



twin city

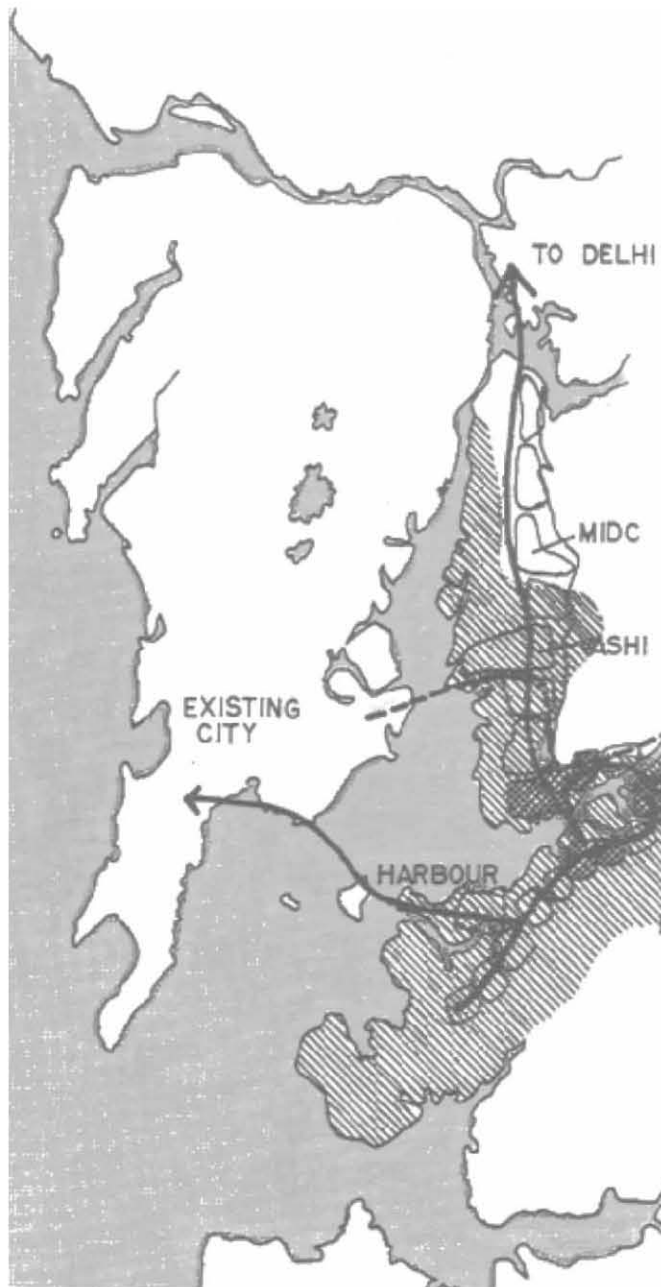
navi mumbai thirty years later

Thirty years ago, New Bombay was a green field site - a dream in the planners' mind as a locale for a new city. Today, it is home to almost one million people grappling with the realities of urban India. In fact, this urban system that was meant to act as an idealistic Twin City, is now reduced to a mechanism serving to absorb distress migrants and fuel the speculative real estate market, which together combine to become the most important forces that drive urban growth in India. This situation is far removed from the larger visions and hope that characterized the idea of New Bombay when it was first conceived.

The idea of 'New Bombay' was a big one - an idea that carried with it the vision to fundamentally alter the very structure of Bombay, the spirit of Bombay and its relationship to the hinterland. It was an idea for a new city imagined with all the optimism that symbolized independent India. A city on the water, with people working and living in close proximities, of the Government setting up a new center symbolizing the progressive nature of Maharashtra and while doing all of that, also saving Bombay!

Rahul Mehrotra

In 1964, responding to the then published Development Plan, Charles Correa, Shirish Patel and the late Pravina Mehta, proposed the idea of (urban) development striking out on to the eastern mainland instead of perpetuating growth in the northern direction as the city was naturally doing. The Government plan was further reinforcing this northern growth pattern in the attempt to create a Greater Bombay region. This concept of striking out on the eastern mainland recognized that any development in the north would only add pressure to Bombay and the north-south infrastructure pattern that was already, by the 1960's, stretched to its limits. For Correa, Mehta and Patel, the starting point for this idea of a new city across the harbour was the already planned extension of Bombay's port at Nhava Sheva. There were also two industrial zones in the eastern mainland, Thane-Belapur and Taloja, for which housing and ancillary services would in any case have to be provided and the Thana Creek Bridge (a critical link to the mainland) was also under construction. However, although these existing components could have dispersed development away from Bombay, they were not adding up to any clear end results in terms of orchestrating the planned growth of the Greater Bombay region in the future.



