

TRADERS SOUND ALARM OVER FIRE SAFETY, PARKING CRISIS AT MARGAO'S NEW MARKET

Overhead tank, hydrant repairs delayed; illegal hawkers take over footpaths and parking spaces; market traders decry govt inaction

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Margao municipal new market continues to grapple with illegal encroachments, inadequate parking facilities, and the absence of necessary safety measures, with authorities yet to take decisive action. Market association members have repeatedly raised these concerns with the Margao Municipal Council (MMC), but their grievances remain unaddressed. The number of vendors illegally occupying footpaths has also increased, making it difficult for shopkeepers to conduct business.

Authorities, including the MMC and the Fire Brigade, had previously met with the District Collector's administration, where the Margao MLA was present, to discuss solutions. However, progress has been slow. A crucial overhead water tank, which was among the proposed measures, has yet to be constructed. Traders argue that the inaction has left the market vulnerable, especially in the event of another fire.

"It is sad that we are in the middle of February 2025, and no solutions have been implemented. After the last



FILE PIC: ADITYA BIDRE

Firefighters struggled to access a building on fire in December 2023. Over a year later, the situation remains the same, say traders

“There are hydrants, but we still need more. Without the tank and proper connections, these hydrants are useless. The illegal encroachments have also taken away much-needed parking space, which is a serious issue. It affects both customers and emergency vehicles like the fire brigade. Many buildings have converted their basements—originally designated for parking—into commercial spaces

— Vinod Shirodkar, former president, traders' association

“The market's business is not what it used to be. Competition within the market is one thing, but the bigger issue is vendors from other areas selling goods illegally—not just on the roads and footpaths but also in key locations like the SGPD area and Rawanfond

— Manohar Ajaonkar, former Minister

not been built, and work has not even begun. There are hydrants here, but they are non-functional because they lack a water connection. We had proposed a site at the old pickup stand, but nothing has moved forward. I will continue to follow it up. Another major issue is the illegal vendors occupying roads and footpaths in the evenings from Bank of India to Station Road. This is hurting businesses in the market.”

Former Association President Vinod Shirodkar echoed these concerns, emphasizing that he has been raising the issue for years without any results. “There are hydrants, but we still need more. However, without the tank and proper connections, these hydrants are useless. The illegal encroachments have also taken away much-needed parking space, which is a serious issue. It affects both customers and emergency vehicles like the fire brigade. Many buildings have converted their basements—originally designated for parking—into commercial spaces. Authorities should take action and restore these basements to their intended use to ease the congestion.”

fire, it was only by the grace of God that people were not injured. It wasn't like one of those huge fires we hear about in other cities, but the lessons from that incident seem to have been ignored. Shops were burnt, but what about the difficulties faced by the firefighters? Their

vehicles couldn't reach on time due to the narrow road space, which is further blocked by illegal encroachments and haphazard parking,” said a local shopkeeper. Gopal Naik, President of the New Market Traders Association, expressed frustration over the delay in install-

ing the overhead tank. “Ever since the fire in December 2023, we have raised this issue multiple times with the authorities, both in person and in writing. I believe there were two meetings, but I'm not sure of the latest outcome. What's clear is that the overhead tank has

Margao Comunidade reclaims land after 20 years, razes illegal shops, eateries on Mungul-Colva road

Political interference delayed action, but law prevailed, says Comunidade president

Team Herald

MARGAO: Illegal commercial structures on Comunidade land at Mungul-Margao were demolished on Wednesday, bringing an end to a nearly two-decade-long issue. The demolition, carried out under the supervision of the South Goa Administrator of Comunidades, saw the participation of Margao Comunidade members and police officials.

The structures, which included small businesses such as eateries and shops, had been operating without permission along the Mungul-Colva road. Margao Comunidade President Savio Correia described the demolition as the culmination of an effort spanning over a decade. “The process began around 2015, and a demolition order was passed in 2017. However, it took us eight years to get this order implemented. Today, we have finally succeeded,” he said, crediting the District Administration, particularly the South Goa Collector,



RAJ RODRIGUES

Additional Collectors, and the Administrator of Comunidades, for their support. He also acknowledged the shareholders of Margao Comunidade for remaining steadfast on the issue. Addressing the delay in executing the order, Correia blamed political interference. “Sadly, lawbreakers had the support of lawmakers. But as we have seen today, the law stands above all. Despite all pressures, we have carried out the demolition,” he asserted.

