

Mumbai's Realty Check: BPT Land Development
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Firstly, we are fortunate that 1800 Acres of land has been under the BPT, exclusively for Port and related activity. Otherwise this land would have been taken –over long back and developed to further Real-Estate interest, as much as what happened to the 500 acres of textile mills land. The Realty story in Mumbai is long & entrenched into the city's political history. The tragedy all along has been that the developments in the city have been contrary to larger social interest and at the cost of development of social infrastructure – schools, health centre's , recreation, open-spaces etc. Quality of life and environment in the city has constantly declined inspite of our 'progress' mega construction, activity (amongst the biggest in Asia). The city infact is rapidly deteriorating into a state of underdevelopment as more and more people have limited opportunity and restricted access to education, health-care, recreation and more importantly, secured jobs. Formal sector employment has been sharply declining and the growth of informal sector jobs is a matter of shame. Minimum wages, health insurance, subsidized education, working hours etc., are not respected in the informal sector. As a matter of fact this is increasingly happening in formal sector due to increasing contract-based employment. It is a disgusting how the struggles of the people for daily sustenance and dignity particularly of the poor has been romanticized under the garb of enterprise, in certain publications.

Secondly, let us stop expanding the physical limits and the land area of our city, including proposed expansions into Pen, Panvel, Allibaug and other independent neighbouring areas for Mumbai's needs. Colonization of Mumbai's neighbourhoods and the BPT land for promotion of limited and shortsighted real-estate interest cannot be accepted. Realty business as we know will never address the social needs of the people of Mumbai while simultaneously destroying the local economy and displacing the people in the neighbourhoods. Land all over Belapur, Panvel, etc., were forcibly acquired to decentralize Mumbai therefore to improve living conditions in the city. Did this mega new city project help ease Mumbai's problems and affect the living conditions in the

city? The present trend in Realty growth must be checked in the interest of social justice and development of the city and its people. In the present situation in which real-estate developers dominate and influence 'growth', the depletion of public assets is inevitable. Our governments too are committed to facilitating this 'free enterprise'. Those who are claiming 'rights' over the BPT land and demanding comprehensive planning for its development in the 'interest' (of exclusive citizens) of the city are in fact furthering real-estate interest.

Alternatively, let us focus on the planned redevelopment of the city itself in order to promote the internal efficiency and create people friendly environment and networks.

Alternatively, can we draw attention to developing the internal efficiency of the city – of comprehensive planning and redevelopment of different areas. There is ample scope for growth including massive construction, potential for housing, offices, industries and so on. Don't we see construction happening on every second or third plot in our neighbourhoods, to the extent that it has upset our lives and environment altogether (its like living permanently on construction sites). Don't we have over 500 Ha of vacant land identified through survey's under the ULC Act. What about all the closed industrial sites, reconstruction of cessed buildings with ever increasing FSI, the redevelopment of slums with higher FSI's and the constructions due to TDR. **The Slum Redevelopment Authority (SRA) in its present form needs to be extinguished as it has become a cesspool of corruption and has completely deviated from its original mandate and has become a tool in the hands of the private builders. The principal of cross-subsidy and grant of TDR to the developer who rehabilitates the slums should continue but must be primarily promoted by the nodal government organizations like BMC, MHADA, Railways on whose land the encroachment has occurred. Development by private builders of slum lands must end as it has only resulted in skewed development. Some of these issues have been rightly represented in the Interim Housing Policy statement.** We have to thus focus our attention on these developments and more importantly on comprehensive planning to cohesively network these expansions for better quality environment and fulfill the deficiencies in social

amenities, infrastructure and low-priced mass housing. The issue is not about building more and having larger turnovers but about positively affecting the quality of life in the city. Let our growth be of high quality and not be judged merely on quantitative terms. Let our attention not be diverted to other areas and projects and let us not play into the hands of those who are proposing new mega schemes activities can only be undertaken at the cost of development of existing areas. Studies will be carried out and data will be constructed by them to substantiate their false arguments.

Therefore let the BPT land continue to be in safe custody with the government (BPT being a public enterprise) and used for the growing port and port related activity, thus contributing to the cities economy, employment, ancillary activity and so-on. This also means that BPT too should not give-away or sell parts of its land and property for non-port activity. Otherwise it will act as an irresponsible public enterprise undermining the city's larger interest. While planning for the ports expansion (as it is doing today due to rapid growth in its handling capacity from 20 TU's to 50 TU, BPT being the second largest port in the country after Vizag), let BPT along with the City government open-up parts of its areas to the public undertake the development of parts of the waterfront for public-use in the form of promenades, parks (as it has developed in Colaba), cultural spaces, play-grounds etc., all as open-spaces, public roads, transportation networks, railways expansion and similar infrastructure works must be integrated into the Master Plan for BPT's expansion, thus making the city and the BPT as a cohesive unit. There need be no grand schemes here but minimal re-organization of activity.

The Development of BPT land raises two significant questions.

- (1) Should such vast land areas owned by government agencies, particularly when the port is growing be allowed to be taken-over for realty interest. Land has remained in safe custody with the government, otherwise this important public asset (land & property) would have been depleted for promoting Realty interest and exclusive developments without necessarily responding to the needs of the city and all its people .

- (2) As a matter of fact more land for Mumbai's growth is not required. Instead there is need to focus on qualitative change and promote the internal efficiency of the city. Colonizing neighbourhoods and expanding at the cost of social development and quality of life in the city is counter productive. We need to check Realty interest if we have to fight against the fast growing underdevelopment of our city and the people.

We already have humongous amount of land under construction or to be constructed within the city due to various schemes. Let us ensure planned development of the areas where these projects are executed.