

# Stiff opposition to industrialisation of Kerim's Bhutkhamb plateau

Villagers dare government; want locals to be taken into confidence before taking decisions

Team Herald

**PONDA:** The Nagrik Kruti Samiti, Kerim (NKS), has urged Chief Minister Pramod Sawant to consult locals before proceeding with any industrial projects on the scrapped Nylon 6,6 project land at Bhutkhamb plateau. The group reminded the government of the violent protests in the 1990s that successfully halted the controversial project.

## UNITED THEY STAND

The NKS, through funds raised by its members, had even approached the Supreme Court to reclaim the land for Kerim village. They argue that the plateau is a crucial water source for agriculture, *bagayats* and *kulagars* in five surrounding villages, as well as for wetlands in the Priol constituency.

Activist Swati Kerkar expressed surprise at the Chief Minister's recent statement about bringing "green industries" to the area, despite

the fact that villagers are still fighting for the land in the Supreme Court.

"Villagers fought against the Nylon 6,6 project in 1995-96 and later opposed the SEZ project for Cipla in 2007. Now, we are again forced to protest against the government's plan to bring so-called green industries," said Kerkar. "The community remains determined to protect the plateau and only activities that preserve its ecological balance should be considered."

The land in question spans approximately 12 lakh square metres.

It may be recalled that on Wednesday, Chief Minister Sawant announced plans to take over the SEZ land at Kerim and introduce green industries. However, Swati Kerkar warned that industrial development could lead to irreversible damage, as seen in other areas where locals have taken to the streets to stop environmental destruction.

"People fear that in the

**"Villagers fought against the Nylon 6,6 project in 1995-96 and later opposed the SEZ project for Cipla in 2007. Now, we are again forced to protest against the government's plan to bring so-called green industries"**

— Swati Kerkar, Activist

**"It is a rich water source and a hub for spiritual and religious activities. We do not want the destruction of our land in the name of industries. Only agriculture and environmentally friendly activities should be considered, with local consultation"**

— Ramkrishna Zalmi, NKS member



Memorial of Nilesh Naik, who was martyred in Nylon 6,6 agitation

name of green industries, large corporations will destroy the plateau. This land is a vital water source for the villages at its foothills," said Kerkar.

She also highlighted that for generations, villagers have performed religious rituals at 12 locations along the border of Bhutkhamb plateau to protect the land. The Karmalem Lake, which

has been declared a wetland, also receives its water from Bhutkhamb Plateau.

"The chief minister must take locals into confidence before making any decisions," she added.

Swati Kerkar was joined by Ramkrishna Zalmi, Pratiksha Gaude (former Kerim Sarpanch) and other members of NKS.

They recalled that dur-

ing the 1995-96 protests against the Nylon 6,6 project, one villager, Nilesh Naik, was killed in police firing. Following intense resistance, the project was scrapped. In 2007, locals strongly opposed handing over the same land for the Cipla SEZ project and even approached the courts to reclaim it.

"The five villages depend on this land for water and *bagayats*. The government must consult us before making any announcements about industries," warned the locals.

Ramkrishna Zalmi pointed out that the plateau was

once used for growing ragi, coconut plantations, and other crops. "It is a rich water source and a hub for spiritual and religious activities," he said. "We do not want the destruction of our land in the name of industries. Only agriculture and environmentally friendly activities should be considered, with local consultation."

The villagers remain firm in their fight in the Supreme Court to reclaim the land, stressing that their ancestors had preserved Bhutkhamb Plateau for the survival of agriculture and *bagayat* activities.

## THEATRICAL BRILLIANCE



Artists performing the drama *Mai Ri Main Ka Se Kahun* at Kala Academy, Campal, organised by the Directorate of Art and Culture in collaboration with the National School of Drama, New Delhi

## HSSC seating arrangement for Mapusa and Marcela

**MAPUSA/MARCELA:** The Goa Board HSSC Final exams will begin from February 10 to March 1 for the general stream and from February 11 to February 24 for the Vocational stream.

