

Villagers reject five-star hotel on Sinquerim hill, demand botanical gardens instead

Citizens urge the Goa government to scrap plans to lease 3,00,000 sq mtr of pristine land to Indian Hotels Company Limited for Rs 63 cr; push for protection of the scenic seaside hill and its biodiversity

Team Herald

CALANGUTE: Residents of Candolim, backed by the Calangute Constituency Forum (CCF) and concerned citizens from the surrounding areas, have strongly opposed the state government's decision to allow the commercial development of Sinquerim Hill.

At a public awareness meeting held in Candolim on Wednesday, the CCF highlighted details of a supplementary lease agreement dated August 13, 2024, granting Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL) permission to develop a five-star project on 3,00,000 sq mtr of land in survey no. 96/0 of Candolim village. IHCL is the company that operates the Taj Group



of hotels, which already operates two massive luxury resorts in Candolim- Sinquerim. The lease, valued at Rs 62.25 crore, extends for 50 years, with an option for renewal for another 24 years on mutually agreed terms.

Concerned villagers signed a letter addressed to the Chief Minister, expressing fears that the project would lead to large-scale environmental degradation. "Sinquerim Hill is not only a treasure trove of old heritage monuments



but also a crucial ecological zone that maintains the village's environmental balance," the letter stated. The villagers argue that allowing commercial activity in this area would threaten biodiversity and disrupt the ecological stability

of Candolim. Instead, they have proposed an alternative vision: the development of a world-class botanical garden. This, they say, would serve as a sustainable tourist attraction while preserving the historical and natural heritage of Sinquerim Hill.

Emphasizing the need for responsible development, they urged the government to prioritise environmental and community welfare over commercial interests.

As part of their continued opposition, the villagers have vowed to strengthen the "Save Sinquerim Hill for the Next Generation" movement with the support of the people of Calangute constituency and the wider Goan community.

MPA assures 24-hr public access to port flyover at Baina

Team Herald

VASCO: Mormugao Port Authority (MPA) Chairman Dr. N. Vinod Kumar has assured local MLA Sankalp Amonkar that the gates installed near the Up Ramp and Down Ramp of the new flyover at Baina will remain open 24 hours a day for public access.

The assurance came after Amonkar, along with a delegation of locals, met the MPA chairman following a prior discussion with Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on Tuesday evening.

While the gates were installed for port security in case of emergencies, the MPA has assured that there will be no restrictions on public

movement. Additionally, Amonkar revealed that the MPA has agreed to allocate 200 square metres of land at Headland Sada for erecting a statue of Maratha warrior Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. He further announced that a new access route to the fort—previously controlled by the MPA—has been secured, paving the way for its restoration.

Moreover, the MPA has agreed to lease the historic Viceroy's Palace to the Goa government for 99 years, allowing restoration work to commence soon. Expressing gratitude to CM Pramod Sawant, Amonkar also welcomed the cabinet's approval for a 20-bedded hospital, to be constructed on 4,000 sq mtrs of land at Sada.

RTI breach: State Commission orders Majorda P'yat to provide information free of charge

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Goa State Information Commission has ordered the Public Information Officer (PIO) of the Majorda-Utorda-Calata village panchayat to conduct a fresh inspection and provide authenticated copies of requested documents free of charge. The Commission, led by Atmaram R. Barve, has set a deadline of February 20 for compliance.

The directive follows a Right to Information (RTI) application filed by Shariet Fernandes, who sought

specific information from the panchayat. The PIO failed to respond within the 30-day period mandated by the RTI Act. During the first appeal process, PIO Custodio Faria provided partial information but stated that certain details were still being processed. Despite this, the first appellate authority dismissed the appeal, deeming the response satisfactory.

Upon review, the Commission found that the PIO had violated Section 7(1) of the RTI Act, 2005, by not responding within the stipulated time, providing in-

complete information, and failing to specify when the remaining details would be made available. It ruled that these lapses infringed on the appellant's right to access information.

The Commission further ordered that in future RTI responses, if any information cannot be provided, the PIO must clearly mention the reasons and relevant provisions of the RTI Act in the initial response. The PIO must also reply to the show-cause notice and submit a compliance report as per the Commission's orders.

