

# Worker safety ignored as never-ending Smart City works forge ahead

Poor coordination between departments and the lack of an accurate site plan puts the migrant workforce at risk; workers of all ages are seen working in squalid conditions, digging and handling rubble sans gloves, helmets, masks or even footwear

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**PANJIM:** Less than a year after a young worker survived an electric shock while working on a Smart City project near Jama Masjid in Panjim, safety issues remain dangerously neglected. Labourers, often migrants, continue to face perilous conditions without proper safety gear, training, or adequate safeguards.

In April 2023, the young worker, unaware of underground live cables, struck an electric wire twice while digging the ground. A small blast resulted in mild electrocution, but fortunately, the worker escaped without critical injuries. The worker revealed that the contractor had not warned him about the cables in the area, or provided any safety equipment.

Such negligence has led to more tragic consequences. In October 2023, 28-year-old Angad Kumar from Bihar died after being buried under a mound of soil at a Smart City work-site in Ribandar. The tragedy underscored the lack of even basic safety measures, which remain glaringly absent despite repeated accidents.

Just last month, O Herald observed workers excavating deep trenches for sewage line work on Dr. Wolfgango Silva Road without helmets or protective gear, while precariously piled rubble loomed over



Barefoot and oblivious to the danger, a worker digs around a frayed electricity cable near Azad Maidan

“It is not Smart City work but a smart way of plundering public money. Panjim has been dug up everywhere but the workers carrying out the work have not been provided any safety equipment. The authorities do not care whether people die or remain alive. In fact Imagine Panaji Smart City Development Limited (IPSCDL) should insure those workers – Wilson D’Souza, Ribandar

them. On January 2, a labourer was seen laying cement blocks near exposed electrical wires on M.G. Road, oblivious to the hazards around him.

When questioned, labourers admitted that contractors dismissed the need for safety equipment, claiming it was unnecessary for tasks that were not explicitly “building construction work.” Meanwhile, women and men alike are deployed to work in trenches up to three metres deep without

protection, risking their lives daily.

Local business owners have also expressed frustration with the chaotic Smart City projects. Wilson D’Souza from Ribandar condemned the lack of accountability, saying, “It’s not Smart City work; it’s a smart way of plundering public money. IPSCDL should insure these workers and mandate safety measures. The authorities don’t care whether people live or die.”

“The works are substandard. Digging starts without providing notice to the residents or shop owners. This is the period when we get more customers but because of these dug up roads customers are finding it difficult to come to our shops. Carry out the work, but please inform us in advance, and also finish one task and then move on to the other – Shop owner on M G Road

On M.G. Road, shopkeepers criticised the disruption to their livelihoods.

“They are trying to finish the work within a day too with substandard quality of material. See the kind of stones used for the work. Will they last? Because of the digging, telephone connections are being cut, and this is affecting our business which is dependent on the internet – Business owner, Panjim

“Roads are dug without informing residents or businesses, causing chaos during peak business periods,” one proprietor complained. “Customers avoid our shops due to blocked access. We’re not asking them to stop, just to plan better—finish one section before starting another.”

Another shop owner, who declined to be named, voiced concerns about quality. “Look at the stones they’re using—they won’t last. Substandard materials and unplanned work are ruining the city. Digging up roads is also cutting phone and internet lines, which hits our businesses hard.”

Despite repeated incidents and mounting complaints, contractors and officials appear indifferent to the risks faced by labourers and the inconvenience to the public. Instead of symbolising progress, the Smart City projects are rapidly becoming a tale of neglect and poor governance, where human lives and local livelihoods bear the brunt.

## Dustbin dilemma sparks heated debate at Margao civic body meeting

Councillors smell a ‘dustbin scam’, allege bins promised to various wards have not been distributed



TEAM HERALD

**MARGAO:** Friday’s Margao Municipal Council meeting witnessed fiery exchanges among councillors, with sharp disagreements arising over the distribution of dustbins and alleged mismanagement.

