

Stalled plans, derailed progress: South Goa's 2025-26 Development Plan in limbo

Delayed govt approval for the Rs 229-crore development plan leaves local bodies uncertain about district's progress

Team Herald

MARGAO: The uncertainty surrounding South Goa's District Development Plan (DDP) has deepened as officials remain hesitant to initiate the process for 2025-26. The silence over the 2024-25 proposals, which included over 3,100 developmental projects and an estimated budget of Rs 229.42 crore, has cast a long shadow on the region's developmental aspirations.

With the new financial year approaching, the usual flurry of activity at the South Goa District Planning Committee (DPC) is conspicuously absent. Local officials, reluctant to seek fresh proposals from panchayats and municipal bodies, have voiced

concerns about the lack of implementation of the previous plans, which were compiled and forwarded to the government in January 2024.

The delay is particularly glaring given that the 2024-25 draft was the first comprehensive DDP prepared by South Goa's DPC in its 23-year history. The achievement, however, now feels hollow as none of the proposed projects have been sanctioned or funded.

A senior South Goa Zilla Panchayat (SGZP) official admitted that without progress on last year's plan, initiating new proposals feels futile. "How can we approach local bodies for fresh development plans when their efforts last year yielded no results?"

the official remarked. The apprehension among officials stems from the risk of backlash from panchayats, many of which had invested significant time and effort in submitting detailed proposals.

The 2024-25 plan had generated optimism when it was finalised in January 2024. Following a rare meeting of the DPC in December 2023—its first in three years—the committee had consolidated 3,400 proposals from local bodies, including 3,119 from panchayats and 346 from SGZP. The proposals represented a wide array of developmental goals, from infrastructure upgrades to community projects, covering 53 of South Goa's 89 panchayats.

STALEMATE

2024-25 District Development plan highlights:
Projects proposed: Over **3,100**
Estimated budget: **Rs 229.42 crore**
Panchayats covered: **53** out of **89**
Timeline: **Dec 2023:** DPC held its first meeting in 3 years
Jan 2024: Plan finalised

with 3,465 proposals (3,119 from panchayats, 346 from SGZP)
Apr 2024: Government forwarded the plan to Finance Department
Sep 2024: Plan questioned by "higher authorities," leaving it in limbo
2025-26 DDP status: No initiation of proposal compilation
Missed deadlines for local body submissions.

However, progress stalled after an April 2024 communiqué from the government, which initially indicated that the plan had been forwarded to the Finance Department for funding allo-

cation. By September, hopes were dashed when a letter from the Panchayat Director flagged numerous concerns raised by "higher authorities." These concerns questioned the feasibility

and background of the plan, despite its compliance with Article 243G of the Constitution, which mandates comprehensive district development planning.

Efforts by SGZP to address these concerns, including referencing a High Court directive emphasising the importance of district planning, have not yielded any updates since September. This prolonged silence has left officials and local bodies in a state of limbo, with no clarity on whether the 2024-25 proposals will move forward.

The lack of communication has also affected morale among panchayat leaders, many of whom feel disillusioned by the process. A panchayat official, speaking on condition

of anonymity, expressed frustration over the lack of transparency. "Our communities rely on these projects to address critical infrastructure gaps. When nothing materializes, it undermines trust in the system," the official said.

Meanwhile, as 2025 has begun, the prospects of initiating a new DDP for 2025-26 appear increasingly bleak given that 2024 passed without finalising the previous 2024-25 DDP. The usual deadlines for compiling proposals from local bodies have already passed without any movement, raising questions about whether South Goa's DPC will even convene to discuss a plan this year.

This delay has broader

implications for the region's development. Without a functioning district plan, South Goa risks missing out on funding opportunities and falling further behind in addressing critical needs. Local governance experts have warned that the ongoing stalemate could weaken the district's ability to advocate for its development priorities at the state and national levels.

For now, the future of South Goa's development planning hangs in the balance. As local bodies await clarity on the 2024-25 proposals, the absence of decisive action threatens to derail another year of potential progress, leaving communities without the infrastructure and resources they urgently need.

Minister takes stock of repairs and upgrades on govt buildings

Team Herald

MARGAO: A comprehensive review of government buildings and public grievances recently highlighted significant progress, including the completed refurbishment of toilet facilities at the South Goa Collectorate. Neglected for nearly a decade, these facilities have finally been renovated, providing much-needed relief to both government employees and visitors.

