

Electricity workers reject privatisation of power, warn of nationwide protests

Say Union Finance Minister announced plans to privatise power generation in the budget; allege 'prepaid smart meter' scheme a ruse to handover power sector to large corporates for 93 months

Team Herald

MARGAO: The All India Federation of Electricity Employees (AIFE) has strongly opposed the Central Government's ongoing push for privatisation in the electricity sector, warning of nationwide protests against the move.

Speaking at a press conference in Margao on Thursday, Mohan Sharma, General Secretary of AIFE, alongside other union office bearers, told reporters that all unions and associations of power workers and engineers will meet on February 23 in Nagpur to strategise a nationwide response against the government's privatization policies.

Sharma explained that, in the past, the Govern-

ment of India had nationalised most private power utilities, establishing State-owned electricity boards. By 1972, nearly all private power licenses were absorbed by these boards. However, in 1991, the government began allowing private entrepreneurs to establish power projects. Since 2014, it has made persistent attempts to privatise all three sectors of power utility—generation, transmission, and distribution, he alleged.

To advance this agenda, the government has introduced the Electricity Amendment Bill five times (2014, 2018, 2020, 2021, and 2022), he said. Sharma emphasized that power workers and engineers have fought these provi-

“Since 2014, the government has made persistent attempts to privatise all three sectors of power utility—generation, transmission, and distribution. To advance this agenda, the government introduced the Electricity Amendment Bill five times, meeting resistance from workers every time. It is now using backdoor tactics to privatise power utilities through joint ventures, franchises, tenders for private transmission, parallel licenses, and the introduction of prepaid smart meters

— Mohan Sharma, general secy, AIFE

sions through nationwide strikes, leading to the temporary withholding of the 2022 amendment Bill by the government.

However, he alleged that the government is now using backdoor tactics to privatise power utilities through joint ventures, franchises, tenders for private distribution and transmission, parallel licenses, and the intro-

duction of prepaid smart meters. Sharma also cited specific examples of privatisation attempts, including power distribution in Puducherry, power generation and distribution in Jammu & Kashmir, and distribution in Chandigarh and Uttar Pradesh. Furthermore, Sharma accused the Central government of attempting to hand over India's power sector to large

PRIVATISATION ATTEMPTS

>> Power distribution in Puducherry

>> Generation and distribution in Jammu & Kashmir

>> Distribution in Uttar Pradesh and Chandigarh, where 800 workers and engineers were allegedly forced into retirement by the corporate entity

corporate conglomerates like Adani, Ambani, Tata, and Reliance.

He pointed out that during the recent presentation of the financial budget, the Finance Minister an-

nounced plans to privatise public sector units, including power generation and distribution.

One of the latest efforts by the government, according to the federation, is the introduction of a nationwide prepaid smart meter project, which would hand over control of the power distribution sector to private companies and corporations for a period of 93 months.

Additionally, it was noted that on February 1, the government finalised a tender allowing Goenka Company to take over power distribution in Chandigarh. Following the takeover, Goenka Company reportedly forced the retirement of 800 workers and engineers,

P'yat opposes Rly station in Sarzora, plans missive to Union Minister

Team Herald

MARGAO: In the wake of sustained protests by Sarzora villagers against the proposed railway station in their village, the local panchayat has now formally backed the agitation. In a special meeting convened to address the issue, the Sarzora panchayat body passed a resolution to write to Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, conveying the village's strong opposition to the project. Sources indicated that the letter would likely be dispatched this week and that the issue is expected to be raised at the next gram sabha meeting.

It may be recalled that earlier this week, there was a large-scale protest by Sarzora vil-

lagers, where residents took to the streets questioning the government's decision to set up a railway station in their village. They criticized the authorities for ignoring their long-standing demand for a road overbridge at the Sarzora railway crossing, a critical need for daily commuters, including schoolchildren. Panchayat members, led by Sarpanch Leona Fernandes and member Sabita Mascarenhas, had submitted a memorandum to Velim MLA Cruz Silva, who attended the protest, urging him to intervene and push for the scrapping of the railway station plans.

The memorandum emphasized that Sarzora is a tranquil village, rich in biodiversity,

and that residents have consistently resisted projects that threaten its peaceful environment. The villagers cited past efforts to block high-rise developments, warning that the railway station would bring an influx of migrants, lead to unregulated commercial activity, and potentially increase crime in the area. They pointed out that with Margao station just eight kilometers away and Balli station even closer, the necessity of another station in Sarzora was highly questionable.

Highlighting the ecological sensitivity of the region, the memorandum described Sarzora as an agricultural hub with vast rice fields, coconut plantations, and a biodiverse habitat that includes leopards and medicinal plants. Villagers fear that the station's construction would not only destroy

the area's green cover but also disrupt the delicate ecosystem sustained by the Sarzora lake, which irrigates a large portion of farmland.