The meeting also saw the council approving two contentious projects—a coffee shop within the Municipal Garden and an automated hydraulic car parking system under GSUDA—despite some lingering concerns.

Discussions over outsourcing door-to-door garbage collection in all 25 wards brought the issue of dustbin distribution to the forefront. While the council claimed that 150 bins were distributed recently, several councillors, including Sidhart Ghadekar, alleged that the bins were either not provided as promised or were sold off, hinting at a potential “dustbin scam.”

“Where are the bins supposed to be distributed to the wards? We suspect irregularities in the process,” Ghadekar asserted.

In response, the council clarified that two bins per ward had been distributed

### KEY RESOLUTIONS

- Council approves two controversial plans—to open a café within the Aga Khan Children’s Park and set up an automated parking system
- Several other proposals were approved during the meeting, including: Development of the old bus stand. Demarcation of parking spaces at the KTC bus stand.
- Implementation of a capital value system for calculating house tax on new constructions, as recommended by the Directorate of Municipal Administration.

via supervisors and stated that 600 bins had been purchased in 2023, with plans to procure more.

The council unanimously approved a proposal to set up a coffee shop within the Municipal Garden, a plan that had previously attracted criticism. Strikingly, no councillor opposed the move during Friday’s meeting, raising eyebrows among attendees.

## Curtorim development projects launched with 2027 timeline

TEAM HERALD

**CURTORIM:** Chief Minister Pramod Sawant inaugurated the virtual foundation stone-laying ceremony for the ‘Better Curtorim Constituency’ initiative at a well-attended event at Maina Curtorim, on Saturday. Spearheaded by Curtorim MLA Aleixo Reginaldo Lourenço, the event saw participation from senior ministers, dignitaries, and local representatives.

Addressing the gathering, CM Sawant announced that the development projects unveiled would be completed by January 2027. “Projects like the clearing of the Sossoddo legacy dump and the establishment of an independent Maina-Curtorim Police Station highlight our government’s commitment to development,” he said, praising Lourenço for his dedication.

The unveiled projects include an upgraded Primary Health Centre in Curtorim, underground power cabling with new transformers, road hotmixing, and upgrades to Curtorim and Maina football grounds. In the pipeline are a home for the elderly and a rice mill, according to local MLA Aleixo Reginaldo Lourenço.

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culture machinery, a physiotherapy clinic, and CSC centres were also announced.

MLA Aleixo Reginaldo Lourenço quoted Mahatma Gandhi, saying, “The future depends on what you do today,” while reiterating his commitment to delivering for Curtorim’s constituents. “The Chief Minister has supported our plans and cleared vital projects,” Lourenço stated, adding that his next focus would be a home for the aged and a rice mill.

Cabinet ministers Subhash Shirodkar (Water Resources), Rohan Khaunte (Tourism), Aleixo Sequeira (Environment and Climate Change), and Govind Gaudé (Sports) were present alongside other MLAs, including Sankalp Amonkar, Premendra Shet, and Anton Vas, as well as local panchayat members and constituents.

## Tensions escalate over Sopo collection at Margao’s wholesale fish market

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** A heated dispute over the collection of sopo fees outside Margao’s wholesale fish market erupted on Friday morning, marking the second altercation in three days between the Margao Municipal Council’s (MMC) sopo contractor and the South Goa Planning and Development Authority (SGPDA).

The confrontation involved representatives of the MMC’s contracted agency, Wild Security Agency, and the SGPDA, with both sides accusing each other of encroaching on jurisdiction. The situation became so intense that the police had to intervene to prevent further escalation.

Milagres Fernandes, the MMC’s sopo contractor, defended his agency, stating, “We are collecting fees strictly as per the



The clash between different authorities with overlapping jurisdictions has left fish sellers and the public caught in the crossfire

directions issued by the civic body. We have not entered the SGPDA complex. They have no right to collect fees from the retail fish sellers or businesses operating outside the complex. We were awarded the tender legally. SGPDA is harassing us and disrupting our business.”

