

HIGH COURT OF MEGHALAYA
AT SHILLONG

PIL No.4/2021

Date of Order: 14.02.2022

Registrar General,
High Court of Meghalaya

Vs.

State of Meghalaya & ors

Coram:

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Sanjib Banerjee, Chief Justice
Hon'ble Mr. Justice W. Diengdoh, Judge

Appearance:

For the Petitioner/Appellant(s)

: Mr. P Yobin, Amicus Curiae

For the Respondent(s)

: Mr. A Kumar, Advocate General with

Ms. R Colney, GA

Dr. N Mozika, ASG

i) Whether approved for reporting in
Law journals etc.:

Yes/No

ii) Whether approved for publication
in press:

Yes/No

This matter pertains to the Umroi airport and the possible expansion plan thereat. At present, only short-haul ATR aircraft are able to land at Umroi airport and the bigger aircraft cannot land because of the shortness of the existing runway. There are, according to the respondents, regular flights operating from Kolkata and places in North-East, including Imphal, Agartala, Dibrugarh, Lengpui, Dimapur, Silchar and Guwahati.

The State of Meghalaya has rich prospects in developing tourism. If a plan of sustained development of the tourism industry is chalked out, upon monitoring and regulating the critical parameters, the local economy may get the necessary fillip, particularly since there is no big industry in the State. The boost of tourism in the State will also result in substantial benefit to the national economy.

In addition, since long-haul flights from up-country cities can only land at Guwahati, which is the nearest big airport, the travel time from Guwahati to Shillong is in excess of three hours and, if a person interested in coming to Shillong is able to directly land at Umroi, the travel time would be reduced to about 40 minutes. In the long run, this may be greatly beneficial apart from reducing the time required to reach Shillong.

It is submitted on behalf of the State that substantial expenses have been incurred for expanding the flat land beyond the runway on either side by cutting down the hills. However, it is possible that further hills have to be cut into before a safe runway can be put in place to be able to handle the Boeing and bigger aircraft.

It is for such purpose that both the Airports Authority of India and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation were required to file affidavits indicating the feasibility of expanding the Umroi airport to accommodate long-haul flights including Boeing and like aircraft. While the AAI has filed an affidavit indicating the development activities undertaken recently at Umroi airport, the crucial element regarding the feasibility of expanding the airport to be able to handle long-haul flights and larger aircraft has been completely missed out in such affidavit. No affidavit has yet been filed by the DGCA. In the interest of the State, particularly as tourism is likely to gain momentum here, it is necessary to indicate the feasibility of expanding the Umroi airport to accommodate larger aircraft than ATRs and the cost-benefit analysis in respect thereof. It is made clear that safety cannot be compromised and the international standards pertaining to the length of the

runway for bigger aircraft have to be adhered to. Both the AAI and DGCA should file their affidavits dealing with such aspect of the matter.

It is submitted at this stage that the DGCA is involved more with assessing the airworthiness of aircraft, issuing licenses and monitoring the operation of flights in the country rather than being involved in the construction of any airport or the requirements therefor. If such is the case, the DGCA's affidavit should indicate the same and the entire matter may rest on the assessment of the feasibility of expansion of the airport by the AAI.

The matter will appear four weeks hence. Advance copies of the affidavits should be reached to the office of learned Advocate General for the State to be able to respond to the same when the matter appears next.

List on March 14, 2022.

(W. Diengdoh)
Judge

(Sanjib Banerjee)
Chief Justice

Meghalaya
14.02.2022
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