

Rajan P. Parrikar
Monday, September 10, 2012

Questions to Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar – Day One

Topics: Mining, Casinos

Dear Manohar-bab,

When I was in Goa last month, you and I were supposed to meet. However, that did not happen for reasons best known to you. I shall, therefore, publicly pose the questions I had meant to ask you in person. They will be posted on Goan forums all over the web.

Each day for the next 5 days I shall intersperse commentary and questions on what I think are the key issues that currently bedevil Goa.

I do not mean this exercise to be adversarial. As someone who has supported you in the past when you were down and out, I am rooting for you because you have the capacity to lead Goa into a better future. The purpose of this discussion is twofold: one, to candidly let you know what is on my mind, and on the mind of many Goans. As your friend and as someone who cares for Goa you will expect nothing less. The second reason is to find out, if possible, the trends in your own thinking on the vexing problems of Goa.

Goans gave you a clear mandate in the election. The crucial point here is that it was a mandate given to YOU, not to the BJP. Goans recognized that you stood out from the dismal cast of politician thieves and criminals who have sucked the life out of Goa the past 7 years. There was much joy all over the state when you were swept back into power. But following your swearing-in you have made a series of puzzling announcements on mining, casinos, Mopa and other issues that have cast serious doubts on both your motives and your priorities. One senses today ripples of nervous uncertainty among Goans.

The expectation and hope were that you would be different. It is surely unfair that so much has been dumped on your plate and that so much is expected of you. But you signed up for this job. With Matanhy's

sudden departure, you lost a strong and capable confidante. You now face daunting choices, and you have to tread very carefully - most Goans get that. We don't expect you to turn in miracles and solve Goa's problems in an instant.

We know that the mess left behind by the Congress rogues will take years to clean up. But what we expect is an honest reckoning and that you will tell us the truth. Goans not only in Goa but all around the world are watching you closely. It is a wholly different universe now from the one just 2 or 3 years ago. Social media like Facebook, Twitter, Google, YouTube and so on have revolutionized the reach and speed of interaction.

To a politician this is a double-edged sword. If you do right by the people, the new technologies will be a force multiplier to your advantage. Obversely, if you try to pull a fast one on the people of Goa, there is no way - NO WAY - you will be able to get away with it.

On Day One, I shall discuss mining and casinos.

You have unfortunately started out on the wrong foot and it has lead to the well-worn meme that you are a U-turn Chief Minister.

When you said there is no illegal mining in Goa, WHAT WERE YOU THINKING? Were you misquoted? If so, why was no clarification issued right away? What exactly did you say? Was this a coded signal to the miners that all will be well for them? These are the questions on the minds of people today.

Now that the Shah Commission report is out, the day of reckoning has arrived. The FIRs in and of themselves don't mean much. This should not turn into a dog and pony show, a mere window dressing. No politician of any standing has gone to jail in India the past 50 years. The judicial process is compromised and can be easily gamed by these crooks. Are you going to appoint a special court? If you do not bring these crooks to account and let them get away, you will have betrayed the trust reposed in you.

While you have rightly trained your sights on Digu and Rane, what about the miners? Are you willing to move against Timblo, Salgaocar, Vedanta and the rest, or are you scared of their financial muscle?

It is common knowledge that the miners have given large sums of money to both the Congress and the BJP. By mining Goa to death they have become near-dollar billionaires. With that kind of cash sloshing around they can buy off 39 MLAs twice over leaving you moping alone in the corner. So, how are you going to deal with this reality? (Hint: You have the people of Goa on your side.)

As regards the draft mining policy, some activists have raised serious questions and advanced alternative proposals. I hope you are going to take them seriously. There is a feeling that you may cut behind-the-scenes deals with the miners to offer them favourable loopholes. I can tell you one thing: you won't get far if you play fast and loose with trick language and numbers (some of us who haven't attended IIT can read and count, too).

It is a matter of great concern that you haven't set any timeframe to sunset mining. This is the one chance you get to do it right and you seem to be squandering the opportunity.

Your other celebrated U-turn was on casinos. I was present at the rally near the jetty in May 2008 where you railed against casinos. Now suddenly you are singing in a different scale. Please explain to us Goans why these casinos are still in the Mandovi. We saw Mr. Mody, the casino pooh-bah who struts around with bodyguards, occupying a prime seat at your outdoor inauguration in Campal in March. (Perhaps as your special invitee?)

You know very well that if you really want to, you can make life miserable for the casinos, so miserable that they will pack up and leave. Yet you are dithering, spinning a yarn of lame excuses. No one is buying them. You have damaged your credibility on this one.

Tomorrow, I shall talk about Construction and Real Estate.

Warm regards,

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ps: You know how to get in touch with me if you want to.