

Mormugao Port has no say in what it handles: Chairman

Says coal still essential for India's energy and industrial sectors; assures MPA taking steps to reduce pollution, switch to solar energy for port operations

Team Herald

MORMUGAO: Mormugao Port Authority (MPA) Chairman Dr N Vinodkumar on Friday clarified that the port has no authority to decide what commodities it handles, as those decisions are driven by trade demands and the country's requirements.

Responding to concerns about pollution caused by coal handling at the port, Dr Kumar said, "The port has no say on reducing coal handling. It is the country's requirement. I may wish to export jasmine flowers, but that is not

possible because the decision is not ours. It is the trade that dictates this, and we, as a port, are facilitators."

Dr Kumar elaborated on the necessity of coal for India's energy and industrial sectors, highlighting that approximately 200 power plants in the country depend on coal. "India has the fifth-largest coal reserve in the world. The question is whether we should use this resource for development. Currently, 73 per cent of power generation in the country is thermal. Yes, we need to reduce fossil fuel dependency, but coal

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— Dr N Vinodkumar, MPA Chairman

remains essential for development," he stated.

On the issue of coal imports, Dr Kumar explained that the imported coal is primarily non-coking

and of low grade, used in various industries. "We import non-coking coal because our domestic reserves cannot meet the specific needs for coking coal, which is vital for steel manufacturing. This coal is both exported and consumed within the country," Dr Vinodkumar said.

Addressing the environmental concerns, Dr Kumar assured that MPA is committed to mitigating pollution caused by its operations. "Our port is among the few in the country with state-of-the-art facilities and advanced technologies to minimise pollution.

We constantly aim to improve, and soon, we will commission a three MW solar power plant, the largest single solar project in Goa. Once operational, the port will achieve 100 per cent green energy status," he announced.

He reiterated that while coal handling is a necessity dictated by national requirements, MPA is actively working to reduce its environmental footprint through sustainable measures and technological advancements. "Our focus is to balance development with environmental responsibility," Dr Vinodkumar concluded.

Team Herald

MORMUGAO: Mormugao Port Authority (MPA) Chairman Dr N Vinodkumar on Friday said that Vasco Bay project could not go ahead as Goa government could not finalise its Coastal Zone Management Plan (CZMP).

Speaking to reporters, he said, "The project has a long history. The port initially received environmental clearance, but it lapsed as the CZMP 2011 was not finalised. When the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) intervened, they issued extensive terms of reference."

"We have appointed a consultant who will complete the study within five

or six months. Then we will submit a proposal again to the MoEF&CC to obtain the environment clearance," he said.

Further complicating the project is the unavailability of land for rehabilitation. Dr Vinodkumar noted, "An MoU between the Goa Government and MPA identified 30-40 households for relocation. Rehabilitation remains a key challenge, though discussions with the Goa government and the Defence Ministry, which seeks jetties for the Coast Guard and Navy, are ongoing."

The controversial project to deepen the navigation channel in Vasco Bay was approved despite inadequacies in the environmental impact assessment (EIA) report in 2022.

Two-day Assembly serves no purpose, cancel it, say Romi Konkani activists

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Global Romi Lipi Abhiyan (GRLA) strongly condemned the government's decision to hold a brief, two-day Winter Assembly session on February 6, calling it a mockery of the democratic process.

The organisation has urged the government to cancel the session, stating it serves no substantial purpose.

Kennedy Afonso, President of GRLA, expressed concern, stating that the first day will be dedicated to the Governor's address, and the second to supplementary demands, leaving no time for the Opposition to discuss pressing issues facing Goa.

"Goa and Goans are grappling with several urgent issues, such as land grabs and the Romi Script, which require serious attention and deliberation in the Assembly," Afonso said.

