabilitate the fields of Advalpal, the village does not seem lost altogether. When TOL 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 Gagalkovda. In front of the Shri Sakti Shantadahar Prasanna temple, village women washed clothes at a spring that flowed fast and furious.

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