REEK CREEK

SAGUN GAWADE



The St Inez Creek has turned an unsightly green hue, signs of the poor health of the water due to the release of waste water near the Sewage Treatment Plant in Tonca. The creek empties into the River Mandovi in Panjim

Davorlim P'yat wins national award for accounting reforms

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Davorlim panchayat has been honoured with the ICAI Award for its successful implementation of economic and accounting reforms at the national level.

The award, presented under the 'Gram Panchayats at the National Level' category, recognises the panchayat's adherence to the 15th Finance Commission (FC) recommendations and its efforts in promoting accounting transparency in local governance.

Davorlim Sarpanch Saish Rajadhyax and Secretary Pradeep Tamhanke received the award at a programme organised by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India in New Delhi.

The Sarpanch highlighted that Davorlim stood out among 600 panchayats nationwide, including 15 from Goa, that were in contention for the award.

Tiatr scripts should be included in Nat'l Literary Awards: CM Sawant

Team Herald

MARGAO: As the debate over the Konkani script intensifies, Chief Minister Dr. Pramod Sawant has urged the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, to consider tiatr script books for national literary awards.

Sawant emphasized the literary significance of tiatr scripts, which are an integral part of Goa's culture and heritage.

The Chief Minister made these remarks during the Goa Official Language Day celebrations, where the Goa Konkani Academy hosted its literary awards ceremony at

Raj Bhavan. A total of 51 awards, covering the years 2022, 2023, and 2024, were presented by Sawant.

In the presence of Prof. Kumud Sharma, Vice-President of the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, Sawant stressed the importance of tiatr in Goa's cultural landscape. He urged the Sahitya Akademi to recognise tiatr books in national literary awards, underlining that the State government is actively working to bring tiatr to global audiences.

Sawant also addressed the need for unity among Goans, calling on them to put aside caste and religious differences and focus on the collective advancement of the Konkani language.

The CM's remarks were warmly welcomed by the Tiatr Academy of Goa.

TAG president Anthony Barbosa, said, "Tiatr has a rich heritage of nearly 133 years. Many tiatr script books have already been published, and it would be a proud moment if these works receive recognition through Sahitya Akademi awards at the national level. The Tiatr Academy is fully committed to encouraging tiatr writers to publish their scripts in book form."

MMC razes structure for coffee shop in Municipal garden

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Margao Municipal Council (MMC) was forced to demolish an under-construction coffee shop in the garden at Old Market following strong objections from local residents. The site, located near the Civil and Criminal Court building, falls within a designated conservation zone.

In 2024, residents had filed a formal complaint questioning the construction, asserting that the land housing the garden does not belong to the MMC. They pointed out that, according to the Outline Development Plan (ODP), the area is classified as a conservation zone, where any construction requires prior approval from the Conservation Committee of the Town and Country Planning (TCP) department—an approval the MMC had not obtained.

WIN FOR CITIZENS

The demolition comes amid concerns over the MMC's development plans, which had included the coffee shop as part of a larger beautification project for the garden. Residents maintained that the construction violated conservation zone regulations.

A senior MMC technical official confirmed that the structure was dismantled after verifying that no permissions had been granted for the project. "We have reviewed the files, and it has been found that no approvals were granted for the construction," the official stated.

Chinchinim students lead charge for sustainable, drug-free living

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Village Panchayat of Chinchinim-Deussua has launched an awareness campaign engaging local school students to promote environmental sustainability and a healthier lifestyle.

Centred around the themes "Green Village, a Healthy Village" and "No Tobacco, No Smoking, No Alcohol, and Stop Drug Abuse & Addiction," the initiative aimed to instil positive habits among the youth. Students from St Mary's of the Angels Con-



vent High School, guided by Headmistress Sr Flavia, showcased vibrant paintings highlighting the importance of a clean, green environment.

Their artwork depicted lush landscapes, pollution-free surroundings, and

the benefits of sustainability on public health. Students from Mount Mary Higher Secondary School, led by Principal Melba Vas, created powerful visual messages warning against tobacco, smoking, alcohol, and drug abuse.

Budget allocation of Rs 482 crore for Goa rail projects, Rs 5,696 cr investment in SWR underway

Konkan Railway Corporation plans major infra boost with new railway stations at Sarzora, Neura and Mayem

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Union Budget 2025-26 has allocated Rs 482 crore for railway projects in Goa under the South Western Railway (SWR) and Konkan Railway, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw announced while addressing the media present at the Konkan Railway Conference Hall in Margao via video conference recently.

