

Over the last three decades in Mumbai, planning has largely been about rearguard actions versus the *avant-garde* approaches that have traditionally led planning. Thus today most infrastructure follows city growth rather than leading development by facilitating and opening up new growth centers within and outside the city. Planning in contemporary Mumbai is systematically “posterior” as a recuperative and securing action¹. Perhaps the effects of globalisation and the urgency of integrating with a broader economic system, have completely changed the priorities of the governing authorities that are responsible for making the city? Their mandate (encouraged by commercial interests such as the Chambers of Commerce, Bombay First, etc) is about facilitating this integration as rapidly as possible to make Mumbai part of a global urban order! But obviously, as is visible in the fast deteriorating built environment in the city, the government is absolutely incapable of keeping ahead of the physical transformation of Mumbai that they have unleashed.

REMAKING MUMBAI

Rahul Mehrotra

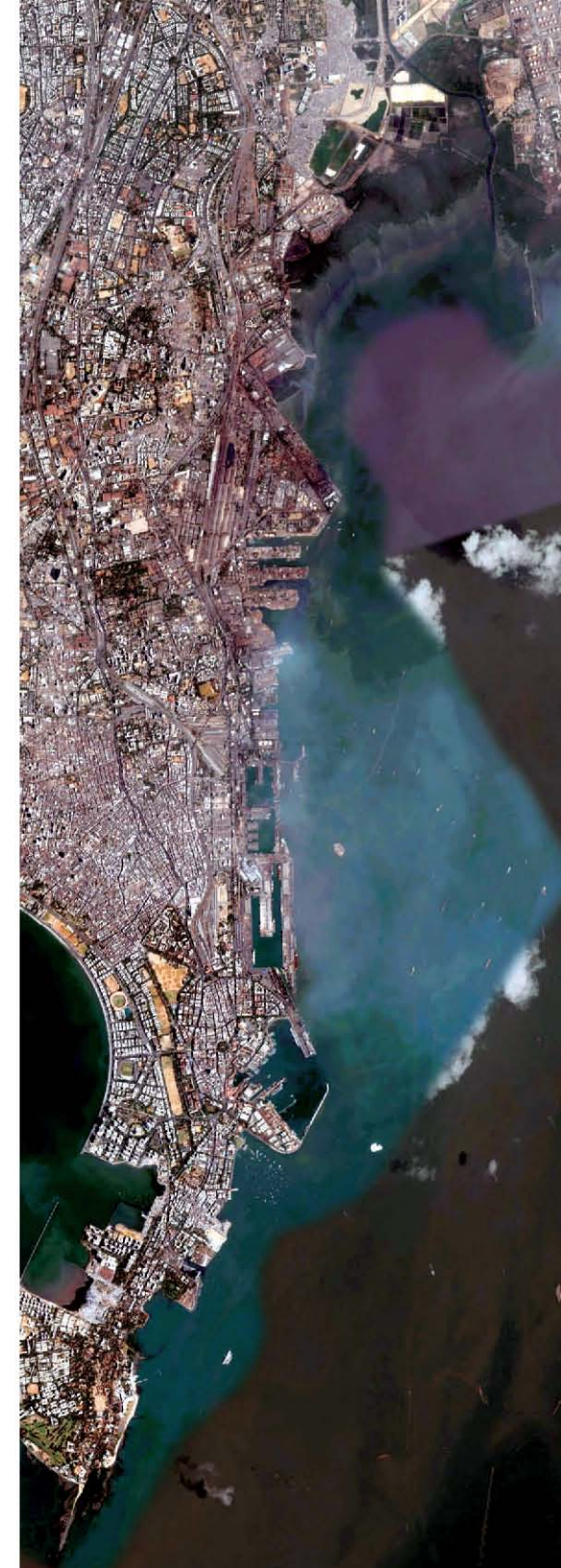
The case of the mill lands vividly illustrates this condition of runaway physical growth in Mumbai. In the development of these lands (with an area of approx 585 acres) located in the crowded central Mumbai district of Parel, only economic gain by a few has driven the conversion of this rare asset of the city into private commercial development. It is indeed shocking that for such an important planning decision in the city, no planning agency in Mumbai even prepared a master or strategy plan for the processes by which these lands could be integrated for the benefit of the city.