St Xavier's Higher Secondary School, Mapusa will be the main centre, while St Britto's High School and Shree Ganesh Higher Secondary School will be the sub-centres.

The seat arrangements for the Mapusa centre for the HSSC Board exams are as follows:

Seat Nos 52832-52834, 52838-53035 (Arts), Seat Nos 52835, 53136-53481 (Commerce) and Seat Nos 53482-53898 (Science) will answer at St. Xavier's Higher Secondary School, Mapusa.

Seat Nos 53036-53135 (Arts) will answer at Shree Ganesh Higher Secondary School, Ganeshpuri, Mapusa.

Seat Nos 52836-52837, 52899-54036 (Vocational) will be at St Britto's High School, states a press note is-

sued by Lynette D'Souza (St Xavier's HSS, Mapusa), conductor of the HSSC Mapusa Centre (07) for the February-March 2025 final exam.

At Marcela, Krishna Vasudev Parab Memorial (KVP) Government Higher Secondary School, Khandola will be the main centre.

The seat Nos for Arts stream include, regular 65969 to 66063, repeaters 66064 to 66066 & 66068 to 66071 and private 67067, 66072 to 66078.

The Commerce stream seat Nos are, regular 66079 to 66157, repeaters 66158 to 66165 and private 66166.

The seat Nos for Science stream are, regular 66167 to 66281 and repeaters 66282 to 66308.

The seat Nos for OM stream are, regular 66309 to 66341 and repeaters 66342 to 66345.

The seat Nos for MREDA stream are, regular 66346 to 66366 and repeaters 66367 & 66368.

## Cong slams BJP, RSS for attempting to distort historical narratives

Accuse them of glorifying Mahatma Gandhi's killers

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** The Congress Party hit out at the BJP and RSS for attempting to distort historical narratives during the observance of Martyrs' Day in Margao and Navelim, marking the 77th death anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. The events, held on January 30, were part of the party's ongoing effort to honour the Father of the Nation and commemorate his immense sacrifice.

Floral tributes were paid to Mahatma Gandhi at Malhat in Margao, while a similar ceremony took place in Navelim near Perpetual Convent School.

South District Congress President Savio D'Silva, Navelim Block President Peter Coutinho, former Sarpanch Zacarias Goes, district committee members, local citizens, and special guest Priya Sadekar, a Bhagavad Gita tutor

were present on the occasion.

Addressing the gathering, Coutinho condemned the BJP and RSS, accusing them of distorting history and glorifying Gandhi's assassin. He recalled the tragic events leading to Gandhi's assassination on January 30, 1948, following his fast unto death in protest of post-independence violence. "We must avoid giving undue importance to the name of the assassin," he asserted, denouncing any attempts to glorify the murderer.

Coutinho further emphasised that the Congress Party's presence in Navelim was a deliberate statement against divisive politics and vote-splitting tactics. "We are united and will not fall prey to manipulative politics," he declared.

Meanwhile Savio D'Silva urged the public to remain vigilant against communal forces attempting to divide society under the

guise of religion. He also questioned the silence of local MLAs regarding the government's ongoing scams, calling for greater accountability.

Special guest Priya Sadekar, in her address, encouraged the public to adopt Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence. "Non-violence was the cornerstone of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy," she said, stressing that conflicts should be resolved through peaceful dialogue rather than aggression. She illustrated this with a simple example, noting how, in the aftermath of an accident, people often escalate tensions instead of settling disputes amicably.

The event concluded with a collective commitment to upholding Gandhian principles of peace, unity, and integrity, ensuring that the sacrifices of the past continue to inspire present and future generations.

## Cops net three drug peddlers in North Goa

Team Herald

**PANJIM:** Three persons were arrested for possessing drugs worth Rs 5.5 lakh in the jurisdiction of two police stations in North Goa on January 31.

The Mapusa Police arrested two persons identified as Sukha Masaka Majhi, 29, and Chandan Chaitanya Sethi, 23, both natives of Odisha for allegedly possessing ganja worth Rs three lakh.