In total, the Railways has planned investments worth Rs 5,696 crore in the State through SWR projects, covering station development, new railway lines, track doubling, renewal, and route electrification. This comes even as double tracking in Goa continues to face opposition, with SWR pushing ahead to meet its project deadlines.

"In Goa, there is a very special condition because Konkan Railway is a company—a corporation limited. The Indian Railway Budget portion is very small in Goa," Vaishnaw explained. While Karnataka received Rs 7,564 crore, Tamil Nadu Rs 6,626 crore, and Kerala Rs 3,042 crore in the Railway Budget,

The Rs 482 crore allocation is for projects under both SWR and Konkan Railway. The total investment figure is specifically for SWR projects; for rail doubling and electrification, we have to spend from our own revenue — Baban Ghatge, spokesperson, KRCL

he emphasised that the overall investment in Goa remains significant. Following the minister's briefing, Konkan Railway Corporation Limited (KRCL) officials provided further details about their own infrastructure projects. Joseph George, Executive Director for Strategic and Business Development at KRCL, further elaborated on funding for Konkan Railway's expansion plans. "We also get support from the Ministry for these projects. We have received assistance in the past as well," he said. KRCL officials also outlined KRCL's broader development

strategy, which includes new stations, additional track infrastructure, and enhancements to existing facilities. Land availability is not a constraint for KRCL, as the corporation has secured spaces for track doubling, tunnels, and bridge realignments, they said.

KRCL has also identified Margao station for redevelopment, with conceptual plans being finalised in consultation with the Ministry of Railways. KRCL has unveiled plans to construct three new railway stations in Goa over the next three years. The stations, to be located in Sarzora in Salcete, and Neura and Mayem in North Goa, will be financed using KRCL's accumulated operational revenues rather than direct budgetary allocations.

Work on the Sarzora station is already in progress, with a railway overpass completed, though access roads are yet to be developed. "We will complete these works soon. The other two new railway stations will be set up within the next three years," Deputy General Manager of Public Relations Baban Ghatge said.



INSTEAD OF CRACKING DOWN ON DRUGS, POLICE ARE SMUGGLING DRUGS INTO COLVALE JAIL

The Goa police department is responsible for this. They should have posted honest policemen to the Colvale jail, then this smuggling of drugs would not have happened. It appears they don't have fear, because they have godfathers. Their posting itself has been done by the godfathers. The sincere officers suffer. Action should be taken against those who have smuggled drugs and they should be dismissed. They cannot be reformed; if they are transferred, they will ply their trade elsewhere. Despite good salaries, they want to make fast money. Since there are fewer jail guards, police are sent there. Guarding and searching is done by the police. So, they have to send honest officers

Alex Rasquinha, Retd SP

It is a great irony that the police, who are supposed to keep law and order and fight crime are themselves found indulging in crime. The recent case where four policemen were suspended for smuggling drugs into Colvale jail appears to be a major embarrassment for the police. Herald media asked citizens for their opinion

The Colvale jail has become an entertainment centre, a place where inmates can have fun, eat, and drink as they please. However, accused individuals are sent to jail as punishment. It seems the police and those in charge are there just for time pass. Mobiles, drugs, and other contraband have been found in the jail multiple times. Illicit activities are rampant, and several police officers have been suspended. But what's the end result? The Colvale jail remains an entertainment hall. Will suspended police officers be reformed? The North Goa collector once found 40-50 mobiles in the jail, but mobiles are still circulating. When questioned, jail authorities claim they also need entertainment to stay there. But if they want time pass, they shouldn't be committing murders, rapes, and thefts

Tara Kerkar, social activist

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Those who are suspended are constables, but the actual investigation should target their bosses. How did drug smuggling occur in the jail? Isn't the jail supposed to be secure? With four security gates equipped with cameras, it's alarming that such activities took place. Despite arrests, these police officers are released, and those involved in the job scam are now back home, enjoying their freedom. We can't celebrate their arrest, as they're back to their normal lives after a brief jail stint. Nothing seems secure today, and the availability of drugs in Panjim city is a stark reminder of this reality

Rama Kankonkar, social activist