

Rajan P. Parrikar
Tuesday, September 11, 2012

Questions to Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar – Day Two

Topics: Construction, Land Conversion, Regional Plan, Mopa

Dear Manohar-bab,

Today I shall address the issue of indiscriminate construction, the builder's mafia, and the destruction of Goa's land & environment.

The burning news of the day is that you have called for a temporary ban on mining activity in the state pending a thorough review.

PLEASE DO THE SAME FOR CONSTRUCTION AND LAND CONVERSION.

Halt all the mega-projects and order a review. Investigate how they were approved in the first place, and demolish all those found in violation.

Right now there is a huge project in progress across the water on the hillside at Reis Magos and another one in Dona Paula. Both of them are prima facie in violation of CRZ and other regulations.

Likewise, bring a ban on land conversion. There is not much Goan land left for spatial planning. What about the generations of Goans to come after us?

Construction and conversion of agricultural land have laid waste to our beautiful homeland.

In March 2008, you and I sat down for a long conversation about the state of Goa. At the end of our tête-à-tête I asked you about Goa's condition. You replied that we had a very narrow corridor to set things right and that "**shivers pass down my spine.**" Here is the video clip, cued at that question -

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=rjA1H9l9d-Y#t=532s

Construction & Land Conversion

When you won the election, I and many other like-minded Goans looked forward to you ordering a comprehensive review of the critical areas: mining, construction, land conversion, tourism, and the migrant influx. We thought you would assess the misuse of Goa's scarce land resources, and chart an entirely new direction.

But our hope has turned to dismay. Over the last 5 months, all we have seen from you and your cabinet ministers are more grand plans for construction and land use. Instead of reining in concrete you and your colleagues are chanting the Build! Build! Build! mantra with even more vigour.

Let me be clear: the objection is not to the building of new critical infrastructure or the repair and restoration of existing roads and bridges. We are asking for a judicious policy. We are asking for a stop to the construction frenzy that has taken Goa down the drain the last 10 years. We reject the incessant and unnecessary urge the government and its builder friends have for pouring concrete on any piece of open land they can grab.

Even as late as 2002 Goa still had much of its original flavor intact save for the coastal belt in the north. But then came the IFFI and the tinseltown starlets. Fast on their heels came the national builders and the national land mafia. This was the beginning of the end of Goa. I wish those “shivers” had passed by your spine then itself, when you were the Chief Minister. Later, the corrupt administrations of Rane and Digu took the party to a wholly new level. Thankfully, the SEZ Armageddon was averted in no small part due to the fight put up by your dear departed friend Matanhy.

Have you noticed what has happened to the face of Goa in the last 10 years? What has become of our villages, fields, orchards, hills, coastline and other open spaces? Many areas of Goa now look like the rest of urban India, an ugly, faceless, unpleasant Third-World landscape.

Goa's signature was its delicate beauty, with its quaint villages punctuated by vegetation, fields, and forests. But a drive through what were not-long-ago beautiful villages reveals hideous mega-projects of apartment buildings and villas, almost all of them built for outsiders. These are not Goan-centric projects. Today, a young Goan coming out of college has no hope whatsoever of owning a place in his own homeland. Whereas rich outsiders armed with bags of ill-gotten cash can come in and lord over. (Poor outsiders simply squat on comunidade land and turn it into a slum.)

I have thousands of photographs documenting the destruction of Goa's environment from 2006 to 2008. You saw my documentary **The Rape of Goa** when you visited Silicon Valley in 2009. In 2008 I also filed RTI applications at around 40 panchayats to see for myself the rampant violations and corruption by the builders, enabled by politicians at all levels and the bureaucracy at Town & Planning Department.

You said “shivers pass down my spine” when you think about the state of Goa. How about showing that spine now and standing up to the builders' mafia?

You know very well the shenanigans related to Aldeia de Goa and Grand Hyatt, both projects of dubious origin. The file related to this project went missing under Digambar Kamat. Can we count on you to investigate these projects? Here is my recent appeal to you –

<http://lists.goanet.org/pipermail/goanet-goanet.org/2012-August/224505.html>

NOT A SINGLE ILLEGAL PROJECT IN GOA HAS EVER BEEN DEMOLISHED AND NOT A SINGLE BUILDER HAS EVER SEEN THE INSIDE OF A JAIL.

Rampant construction has had other repercussions. Sand mining is out of control and the riparian ecology has suffered extensive damage as a result. Other consequences – it has attracted migrant labour and spawned slums. I shall get to these topics in another installment.

Mopa – Mother of all Scams

Within days of your swearing-in you announced your intention to go ahead with Mopa. Why make haste for a project of this magnitude, one that will change the face of Goa? **You have not made the case for Mopa.** It is well-known that politicians of all parties have bought extensive land around Mopa and stand to make a killing should the project go ahead.

Dabolim is perfectly fine for Goa and you should ask the Prime Minister to release land that rightfully belongs to Goans, land currently occupied by the military.

You said “shivers pass down my spine” when you think about the state of Goa. How about showing that spine now and standing up to the Indian military? The military’s appetite for usurping Goa’s land is insatiable.

I urge you to bury Mopa quickly and for good. Here is my **The Case Against Mopa** –

<http://www.parrikar.org/misc/Mopa.pdf>

Regional Plan

You were right to scrap the RP2021 draft plan prepared under Digambar Kamat. Some of the more desirable sections of the older draft can be carried over in the new plan after a thorough vetting. Please appoint capable members to the committee (I have already suggested some candidates when we last met) and have a draft ready before the year is out.

That's all for now. Tomorrow topics: tourism and the migrant influx.

Warm regards,

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