1. William S W Lim, *Asian Ethical Urbanism – A Radical Post-modern Perspective*, Introduction by Leon Van Schaik, Singapore, 2005 (page 31,32)

Shrouding the issue in ambiguity, politicians, mill owners and bureaucrats manipulated legislation and essentially deprived the city of a fantastic moment to balance its desperate shortage of affordable housing, open spaces, public amenities and social infrastructure like schools and hospitals. The fatal combination of greed and myopic thinking in dealing with the recycling of mill lands has resulted in Mumbai losing an important opportunity to reinvent itself. Concerned citizens, environmentalists and planners, disadvantaged by scanty and inadequate public notifications, moved in too late after the event, to salvage whatever could be retrieved through Public Interest Litigation (PIL) within an already biased set of legislative moves to divide this prime land.

The Mill Land issue also demonstrates the state of the profession of urban planning and the culture of architecture in the city. Here, professionals and institutions are seemingly unequipped to grapple with emergent issues in the city. Thus, the profession is being largely engaged in recuperative action – of intervening post-facto to clean up the mess! It is therefore no coincidence that in Mumbai, that there is an increased celebration of projects involving ‘cleaning up’ – whether they involve the restoration of our historic buildings, precincts or districts, or waterfronts and sidewalks, or the relocation of slums to make way for infrastructure. While critical to the functioning of the city, these projects are an indication of the limited role of the architectural or engineering professions and all the other agencies involved in the making of the city.

By default, the private sector (developers in the city) is determining the emergent form of Mumbai. This is the result of a fundamental shift that has occurred in the planning process where the government has privatised city development. While with this shift the government has devolved itself of the responsibility of delivering urban amenities within a strategic framework, it has not defined its new role. Should it still be the



custodian of the public realm or should it play the role of putting into place the checks and balances required when private enterprise is unleashed for city development? Today, there is an incredible disjuncture in the city between existing and allocated land uses and the positioning of new infrastructure – a condition where landuse, transportation planning and urban form have no relationships with each other in the emergent landscape.⁽²⁾ How then does one orchestrate growth and planning and visions for the city in future?

Remaking Mumbai

First of all, in order to evolve an approach relevant to this emerging scenario, there would be a need for a greater engagement with city issues by the citizens and professionals in the city. To allow this to happen, planning or decision-making about the city should clearly have to be dealt with at two levels – the macro (or city) level and the micro or area/neighbourhood level. In this model, akin to the state and

2. Studies carried out through the UDRI Mumbai Studio by Pankaj Joshi and participants in the Fellowship Program, shows an incredible emerging disjuncture between infrastructure, land use and the physical, social, economic fabric of the city. This will be published in early 2007 as a series of studies on Mumbai and the new emerging Navi Mumbai where private ownership of land will soon overtake what CIDCO owns – defeating completely the objective of government orchestrating growth through land ownership.



Source: Bombay- Cities Within

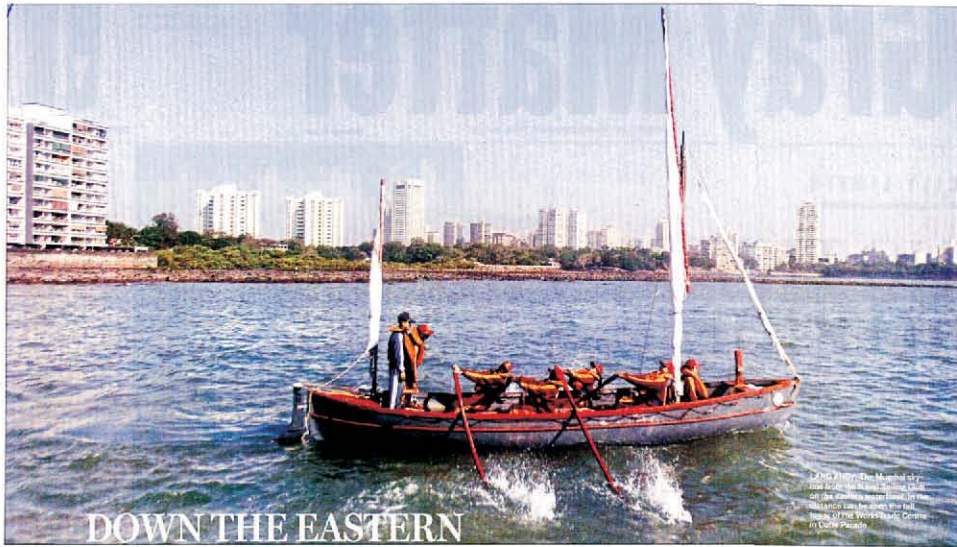
concurrent lists at the national policy level, the macro level concerns would be infrastructure, roads and connection between parts of the city as well as broad policy for the metropolitan area.