Margao Comunidade Attorney Celestino Noronha

confirmed that the land belonged to the Comunidade and that the businesses had been operating illegally for the past 20 years. He expressed disappointment over the previous lack of administrative action despite the 2017 demolition order. However, he credited the current Administrator of Comunidades for taking decisive steps and noted that intervention from the South Goa District Collectorate had led to necessary directions being issued.

Additional District Collector Ganesh Barve explained

Shopkeepers claim they paid rent, believed shops were legal

MARGAO: Several shop owners cried foul over how the demolition was conducted, alleging that they were misled about the legality of their businesses.

Many claimed they had been paying rent—along with hefty deposits—to a businessman from Colva, under the assumption that he had obtained all necessary permissions. “We invested lakhs of rupees to set up our shops, believing everything was legal. No one told us otherwise,” said one of the affected shopkeepers. They also questioned how the authorities had sanctioned water and electricity connections if the structures were illegal and how the land—now being described as Comunidade property—was previously developed if it had once been paddy fields.

Shop owners also expressed frustration over the lack of clear communication regarding the demolition timeline. “We were initially told the demolition was scheduled for two days ago but was postponed. No one informed us about today's action,” one vendor complained. A tea shop owner, who was at home when she heard about the demolition, said her shop was the first to be razed, with all her goods still inside. “They should have at least given me time to remove my belongings,” she lamented.

that while the demolition order had been upheld by the Administrative Tribunal, its execution faced delays. Initially scheduled for Tuesday, the demolition was postponed to Wednesday due to technical reasons. He also noted that occupants were given time to remove their belongings before the structures were razed.

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RTI commission pulls up PIO, orders probe into missing P'yat circular

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Goa State Information Commission has pulled up the public information officer (PIO) of the Directorate of Panchayats for failing to provide crucial government records under the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

The Commission has directed the PIO to locate and furnish a 1965 circular that outlines guidelines for conducting panchayat body meetings. The order came in response to a petition filed by Sharlet Fernandes of the Village Panchayat of Majorda-Calata-Utorda, who sought access to the document but was informed that it was not available in departmental records.

Initially, the PIO of the Majorda-Calata-Utorda Village Panchayat also failed to provide the requested information, prompting the Commission to reprimand the

Panchayat Secretary. The Commission noted that the PIO at the Directorate of Panchayats had responded to the RTI application in just three days, dismissing the request without making an effort to trace the information or consult other public authorities.

Expressing concern over this trend, the Commission observed that PIOs often cite non-availability of records without conducting proper searches. It stressed that if information is not readily accessible, the PIO is duty-bound to locate and provide it. Fernandes had submitted a circular dated October 10, 2023, referencing a memorandum from May 14, 1965—strong evidence that the information exists in government records.

The Commission criticized the PIO's conduct as a clear denial of information, undermining the spirit of the RTI Act, 2005. It has

ordered an inquiry into the matter, directing officials to trace the memorandum and submit a report by March 17. The Commission has also issued a show-cause notice to the PIO, demanding an explanation as to why penalty or disciplinary action should not be taken under Section 20(1) of the RTI Act.

Reacting to the order, Fernandes expressed frustration over the repeated denial of access to crucial files. “The Panchayat has blatantly refused me access to documents that should be presented during meetings, which is a gross injustice and a violation of my democratic rights,” she said. She also pointed out the significance of the 1965 circular and the authorities' failure to locate it. “The department has misplaced a key memorandum that lays out the conduct of meetings and has made no effort to trace it,” she added.

