

# Tension in Velsao as villagers halt rail work

Residents vow to fight for their traditional access, halt grader from levelling mud dumps, work grounded



Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Anger and frustration boiled over at Primeirovaddo, Velsao on Monday evening as residents took direct action against railway construction work that has left them landlocked in their own homes. Local villagers successfully halted a grader that was levelling mud dumps, bringing the Rail Vikas Nigam Limited's (RVNL) work to a standstill in a desperate bid to protect their access rights.

The concern was once the road is levelled, their ac-

cess would be permanently blocked, besides other potential concerns with the height of the track being much higher than their compound walls and related water drainage problems in the monsoon period.

Highlighting the mounting crisis facing the community, local resident Sandra Rodrigues's situation exemplifying the daily hardships being endured. "My car as well as my scooter are now blocked within my compound," Rodrigues lamented, describing how her family has been forced to cope with mounting dif-

**“The landfilling activities have effectively trapped residents, turning their homes into islands cut off from essential access routes**

– Sandra Rodrigues, Velsao resident

**“The railways' rush to proceed with construction while the matter remains active in court, with the next hearing at the Inspector of Survey and Land Records (ISLR) Court in Margao scheduled for February 17, 2026, is questionable**

– Orville Dourado Rodrigues, Goencho Ekvott (GE) founder

iculties through no fault of their own. "The landfilling activities have effectively trapped residents, turning their homes into islands cut off from essential access routes, said Rodrigues

Former Environment Minister and ex-MLA Alina Saldanha, joined the protest, directing pointed questions

at RVNL officials about their intentions. She also challenged their plans to pursue what locals describe as a coal corridor through Goa, questioning the necessity of such development in India's smallest state.

The Deputy Manager of RVNL faced intense criticism from directly affected

villagers, who made it unequivocally clear that the railways cannot arbitrarily acquire private land for their second track project. The railways' aggressive approach has particularly angered residents given that the land ownership itself remains under dispute. Goencho Ekvott (GE)

founder Orville Dourado Rodrigues, while attempting to maintain dialogue with railway officials, emphasized the widespread support their cause has attracted. "This isn't just about Velsao anymore," he explained, highlighting how organizations and individuals from across the region

have rallied behind the affected residents.

"The railways' rush to proceed with construction while the matter remains active in court, with the next hearing at the Inspector of Survey and Land Records (ISLR) Court in Margao scheduled for February 17, 2026, is questionable," said Dourado.

"Why such haste?" Dourado demanded of the railway authorities, pointing out that the disputed land's ownership is still being contested in the District Court. The railways' determination to forge

ahead despite pending legal proceedings has only intensified local resistance, with residents viewing it as a clear disregard for their rights and the legal process.

The evening's events marked a significant escalation in the ongoing dispute, with residents making it clear they won't stand idly by as their community's access rights are stripped away. They vowed to continue to protest what they have alleged is an unauthorized encroachment by the Railway authorities on their fundamental right to access their own homes.

## Catastrophic damage caused to Earth: Saran

Former envoy says govt treading path of development at cost of sustainability

Team Herald

**PANJIM:** Former special envoy for nuclear affairs and climate change in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) Shyam Saran said that irreversible catastrophic damage has been caused to the planet and the government is treading the path of development at the cost of sustainability.



**“We are cutting down our forests rapidly and polluting our oceans at an alarming rate. There is an island of plastic waste floating in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, which is the size of Texas**

– Shyam Saran, ex-special envoy for nuclear affairs and climate change in PMO

Delivering a lecture on "Climate change is it too little, too late?" at the International Centre Goa (ICG), he said, "We had a massive ecological crisis on our hands caused by human greed and a steep drop in human values."

Stating that human activities had been altering the planet's ecology since the start of the industrial revolution in the 18th century, Saran said, "We have been burning fossil fuels like wood, coal and oil for two centuries, building a strong stock of carbon dioxide in the earth's atmosphere. This accumulated stock of carbon dioxide is the main cause for the irreversible catastrophic damage caused to our planet."

