

# Green hills pay the price for widening of NH at Kerya-Khandepar

## Locals upset; flay destructive development at the cost of the environment

Team Herald

**PONDA:** Residents of Kerya-Khandepar have expressed their distress over the ongoing National Highway (NH) widening project, which they say has destroyed the lush green hills that once defined the landscape. The road expansion, which has been underway for a decade, has led to significant environmental damage, including landslides and loss of natural habitats.

A decade ago, the village of Kerya-Khandepar, located at the entrance of Ponda city, was known for its verdant hills and deep valleys. However, when the narrow road was expanded into a four-lane highway, a significant portion of these scenic hills was levelled. The construction involved cutting through the hills and filling the valleys with excavated material. During the initial phase, a major landslide was reported, forcing authorities to halt NH traffic and divert vehicles through internal roads for

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fifteen days until the debris was cleared.

The second phase of widening commenced in 2023, this time for the construction of two-way service roads. As a result, the remaining hills were further levelled, leaving the once-green landscape barren.

Rocky Dias, a local resident, voiced his anguish over the environmental impact of the project. "It pains me to see the destruction of Kerya-Khandepar's scenic green hills due to NH widening," he said.

**“When this area was a valley, we could feel the cool breeze, enjoy waterfalls during the monsoon, and appreciate the rich green cover that was home to birds and animals. The valley was also a natural source for groundwater recharge and springs. But now, all of that is lost”**

— Rocky Dias, local resident

Development is essential, but it should be carried out with minimal damage. The government could have avoided this by constructing a flyover at Kerya Valley and providing an underpass for locals,” he said.

Dias also pointed out the dangers faced by schoolchildren due to the lack of an underpass. “Not only have we lost our natural hills, but we were also not provided with an underpass. Primary school students

are now forced to run across the road while vehicles speed past. While commuters on the highway have benefited, the locals are suffering,” he added.

He further noted that even animal corridors have not been built, leading to wildlife straying onto the highway. “Recently, a wild bison was seen roaming on the road,” he said.

Recalling the past, Dias stated, “Kerya-Khandepar was once known for its beautiful greenery, deep valleys,

and hills. Five to six years ago, the NH was a narrow road passing through a valley. Later, it was widened into a four-lane highway after massive land filling, with soil excavated from the hills.”

The locals had raised concerns about the environmental impact of the project but found few alternatives, as the highway expansion was deemed necessary for infrastructure development.

Claiming that the greenery has now become a thing of the past, Dias lamented, “When this area was a valley, we could feel the cool breeze, enjoy waterfalls during the monsoon, and appreciate the rich green cover that was home to birds and animals. The valley was also a natural source for groundwater recharge and springs. But now, all of that is lost.”

Residents continue to urge authorities to consider measures that could mitigate further environmental damage and improve safety for both locals and wildlife.

## shorttakes

### MAN ARRESTED FOR KIDNAPPING, SEXUALLY ASSAULTING MINOR

**MARGAO:** Margao police arrested Sunil Pujari, 30, from Odlembhat, Quepem, for allegedly kidnapping a minor girl from Dramapur-Salcete. Technical surveillance led police to Hanabartti-Karnataka, where the victim was traced with the help of local authorities. Further investigation revealed that the accused had sexually assaulted the girl multiple times. Charges under Section 64 of the BNS, Section 8(2) of the Goa Children's Act, and Sections 4, 8, and 12 of the POCSO Act have been added. Meanwhile the Maina-Curtorim police also arrested 20-year-old Placido Colaso for allegedly sexually assaulting a minor girl. Police confirmed that the accused has been booked under relevant sections and will be produced in court. The victim's statement will be recorded, and she will undergo a medical examination at GMC Bambolim.

### RUSSIAN CREW MEMBER BOOKED FOR CARRYING E-CIGARETTE

**PANJIM:** Mopa Airport Police have booked a 29-year-old Russian national for carrying a prohibited electronic cigarette. The accused, Sidko Olesia, a crew member of an international flight, allegedly concealed an e-cigarette worth Rs 1,000 inside her hair band during security screening. An FIR has been registered, and the case has been charge-sheeted before JMFC Pernem. LPSI Sashanka Parab of Mopa Airport Police Station is investigating.

### ELDERLY WOMAN DIES OF POISONING AT GMC BAMBOLIM

**MARGAO:** Francisca R Simoes (72), a resident of Vellim, Betul, died of poisoning while undergoing treatment at GMC Bambolim. Cuncolim police stated that the body is preserved at GMC's morgue for medico-legal formalities. Investigations revealed that she was first admitted to South Goa District Hospital on February 3, later referred to GMC, where she passed away. Her daughter confirmed the cause of death as poisoning. PSI Tejas Kumar Naik of Cuncolim Police is investigating the case.

