

## The Case Against Mopa

by Rajan P. Parrikar

*"When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?"* - John Maynard Keynes

In a recent post I admonished folks for their impatience with Manohar Parrikar and asked that he be given time before rushing to judgment. That was last week. The facts concerning Goa have changed this week, and I have changed my mind.

In the same post, I had written about my one-on-one meeting with Manohar Parrikar in February, a couple of weeks before the election. We had agreed on every issue I put before him except one: Mopa. I expressed my opposition to the proposed Mopa airport forcefully and briefly laid out my case. He was unmoved and equally upfront about it. He said he wanted Mopa to go ahead should he be voted to power. I pleaded that at the very least he should defer its consideration until he had first resolved the other sicknesses afflicting Goa.

Now we read that Mopa is being pushed through at warp speed, whereas the issues of mining, land conversion, construction, and migrant influx don't seem to have received priority or attention. We

already saw how casinos got a sly nod.

Our expectation was that given what Goa has been through the past 10-12 years, ravaged by indiscriminate construction everywhere (much of it illegal, later 'regularized' through bribes), Manohar-bab would have the foresight to not only arrest the madness but roll it back. We thought that Manohar-bab's idea of 'development' would be a radical departure - that it will not involve land and concrete. Instead, he has just handed the real estate & construction lobby its ultimate bonanza yet - Mopa.

This is not your run-of-the-mill mega project. This is the MOTHER OF ALL MEGA PROJECTS. Projects of this scale ought to be carefully deliberated upon, its pros and cons clearly understood. Shouldn't Manohar-bab have put the plan up in the public domain for scrutiny and sought counter-opinions?

What is the rush, especially given its magnitude? Here in California, there is a mega project in play right now - a bullet train from San Francisco to Los Angeles. It was put on the ballot for the citizens to vote on, and has gone through numerous iterations and revisions (and ultimately scaled down). When the Americans, masters of infrastructure and planning, proceed with such

caution on large public projects, I wonder where the Indians, champions of monumental screw-ups, get their libido from.

The case again Mopa is obvious: it will *kill* Goa as we know it.

### 1) One Airport Too Many

We already have an airport at Dabolim, one that is roughly equidistant from Goa's northernmost and southernmost points. The Indian Navy has usurped it just like it has other prime Goan land. Goa has scarce land resources. It makes no sense whatsoever to build a second airport. This alone should settle it. Let the Navy move to Karwar or wherever. For decades the Navy has used the excuse of 'national defense' to muscle in and grab Goa's land (and simultaneously silence its critics). We ought to have called the Navy's bluff.

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### 2) The 'Jobs for Goans' Carrot

We are told it will create jobs for Goans, especially the poor people of Pernem and surrounds. Hogwash. The chief beneficiaries of this project will be politicians who stand to make a killing, and I have no doubt that the spoils will be shared between both BJP and Congress

politicos, local and from Delhi. Sharad Pawar's cronies have bought huge tracts of land in the area and stand to benefit enormously from the secondary and tertiary 'development' that will accrue from Mopa.

A spend of Rs 2500 crores to create employment opportunities for Pednekars and Goans? Is Manohar-bab out of his mind?

Goans were sold a similar fraudulent bill of goods in the 1980s and told that tourism would be their salvation. Today you cannot order a fish curry plate in Konkani at restaurants along the coast. All the tourist establishments are infested with non-Goans. Thanks to the muddle-headed tourism policy, what we got instead were ghatis defecating on our beaches, and Indian boors trashing them.

Then again, walk around in any industrial estate. They are chock-full of ghati labour and non-Goans. Effectively Goans have instituted a jobs scheme for Bihar, Andhra, UP, Jharkhand, Orissa, W Bengal - you get the idea.

Mopa will create jobs yes, but overwhelmingly for outsiders. This jobs-for-Goans promise is a pinch of nonsense.

### 3) Have Concrete, Will Pour

The end result of Mopa will be to turn everything north of the Mandovi bridge into a concrete wasteland. And slums will proliferate. Let me provide a visual aid: think of the hideously ugly stretch as you drive through Porvorim.

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Post-Mopa, that scene will extend right up to Patradevi. What is today pristine rural land in eastern Pernem will be split open for ugly concrete. Korgaon, Parsem, Virnoda, Alorna, etc - all quiet, agrarian and ancient village communities, will make way for ghatis and other non-Goans who will flood the area. Make no mistake about it. Secondary and tertiary construction projects will mushroom everywhere. Apartment complexes, hotels, you name it.

I was in Mopa in February and spoke to some members of the Dhangar community, one of the traditional tribes and longtime residents of the area. They were uncertain about their future, But not to worry - they will be bought out with cash. They'll get peanuts, but they'll be pleased no doubt (these folks aren't used to wads of 500-rupee notes).

Eastern Pernem is in need of economic uplift, yes. BUT MOPA IS NOT IT. Is Manohar-bab's imagination

so limited that he cannot think beyond land and concrete for economic advancement?

I had suggested to the Chief Minister that in lieu of Mopa, he should declare the entire area a protected reserve and create a state park system, permanently out of bounds to any development. Same with many other places in Goa still unmolested by builders. This ought to have been our bequest to future generations of Goans.

#### 4) The Open Door Brothel

Mopa is supposed to increase the number of tourists. WHY? Don't we have enough of them already? Has there been ANY reckoning about Goa's capacity to handle tourists? We should be looking to

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DECREASE the number, and augment the quality of tourist we attract.

#### 5) To Infinity and Beyond

The construction frenzy will not come to rest with Mopa. Take this to the bank, dear Goans.

There will be more monster projects lined up. I

can list one right now. Someone will soon have another bright idea and propose that we need to reduce the travel time from south Goa and Mopa. So what next? Why, of course the Sea Link project.

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