

Another Bad Year for Goa

by

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2014 brought home to Goans the full extent of the debacle of Manohar Parrikar. Here was a man to whom Goans had given a clear mandate to clean house, preserve what was left of Goa, and to reboot. Instead, he fanned the prevailing miasma and dug a bigger hole. He reneged on election pledges, lied blatantly, and allowed corruption to flourish under his watch. His administration sold Goa down the drain to moneyed outsiders, builders, land sharks, and casino honchos. His scorn – and the scorn of his minions spread across Goa and the UK - was always aimed at those who questioned his questionable dealings, never at the people doing a number on Goa. This is the shining knight who will now work his magic wand with India's defense? The mind reels.

One recent instance illuminates the arrant poverty of Manohar Parrikar's imagination. In a public speech, referring to me, he alleged that a "distant relative" was misleading Goans on Mopa, the real estate scam that he had been trying to unload on Goa from the get-go. He added what he thought was his clincher by claiming that the place "he lives in US has seven airports within a radius of 10 Kms."

It is true that I live in Silicon Valley in California. (I didn't say I was perfect.) It is a singular place, unrivalled on the planet and in the continuum of human history, and the technological advances that have been made within this area of a few square miles have forever changed the arc of global civilization. Silicon Valley is a miracle wrought by a confluence of synergistic factors. This, then, is the place Manohar Parrikar is seeking recourse to in

order to justify Mopa. What can be more absurd?

I recall driving Manohar-ji around Silicon Valley on at least two occasions, once arranging a personal tour of the Google headquarters through a friend of mine. Evidently the only lesson he ingested from his tour of Silicon Valley is the count of airports (by the way, not seven within a radius of 10 Kms, as he claims).

Manohar-ji wants to emulate Silicon Valley, but only in regard to the number of airports. Why not expand the import to other areas? Were the standards of Silicon Valley to be adopted, political corruption of the kind that has flourished in Goa would lead to an indictment of Manohar Parrikar and all the other politicians in the Goa Assembly. No wonder Manohar-ji tried his utmost to not appoint a Lokayukta. Clearly, Manohar-ji's interest in Silicon Valley stops at the count of airports.

I also took Manohar-ji to Stanford University, home to a medical school and a hospital that are among the world's finest. On the other hand, in Manohar-ji's Goa, the main hospital is a disaster, where dogs roam the corridors and where mice feed on the corpses in the morgue (you can't make this up!). How tragic that only the number of airports here registered on Manohar-ji's mental radar, not the features that would actually make a difference to the life of the ordinary Goan.

Goa is beyond repair. The new generation of Goans does not even realize what it is that we had and what it is that has been lost. Their reality and expectations have been renormalized to the abysmal Indian standard.

To us Goans, regardless of our domicile, Goa has always been more than just our place of birth. It was our home, our sanctuary from the chaos of India. That situation has been cured with Goa's total immersion in the Indian sewer. Our land, our villages, our towns were once pure visual delight. No more. What greets us now at every step is visual dreck. The Indian tourist hordes have trashed Goa. And with every other Indian wanting to buy or

grab a piece of Goa, our once-civilized refuge has been upended. For this we have ourselves to blame.

Changing tracks - I am writing this from Death Valley National Park in California where my wife and I typically spend the final week of December. For a photographer this is fertile ground. The cold & crisp winter air, the rugged mountain ranges, the stark open basins, the canyons with their gigantic alluvial fans, and the spectacularly pink skies at dawn are a great pleasure.

Most of the Mojave Desert is remote wilderness but a few of the highlights are accessible via a splendid network of roads - hundreds and hundreds of miles of paved routes plotted through challenging desert terrain. How did they come to be? These roads were laid by the volunteers of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) during the years following the Great Depression. Every time I drive through the vast expanse of Death Valley, I am filled with gratitude for these men and women of an earlier era whose sweat & toil made possible today my enjoyment of some of the most sublime vistas on the face of this earth.

These are the people who built and shaped America. At the same time, I wonder about the narcissism and the empty boasts of Indians (both in America and India) whose advent in America is recent but who have deluded themselves about their importance in and to this country. Indians didn't build America and the role of the post-1965 Indian immigrant in the making of the United States is insignificant, the copious supply of code monkeys, IITian and otherwise, notwithstanding. A tiny country like Hungary has contributed far more. Where do Indians get this hubris?