### WILD BISON COLLIDES WITH SCOOTER, INJURING MOTHER AND SON

**PONDA:** A mother and son were injured after a wild bison suddenly appeared on the road at Tiral-Usgao and knocked them down recently. Locals, alarmed by frequent sightings of wild bison crossing roads, have informed forest officials, who visited the area and urged residents to stay cautious, especially during early mornings and late evenings. Additionally, locals reported a leopard attack on a dog in the area.

### THREE ARRESTED FOR ABDUCTION OF 50-YEAR-OLD MAN

**MARGAO:** Maina-Curtorim police arrested three Maharashtra natives for allegedly abducting a 50-year-old man from Davorlim-Salcete. A police team, aided by technical surveillance, tracked and arrested the suspects—Vishwas Sadhu Pandhare, 36 from Jat, Sangli; Abhishek Motiram Rathod, 19 and Abhishek Umesh Rathod, 24, both from Tanda-Solapur. The victim, Shankar Pandu Rathod, was rescued and brought back to Goa. The accused are currently in police custody. LPSI Veronica Coutinho is investigating.

### SCOOTER STOLEN FROM VERNA INDUSTRIAL ESTATE

**MARGAO:** A scooter, valued at approximately Rs 83,570, was stolen from an open parking space near Cipla Company, IDC Verna. The complainant, Dadi Lokesh from Vishakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, reported the theft to Verna police. A case has been registered under Section 303(2) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). Police have inspected the site and conducted a panchanama. Investigations are ongoing.

### MAN FOUND HANGING IN RENTED ROOM AT FATORDA

**MARGAO:** Ranjit Ramhari Vidhate, a resident of Fatorda and a native of Osmanabad, Maharashtra, was found dead in his rented room near Noble Medicare, Fatorda. Police discovered his body hanging from a ceiling fan with a yellow nylon rope. His roommates identified him as an employee of Cipla Company. Fatorda police have conducted an inquest and referred the body for post-mortem at SGDH Margao.

### POWER SHUTDOWN

**TALEIGAO:** On February 7, from 9 am to 2 pm. The affected areas are entire Gopika Vihar building complex and surrounding areas at Taleigao.

**CORLIM:** On February 8, from 9.30 am to 2 pm. Areas affected are Gaurish Pereira, Ajit Chohan, Village Panchayat Corlim and Vicinity of Dhulapi Village.

## Khandepar locals go thirsty as pipeline bursts again

### Blame unplanned road works for repeated damage

Team Herald

**PONDA:** A rupture in pipeline at Khandepar has resulted in acute water shortage, with residents blaming unplanned road widening and excavation work for the ongoing National Highway (NH) project at Kerya, Khandepar.

The 250 mm diameter pipeline was damaged during excavation for the highway work, leading to a major water fountain from the ruptured pipe. The resulting water gushing onto the road not only disrupted traffic flow but also caused water shortages in parts of Khandepar and Usgao, which rely on the affected pipeline for supply.

Local resident Sandeep Parkar expressed his frustration, stating, “This is not the

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first time it has happened. On several occasions, water pipelines have been damaged due to the unplanned highway work. The frequency of such incidents is increasing.”

Parkar suggested that the

concerned engineers should be physically present at the widening site to guide the workers involved. He pointed out that many of the labourers are from outside the area and are unfamiliar with the

underground pipeline layout. He urged the Public Works Department (PWD) to provide workers with proper plans of the underground utility lines to prevent such accidents in the future.

Additionally, he criticised the government for failing to install utility ducts to accommodate essential services such as electricity cables, water pipelines, and communication lines. He argued that proper planning and the implementation of such ducts would prevent recurring damage and service disruptions.

Residents have urged the authorities to take immediate measures to ensure that such incidents do not recur; as they continue to face difficulties due to the ongoing highway construction.

## Man evading arrest in cheque bounce cases held by Vasco cops

Team Herald

**VASCO:** Pundalik Verlekar alias Shekhar Verlekar (54), a resident of Mangor Hill, Vasco who was evading arrest for the last few months was arrested by the Vasco police at Belagavi on Monday.

Verlekar had multiple non-bailable warrants (NBWs) issued against him under Section 138 of the Negotiable Instruments Act by various courts in the State. The cases have been registered against him at Margao and Mapusa, according to the police.

Police said that Verlekar was on the run and was frequently moving between Sindhudurg, Maharashtra and Belagavi in Karnataka to avoid his arrest.

The Vasco Police Station received a standing warrant and two NBWs against him, issued by the South Goa Sessions Court, Margao.

Police team under the guidance of PI Kapil Nayak, ASI N Samir and constables Subhani Shaikh and Naeem Shaikh, tracked Verlekar using technical surveillance and arrested him at Belagavi on Monday.

Verlekar was later produced before the courts and has been remanded in judicial custody. The Vasco police are now verifying other pending NBWs against him.

## Differently-abled man receives motorised wheelchair

Team Herald

**PANJIM:** The Office of the State Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities handed over a Neo Motion Motorised Wheelchair to Salil Mahale, boosting his mobility and independence.

