

Canconkars oppose highway widening, demand tunnel at Karmal Ghat

Feasibility study backs residents' concerns about ecological damage and fragile terrain prone to landslides, recommends tunnel construction for NH-66 project through Western Ghats section

Team Herald

MARGAO: Residents of Canacona have strongly opposed the proposed widening of NH-66 (formerly NH-17) along the existing alignment at Karmal Ghats, urging authorities to opt for a tunnel alternative instead. Their concerns have been supported by South Goa MP Captain Viriato Fernandes, who has written to Union Highway Minister Nitin Gadkari, requesting a reconsideration of the project.

Backing their argument is a feasibility study conducted by Aarvee Associates Architects Engineers & Consultants Pvt Ltd., which was commissioned by the Goa PWD. The study examined the stretch of NH-66 from Patradevi to Pollem, with particular focus on the Karmal Ghat section between Km 570 and Km 582. According to the findings, the terrain is fragile and prone to landslides, making a tunnel the safer and more sustainable alternative.

Environmental concerns form a major part of the



opposition. Karmal Ghat is an integral part of the Western Ghats, a globally recognized biodiversity hotspot, home to protected wildlife such as tigers, bison, pangolins, and various species of deer. Many of these animals are covered under Schedule-I and Schedule-II of the Wildlife Protection Act. Residents fear that expanding the road would fragment habitats, increase human-wildlife conflict, and cause irreparable damage to the fragile ecosystem. Several residents recall

that just four decades ago, Karmal Ghat was an evergreen forest where travellers needed sweaters even during summer months due to its cool climate. Over the years, parts of the landscape have changed due to monoculture teak plantations, but much of the natural forest is slowly regenerating, making its preservation all the more important.

In his letter to Gadkari, Captain Fernandes highlighted recent disasters in Kerala and Karnataka, citing the Wayanad land-

slides and road collapses along the Ankola highway as warnings of what could happen if infrastructure projects in the Western Ghats do not account for the region's ecological sensitivity. He also raised concerns about the impact on tribal communities who depend on the forests for their livelihoods, arguing that the project violates the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, as proper consultation and consent procedures have

TUNNEL OVER ROAD EXPANSION

- The report highlights that the existing road has substandard horizontal and vertical curves, especially between Km 579 and Km 582, making it hazardous for vehicles
- It proposes a 1.45 km twin tunnel as a superior solution, which would improve road geometry and safety
- Vehicles using the tunnel could maintain speeds of up to 100 kmph, compared to the current 30-40 kmph limit on the winding ghat road.
- The tunnel option would prevent large-scale deforestation. While road widening would require clearing 11.7 hectares of forest land, a tunnel would allow for natural revegetation post-construction.
- With an estimated 22,000 vehicles using the highway daily, the tunnel's shorter and flatter route would cut fuel consumption and save approximately Rs 8 crore annually in fuel costs, and reduce carbon emissions as well

not been followed.

The viability of tunnel construction has already been demonstrated in the region. The Konkan Railway successfully operates a tunnel through the same ghat section, and railway officials have confirmed that the required technology and expertise for such construction are available. The estimated cost of tunnel construction ranges from Rs 50-100 crore per kilometre per track, which resi-

dents argue is a worthwhile investment considering the long-term benefits in terms of safety, efficiency, and environmental preservation.

While residents acknowledge the need for improved road infrastructure, they insist that development should not come at the cost of ecological destruction and safety risks. They stress that in the 21st century, infrastructure planning must balance progress with environmental responsibility.

Borim bridge row: Only 70k sq mtrs land acquired, says govt

Team Herald

MARGAO: Ahead of the February 17 National Green Tribunal (NGT) hearing on the petition filed by Loutolim farmers opposing construction of the new Borim bridge, the State government has expressed hope that it will receive a favourable verdict and contended that it had reduced the amount of land to be acquired for the bridge.

"The NGT is currently reviewing the new Borim bridge project, and its ruling will be binding on all stakeholders, including the government. I have always listened to the sentiments of locals and have engaged in discussions with them on multiple occasions. I have also initiated meetings with the Chief Minister and Union Highway Minister Nitin Gadkari to ensure their concerns are addressed," Environment Minister Aleixo Sequeira, told reporters here on Tuesday.

"Following these discussions, the initial land acquisition of 1,20,000 sq. metres has been reduced to approximately 70,000 sq. metres, minimising the impact on local landowners. I remain hopeful that the

NGT's decision will reflect the interests of the people while ensuring a balanced approach to development," he added.