While speaking to the media after this review meeting, Environment Minister Aleixo Sequeira emphasised the persistent efforts required to resolve the issue, acknowledging the challenges faced over the years and celebrating the project's completion as a long-overdue accomplishment.

During the review, several ongoing and upcoming projects were also discussed. The Minister shared updates on the Margao Urban Health Centre (UHC) building, noting discussions with PWD officials about commencing necessary work soon. Additionally, a meeting was held with representatives of the Cavellossim village panchayat to address issues related to the construction of a retaining wall and repairs to a bund along River Sal. Sequeira urged the panchayat to submit essential documentation, citing complications arising from a case currently

under the National Green Tribunal (NGT), which has delayed the process.

The South Goa Planning and Development Authority (SGPDA) areas also came under scrutiny during the review meeting, which assessed the progress of sewage line installations in the region. Officials confirmed that work on these critical infrastructure projects would commence shortly, aiming to address long-pending demands for improved sanitation facilities.

In a bid to streamline public services, the South Goa Collectorate announced a one-day session across all deputy collector offices to address pending applications for regularizing unauthorized structures built before the January 2024 cut-off. This initiative aims to resolve long-standing grievances of residents seeking regularization and provide clarity on compliance procedures.

Moreover, the Goa State Pollution Control Board (GSPCB) will host a session on January 24 at the South Goa Collectorate to assist various businesses in applying for online consent to operate their establishments by the January 21 deadline. Sequeira emphasized the importance of such initiatives in ensuring transparency, improving public access to essential services, and addressing environmental concerns effectively.

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GOLDEN HOUR



A group of women on holiday frolic in the sea at Baga, posing for a selfie during high tide

Will contest 2027 polls from Benaulim or Navelim: Churchill

Team Herald

MARGAO: Former Minister Churchill Alemao has announced that is eyeing the 2027 State Assembly elections and is considering contesting either from the Benaulim or Navelim constituency.

Alemao, who was speaking to media persons on Saturday, added that finally it would depend on what the people want and that if the people want to elect him again, he would be ready to contest.

Speaking of Benaulim, he indicated that if he does not

stand for elections from this constituency, someone else from his family would.

Despite having lost the last Assembly elections from Benaulim, Alemao asserted that the people of Benaulim have always been with him, right from the start of his political career and were also responsible for him becoming the first Catholic Chief Minister of Goa.

Similarly, he added that the people of Navelim have not left him and that the Navelim seat was also open for him.

He went on to list his achievements as

an elected representative in the past, recalling how he was elected as the MP as well, while illustrating that he is confident of winning again. He added that political parties don't matter and how he has even formed parties in the past that were instrumental in forming or supporting the State government in the past.

The former Minister reiterated that it is because of the people of Goa that he has been to win elections and added that all his life, he has been giving back to the people in the way of his social work.

Tourism sector needs visionary leadership, not optics: Vijai

Team Herald

MARGAO: Goa Forward Party (GFP) has criticized the recent Tourism Board meeting chaired by Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, calling it poorly timed and ineffective. The meeting, which was held as the tourism season nears its end, represents a reactive approach to governance, according to GFP President Vijai Sardesai.

He claimed that no Tourism Board meeting had been convened since 2023, and the recent meeting was only called after he demanded the minutes under Legislative Assembly Questions. The Fatorda MLA questioned the timing of discussions on infrastructure improvements, transport regulations, and

“Tourism should empower locals, create sustainable livelihoods, and allow Goans to reap the dividends of their rich heritage, culture, and natural beauty—not reduce them to mere spectators in their own land – Vijai Sardesai, Fatorda MLA

cultural promotion, arguing these should have been addressed before the tourism season began.

Sardesai also raised concerns about the lack of data backing the policy proposals discussed in the meeting. According to Sardesai, the proposals, including infrastructure development at cruise

terminals, regulated taxi fares, and cultural tourism initiatives, were already outlined in the KPMG Tourism Policy but remain unimplemented. "Recycling old announcements does not constitute governance—it is a betrayal of Goa's tourism industry and its stakeholders," he stated.

"Goa's tourism sector is in dire need of visionary leadership, but the government has chosen to be more focused on optics than on delivering results," the GFP President added. He characterized the meeting as a hasty response to criticism rather than a genuine attempt at governance, adding that the lack of a coherent, data-driven, and timely approach was pushing the

state's tourism industry into further decline.

GFP asserted that tourism is the lifeline of Goa's economy, and called for an end to what Sardesai termed the government's "Goa for sale" policy.