“The first day will be dedicated to the Governor's address, and the second to supplementary demands, leaving no time for the Opposition to discuss pressing issues Goa is facing. Do the citizens of Goa not deserve more time for representation and governance, or is this a strategic move by the government to dodge scrutiny and sidestep debates on sensitive issues affecting Goa and its people”

— Kennedy Afonso, President, GRLA

He highlighted that the people of Goa are eagerly awaiting the amendment of the Official Language Act, especially the introduction of two important Bills: one to grant Roman Script equal status in the Act, and another to introduce Roman Script Konkani in schools in a phased manner.

"Global Romi Lipi Abhiyan has been actively engaging with legislators from all political parties to push for these two Bills, but with such a short session, their passage seems highly unlikely. Is this one of

the issues the government is trying to avoid, among many others?" Afonso questioned.

"Do the citizens of Goa not deserve more time for representation and governance, or is this a strategic move by the government to dodge scrutiny and sidestep debates on sensitive issues affecting Goa and its people?" he added. "This decision undermines democratic principles, silences the Opposition's right to question the government, and ultimately weakens the voice of the people."

ART OF DEMOCRACY

SAGUN GAWADE



College students browse through an art exhibition featuring children's interpretations of voting rights during National Voters Day organised by the Chief Electoral Officer at NIO, Dona Paulo

Geobags installed at Colva to tackle coastal erosion

Team Herald

MARGAO: In a bid to combat coastal erosion at Colva, local authorities have turned to a low-cost, eco-friendly solution - 'geobags'.

On Saturday, Benaulim MLA Venzy Viegas inaugurated an anti-sea erosion project at Colva, where geobags were installed to protect the area from further damage.

He sharply criticized the Goa government's failure to address the significant environmental damage along the coastal belt, particularly erosion.

Speaking to reporters, Viegas emphasized the importance of finding a permanent solution to the ongoing environmental threat.

"This is a unique initiative to prevent sea erosion, and I have been advocating for such measures since I was elected," Viegas stated. "Geobags are an environmentally friendly solution, and this project is a soft measure to protect our coastline." Geobags are essentially sacks of sand which are cheaper and easier to install than transporting huge boulders or breakwaters to reinforce existing barriers of the river banks, beach fronts and other water bodies.

He stressed that, while the government has yet to implement a lasting solution, he and his team will continue to take proactive steps to mitigate the effects of sea erosion.

"We have seen severe erosion during the monsoon over the past few years, and it is crucial that we act now to prevent further damage," he added.

The MLA also announced that feedback on the effectiveness of the Geobag measures will be collected during the upcoming monsoon season.

'Market for outsiders, not Goans': Vijai slams redeveloped fish market

Condemns missing facilities in Rs 37 crore project, state of toilets and messy site

Team Herald

MARGAO: On the eve of the inauguration of the redeveloped wholesale fish market, Fatorda MLA Vijai Sardesai expressed strong objections to the 'incomplete' project, alleging that it was designed more for outsiders than for the local Goan fishing community.

During his inspection of the building on Saturday, Sardesai highlighted several critical issues, emphasising that key provisions were missing from the market. The MLA pointed out that the block intended for inauguration lacked essential facilities, including formalin testing, an administrative block, cold storage, and a fisheries block—all vital components initially outlined in the project.

Sardesai also raised concerns that, despite being a local MLA, he had not been consulted or taken into confidence regarding the inauguration plans. "I am shocked to see that the re-developed market has no provisions for testing fish coming from outside for formalin and there's no cold storage, which is a necessity for the local fishing community. This market looks more like an aquarium than a functioning marketplace for Goans," said Sardesai.

He further claimed that the initial estimated cost of the project was Rs 13 crore, but the government is now spending nearly

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—Vijai Sardesai, Fatorda MLA

Rs 37 crore. Sardesai expressed frustration that what was meant to be a benefit for local fishermen now appeared to prioritise big traders and outsiders, with no proper entry and exit points for locals.

Sardesai also took issue with the state of the market, pointing out the mess and the leachate flowing across the site. He criticised the aesthetic choices, particularly the paintings of dolphins, which he felt did not reflect the local fishing community. "The artwork on the walls shows dolphins, but there's hardly any depiction of our traditional fishing community," he said.