navi mumbai structural plan

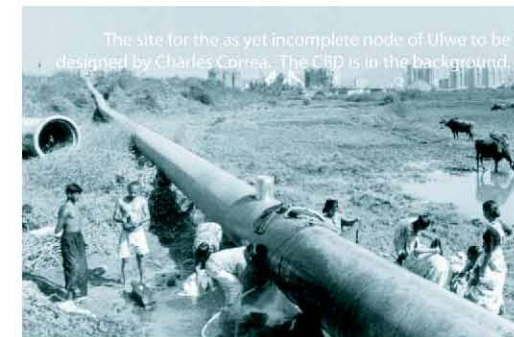
What the authors of the 'twin city' idea had astutely done was to reorchestrate these already proposed components in a new fashion, with fresh meaning in order to create an urban pattern in the form of a 'New City'. The idea, on which their proposal hinged, however, was that of the State Government moving to New Bombay. By locating government offices in the new city, the intention was to use that resource to get the Twin City going as also to get people to commute on an east-west axis instead of a north-south axis. Furthermore, the government offices would form the core functions and symbolically signal a clear purpose for the new city and for the State of Maharashtra.

On the mainland across the harbour, the proposed New Bombay covered an area of about 344 square kilometers, integrating 95 villages spread over the districts of Thane and Raigad. The 'new' city was proposed to have 2 million people and the intention was to distribute the existing population between the old city and new city and also to absorb additional migration. In order to make this all happen, road bridge and waterway connections to the mainland from the South Bombay were proposed. Furthermore, CIDCO (City and Industrial Development Corporation) was established by the State Government in March 1970, and designated as "New Town Development Authority" under the Maharashtra Town Planning Act (1966) specifically to plan and manage New Bombay. The actual work on New Bombay was started by CIDCO in March 1971 (thirty years ago), the agenda being to plan and develop the new city and give major relief to the existing city of Bombay from pressures of population growth, overcrowding and the intensification of activity - both commercial and manufacturing.

However, in spite of constituting this agency, the precise relationship between Bombay and New Bombay and their administration was never outlined or clearly understood. In fact, the authority set up to create and manage the new city - CIDCO had no connection with the Bombay Municipality whatsoever and thus the new city was planned in complete isolation from the authorities managing 'Old Bombay' - there were no shared visions for the region. In retrospect, it seems like the ambiguity in this relationship frustrated the potential of the old city to rejuvenate itself and retarded the process of the new city to mature! Also, encouraging the creation of New Bombay - or a new city in such close proximity to the old - only created greater concentration in the Bombay Metropolitan Region area and perpetuated dependency, forcing the new centre to assume the role of a dormitory city. In the final analysis, the fact that the State Government never did move to New Bombay, deprived the twin city of its core function - the catalyst that would have generated self-propelled growth.

In addition, the urbanization of the Vasai-Virar (Bassein) area in north Bombay which intensified at the beginning of the 1980s (again with CIDCO's involvement in the planning from 1992), has in a sense pushed the clock back to the 1960s - when New Bombay was proposed. It was presumably to avoid such a scenario of northward expansion that forced the agenda for planning between 1960 and 1990 and was central to the very idea of New Bombay. The implementation of the Vasai- Virar (sub-region) development plan will inevitably further retard the growth and blur the purpose of New Bombay. For, it will draw growth as well as investment in infrastructure in the northern direction instead of giving impetus to New Bombay.

What started out as a plan brimming with optimism and clarity was very quickly reduced to a blur of intentions. This is particularly amazing given that at its inception, the idea was accepted by the State Government and administration



The site for the as yet incomplete node of Ulwa to be designed by Charles Correa. The CID is in the background.

Belapur Railway Station with its enormous parking lot.



Hovercraft Terminal in Belapur



Aerial view of Agricultural Produce Market.





that seemed interested on acting and wanted to prove that effective action was possible. By supplying a critical resource - land, the government and the planners hoped to increase housing construction especially affordable housing in a dramatic way. Furthermore, by pooling the land under a single authority (through acquisition) the planners ensured that strategic planning at a macro level was possible. The intentions were great - but did it really sort out the mess for Bombay or itself?

