

# High Court intervenes as GCZMA permits hotels near Agonda turtle nesting site

AUGUSTO RODRIGUES

**PANJIM:** The Goa Bench of the Bombay High Court may have stepped in to provide relief to Olive Ridley turtles nesting on Agonda Beach, but the Goa Coastal Zone Management Authority (GCZMA) secretary Johnson Fernandes' interpretation of environmental laws has become a cause for concern for many.

Despite the Gazette of India (January 18, 2019) explicitly categorising turtle nesting sites as CRZ-1A—an Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) where development is restricted—Fernandes has defended GCZMA's decision to permit hotels and restaurants near the nesting zone.

"GCZMA has given permission to build hotels and shacks on private property because they are not on the beach itself. Turtle nesting

## QUOTEROOM

**“Olive Ridley turtles are declared an endangered species under Schedule 1 of Indian Wildlife Act. They nest within fifty to hundred metres of the high tide line, and hence in No Development Zone. So, the question of granting permissions for hotels or any other business does not arise**

— Captain Gerald Fernandes, conservationist

**“Disturbing or removing sand around nesting sites, or constructing buildings nearby, is harmful not only to turtles but to the entire coastal ecosystem**

— Puja Mitra, marine conservationist

**“People sit around the nesting sites, steal eggs, and sell them. This is why strict monitoring is essential**

— Aaron Fernandes, herpetologist

happens on the beach, so no violation has occurred," Fernandes asserted, while acknowledging that permissions were granted in close proximity to the nesting site.

Government regulations, however, paint a different

picture. Section 1.5 of the Gazette of India states:

Turtle nesting grounds must be protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

No activities causing light and sound pollution



are permitted near nesting grounds.

Strict management plans must be implemented to protect these sites.

When questioned about official concerns raised over disturbances to turtle habitats, Fernandes downplayed the issue. He also claimed ignorance of a letter from the Range Forest Officer to Canacona Police regarding alleged habitat disturbances by a local shack owner—despite the

letter being forwarded to him via WhatsApp.

Environmental experts have condemned the permissions granted near the nesting site. Retired Captain Gerald Fernandes, an award-winning marine conservationist, pointed out that Olive Ridley turtles are a Schedule 1 protected species under the Wildlife Act, making any development in their nesting area illegal.

"Disturbing or removing sand around nesting sites,

or constructing buildings nearby, is harmful not only to turtles but to the entire coastal ecosystem," marine conservationist Puja Mitra warned.

Herpetologist Aaron Fernandes further highlighted a growing threat—egg poaching. "People sit around the nesting sites, steal eggs, and sell them. This is why strict monitoring is essential."

Adding weight to these concerns, the Beach Carrying Capacity Report prepared by the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management and adopted by GCZMA explicitly states that no additional shacks, huts, or cottages should be permitted at Agonda, as it is a designated turtle nesting site.

With the High Court now involved, conservationists and locals await decisive action to uphold legal protections for Goa's fragile marine ecosystem.

## shorttakes

### BANASTARIM BRIDGE TO BE CLOSED FOR INSPECTION ON FEBRUARY 2

**PANJIM:** Banastarim Bridge on NH-4A will be closed to all vehicular traffic on Sunday, February 2, from 6.30 am to 8.30 am for inspection and recording of the deck level. Commuters are advised to plan their travel accordingly.

### PANJIM POLICE RAID ILLEGAL SAND EXTRACTION IN MANDOVI RIVER

**PANJIM:** Panjim police acting on local intelligence and information raided an illegal sand extraction operation in Mandovi river. The action was taken late night on January 29. The police have arrested a West Bengal native and seized one canoe that was used for the commission of crime, five cubic meters of extracted sand and other articles worth nearly Rs 10 lakh. Panjim Police have registered an offence under section 303 (2), 3 (5) and other sections of the Minor Minerals Act. Police have arrested accused Samir Mondal, age 30 who is a native of West Bengal along with 12 others for the offence. The raid was conducted under the supervision of Panjim Coastal Security Police Inspector Ajit Umarye and other staff.

### 80-YEAR-OLD WOMAN COMMITS SUICIDE IN QUEPEM

**MARGAO:** An 80-year-old woman, Ana Maria, from Dhamad, Xeldem-Quepem, was found dead at her residence after allegedly hanging herself with a nylon rope from the window grilles.

Quepem police rushed to the scene after receiving information from the Police Control Room (PCR) in Panaji. A scene of occurrence and inquest panchanama was conducted, and the body has been preserved at South Goa District Hospital for medico-legal formalities. Further investigation is being carried out by PSI Siddesh Naik of Quepem Police Station.

### MINOR RAPE CASE TRANSFERRED TO WOMEN'S CELL IN MARGAO

**MARGAO:** A rape case involving a minor student, initially registered at Cuncolim Police Station, has been transferred to the Women's Cell in Margao due to the absence of a female sub-inspector at Cuncolim.

The accused, identified as 32-year-old Girish alias Nilesh Velip from Cola, Canacona, was arrested and remanded to three days in police custody after being presented before the Judicial Magistrate First Class (JMFC), Margao.