At the micro level, the concerns would range from issues of urban form (appropriate FSI and TDR designations), to those of micro managing the environment in terms of its aesthetics as well as health and hygiene. This shift would then clearly make city authorities responsible for the larger strategies to orchestrate growth in the region and the locality level organisations (be they ward offices or citizens' groups) to be concerned about the tactics for urban governance. This decentralised system would be far more efficient in managing as well as responding to crisis situations – like smaller pixels on a screen, we will get higher definition and resolution in our cities on the ground.

Cities grow and evolve either by opening up new land for growth or recycling land within their domains. In both these processes, people are affected by these moves and must necessarily participate in the process if they are to safeguard their interests and the decisions made are to be sustainable. The mis appropriation of the mill lands has shown that without this engagement, land becomes an abstract entity which is but reduced to blobs of colour on a land use plan open to change and manipulation. Cities by nature are contested territories. Who commands what and how in a Democracy is determined by who



Source: Bombay- Cities Within



DOWN THE EASTERN

WATERFRONT

The serene but neglected seafront from Colaba to Wadala holds the last great opportunity for Mumbai to reclaim its open spaces

Mini Pant Zachariah
Mumbai

DRIVING from Bandra to Colaba? Presume your regular route via the glass-and-chrome buildings of Prabhadevi and Marine Drive. Try the Sewri, Dockyard and Durgam Road, instead. Barring the squalls, hordes and aging ker-

ries can make for a nerve-racking journey. The two approaches are like shells and cheese, much like the two seafronts these abut. On the west are the crowded hostels, shopping arcades, skyscrapers and swank hotels. The east could have all of this, plus more - a sense of open space. But it doesn't. The reason the Mumbai Port Trust (MPT) is loath to part with the spectacular seafront 14.5 km stretch from Colaba to Wadala that it owns.

The MPT owns the entire stretch from Colaba in the island city to Pipra in the north. En route are the Sassoon docks, Prince's and India docks, Bhauca Thakka, the Sewri Port and mudflats where the migratory flamingos come calling every year. Tiny boats and aquatic scuba divers also have a place under the sun along this blue-green expanse.

Not many have noticed these precincts because these are not open to the public. That could change - if the MPT alters its stance. Glaring equipment and security measures, it has reluctantly agreed to concede just 12 of its 1800 acres. "Interestingly only 50 per cent of this land has been used for Port activities," points out architect Rahul Mehrotra in an essay in *Mill Lands: The way*

ahead, a book edited by Dursyl D Monte for Marc Tardif. The rest of the land is either taken up by

the world over, city planners have redesigned existing docklands to reclaim space for their city. Says Mehrotra, "The city's eastern waterfront is of great relevance for the city's future for the way both the city and the region reinvent themselves."

D Monte publishes the MPT's claim that access through its land will be a security risk. "The MPT is behaving like an old landlord refusing to part with his land. It should allow public access to the seafront, from front to back, four floors up its land," he says.

Zohel Schwela, Vice President of the Iron and Steel Scrap Dealers' Association, in Bandra, substantiates. "The MPT has already opened the Curragh Bunder in Chembur road to the public since 2001," Schwela is one of the MPT's 2000 tenants, who include the Food Corporation of India, the Taj Mahal Hotel and the Indian Navy.

BSP leader Kirti Suraniya has another suggestion: "Like the Mumbai-Ahmedabad catamaran service, a Mumbai-Thane and Mumbai-Navi Mumbai sea link could cut down travel time." Clearly, there's no shortage of ideas for the eastern seafront. Mumbai lost a huge chance to get some open space with the sale of mill lands. The MPT land may go the same way, warns Mehrotra. If the citizens of Mumbai do not act quickly, the very people who pretend to avert the city will once again deprive it of perhaps the last great opportunity to reinvent itself for the future.



GLOBAL CONT



SET FOR SAIL: (above) Beyond the seafront being leased at Prince's Dock, one can see the domes of the General Post Office, Municipal Corporation and Colaba Group Terminal. (right) A diagonal view of the massive dry dock where sea vessels come in for repairs

DANCE WITH ME: Many migratory birds, most spectacularly migratory flamingos, keep their annual dance with the city at the Sewri mudflats along the eastern seafront



PHOTOGRAPHS: VIKAS KHOT, VISHWANATH GUPTA & KIRAN PRAKASH



BOATS BIG AND SMALL: Dhawala dhawals, (left) with its colourful boats and fishermen is a lively place to see Mumbai's native Koli community in action. (Right) The ship-breaking yard at Dharukhane, once an ammunition dump, from whence it gets its name, gets little business now.