Today, New Bombay in most parts is seen as a landscape of four stored RCC frame structures that plod relentlessly through the landscape. The rail link, two decades too late, has arrived upon the landscape - bringing a new 'gush of energy' to the urban system. Oversized stations dwarf the surrounding built environment waiting anxiously for the city to sprout around them, and the CBD (at Belapur) a ghost town (barring some government offices) is under the ownership of the Non-Resident Indians and Indian speculators who wait patiently for the emerging city to cause an appreciation in the prices of the property they own. The Government and CIDCO now also speculate on this land to raise finances for the development of physical and social infrastructure. And the State Government locating in New Bombay - an idea the original plan hinged on - is as far a reality as it was three decades ago? In fact, it has indirectly even retarded the growth of the new city - through CIDCO on the one hand attempting desperately to accelerate growth (and property prices) in New Bombay and on the other hand "regularizing" laissez faire growth in the north of Bombay at Vasai and Virar. Similarly, the State Government having blessed in the late 60's, the Nariman Point Scheme and now through the Bombay Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) developing the Bandra-Kurla Scheme - has all added up to really drastically slowing down the growth of New Bombay.

But then could the planners have really expected to create, next door to a vital capitalist market driven city that grew piecemeal, an exact opposite preconceived urban system

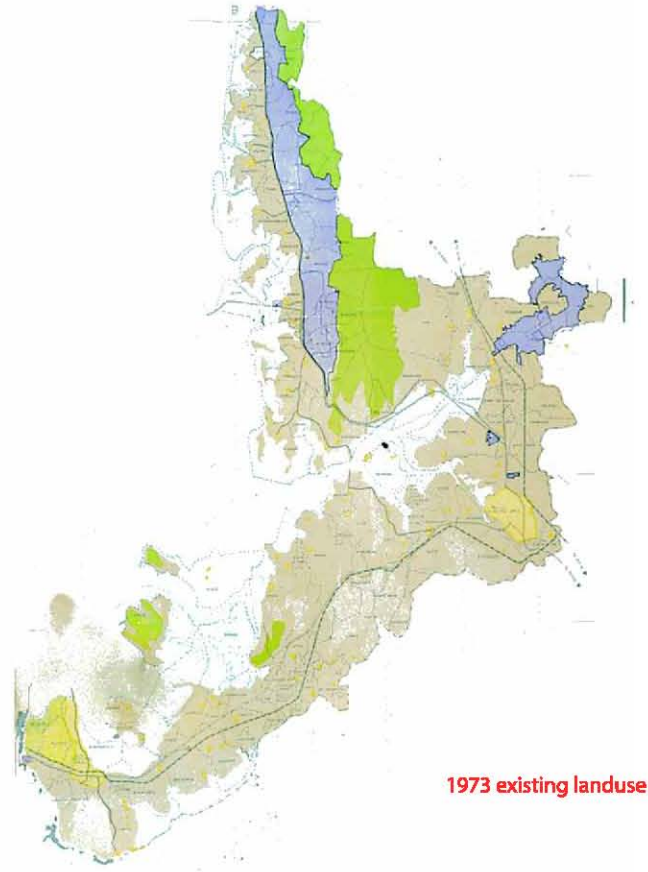
based on true social justice? And to move a government institution entrenched in and thriving on an economically buoyant city to uproot itself to a tabula rasa situation and to build a new constituency - was it plausible? The last four decades of independent India have clearly demonstrated that the myopic view of Indian politicians leads them to 'find and claim' and not 'make' cities. Or perhaps, New Bombay's failure stems from the tendencies by the planners to have conceived growth in ideal terms - creating a bridge too wide for the implementers of the plan to grapple with?

Similarly, the perceived failures at the physical planning level also deserve critical attention. Ranging from questions regarding the appropriateness of the housing and building typologies to the macro level issues such as the connections via bridge to Bombay - planning policies and priorities for New Bombay have been strangely misplaced. New Bombay, inspite of CIDCO's single majority ownership of a majority of the all land, has failed to break loose from the blanket FSI and bylaw system that has ravaged the natural terrain. Could not building bylaws and policies have been more sympathetic to the natural landscape as well as to the issue of affordability in terms of the building typologies that they encourage. Given the fact that all the land is under single ownership this varying of bylaws and subsequent built forms was more than possible. In that sense, Urban Design inputs were totally absent in the conception of New Bombay. No pictures, no images to work towards - in fact this crucial component to motivate the multifaceted set of players ranging from politicians, to industrialists, technicians and citizens that make a new city was sadly missing. The only physical image that the planners consistently referred to was the notion of the "city on the water". However, this imaging will be restricted to only the experience of 'crossing the bay' - once the water transport systems with bridges are put in place. Aside from the landing points the remaining potential waterfront strips are definitively buffered from the waterfront by healthy mangrove forests or swamping mud flats. One might argue that a city like Bombay started in the same fashion - and then as the city swelled out, it became

economical to reclaim upto a point where the presence of the water was a real phenomenon - as in the Apollo Bunder or Marine Drive developments in Bombay. Therefore to focus physical imagery related to the water's edge sans the water transportation systems limited the idea to merely an evocative illusion.