According to police, the accused were allegedly caught red-handed in a possession of 3.5 kg of ganja during a raid conducted during the night of January 30.

An FIR has been registered and the case is being investigated by LPSI Ravina Sawtodkar.

In another case, the Calangute Police arrested Akhil Mhalasekar, 24, from Saligao for allegedly possessing 25

grams of MDMA worth Rs 2.50 lakh. Calangute PI Paresh Naik is probing the case.

Meanwhile, North Goa Superintendent of Police (SP) Akshat Kaushal said, the North Goa District Police have booked ten cases under the NDPS Act since the beginning of 2025 at various police stations against accused persons involving four Goans, five non-Goans and one foreigner.

"Through human and technical surveillance, we have identified a list of suspects who are dealing with drugs. Special teams have been formed at police stations and district level which are working round the clock to apprehend all such persons. Going ahead, we are also keen on focusing on awareness to dissuade our youth from taking to any intoxicant or drugs," the SP said.

## shorttakes

### PERNEM RESIDENT BOOKED FOR FORGING SCHOOL DOCUMENTS IN CURCHOREM

**MARGAO:** The headmaster of Guardian Angel High School, Curchorem, has lodged a complaint with the police against an individual accused of presenting forged school documents.

According to the complaint, prior to January 31, the accused, identified as Sashikant Gadekar of Chawdewada-Parcem, Pernem, allegedly created fake documents, including a passing certificate-cum-mark sheet and a school leaving certificate, in the name of Guardian Angel High School, Curchorem.

He then submitted these forged documents as genuine to obtain a bonafide certificate, thereby committing an act of cheating. Curchorem police have registered an offence under Section 336(3) and 340(2) of the BNS Act 2023. Further investigation is being conducted by PSI Gautam Shetkar.

### GANG-RAPE ACCUSED TO REMAIN IN POLICE CUSTODY FOR 3 MORE DAYS

**MARGAO:** The five youths accused of gang-raping a mentally unsound girl at a Cansaulim guest house will remain in police custody for an additional three days, as ordered by the Margao Court. The accused have been identified as Adil Abdul Karim Lalsab Algur (18) of Chicalim, Mohammed Ali Mulla (22) of Mangoor Hill, Shahzad Mohammed Samim Shaikh (18) of Khariwadda, Viresh Amrish Aguanda (18) of Gandhi Nagar, and Mohammed Yasir (18) of Bogda, Vasco. According to Fatorda police, the crime took place between 8 pm on January 22 and 3.30 am on January 23, when the accused allegedly kidnapped the victim from Margao KTC Bus Stand. Adil Algur, the prime accused, lured the victim and travelled with her by bus to Vasco Bus Stand. He then transported her on a scooter to Dabolim Junction, where the four other accused were waiting in a car. The group took the victim to a flat in Cansaulim, where Adil first engaged in sexual intercourse with her, followed by the other four accused, exploiting her vulnerable mental condition. They then dumped the victim by the roadside at Nuvem who was helped by a Good Samaritan.

Fatorda police have registered a case under Sections 138, 70(1), and 64(1)(k)(m) of the BNS Act 2023. Investigations are ongoing, and police confirmed that the victim's condition is improving. A medical examination of the accused has been conducted.

### UNIDENTIFIED MALE FOUND AT KULEM RAILWAY STATION

**MARGAO:** The body of an unidentified man, aged approximately 35 to 40 years, was found at Platform No. 11 of Kulem Railway Station, police confirmed. Upon receiving a call from PSI Sadanand Dessai of the Collem police station, a police team rushed to the scene. The deceased was found lying at the platform with no identification details. Police conducted all legal formalities and preserved the body at SGDH Hospital, Margao, for identification purposes. Preliminary investigations suggest that the deceased may have been a ragpicker who died due to illness. No foul play is suspected. Further investigation is being conducted by PI Amarnath Passi of Vasco Railway Police Station.