The MLA concluded by condemning the condition of the toilets, stating, "The state of the toilets here reflects the state of the government." Sardesai made it clear that as a local representative, he was strongly opposed to the inauguration of the market in its incomplete state.

Abandoned mining pits a ticking time-bomb, fear locals of Kodli, Dharbandora

Team Herald

PONDA: Residents of Kodli, Dharbandora, have sounded the alarm over the risks posed by two mining pits that have merged together, forming a large, deep water body near their village. Locals fear that the weakened mud barriers could collapse during the monsoon, leading to flooding in downstream villages along the Dudhsagar River.

They worry that if the pits collapse, the water could flow into the Khandepar River, submerging nearby villages, damaging property, and flooding the Khandepar water treatment plant, disrupting water supply across the area.

Locals recall that during the previous monsoon, the pits—already at risk of overflowing—resembled an inland sea. According to them, a narrow mud embankment of about 25 metres separating the two pits has since collapsed, merging the two water-filled cavities. The



proximity of the massive pit to the Dudhsagar River, with a buffer of merely 20 to 30 metres, has further escalated fears.

Cracks have also developed on the riverbank, where the village road is built, increasing the risk of collapse under the water pressure. If the road gives way, residents would face the added inconvenience of a 10-km detour for daily

travel.

Local resident Dilip Gaonkar criticised the government's inaction, saying that earlier mining companies regularly pumped out water from the pits, but this practice stopped over a decade ago. While officials from the Water Resources Department (WRD) and Mamlatdar office inspected the area last monsoon, no concrete measures have

“Earlier mining companies regularly pumped out water from the pits, but this practice stopped over a decade ago. If the cracked mud walls collapse, it would lead to disastrous floods”

—Dilip Gaonkar, local resident

been taken. Gaonkar emphasised the urgency of pumping out water and releasing it into the river before the monsoons intensify.

Environmentalist Sandeep Parkar urged the government to restore and fill such abandoned pits, which are now in state possession. He highlighted the violation of the mandatory 100-metre buffer zone and its potential consequences, warning that a collapse could devastate downstream villages.

Efforts to reach the WRD assistant engineer for a response were unsuccessful.



INSPIRE OF THE PINK FORCE AND TWO WOMEN'S POLICE STATIONS, WHY ARE CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN ON THE RISE?

“Even when there is so much security, why are such atrocious things happening in Goa? A woman is not safe in Goa. It is proven that these mechanisms of the government are not working. It appears the government is not taking these things seriously. The criminals have a free hand. Either they get out on bail or they get jailed for some time and they are let off. They again get the chance to commit these crimes. No one is afraid any longer. Many organisations are shouting hoarse, but the government is not taking this seriously”

— Swati Kerkar, trade union leader

Is women's safety on the priority list of the government? Is the Pink force and women's police stations doing enough to ensure patrolling, especially at night to ensure the safety of women. Or are the Pink Force vehicles parked in one place throughout the night?

“The South Goa Police quickly nabbed the culprits, but there should be preventive steps. Police should be posted at bus stands at night. The beat cops patrolling should be the eyes and hands of the police station. If the police act, then no one will be able to take advantage of vulnerable women who travel during late hours. Pink Force and the local police station constables should take rounds. The flat used for the crime should be sealed.”

— Auda Viegas, convenor, Bailancho Ekvott

“The women's police station has less staff strength. Women police mostly work on the sidelines. They don't want to work at the police stations. They want to be susegaad. They only want to collect the government salaries. Where is the Pink Force? They park the vehicle near the Panjim Church all night. People are complaining to us about it. The government's intention of having the Pink Force was to do patrolling through the city and the villages. They don't do it. Do they have the power? There should be more Pink Force vehicles. The crimes in Goa have risen considerably.”

— Tara Kerkar, social activist



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