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MPT bundh: Goa comes to a standstill

PANAJI, DHNS: Hundreds of fishing trawlers, barges and launches suspended operations in Vasco and other jetties in South Goa on Monday to protest the Mormugao Port Trust's (MPT) expansion plan and bid to relocate fishermen and barge anchorages.

The stir called by the *Mormugao Bachao Abhiyan*, a collective of fishermen, launch and barge owners' associations also brought the port town to a standstill on Monday, compelling the state government to intervene in an attempt to medi-

ate a solution. But talks failed, officials said. The police said the bundh was largely peaceful. On an expansion drive, MPT is planning new berths and rig repair facilities in Vasco bay, cruise and container terminals, an international-size shipyard and a marina for water sports at Baina Bay.

All of these at close to Rs 1,000 crore, will see the relocation of 194 houses, the reclamation of massive areas from the sea, the virtual obliteration of Baina beach, and most contentious of all to fishermen, launch and

barge operators, the relocation of the Vasco jetty and anchorage. Backed by politicians, the *Abhiyan* says trawlers, launches and barges will not relocate from the Vasco bay. It has asked for MPT chairman Praveen Agarwal to be recalled instead.

"Everyone is affected by this one way or other," said Congress Deputy Speaker Mauvin Godinho, elected from a constituency in the area. Like Godinho, NCP Minister Jose Phillip D'Souza and BJP MLA Milind Naik have also thrown their

weight behind the agitation. There is resentment against Agarwal for bringing in contractors from outside the state to operate launches to ferry people to transhippers and ships within the port area.

Agarwal told *DHNS* that the port's expansion drive was still in its preliminary stage and the affected people would be taken into confidence. "Our primary concern is to facilitate shipping. We are not on a collision course and would like to work in tandem with the people."