He pointed out that human greed and callousness were also depleting the strength of our two greatest carbon sinks, the oceans and the forests.

"We are cutting down our forests

rapidly and polluting our oceans at an alarming rate. There is an island of plastic waste floating in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, which is the size of Texas," Saran said.

Saran pointed out that governments across the world are prioritising their development agendas over sustainability.

Responding to a question from the audience on the Government of India's proposed mega projects in the Nicobar islands, Saran said, "There is a false trade off between development and environment. Our government is treading the path of development at the cost of sustainability."

Saran felt that India must concentrate on building effective mass transportation systems instead of building expressways and flyovers.

"We do not need more cars, we need better public transport systems to remain sustainable," he said.

## BUSINESS WITH PLEASURE



Yachts appear to have made Mandovi River their permanent home for pre-wedding shoots. The operators are charging fees as high as Rs 25,000 per trip

## Kidnapped Delhi girl traced at Vasco Railway Station

Team Herald

**VASCO:** In a swift and coordinated effort, the Vasco Railway Police successfully traced and rescued a 15-year-old girl, who was reported kidnapped from Delhi, at the Vasco Railway Station.

The case came to light on Sunday when PSI Yaspal Yadav of South Campus Police Station, Delhi, informed Vasco Railway Police about the offence registered under Section 137(ii) of the BNS about the kidnapping of the minor girl. PSI Yadav revealed that the girl's mobile phone location indicated her presence at the Vasco Railway Station.

Acting promptly on the given information, PSI Krishna Talpi and the police team from

Vasco Railway Station initiated patrolling at the station premises. During the operation, the missing girl was located in the company of a 25-year-old man. The police detained both individuals and lodged the minor girl at Apna Ghar, Mercedes Sunday late night.

The 25-year-old man was handed over to the South Campus Police Station team on Monday. Arrangements are underway to transfer custody of the rescued girl from Apna Ghar, Mercedes to the Delhi Police for further investigation.

The Vasco Railway Police's timely intervention has been widely appreciated, showcasing their commitment to public safety and efficient inter-state coordination in such sensitive cases, states a press release.

## GRLA demands Goa State Minorities Commission

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** The Global Romi Lipi Abhiyan (GRLA) has expressed that the establishment of a Goa State Minorities Commission (GSMC) could significantly benefit the Roman Script Konknni community, as well as address various issues affecting minorities in Goa.

Kennedy Afonso, President of GRLA, emphasized that such a commission would provide a vital platform for the Roman Script Konknni community to voice their concerns and advocate for the official recognition of their language and script. It would also serve as a mechanism to address grievances re-

lated to the perceived neglect and marginalization of Roman Script Konknni.

"The Commission can push for the inclusion of Roman script Konknni in the school curriculum and advocate for policies that recognize and promote it as an essential part of the cultural identity of minorities," Afonso stated.

He further pointed out that the Union government had established the National Commission for Minorities in 1992 to safeguard the constitutional and legal rights of minorities. Under the Constitution, every state is allowed to establish its own State Minority Commission, yet Goa

**“The Commission can push for the inclusion of Roman script Konknni in the school curriculum and advocate for policies that recognize and promote it as an essential part of the cultural identity of minorities**

– Kennedy Afonso, GRLA president

has yet to set one up.

"Article 29(1) of the Indian Constitution guarantees minorities the right to protect their language, script, and culture. Unfortunately, this fundamental right has been denied to the minorities of Goa since

1987, when the government recognized only the Devanagari script under the Official Language Act, effectively sidelining the Roman Script, which is widely used by the minority community," Afonso added.

He also raised concerns over the fact that Roman Script Konknni is not taught in schools, which has hindered the growth and development of the Konknni language overall. A State Minority Commission in Goa could help resolve these issues, he suggested.

Afonso recalled that in March 2012, the BJP government had promised to establish a minority commission as part of its election manifesto.

While a bill was introduced in the Legislative Assembly, it was referred to a select committee and has remained stuck there for over 12 years.