According to the complaint, in November 2024, the accused allegedly confined the victim inside her house in Morpilla, Quepem, forcibly disrobed her, and sexually assaulted her, later threatening her with dire consequences if she disclosed the incident. The matter was first reported to the Women's Cell, Margao, before being transferred to Cuncolim Police, where a case was registered under relevant sections of the Goa Children's Act, POCSO Act, and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). Following an investigation, the accused was traced and arrested on Thursday night. The victim is a student from Salcete.

### ORGANS DONATED BY FAMILY OF BRAIN DEAD MAN SAVE MULTIPLE LIVES

**PANJIM:** A selfless act of 48-yr-old Ajay Giri who passed away recently, gave a new lease of life to three other individuals.

This milestone comes after a tragic but noble decision by the family, and an employee of Manipal Hospital Goa since 2014. Giri was declared brain dead on Wednesday following a critical medical condition, and his family made the compassionate choice to donate his organs, offering a second chance at life for multiple patients in need. Manipal Hospital Goa, in its unwavering commitment to organ donation and life-saving efforts, facilitated its second cadaveric organ donation.

The hospital's medical team carried out thorough evaluations and coordinated closely with the relevant authorities to ensure the safe and timely harvesting and transplantation of Giri's organs.

After counselling by Dr Parul Dubey and Dr Stacie, Giri's wife consented to organ donation. SOTTO Goa allocated one of the kidneys to Goa Medical College, Bambolim while the other was sent to Healthway Hospital. Additionally, the liver was transported to Vishesh Jupiter Hospital, Indore for transplantation to a patient in need. These organs were successfully transplanted, offering life-saving opportunities to those in need, states a press release.

Goa Police, through swift coordination and traffic management, facilitated a green corridor for speedy organ transport.

This selfless act by Giri's family has made an immeasurable impact, underscoring the vital role of organ donation in saving lives and improving the quality of life for many individuals. The decision reflects immense compassion and generosity, which will resonate with both the medical community and the public.

## POWER SHUTDOWN

**BICHOLIM:** January 31, from 9 am to 2 pm at Gaonkarwada, Kolamwada, Harijanwada, Kailasnagar and surrounding areas.

**MARGAO:** On February 1, from 9 am to 3 pm at Sabeena hotel, opp. Police Station, near State Bank of India, Nina Gracias building, near Woodland hotel, Carmo Gracias hospital, Loyala school, Saaj hotel, Lotlikar TV showroom, opp. Lotlikar TV showroom, Fatima School, Durga building, Gomati classic, Woodland hotel, BSNL telephone exchange and surrounding area.

## SILENT TRIBUTE

SAGUN GAWADE



As a tribute, armed forces personnel sounded the Last Post, followed by a two-minute silence to honor the martyrs' sacrifices at Azad Maidan, Panjim

## Dismantle temporary structures at Old Goa, ASI tells PWD

Team Herald

**PANJIM:** The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) Old Goa has requested the Commissioner for Exposition to take due cognisance of the letter and to facilitate the removal of works undertaken during the exposition of the relics of St Francis Xavier, on an immediate basis.

In September last year, the ASI had granted permission to the Public Works Department (PWD) to carry out certain works in view of the decennial 45 days exposition of St Francis Xavier at Old Goa subject to certain terms of condition.

The PWD was also requested to give an undertaking before starting works as per Clause 7 of the

permission. The said condition was not complied with. Further, vide Clause No. 1 of the said permission, the PWD was also required to remove these works (except the permanent toilet block at Se Cathedral) upon conclusion of the exposition. The said works have also not been removed so far as per the inspection carried out by the ASI superintending archaeologist.

The letter further states that a complaint in this regard has also been received from John B Mascarenhas of Varcondem, Ponda. The ASI has asked the PWD to take due cognisance of the letter and to facilitate the removal of the works on an immediate basis.

The copy of the letter has also been forwarded to the

North Goa Collector, Tiswadi Taluka Mamlatdar, Old Goa Police and the Se Old Goa Village Panchayat.

After the conclusion of the exposition, John Mascarenhas had written to the concerned authorities to remove temporary structures built within the prohibited areas of Old Goa. He had also pointed out that the one of the conditions laid down while granting permissions was that the PWD would remove all temporary and semi-permanent structures within 10 days after the exposition was completed. Mascarenhas has also filed a public interest litigation (PIL) writ petition in the High Court of Bombay T Goa seeking removal of illegal structures in and around Old Goa.

## Serula Comunidade components demand fresh elections

### Want new managing panel dissolved

Team Herald

**PANJIM:** Some of the components of Comunidade of Serula have taken strong exception to the election of its new managing committee by 'show of hands' and have demanded fresh election.

One of the components Shankar Phadte said that he has filed a writ petition in the High Court of Bombay praying to quash and set aside the entire election of the managing committee elected for three years 2025-2028 and to declare the elections as illegal and null and void. He said that the 'show of hands' had amounted to a denial of free and fair elections and it was violative of Articles 14, 19 and 21 of the Constitution.