Sardesai accused the current administration of prioritizing commissions and vested interests over the welfare of local residents, arguing that tourism should instead empower locals and create sustainable livelihoods.

"Tourism should empower locals, create sustainable livelihoods, and allow Goans to reap the dividends of their rich heritage, culture, and natural beauty—not reduce them to mere spectators in their own land," Sardesai emphasised.

Nagoa p'yat gets new multipurpose hall

Team Herald

MARGAO: Chief Minister Pramod Sawant inaugurated the multi-purpose hall of the Nagoa village panchayat, which was built by the Goa State Infrastructure Development Corporation (GSIDC).

The inauguration was done in the presence of Nuvem MLA and Environment Minister Aleixo Sequeira, Nagoa Sarpanch Gabriel

Fernandes along with Nagoa panchas, Nuvem Zilla Panchayat (ZP) Assuciana Rodrigues and other dignitaries.

"This facility is designed to cater to the diverse needs of the community. It will serve as a hub for recreational activities, sports, and community gatherings, fostering social harmony and promoting active lifestyles," said the CM.

Electricity Department's cable removal leaves parts of Margao without internet

Team Herald

MARGAO: Margao residents are voicing frustration as unexpected internet outages have disrupted daily routines, following the Electricity Department's ongoing drive to remove overhead cables from electric poles.

"I work from home and suddenly found myself without internet. No warning, nothing. How are we supposed to manage our work commitments? The power department could have handled this better by giving proper notice," said Maya Naik. Like many others, she pays for an annual internet subscription but is now unable to access the service she paid for.

Rohan Fernandes echoed similar concerns. "The authorities should have at least given us time to make alternative arrangements so we were aware of the disruption. We're not ques-

tioning their authority to remove unauthorised cables, but they could have coordinated with service providers to ensure minimal disruption to end users. I need high-speed internet and not just from the phone," he said.

Executive Engineer (EE) Kashinath Shetye recently spearheaded the Electricity Department's operation to remove unauthorised cables from utility poles in Margao. Leading a team equipped with industrial cutters and a crane, Shetye personally supervised the removal of cable bundles in the Aqueam area.

Explaining the necessity of the action, Shetye said, "These cable bundles are compromising the structural integrity of our electric poles. We've observed significant strain on poles wherever these cables are attached, creating a safety hazard for both vehicles and pedestrians."

I'm with my party, says Venzy Viegas

MARGAO: Benaulim MLA Venzy Viegas reiterated that he is with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and will continue serving the people of his constituency. He said, "I am with the party that the people of this constituency elected me to, and I will remain with it. I am not going anywhere. My focus is on ensuring that AAP's vision, particularly in education, health, and basic infrastructure like electricity, water, and roads, is being implemented. Remaining in the Opposition might limit my ability to build a floyver, but I can still clear files and follow up on essential infrastructure works. I can vouch for my honesty and sincerity to the people of my constituency. I am here to complete the remainder of my term and to deliver maximum development in this time. I consider myself a tool to execute the peoples work."



WHAT IS YOUR REACTION TO VENZY VIEGAS' REMARK COMPARING PRAMOD SAWANT TO DAYANAND BANDODKAR?

Benaulim MLA Venzy Viegas was effusive in his praise for Chief Minister Pramod Sawant after the latter inaugurated various projects in his constituency

“Comparing Pramod Sawant to Bhausaheb Bandodkar who wanted to fully merge Goa with Maharashtra, means you are demeaning the efforts made by Dr Jack de Sequeira. Of course, the goodwill Bandodkar had for the poor and the love for Goa he developed after the Opinion Poll cannot be compared with Sawant who is on a spree to destroy Goa. The whole of Goa is being murdered under his rule. We condemn the statement of Venzy – Anthony D'Silva, social activist

“Viegas' clarification is a clear indication that he made this statement out of his conviction. Now the AAP (Goa) chief's statement on the same claiming that the statement was twisted has been negated by the clarification of his MLA and in fact has exposed that in reality that the AAP's chief and his coterie instead of fighting the BJP, have been attacking the CM personally, allegedly acting as brokers of the known power struggle within the BJP for the top chair – Trajano D'Mello, political commentator

“There is nothing to hype in this statement. The manner in which Venzy Viegas has found support and the way he has been able to do development in his constituency, he has fulfilled the promises given to the people before the elections. He has kept his mutual relationship and made this statement sarcastically. Capt Venzy is an educated man. He knows what to talk, where. This sarcastic statement he has made he will know best and there will be a reason for saying so. – Mariano Ferrao, social activist



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