Source: Hindustan Times

participates or does not participate in the process. It is here that it is crucial for a city to articulate a strategy for its growth and build a consensus for reflecting the aspiration of its citizens. In Mumbai, the mill lands were one such opportunity where the rational use of the land through a clear and transparent strategy could have benefited the city enormously. Unfortunately, the State Government and planning agencies did not engage its citizens in the process of changing and manipulating this asset for their own narrow and myopic needs.

In this context, the city's eastern waterfront is of great relevance for the city's future for both the way the city as well as the region reinvents itself. In fact the very connection of the historic city centre to the region would depend on how the land on the city's eastern water edge is recycled for use by Mumbai. Furthermore, in the regional growth scenarios and projections of the Golden Triangle (connecting Mumbai, Nashik and Pune), the eastern waterfront would be a critical urban space in establishing connections between the old center and this regional triangle - now comprising of emergent industries, special economic as well as agricultural export zones. Thus this land is also important for how the peripheral areas of the city can connect for the Metropolitan region to work as a whole.

This area, of the eastern waterfront, totaling approx 1800 acres (the remaining Mill Lands in comparison are merely 585 acres), forms a large portion of the city. These areas, like the mill lands are in the process of grappling with great transformation and change as the economy of Mumbai moves into the post-industrial phase with the ever-transforming nature of users and aspiration in the city. While this area totals roughly 4.5 times the mill land, interestingly only 6% of this land is under reservation by the BMC for public users and less than 1% (.85%) is for open spaces. This is particularly incredible in the light of the fact that there exist 14.5 km of virtually inaccessible waterfront. Thus the eastern waterfront is critical not only in terms of what the city can potentially gain for public uses but in terms of the possibilities it provides for re-orienting the perception of the city and the region with regard to its own geography and physical form. The visual connection for example from the eastern edge of the city across the harbor, could go a long way in the public's imagination and weave the New Bombay area (which otherwise seems distant and remote) into what we perceive as the metropolitan area. Similarly, the potential for the creation of connectivity using water transportation could transform the way mobility within the region is imagined and organized.

Interestingly only 50% of this land (836 acres) is used for Port activities and in fact large seemingly underused infrastructure and roads characterize the present state of the landscape. Dotted with unused warehouses (often beautifully robust buildings with great reuse

potential) a sense of desolation prevail many areas of this landscape. This is offset by parts of this area that are often encroached upon by teeming populations, labour pools – a virtual sea of energy and resources creating new emergent forms of employment in the area. The challenge therefore is how this landscape can be rearranged to synergize these different components? And what process would be most appropriate for this to happen – how we as a society use this incredible resource of land, people and infrastructure to improve the city as well as safeguard the interest of present users occupants and interests? Of course many other questions also need to be considered. The ecology of the region (flamingoes make this zone their home for half the year), the heritage buildings and the high potential of reusable space they offer, the integration of heritage structure such as the Sewri Fort and many such fragments that comprise the rich fabric of the Eastern Waterfront of Mumbai.⁽³⁾

3. This argument is extracted from and detailed in the preface of the book titled “A Study of the Eastern Waterfront of Mumbai”. A Situation Analysis carried out between August 2000 and December 2001”, published by the Urban Design Research Institute, Bombay, 2005. This document contains a detailed mapping of the entire Eastern Waterfront and the potential for the recycling that could occur.



Source: UDRI

In spite, of this self-evident potential and gain that can accrue to the city, the state government and all concerned government departments are once again seemingly insensitive to this opportunity. A familiar pattern that also played itself out in the mill lands saga - no strategy but instead a series of tactics; quick overnight demolitions of property to make way for new development, global tenders, and the creation of new middle men and power brokers. The eastern waterfront is an absolutely crucial zone in the city and one that could completely transform Mumbai and compensate for many physical deficiencies that exist in the city today. The time frame on this is very short and the greed for this land large. If the citizens of Mumbai do not act quickly, set the right process into place and make politicians accountable for their actions - the very people who pretend to govern the city will once again deprive Mumbai, of perhaps the last great opportunity to appropriately remake itself for the future.



Source: UDRI