While reaffirming that they are not against development, the villagers stressed that they would oppose any unplanned projects that pose a threat to their way of life. The Velim MLA, Silva, after receiving the memorandum, assured the villagers of his support and pledged to take up the issue with the government. With the panchayat now formally aligning with the public opposition, the villagers remain firm in their stand, determined to resist any attempts to push the project forward.

TOXIC PADDLE POOL

VINCENT BRAGANZA



A man allows his buffalo to cool off in the murky, contaminated water of the Colva creek flowing onto Colva beach on Thursday

Margao carnival parade on March 2; no political floats, says MMC

Team Herald

MARGAO: As in previous years, the Margao carnival float procession will take place along the route from Holy Spirit Junction to the Margao Municipality Circle.

The parade will feature only traditional art floats, with politically themed floats strictly prohibited.

A screening committee will be set up to enforce this policy, announced Margao Municipal Council Chairperson Damodar Shirodkar.

The Margao Carnival Committee met on Wednesday, with Chairperson Shirodkar, Vice-Chairperson Babita

Naik, Carnival Committee Chairman Camilo Barreto, and other councillors in attendance. The event is being organized by the Margao Municipal Council in collaboration with the Tourism Department and will be held on March 2.

For this year's event, Camilo Barreto has been appointed as the Carnival Committee Chairman, Sandra Fernandes as the General Secretary, and Milagrina Gomes as the Treasurer.

During the meeting, Chairperson Shirodkar emphasized that volunteers would be deployed to manage the crowd and ensure a smooth ex-

perience for spectators, particularly by preventing congestion near the stage during the float viewing.

Carnival Committee President Camilo Barreto added that an ambulance and a fire brigade vehicle would be stationed at the event site for safety. Additionally, the necessary application forms for float participation will soon be made available.

The event's inauguration will be attended by Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, Tourism Minister Rohan Khaunte, MLA Digambar Kamat, and other local MLAs, ministers, and municipal councillors.

Konkani organisations in Goa, K'taka band together to push for Romi script recognition

The groups are working together to organise the All India Konknni Maha Sabha in Goa

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Global Romi Lipi Abhiyan (GRLA) has intensified its efforts to unite Konkani associations in Goa in the fight for justice for the Roman script. As part of this mission, GRLA representatives recently met with office bearers and committee members of the Dalgado Konknni Academy (DKA) to explore avenues for collaboration.

During the meeting, discussions focused on joint advocacy strategies to push for the recognition of Roman Script Konkani.

Kennedy Afonso, President of GRLA, stated that the meeting was attended by key figures from both organizations, including Celso Fernandes (President, DKA), Tomazinho Cardoz, Daniel D'Souza, Vincy Quadros, Afonso (Bond) Gonsalves, and Fr. Myron Barretto from DKA, along with Michael Gracias (Secretary, GRLA) and Ansh Bandedkar (Treasurer, GRLA).

Afonso described the discussions as productive, saying, "We are pleased with the outcome. Both GRLA and DKA have agreed to work together in support of the Romi Konkani movement."

He stressed that a united front among all Konkani associations in Goa and beyond would make it possible to secure equal status for Roman Script Konkani in the Official Language Act.

"This meeting marks a crucial step forward," Afonso added. "GRLA plans to engage with the Tiatr Academy of Goa (TAG), Tiatranchi Sounstha, and other Konkani associations soon. We are confident that they will stand with us to strengthen the Romi Konkani movement."

GRLA has already garnered support from several organizations in Karnataka, including Maand Sobhann, Poetica, and the Karnataka Konknni Lekakancho Sangh. These groups are working together to organise the All India Konknni Maha Sabha in Goa.

Unannounced digging causes confusion in Salcete

Team Herald

MARGAO: Digging for sewerage pipelines, gas pipelines, and other infrastructure work on busy roads in Salcete has been hampering the free movement of vehicles for several months, leaving residents worried that it may snowball into a Panjim-like situation.

Currently, road excavation is underway in Gogal Housing Board, Ramnagri, Malbhat, Borda, Davorlim, and other areas. Notably, the work is being carried out only during daytime, adding to the inconvenience of road users, particularly office-goers. Roads and lanes are being closed arbitrarily at the discretion of site supervisors, without proper alternative traffic arrangements for commuters. The absence of police personnel to regulate traffic on these narrow roads is further contributing to congestion and accidents.

For instance, a few days ago, the Ramnagri road was closed for four-wheelers due to ongo-



ing excavation. However, the concerned department failed to provide any alternate route, leaving vehicle owners struggling to reach their destinations.

