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SA doesn't end at the big cities – Bay also needs govt support

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HERALD OPINION



ODD MAN OUT ODWA MTATI

I HAVE often wondered what would change the face of the metro economically.

When I undertake this exercise, I vacillate between extreme excitement about the possibilities for the city and a hard-to-accept feeling that things will remain as they are. If one considers the city's different elements – diverse natural attractions in close vicinity, pristine beaches, the stable manufacturing industry, the new stadium, the two ports, the Coega IDZ, a revamped casino and an upgraded central business district with an adjoining waterfront – the basic diverse elements to build the city as a business and tourism destination comparable to Durban and Cape Town do exist.

It was therefore with great interest that I read the Sunday Times over the past weekend. Kuben Naidoo, the acting head of the National Planning Commission, is quoted extensively on two projects that are in the Eastern Cape, in our city to be precise.

He is quoted as saying the Coega IDZ is “not a complete waste of money but a big waste of money”. He then goes on further to refer to the proposal to build an oil refinery and says “the decision must be made on the basis of sound economic analysis taking into account the cost to

the consumer, the balance of payments, the effects on the cost of capital, the environment and security of supply”.

The latter statement is sound if this was a matter of a principle applied consistently by government and the state-owned enterprises. In respect of the government, our experience has been different.

Massive infrastructural programmes have been undertaken, such as the Gautrain and the new airport in Durban, with little or no regard to this supposed principle. This is especially true of parastatals such as Transnet and Eskom – I and many would be interested to see the basis of decisions affecting them.

I have not heard a hue and cry about the cost of an idle airport in Durban that may soon be converted into a dugout port.

The Eastern Cape is still one of the most underdeveloped provinces with a high unemployment rate, yet with the least investment by parastatals. I am not advocating investments must be made when they are not viable.

I am questioning whether the city and the province will always be condemned to underdevelopment as a consequence of the economically sound rationale. We have gone past the stage of the often repeated question about the market demand.

Rather we are at the stage where in anticipation of it, we must create the infrastructure to induce demand.

The least we expected was that with the dawn of democracy, there would be an effort to build an equitable country.

There is still an expectation that those in power will make a conscious effort to reverse the pro-

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There is still an expectation that those in power will make a conscious effort to reverse the pre-1994 planning, but with Naidoo at the helm, the prospects are dim.

I must confess though that I am not the least surprised by these comments from Naidoo, as he has held them since his days at national Treasury. In the book about the life of Trevor Manuel – *Choice not Fate* – Naidoo is quoted as espousing the same views that he will now attempt to transplant into the presidency.


I had my doubts that Naidoo would embrace Albert Einstein when Einstein called for people to learn to see the world anew.

I can only conclude the only way that he will not succeed is when we present alternative answers to those who understand the Republic of South Africa is not Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. Other areas deserve their place in the sun too and then the possibilities will become a reality.

That day will materialise much quicker when the local and provincial leaders talk not only about hunger, reshuffles and disease, but about economic issues as well.


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Basically, it's like saying: "global insight, local action". Local leaders need to be more aggressive and innovative, national leaders need to have an appreciation for the country as a whole with regard to development and economic growth.

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