In fact the idea of New Bombay would have truly been an idea ahead of its time had it more precisely linked the planning decisions of New Bombay with that of Bombay. Questions of renewal, conservation, economic policies, and projections of demography - would have perhaps more precisely indicated a programme for New Bombay comprising of clearer multiple strategies - aimed at end results rather than an open ended, flexible planning strategy waiting to be fine-tuned as it went along. In that sense the planning exercise can be perceived as a "flight into Utopia"- of the creation of a preferred reality far removed from the complexities of urban planning for an existing city.

But then even the most complex planning strategies for new cities have often not produced ideal results or been able to make accurate projections about their future. And therefore the New Bombay exercise has to be viewed strictly in the context of the then available planning data and understanding of the future. For what the plan most importantly did was to bring to the fore the importance of creating macro level strategies for the orchestration of urban growth. Whether one likes the form of New Bombay or not, it is a planned development with



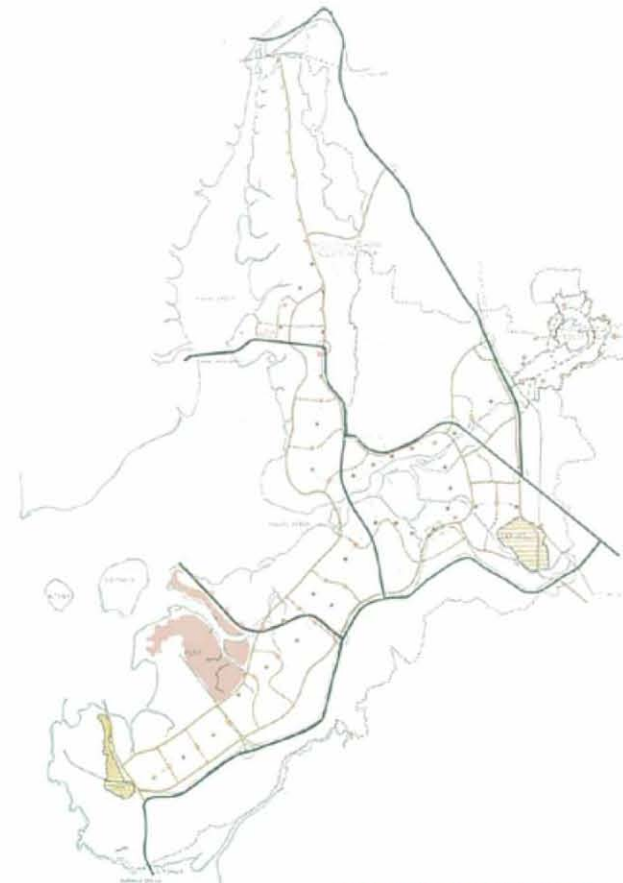
1973 existing landuse

infrastructure and built form working in tandem. However sporadic, the infrastructure is playing the lead role in propelling the settlement - as opposed to the laizze faire spurts of urbanization that characterizes the rest of India.

In that sense, New Bombay yet holds the hope for structured growth in the Metropolitan Region of Bombay. The Government is still in the unique position of possessing a great portion of the land and thus putting together the jigsaw of a cityscape to form a coherent image and functioning entity for the region. The rail-link and its eventual connection to the Konkan railway system will truly and metaphorically connect Bombay and especially New Bombay to western Maharashtra, a region that has fuelled Bombay's growth and energy. Similarly, with the establishment of the New Bombay Corporation in 1995-96 an elected authority will work in

tandem with a special planning authority - hopefully incorporating the pulse and aspirations of New Bombay's inhabitants in the planning exercise.

Actually, the hopes for New Bombay's role in the future of Bombay really makes the rawness and awkward gestures that the city seems to be making through its years of adolescence forgettable? Thirty years is an extremely short, in fact, minuscule time span in the life of a city. New Bombay is finally transitioning into a new phase of its existence and hopefully will soon settle into the firmness and sense of purpose for which its inhabitants and those of Bombay are expectantly waiting.



proposed transport network

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Image & Graphics Source : Author