The handover took place in the presence of Minister Subhash Phal Dessai, State Commissioner Guruprasad Pawaskar, Director Varsha Naik, and Secretary Taha Haaziq. Pawaskar reiterated the office's commitment to accessibility, calling it a step towards empowerment and inclusivity.

Expressing his gratitude, Salil Mahale said, “I am deeply thankful to the Office of the State Com-



missioner for Persons with Disabilities for this generous gift. This wheelchair has significantly improved my mobility and confidence in daily activities.”

The commissioner's office has previously distributed motorised e-bikes, reinforcing its mission to enhance mobility and dignity for persons with disabilities.

## Greens hold candle light protest against land destruction

### Urge masses to rise up against those harming the State

Team Herald

**PANJIM:** Citizens and activists under the banner of Save Goa Environment gathered in large numbers at Azan Maidan, Panjim, on Thursday and staged a candlelight protest against blatant land destruction in the State.

They accused the Goa government of being anti-people and gave a clarion call to the people to overthrow the current dispensation from power.

Protesters condemned the conversion of eco-sensitive land for the benefit of Delhi-based builders and developers and urged Goans to join the mass movement to protect the state's natural resources. They also lashed out at the high-handed behaviour of the government.

Xencor Polji criticised the government, stating, “This is *dadagiri* and

the Chief Minister is working for the casino and builder lobby, and Pramod Sawant is a total failure.”

Peter D'Souza from Sancoale alleged, “Builders are securing police protection under the pretext of soil testing, but borewells are being sunk without permissions. We are being pushed out of our own villages.”

Anthony D'Silva issued a stark warning: “We have been protesting for years, but now we warn the government that there will be another Sri Lanka here.”

Sanjay Naik from Bhoma called for unity among the masses. “To restore peace and preserve Goa, we must take to the streets. We must teach indifferent MLAs a lesson in 2027,” he thundered.

Dayanand Mandrekar highlighted Mandrem's plight, saying, “Mandrem is being destroyed as fast as the rest of Goa. If thousands gather, the govern-

ment will be forced to roll back harmful projects.”

Sabina Martins of Goa Bachao Abhiyan criticised government actions, stating, “Laws protect sand dunes, hill slopes, and farmland, but the government is violating them. We must demand criminal action.”

Zarina D'Cunha accused elected leaders of corruption. “They have become brokers for profit. The laws they pass reflect their greed to destroy Goa,” she charged.

Dipesh Naik from Porvorim lamented the destruction of sacred trees. “600 trees were cut under the guise of pruning. The ones translocated have not survived. I urge Hindu saints and sages to protect Goa's sacred spots.”

Avertino Miranda called for mass protests, urging Goans to rise against those harming the State.

## K'taka man held for stealing diamonds, gold worth Rs 7 lakh

Team Herald

**PANJIM:** The Mapusa Police have arrested Pundalik Laxman Chavan, alias Lamani, a 28-year-old history-sheeter currently residing in Nagoa and originally from Hubli, Karnataka, for allegedly being involved in a house theft case at ACACIA Villa in Parra. Gold and diamond ornaments worth approximately Rs 7 lakh have been recovered from him.

According to the police, the accused was a history sheeter and involved in multiple house theft cases across Goa and Karnataka.

## South Goa police book close to 50K Motor Vehicle Act violations in 2024

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** In an effort to curb road accidents through stricter enforcement of traffic rules, South Goa police stations registered 49,386 cases of Motor Vehicle (MV) violations in 2024, surpassing the 47,851 cases booked in 2023.

The data, released by the South Goa District Police Office, highlights an increase in MV violation bookings but a decline in

overall accident cases. In 2022, police had recorded 31,324 cases for violations such as speeding, rash driving, driving without a licence, and failure to wear seatbelts and helmets.

According to recent reports, speeding, driving without a licence or permit, ignoring no-entry restrictions, drunk driving, distracted driving, failure to wear seatbelts and helmets, and unsafe overtaking remain the most common violations.

| YEAR WISE RECORD |      |
|------------------|------|
| Cases Booked     | Year |
| 49,386           | 2024 |
| 47,851           | 2023 |
| 31,324           | 2022 |

Advocate Priyesh Madkaiker stated that while motorists are generally aware of traffic rules, laxity in adherence leads to accidents. “There are even cases of elderly pedestrians being knocked down. When vehicles are sharing

the road, motorists need to be careful and alert. Reckless speeding remains a major concern,” he said.

He further pointed out that driving under the influence of alcohol is a key factor in fatal accidents, while talking on mobile phones while driving is emerging as a significant distraction.

Retired Sub-Inspector Shyam Naik highlighted that head injuries are common among riders who

fail to wear helmets, while non-compliance with seatbelt rules in four-wheelers often leads to severe injuries in major crashes.

“Studies have shown that wearing seatbelts and helmets significantly reduces injuries in accidents,” Naik added.

A police officer from Salcete stated that the traffic cell is actively conducting road safety awareness programs for drivers and riders to promote safer roads.

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