

HEARD IN THE HOUSE

“Even though some areas have been declared as wetlands, nobody can stop farmers from cultivating their paddy fields and nobody can stop people from repairing or reconstructing their houses. But no construction will be allowed in vacant plots.”
Aleixo Sequeira, Environment Minister

“If new stations are announced in other States, people welcome them. Here, there are objections. Those objecting should submit their concerns in writing. We will conduct a proper study and forward the objections to the Centre”
Pramod Sawant, Chief Minister

“There is fear and anxiety in the minds of the villagers of Neura, Agassaim and Dongrim with regards to the newly proposed railway station on khazan lands in Neura. Extensive landfilling in cultivable land will lead to ecological and environmental destruction”
Viresh Borkar, St Andre MLA

“The real issue is whether the government has the will to act. This shouldn't be just another one-day session where the Chief Minister speaks and forgets everything. Declaring these villages as protected and providing incentives is the only way to ensure the survival of this traditional occupation (salt production) and encourage the youth to continue it”
Vijai Sardesai, Fatorda MLA

CM admits water deficit. Why are huge housing projects okayed then?

MLAs grill Sawant on water scarcity; CM says providing 24x7 supply not possible but aims for 4 hours a day by 2026; Lobo calls for halt of building licences in parched Calangute

Team Herald

PORVORIM: At a time when the Goa government is approving mega residential projects and allowing large-scale conversion of forests, orchards, and hillsides into settlement zones, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant admitted on Friday that providing 24x7 water supply to residents is not feasible.

Responding to a calling attention motion tabled by Bicholim MLA Chandrakant Shetye, Sawant told the State Assembly that the government's goal is to ensure every household receives water for just four hours a day by the end of 2026.

“I admit that it is not possible to provide water 24x7, but the government has

“I admit that it is not possible to provide water 24x7 but the government has plans to provide water for four hours to every household in the State and infrastructure for the same is being developed. It will be done before the end of 2026”

Pramod Sawant, Chief Minister

plans to ensure water supply for four hours a day to every household. Infrastructure development for this is underway and will be completed before 2026,” he said.

The admission raises a critical question: if the gov-

‘Calangute locals get water only for 30 mins every 2 days’

PORVORIM: Pushing for the issue of construction licences in the Calangute constituency to be suspended, MLA Michael Lobo highlighted the severe water crisis in the tourist hotspot, where residents receive water for just 30 minutes every two days. “The North coastal belt is turning into a concrete jungle, yet we don't have enough water for existing residents. There needs to be a serious discussion on this issue. If the government cannot ensure adequate water supply, then construction licences should be revoked—otherwise, we will face a severe crisis in the future,” Lobo warned.

BIG ISSUE

ernment cannot meet the basic water needs of its existing population, what is the justification for inviting more settlers through rampant real estate develop-

ment? Sawant stated that the Public Works Department (PWD) is working on upgrading treatment facilities, distribution networks, and storage systems.

“For Bicholim and Mayem, the PWD is constructing a 10 MLD water treatment plant at Menkurem, along with reservoirs, conveying, and distribution pipelines. Several augmentation schemes are

also in progress to improve water supply across the State. Additionally, PWD is implementing smart monitoring systems to detect leaks, optimise distribution, and improve efficiency, with the long-term vision of achieving 24x7 supply,” he said. Earlier, Shetye raised concerns over the persistent water shortages in North Goa, particularly in Bicholim and Mayem.

Sawant clarifies on State borrowing, highlights additional Central funds

Team Herald

PORVORIM: Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on Friday informed the Legislative Assembly that while the Goa government had a borrowing limit of Rs 4,500 crore, it had only availed of Rs 1,500 crore in loans.

During the discussion on the Goa Appropriation Bill 2024, Sawant stated, “I have not borrowed the full amount permitted. My limit was Rs 4,500 crore, but I have taken a loan of only Rs 1,500

crore. Additionally, we have received Rs 300 crore and Rs 1,185 crore in extra funds from the double-engine government.”

He further explained that in the previous financial year, the borrowing limit was Rs 4,300 crore, but the government took only Rs 2,500 crore, solely for capital expenditure. “Our fiscal deficit to GDP ratio remains under 3%,” he assured the House.

Earlier, while introducing the Goa Appropriation Bill 2024,

the Chief Minister sought approval for Rs 1,039.42 crore, of which Rs 469.33 crore is earmarked for revenue expenditure and Rs 570.09 crore for capital expenditure.

Sawant also noted that the State had initially projected Rs 450 crore in special assistance for the 2024-25 financial year. However, Goa has already received Rs 1,185.17 crore from the Government of India, with an additional Rs 300 crore expected by March 2025.

FUTURE LEADERS



School students watch the proceedings, while a photographer captures the day's happenings in Goa Legislative Assembly on Friday

Don't have to reply if matter is sub-judice: TCP Minister

Rane refuses to answer 2 starred, 5 unstarred questions on TCP, Yuri asks Speaker to intervene

Team Herald

PORVORIM: Town and Country Planning (TCP) Minister Vishwajit Rane on Friday told the Legislative Assembly that he will not provide answers to some of the legislative assembly questions (LAQs) pertaining to the TCP Department since the matters were sub-judice.

As soon as Speak-

er Ramesh Tawadkar took out question-hour session, Rane pointed out that the legislative assembly rules give him the leeway to deny answering questions under such circumstance. He said that he will not provide answers to two starred questions and five unstarred questions.

To this, Leader of the Opposition Yuri

Alemao suggested that these LAQs be postponed but the House did not entertain his request.

Yuri also requested the Minister to give reply to question stating that the matter is sub-judice and brought out to the notice of the House that other Ministers may too skip the LAQs citing court matters. He also urged the Speaker to give a ruling.