"When a bill is deferred to a select committee, it typically signals a lack of seriousness from the government. It is high time the BJP government fulfills its promises and stops deceiving the public of Goa," Afonso remarked.

He also criticized the Congress government, which has often relied on the secular votes of minorities to remain in power, for failing to set up the Goa State Minority Commission and protect the interests of the minorities.



## IS THE GOVERNMENT NOT SERIOUS ABOUT IMPLEMENTING THE REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE OF KALA ACADEMY?

There was a huge uproar among artists and the general public about the Rs 54 crore so-called 'renovation' of the Kala Academy. The once iconic place of art and culture has been soiled forever. The open air auditorium still lies in a dilapidated state with a collapsed roof. The Task Force is frustrated, since the changes they suggested have not been implemented. Herald Media asked people "Is government not serious about implementing report of the task force of Kala Academy?"

**“The rapid pace at which the events are being conducted in Goa, it does not appear that the government is carrying out the suggested improvements in the Kala Academy expeditiously. As Task Force Chairman Vijay Kenkre said the works should have been carried out as fast as possible since events have already started taking place there. But the manner in which the lights, the sound system and the acoustics should have been fixed, this has not happened. The government has not told the Task Force what is their mandate. I have found that the Bose sound system which has been installed has been billed for Rs 4 crore, however the actual cost is Rs 2 crores. So if this is the case then we, the Opposition and artists should file an RTI and bring out all these facts**

**“I don't know what issues Minister Govind Gaude has for taking suggestions from the people. You have ruined the entire Kala Academy which was a matter of pride for us. The Task Force is giving suggestions, but has the government ever listened to the people? Is the government willing to listen to the Task Force? The government wants to do whatever it wants. If there is some Cabinet Minister who does 'bad' and you complain to the chief minister, he does not listen. That is the reason why the present state of the Kala Academy. The way Govind Gaude has ruined Kala Academy, he is solely responsible for this. Anyone who has doubts that the Minister is unfairly targeted can easily go to the Kala Academy and see for themselves**

– Tanoji Adwalpalkar, social activist

**“There are a lot of findings which we have currently are alarming. To get conclusive evidence on this, we need more experts on board and we want to involve more people. The Directorate of Art and Culture is moving at a very slow pace. Due to this, we want to meet the CM. We have had three meetings, we want the CM to know what we have discussed. We are hoping that he will guide and show us how to move ahead and expedite the work. We have sought an appointment from the CM in this regards and we are likely to get it within 10 days**

– Francis Coelho, KA Task Force member

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## MMC yet to crackdown on property defacement

Civic body fails to act on issue despite Collector's order

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Despite the South Goa District Magistrate directing the Margao Municipal Council (MMC) to launch a comprehensive drive against defacement of public property within its jurisdiction, the civic body is yet to initiate a special drive aimed at removing unauthorized advertisements, posters, banners, and graffiti from public properties.

Damodar Shirodkar, Chairperson of the MMC, stated that the council has not yet received the official communication regarding the directions issued by the District Magistrate. It is important to note

that just a few days ago; the District Magistrate issued an order directing the Chief Officer of the civic body to conduct a 45-day special drive. The order instructs municipal officials to identify defaced areas, collaborate with enforcement teams, allocate resources, and submit a compliance report, which should include before-and-after photographs. The objective is to tackle the growing issue of visual pollution caused by the unauthorized defacement of public spaces in the city.

Responding to the order, Shirodkar expressed that the council was unaware of the directions.

"We have not received any such order. However, once the order is received, the civic body will certainly act on it. The MMC continues to take strict action against the illegal erection of hoardings and other graffiti," he said.

Efforts to reach Chief Officer Melwyn Vaz for his comment on the matter were unsuccessful, as his phone remained unreachable on Monday evening.

The District Magistrate's order underscores the importance of maintaining the visual integrity of public spaces, emphasizing that activities such as illegal advertisements and the placement of banners and graffiti must be prevented.