The farmers of Loutolim and Borim have been raising concerns over the bridge construction's impact on khazan land, which is designated under the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ). While the CRZ Notification permits certain activities like standalone bridges, the farmers argue that CRZ khazan land regulations specifically allow only agriculture and pisciculture. "The CRZ Khazan aspect has been completely ignored. These lands are meant for agriculture or fish farming, not construction," said Albert Pinheiro, President of the Carbot, Mascasana & Bebedo Tenants Association in Loutolim. The farmers have also alleged that the authorities are manipulating project dimensions to present the area as below the 150,000 square metre threshold, thus evading mandatory clearance under the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006. Based on their calculations, they allege the area consumed by construction would total 227,800 square metres.

Balli PHC report flags health issues plaguing residents around Cuncolim industrial estate

28 people report respiratory problems, 29 have skin allergies, 11 suffer from asthma; locals afflicted with cancer, kidney disease, sinus problems and TB

Team Herald

MARGAO: Following an alarming report from the Balli Primary Health Centre (PHC), Cuncolim MLA and Leader of the Opposition (LoP) Yuri Alemão has written to Health Minister Vishwajit Rane to conduct a comprehensive health impact assessment to identify and address the environmental and health issues affecting people of his constituency.

It is to be noted that the Balli PHC has conducted a survey of around 449 houses in areas adjoining the Cuncolim Industrial Estate, wherein many people were found suffering from various diseases due to industrial pollution.

**“We demand a thorough health assessment for the people of Cuncolim, who are being affected by the dumping of hazardous waste and rising levels of water and air pollution, at the Industrial Estate – Yuri Alemão
Leader of Opposition**

"In this survey, people have complained about pollution and foul smell, saying they are allergic to it. I had raised this issue during the zero hour of the just-concluded assembly session, and the Health

Minister has assured me to conduct a survey of the Cuncolim Municipal area," said Alemão.

As per the report of PHC-Balli, they conducted this survey in Simplex, Kegdicotto, Masconi, Belathemb, Gullecotto, Bhatti, Takaband and the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) area.

Around 28 people were found afflicted with respiratory problems, 29 have skin allergies, 11 people are suffering from asthma, one is diagnosed with chronic kidney disease, 8 people have sinus problems, two have a past history of tuberculosis, one is suffering from psoriasis, and others have complained of dust

allergies and eye burning sensation. One person is also diagnosed with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease.

Alemão said that along with hazardous waste dumped in Cuncolim Industrial Estate (CIE), the escalating levels of water and air pollution in Cuncolim, particularly due to the fish processing units and steel manufacturing units at the Cuncolim Industrial Estate, demand immediate and thorough investigation as people are facing health issues.

The people of Cuncolim have been protesting against polluting units at the industrial estate for years now.

Loutolim sluice gate auction: Fishers unable to pay upfront

Team Herald

MARGAO: Tenant associations in Loutolim have strongly opposed a government amendment requiring leaseholders of sluice gate fishing rights to deposit 20% of the auction amount before signing lease agreements. They argue the move will burden local fishermen, who rely on these leases for their livelihoods.

The associations have submitted a representa-

tion to the Revenue Minister, urging a reconsideration of the amendment. Lease agreements remain on hold as the required deposit has not been made.

Alberto Pinheiro, chairman of the Carbot Cantor Mascasana & Bebedo Tenant Association, warned that local fishermen cannot afford the upfront payment. He stressed that maintaining the sluice gates is crucial, as they regulate water levels essential

for both fishing and agriculture.

The associations are calling for the reinstatement of the previous rule allowing payment in four instalments. Rising labour costs and maintenance expenses for the sluice gates and bunds further complicate the situation. Pinheiro highlighted that maintenance costs, including replacing sluice gate wooden doors every two years, run into lakhs of rupees.

MMC hands over upkeep of Margao municipal garden to Forest Dept

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Margao Municipal Council (MMC) has begun the process of shifting the responsibility for maintaining its historic municipal garden to the Forest Department, MMC Chairperson Damodar Shirodkar confirmed.

It may be recalled that the decision was

formalized during the council's meeting on January 3, where a resolution was passed with the support of the majority of ruling councillors, despite objections from some members.

It is to be noted that the upper section of the garden, with a designated play area for children, is already under the Forest Department.