FOGGY DAYS

ANISHA FRANCIS



Fog wafts off of Raitollem Lake near Curtorim several hours after sunrise on Wednesday morning

Colva beach suffers as creek pollution leaves it covered with sludge

Team Herald

MARGAO: Senior officials from the Water Resources Department (WRD), along with Benaalim MLA Venzy Viegas and Colva panchayat members conducted a joint inspection to assess the severe pollution of Colva Creek, and the unsightly black sludge that has now spread over a part of Colva beach.

Colva panchayat members expressed concern over the deteriorating condition of the beach due to the polluted water. She attributed the contamination to a public toilet at the beach, alleging that it was discharging wastewater into the open.

It may be recalled that the panchayat has been in conflict with the gov-

ernment over this issue, having lodged complaints with various authorities, including the Goa State Pollution Control Board (GSPCB), which had taken action against those operating the toilet.

During Wednesday's inspection, Viegas lamented that a WRD proposal for regular cleaning of the creek and beach—suggested by him—was rejected due to cost concerns. He pointed out that WRD had estimated the cost at Rs 15-20 lakh, but argued that the expense would have been justified given the persistent pollution problem.

The MLA further stated that even if small-scale measures were implemented now, the issue would resurface within

15 days, emphasizing the need for a long-term solution. In the interim, he urged the WRD to implement short-term measures to mitigate the pollution until a permanent fix is in place.

Viegas also invited BJP leaders, who are scheduled to hold a function in Colva soon, to visit the beach and witness the situation firsthand. He criticized the BJP-led government for repeatedly ignoring his concerns, despite raising them multiple times in past Legislative Assembly sessions.

Looking ahead, he noted that a tourism festival is planned at the beach in May and expressed hope that the area would be cleaned by then—not through temporary fixes, but with a lasting solution.

MAX. TEMP 34.5 °C
MIN. TEMP 21.6 °C

idharudhar



The moment we step inside, no more calling them corrupt!

Margao's century-old municipal library languishes without full-time librarian since 2016

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Margao Municipal Library, a century-old institution, has been operating without a full-time librarian for nearly a decade. In recent months, its daily affairs have been managed by staff from the technical section due to the absence of both a librarian and an assistant librarian. The latter is currently on maternity leave and is expected to resume duties in June.

It has come to light that the Margao Municipal Council (MMC) has not filled the vacant position of a full-time librarian since 2016, raising concerns over the civic body's neglect of the library.

In 2024, an audit team emphasised the importance of libraries in providing access to information, promoting



education, and supporting research. The report noted that library maintenance is an ongoing process that requires attention to physical infrastructure, collections, technology, and user services. Despite

this, authorities have failed to take action to strengthen the library's administration.

MMC Chairperson Damodar Shirodkar acknowledged that the librarian's post remains vacant but defended the current

system of management. “Yes, the post of full-time librarian is still unfilled. However, the library is being managed by the assistant librarian. In her absence, we have deputed staff from the technical section to

oversee operations. Whenever necessary, we also seek assistance from the assistant librarian,” he explained. He further assured that the library would be upgraded with an expenditure of nearly Rs 50 lakh in the

■ An examination of the library's records revealed that the last physical verification of library books took place in January 2021. According to the report, the library had a total of 19,272 books in its collection at the time. The report also highlighted that 133 books issued to library members had not been returned by their due dates.

■ The Portuguese-era collection of rare books continues to remain in need of attention. Plans to relocate this historic collection have been delayed due to the lack of suitable cupboards. Although the process of shifting the rare books has begun, the entire collection will only be properly secured once the full set of cupboards arrives

near future.

However, many citizens are dissatisfied with the state of affairs. Savio Coutinho, a resident of Margao, criticized the civic body for its indifference. “It is shameful that since 2016, the MMC has not filled the vacant post of full-time librarian. Now, with the assistant librarian on leave, we can only imagine how the library is being run. The delay in hiring raises suspicions—perhaps there are hidden motives behind it,” he alleged.

Frequent library visitor Krishna Naik also expressed frustration over the lack of qualified personnel. “We don't understand how the library's functions can be handled by staff from the technical section. Libraries need trained professionals to ensure smooth operations, but here, it seems everything is being taken for granted,” he said.