Govt to complete salt pan survey in 6 months, moots conservation policy

Of the hundreds of salt pans that existed across Goa, only 20 remain operational, Sawant says salt consumption has declined in the State

Team Herald

PORVORIM: The Goa government will complete its ongoing survey of all salt pans across the State within the next six months and formulate a policy for their conservation and support. Additionally, all salt pans will be officially notified, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant informed the Legislative Assembly on Friday.

Replying to a starred question by Sant Andre MLA Viresh Borkar, Sawant said the survey, conducted through the Goa State Biodiversity Board (GSBB), has onboarded experts from Goa University. Sawant emphasised that notifying all salt pans would aid in conservation while exploring industrial uses, as traditional consumption of Goan salt has declined significantly. He also assured the introduction of a scheme to support salt farmers.

Borkar pointed out that from the hundreds of salt pans that once functioned in Goa, only 20 remain operational, according to the government's list. He also noted that several salt pans in his constituency had not been surveyed. In response, the Chief Minister assured that the GSBB would involve local Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) in the survey process.

The government also admitted that no salt pan producers in Goa had availed benefits under the Government of India's Modified Namak Mazdoor Awas Yojana (MNMAY), a scheme for constructing dwelling units for salt workers. The scheme has since been transferred to the Goa Handicrafts, Rural, and Small Scale Industries Development Corporation

A preliminary survey in August last year identified operational salt pans in Pernem, Nerul, Ribandar, Mercos, Batim, and Quelossim, with Nerul producing the highest daily output of 5,000 kg of salt

Limited.

Raising a strong appeal for the revival of Goa's traditional salt-making industry, Fatorda MLA Vijai Sardesai urged the government to declare salt pans as protected areas and provide incentives to salt makers to sustain this centuries-old occupation.

Supporting Borkar's proposal to make Batim a model village for traditional salt production, Sardesai highlighted the cultural and historical significance of Goan salt. Citing Japan's premium bamboo salt, which sells for \$100 per 250 grams, he stressed that Goan salt has immense potential if properly branded and marketed.

However, Sardesai raised concerns over the rapid disappearance of salt pans, particularly in places like Arpora, where they have been converted into land for starred hotels. He demanded a firm assurance that salt pans would be declared protected areas and safeguarded in the Regional Plan.

Highlighting the role of dykes in protecting Goa's salt pans and low-lying areas, Sardesai called for a 30-year long-term plan to safeguard them, drawing lessons from the Netherlands' expertise in dyke management.

ZERO HOUR

Regularise contract staff employed by Goa govt, demands Vijai

PORVORIM: Fatorda MLA Vijai Sardesai on Friday urged the government to regularise contract staff working in various government departments, semi-government corporations, and autonomous bodies, citing a recent Supreme Court judgment mandating the regularisation of long-term employees performing essential functions in government institutions. The court also condemned the misuse of contractual employment in the public sector and stressed the need to prevent arbitrary termination of such employees. Sardesai highlighted a Legislative Assembly Question (LAQ) dated July 22, 2024, which revealed that 1,480 staff members are employed on a contract basis in the Directorate offices alone. He noted that when considering all government-affiliated institutions, the total number of contract workers could be in the tens of thousands, raising concerns about their job security and fair employment practices. In response, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant stated that he would “verify” the matter but did not provide any concrete assurance.

GSWA to inspect Maimollem Lake over land rights issues

PORVORIM: The Goa State Wetland Authority (GSWA) will conduct a physical site inspection of the periphery of Maimollem Lake, Vasco, next week to assess concerns raised by local residents regarding potential loss of land and cultivation rights after the lake was declared a wetland.

Responding to a Zero Hour mention by Vasco MLA Krishna 'Daji' Salkar in the Legislative Assembly on Friday, Environment Minister Aleixo Sequeira said, “We are aware of the issue. A committee, chaired by a retired judge, was formed to address public grievances. The committee's report has been submitted, and after discussions, the authority decided to conduct an on-site visit to assess the ground reality,” Sequeira said. The Minister assured that while the wetland designation imposes certain restrictions, it does not prevent farmers from cultivating paddy fields or homeowners from repairing or reconstructing houses. However, new construction on vacant plots will not be permitted. Earlier, Salkar highlighted fears among residents that the 50-metre buffer zone mandated under Wetland Rules could render their land unusable for future development.

Assembly rejects PUC report

Team Herald

PORVORIM: The Assembly on Friday rejected the Public Undertakings Committee (PUC) report after Legislative Affairs Minister Aleixo Sequeira argued that the committee's term had ended.

Leader of the Opposition Yuri Alemao had tabled the 22nd and 23rd reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) for the years 2014-15 and 2015-16. However, Sequeira contended that the reports could not be presented since the PUC's term ended on March 31, 2024. He suggested that the House could make a decision on the matter if it disagreed.

Speaker Ramesh Tawadkar clarified that a bulletin issued on February 10, 2024, had appointed Vasco MLA Krishna 'Daji' Salkar to the panel of Presiding Officers and Curchohem MLA Nileshe Cabral as a member of the Budget Committee.

Alemao countered, stating that Bulletin No. 150 clearly indicated all committees had been reconstituted. Following a vote, the report was rejected by 30-6 votes.

This development follows a report in **O Herald** on January 29 that which raised concerns over the status of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and PUC meetings convened by Congress MLA Altona D'Costa and Alemao, as both committees' terms had expired.

Later, the Speaker reconstituted various committees for 2025-2026.

FRAMED IN THE HOUSE



Leader of Opposition, Yuri Alemao, puts his point across during the Assembly Session



Agriculture Minister Ravi Naik in conversation with Poriem MLA Deviya Rane



Margao MLA Digambar Kamat greets TCP minister Vishwajit Rane during Question Hour