The festival's budget stands at approximately Rs 11 lakh, with Conceicao Dias named as King Momo. Funding has been secured through support from the Department of Art and Culture, local residents, well-wishers, and contributions from the MLA and committee members.

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Local fisherfolk fear displacement as wholesale market tightens regulations

Demand flexibility in timings, permission to continue retail sale outside the market

Team Herald

MARGAO: The impending commissioning of Goa's modernised wholesale fish market has raised concerns among traditional fishing communities, who fear that new regulations and operational restrictions could disrupt their livelihoods. The newly constructed facility, featuring concrete platforms, aims to improve hygiene and efficiency, replacing the chaotic and often unsanitary conditions of the current market. However, the transition has sparked tensions between various stakeholder groups.

Local fishermen, including ramponkars, magkars, and cantankars, worry that fixed market hours and new access policies could make it difficult for them to sell their daily catch. "The sea doesn't operate on a schedule," said a veteran fisherman. "We can't predict exactly when our boats will return. The market must accommodate our traditional fishing patterns, not the other way around."

Complicating the situation further is the presence of migrant retail vendors, who have become an integral part of the market despite its designation as a wholesale facility. These vendors buy fish in bulk and sell by weight, operating on the fringes of the official system. Over time, their sopo (entry fee) payments have contributed significantly to the revenue of the South Goa Planning and Development Authority (SGPDA). In addition to fees collected from fish-laden vehicles entering the market hourly, these vendors have provided a steady income to both the PDA and pri-

“The sea doesn't operate on a schedule. We can't predict exactly when our boats will return. The market must accommodate our traditional fishing patterns, not the other way around – Veteran ramponnkar

vate sopo collectors.

Adding to the complexity are Goan fish vendors who operate outside the market compound, specifically on the paved area near the PWD road. These vendors claim they were granted permission by former Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar and have since registered with the SGPDA. They argue that their status as traditional fishermen gives them the right to continue selling at this location, regardless of the new facility's regulations.

The SGPDA, led by Chairman Krishna Salkar and board members including Margao MLA Digambar Kamat and Fatorda MLA Vijai Sardesai, now faces a difficult balancing act. The authority must decide whether to enforce strict wholesale-only operations or find a way to accommodate the various groups that have long depended on the market for their livelihood.

Traditional fishermen are particularly adamant about being distinguished from both migrant vendors and large-scale commercial traders. "We're not importing fish from across State borders like the traders do," one fisherman emphasised. "We bring fresh catch straight from our waters to consumers. That should be recognised."



“The Goa government's latest scheme is an online lottery worth Rs 1.5 crore. However, I believe the government would generate better revenue by regularizing matka gambling. People are struggling to make ends meet, and the youth are unemployed - we need to create jobs for them, not tempt them with easy money. With people starving for food, how can they afford to buy lottery tickets? This seems like just another scheme to be showcased in their next manifesto. Is the government genuinely trying to empower people, or is this just a publicity stunt? My suggestion is to regularize matka. We've already legalized casinos, so where is that revenue going? What about loan money and funds from events – Mariano Ferrao

Social activist

GOA GOVT'S RS 1.5 CRORE LOTTERY: A RECIPE FOR MORE CYBER FRAUD?

Lotteries offering huge prize money have suddenly become a rage in India. Ticket sales are shooting up every month, with some State government-run lotteries registering 50 to 100 per cent growth in the last year. The Goa Government too has floated an online lottery offering Rs 1.5 crore prize money. Herald Media asked people if this was a good idea, or will it offer more opportunities for cyber fraudsters?

“If people buy lotteries from these fraudsters and, by chance, the number is drawn and there's a genuine ticket too, it will lead to trouble. Another concern is how the funds will be utilized. The government must exercise caution and prevent people from buying fraudulent tickets, especially those who purchase lotteries due to difficult circumstances. It's the government's responsibility to safeguard against such scams.” – Trajano D'Mello

Political analyst

“Goa has been finished by looting it illegally. Now the government has come up with a new scheme, legally. So many decades have passed, people are playing matka, though officially it is illegal. Even two (former) MLAs are allegedly associated with it. Why don't you first legalise matka? Matka is much more affordable. With a Rs 1.5 crore online lottery, are you not going to open the doors for cyber crime? Already, there are so many cyber frauds day in and day out. Day and night, police are warning the people. They are only warning; what are the precautions? Goa has become a gambling den. – Anthony D'Silva

Social activist

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