Fernandes emphasised that the tender process was transparent and that his agency is acting under the explicit in-

structions of an official order from the MMC Chief Officer, authorising fee collection outside the wholesale fish market.

The dispute intensified after the SGPDA requested Fatorda police on Thursday to prevent the MMC’s contractor from collecting fees on SGPDA-owned property. Despite this, the MMC maintains it has jurisdiction over the roads and spaces outside the SGPDA complex at

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Madel, Margao. The MMC’s directive underscores the need for order to avoid inconvenience to the public. The directive also tasked the sopo contractor with ensuring smooth pedestrian and vehicular movement while collecting fees outside the SGPDA fish market.

## GSIC imposes Rs 22k fine on Majorda P’yat Secy for delaying RTI reply

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** In a landmark ruling, the Goa State Information Commission (GSIC) has imposed a penalty of Rs 22,500 on Custodio Faria, Panchayat Secretary of Majorda-Utorda-Galata Village Panchayat, for failing to provide information within the statutory timelines mandated by the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

The Commission’s order sternly underscores accountability, directing the Directorate of Panchayats to recover the penalty within 10 days of receiving the order and to submit a compliance report within two working days. Additionally, it has mandated that any legal expenses incurred by Faria in connection with this case be borne personally and not funded

by public money.

The GSIC also highlighted the need for proper training and sensitisation of first appellate authorities under the Directorate of Panchayats to enhance compliance with RTI obligations in the future.

The penalty follows a complaint filed by Sharlet Fernandes, a Panchayat member, who alleged that Faria had failed to disclose information requested in an RTI application filed in February 2023. Fernandes asserted that the Panchayat Secretary neglected his responsibilities, leading to the GSIC’s intervention.

This case sets a strong precedent for enforcing transparency and accountability in local governance and underscores the critical role of the RTI Act in ensuring public access to information.



Chief Minister Pramod Sawant has declared that twenty-four departments have spent only 30% of their annual budget. He has directed the departments to spend the remaining 70% budget in the following months. Will this lead to wasteful expenditure? Will the Centre reduce next year’s funds allocations for schemes? With this kind of a report card, Herald TV asked people if they believe the Goa government is really interested in the development of the State

## 24 DEPARTMENTS SPENT ONLY 30% OF THEIR BUDGET - IS THE GOVT REALLY INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING GOA?

“Almost 24 departments are utilising only 30% of the total budget. In simple terms, it means we get Rs 100 and the state government along with the minister and bureaucrats spend only Rs 30. So what happens to Rs 70. It will go back to the Central Government coffers. So does the State government benefit? No way. There are a lot of State government departments where we need infrastructure. So why do the government and the bureaucrats not utilise 100% of the budget? There are a lot of departments which require funds, for instance the highways. We don’t have proper facilities: bathrooms, restrooms at tourist locations. These works could be undertaken. Secondly, if the budget is under-utilised, the next year the budget for the state will be reduced. Centre will say, we gave you Rs 100 you spent only Rs 30, so next year we will give you only Rs 50. – Anthony D’Silva, social activist

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“The Chief Minister has made a statement that 24 departments have spent only 30% of the funds allocated to them. 70% has not been utilised and he is advising them to exhaust it as soon as possible. In other words he is telling them to spend it anyhow. I want to give one example by way of clarification to the CM. Under Viksit Bharat one project was undertaken, that was improvement of infrastructure around Kadamba Bus Stand. It was billed for Rs 70 lakh. There they claimed that 16 JCB, 16 trucks and 150 labourers were utilised. This was like an air show. Was there an air show there? What work did so many vehicles do in such a small place? What did they actually do? I want a clarification from the Chief Minister. This has happened under your department. And whether this is the way that you want them to exhaust the remaining 70% funds which are under your department. – Savio Coutinho, convenor, Shadow Council for Margao