Meanwhile the Maina-Curtorim police have reported the death of 62-year-old Napociano Rodrigues from Orgao-Loutolim, Salcete, who was found lifeless on a chair in Loutolim. During the inquiry, police visited the scene and confirmed his identity. An ambulance from the 108 emergency service was called, and Rodrigues was transported to SGDH Hospital, Margao, where the doctor on duty declared him dead on arrival. The body has been preserved at SGDH, Margao for medico-legal formalities, and a report is awaited.

### HAVERI-KARNATAKA WOMAN FOUND DEAD BY HANGING AT DAVORLIM

**MARGAO:** A woman, identified as Rashida Fatima, a resident of Rumdamol, Housing Board, Davorlim and a native of Haveri-Karnataka, has died by hanging, police confirmed. According to Maina-Curtorim police, a call was received from the casualty police at SGDH, Margao, informing them that a female had been brought in dead as a case of hanging.

A police team rushed to the scene and conducted an inquiry. Officials stated that the deceased, Rashida Fatima, was declared brought dead by the doctor on duty, who confirmed that she had died by hanging at her residence. The body was referred for a post-mortem examination, and the police surgeon who conducted the autopsy certified the cause of death as 'asphyxia as a result of constriction of the neck, as per injury no. 1'. Further investigation is ongoing.

### OLD MANDOVI BRIDGE TO REMAIN CLOSED FOR REPAIRS FROM FEBRUARY 8-23

**PANJIM:** The Old Mandovi Bridge will be closed to all types of vehicular traffic from 8 to February 23, the Executive Engineer, Works Division-VII (NH), PWD, Panjim, has announced. The closure is necessary to facilitate the milling of the existing wearing course, laying of mastic asphalt, and bituminous concrete. Traffic will be diverted onto the New Mandovi Bridge to allow for smooth and speedy completion of the repair work. Motorists are advised to plan their journeys accordingly.

## APPOINTMENTS



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## Ponda records 34 fatal accidents in 2024

Team Herald

**PONDA:** The rising number of fatal accidents in Ponda and Mardol police jurisdictions has become a growing concern for locals, with 34 deaths reported in 2024. This translates to an average of one fatality per month. In comparison, the yearly average in previous years stood at approximately 24 deaths on Ponda's roads.

Despite various government initiatives, including training programmes, awareness campaigns, and road safety weeks, reckless driving

### VIOLATIONS IN 2024

Offences	Number of cases
Over speeding	3,361
Driving under influence of alcohol	373
Using mobile phones while driving	138
Not use of seatbelts	405
Entering a 'No Entry' zone	5,614
Tinted glass	2,917
Riding without helmets	3,200
Dangerous parking	3,911

and speeding continue to be major causes of accidents.

Ponda Traffic PI Krishna Sinhari stated that the traffic cell penalised 36,481 vehicle drivers in 2024 for various

traffic violations. He highlighted that rash driving and driving under the influence of alcohol were among the leading causes of accidents.

"We urge all motorists to

**"We urge all motorists to follow traffic rules to prevent fatalities. The traffic cell also conducts various awareness programmes at the school level to educate young people on the importance of road safety"**

— Krishna Sinhari, Ponda Traffic Cell PI

follow traffic rules to prevent fatalities. The traffic cell also conducts various awareness programmes at the school level to educate young people on the importance of road safety," Sinhari said.

He further noted that while the number of cases involving riding without helmets has decreased, other traffic violations have increased.

While traffic police attribute accidents to violations, locals believe that poor road conditions and infrastructure also play a major role.

Social worker Sandeep Patkar emphasised the need to improve sharp turns and remove roadside encroachments, including illegal parking, to enhance road safety.

Another local Viraj Sapre pointed out that roads have been frequently dug up for development work over the past six to seven years, leading to potholes that contribute to accidents. He also highlighted the need to address black spots and dangerous turns at Farmagudi-Dhavlji, Kundaim, and Dharbandora by improving road alignment.

"Traffic police are mostly seen issuing challans in the city, but they should also focus on regulating traffic on highways. Stray cattle and dogs are also contributing to accidents," Sapre added.