Phadte and two others have prayed that the

North Goa Collector and the Administrator of Comunidades, North Zone, Mapusa be directed to hold fresh elections for the managing committee and to restrain the new committee from participating or from taking part in any administrative and financial decisions in the affairs of the Comunidade of Serula till the pendency of the present petition.

The State government, Secretary (Revenue), North Goa Collector, Administrator of Comunidades, North Zone, and newly elected president, attorney and treasurer and the substitute committee members have been made respondents.

The elections to elect the new managing committee was held on January 12, 2025. According to Phadte, the presiding

officer failed to make a distinction between an 'open ballot' and 'show of hands' methods of voting. In open ballot, choices of voters are made known to the members or are accessible to designated individuals only. This method only ensures accountability and transparency as voters decision are not anonymous. 'Open ballot' is also contemplated under the Code of Comunidade, he pointed out.

Also the Administrator of Comunidades and the Comunidade of Serula had also not displayed the voters list before notifying elections and even after notifying elections the voters list was not made available to the components. Therefore the entire election was not held as per the procedure prescribed, Phadte claimed.

## Locals call for strict action against habitual offenders in Calangute

Team Herald

**CALANGUTE:** Residents of Calangute have expressed frustration over the persistence of touts and illegal vendors, stating that despite police crackdowns, offenders return the next day. They have urged authorities to conduct daily raids to curb illegal activities along the beach.

"The police are doing a good job by taking the touts and illegal vendors into custody and fining them. But the same people are back again the next day. They're taken to the police station and fined Rs 5,000, yet they return back. The fine should be doubled for repeat offenders," locals said.

Continuing their crackdown on illegal businesses, Calangute police on Thursday detained several illegal vendors and touts from the beach promenade. Mean-



while, the tourist police unit apprehended two suspicious individuals allegedly attempting to steal tourists' bags on the beach. The suspects were later handed over to Calangute Police for further action.

The Police staff interacted with tourists, creating awareness about dos and don'ts, and made aware about illegal touts. Public announcements were also made at Calangute and Baga beaches, advising tourists to take

safety precautions while availing water sports activities. Local businessmen were requested to maintain polite behavior with customers.

Adequate Police deployment has been ensured at all static points in the jurisdiction of Calangute Police Station to prevent any untoward incidents.

The drive was conducted by Calangute Police Station, led by PI Pares G Naik and PI tourist unit Jatini J Potdar.

## Goa Foundation objects to mining dump auctions

### Says it's illegal as govt has failed to abide by conditions in SC order; calls for a cancellation of auctions scheduled for today

Team Herald

**PANJIM:** The Goa Foundation on Thursday wrote to the Director of Mines and Geology, drawing his attention to the fact that permitting the mining of dumps would amount to illegal mining, if no prior leases have been granted for the purpose.

The letter was addressed in the context of the auctions of mining dumps scheduled on January 31 and the Goa Foundation has called for a cancellation of the auctions scheduled for Friday.

The mining of dumps for minerals that have a market today is squarely covered under the Mines and Minerals Development and Regulation (MMDR) Act, 1957. The MMDR Act states clearly in Section 4 that any mining operations must be pursuant to a mineral lease. This position has long since been made clear by the judgment of the Supreme Court in Bharat Coking Coal Ltd And Arvs State of Bihar And Ors on August 17, 1990.

Secondly, the mining of dumps has been permitted



by the December 13, 2022 order of the Apex Court on an application (IA 6524) filed by the Goa government itself. The government is required to meet the condi-

tions imposed in that order. There is no indication that these conditions have been met or are being met.

Thirdly, no action has been taken against the

leaseholders who created the dumps illegally, as well as their co-conspirators, such as the land owners and government officials (where government/forest land is involved) as required under the Land Revenue Code, MMDR Act, the Environment Protection Act, etc.

The Goa Foundation has reminded the Director of Mines and Geology that he is merely a trustee of the mineral wealth of the State whose real owners are the people of Goa and especially future generations of the State. As the real owners of

the mineral wealth of the State, the Foundation is bound to challenge the legality of any auctions which transgress existing law and norms and compromise the public interest.

The Foundation has therefore called for a cancellation of the auctions scheduled for January 31 and for re-conducting them after first granting a proper mining lease and after obtaining all necessary approvals, as required by the Expert Committee on Dumps and the various provisions of the MMDR Act.

## APPOINTMENTS

**AN ESTABLISHED MULTI - STATE ARCHITECTURAL + VALUATION FIRM REQUIRES**

**FIELD ENGINEER (FOR VALUATION)**  
Degree / Diploma in Civil Engg. / Civil Draftsman / Architectural Assistant  
For site visits in North & South Goa. Should have a 2 wheeler + Licence.

**BACK OFFICE ASSISTANT**  
Graduate + B'Com

**Contact: 7774006735**  
Resumes to be sent on [jobsdda@gmail.com](mailto:jobsdda@gmail.com)

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