Suresh Naik, a resident of Ramnagri, highlighted that in several places, roads have been dug up, reducing their width, making it difficult for vehicles to pass. He pointed out that people traveling from Ramnagri to Gogol were forced to take a long detour via Davorlim to reach their destination. "No prior intimation was given before closing busy roads meant for vehicular traffic," he said.

Sandeep Naik from Gogal

“In Gogol, particularly at the Housing Board, roads were dug up, and while the work was completed, the roads have not been repaired. Several dug-up roads have been left unattended for over three months

— Sandeep Naik, Gogol local

expressed frustration over the incomplete repair work. "In Gogol, particularly at the Housing Board, roads were dug up, and while the work

was completed, the roads have not been repaired. Several dug-up roads have been left unattended for over three months," he said. He also alleged that well-maintained tarred roads were unnecessarily damaged during excavation and have yet to be restored.

The digging of busy roads has added to pollution and traffic congestion due to the dust it generates. Additionally, road closures and lane restrictions have disrupted the normal traffic flow, leading to severe congestion.

Residents are increasingly frustrated with the slow pace of work, as excavation is only being carried out during the day, instead of utilizing night hours to minimize inconvenience to road users.

A supervisor from the company responsible for the road digging assured that all dug-up roads would be repaired. "Tarring of the roads has already begun in some parts of Salcete, and the remaining work will be completed as soon as possible," he stated.

South Goa police register 70 assault cases in 2024

Team Herald

MARGAO: South Goa witnessed 70 cases of voluntarily causing grievous hurt or causing hurt with weapons in 2024. According to information obtained from the police, 69 have been detected, and most have been chargesheeted in court. In comparison, police stations in South Goa had registered 80 cases of hurt in 2023, of which 79 were detected and chargesheeted. In 2022, 82 cases were registered, with 77 of them detected.

A senior police officer explained that in offences related to causing hurt, the injured person is sent to a hospital for medical examination, and the medical report obtained plays a crucial role in the investigation. "When a complaint of hurt is registered at a police station, the injured person undergoes a medical examination, and based on the medical report, an offence is registered," the officer said.

Assault cases typically include offences such as causing grievous hurt by dangerous weapons, causing hurt to extort property or to constrain an illegal act, causing hurt by means of poison, causing hurt to extort a confession, or to compel the restoration of property, deterring a public servant from duty, causing hurt on provocation, and causing hurt by an act that endangers life or safety of others.

Margao advocate Vinay Patker explained that the legal provision under which an accused is booked determines the punishment for voluntarily causing hurt. "As per the law, except in cases covered under Section 334, whoever voluntarily causes hurt shall be punished with imprisonment for a term extending up to one year, or with a fine of up to Rs 1,000, or both," he said.

Governor backs TAG's efforts to promote art form in Kerala

Team Herald

MARGAO: Goa Governor P.S. Sreedharan Pillai has assured full support to the Tiatr Academy of Goa (TAG) in its efforts to introduce the vibrant cultural heritage of Tiatr to Kerala.

During a recent meeting at Raj Bhavan, a delegation led by TAG President Anthony Barbosa, along with Vice President Marcos Gonsalves, member Fr. Doel Dias, William Fernandes, Jesus Antao, Simon Barretto, and Member Secretary Suresh Divkar, discussed a proposal to raise awareness of Tiatr among the Konkani-speaking community in Kerala.

The Governor expressed keen interest in learning more about Tiatr, a unique dramatic art form with a legacy spanning 133 years, and was



particularly impressed by its role in preserving the Konkani language and culture. He also acknowledged the significant number of Konkani-speaking people residing in Kerala, emphasizing the potential for Tiatr to connect with them.

In response to TAG's request to showcase Tiatr in Kerala, the Governor, who hails from the State, expressed his full support and suggested creating a dedicated programme to facilitate this cultural exchange.

Team Herald

MARGAO: Activists at a talk organised by Goyche Fuddle Pillge Khatir (GFPK) warned that Goa's land use policies promote "anti-planning," benefiting developers at the expense of local residents. Architect and urban planner Tahir Noronha criticized the indefinite extension of Outline Development Plans (ODPs), piecemeal zone changes, and weak planning oversight, arguing that these practices put the State's land and ecosystem at risk.

The rapid pace of land use changes has raised concerns about Goa's fragile environment and sustainable growth. Noronha pointed out that the indefinite extension of ODPs without Comprehensive De-

'PYATS CAN OVERRIDE TCP CLEARANCES'

The discussion also highlighted local governance's crucial role in land use planning. Noronha emphasised that under the 73rd Amendment, Gram Panchayats have the final authority over land improvement and construction, despite widespread misinformation suggesting otherwise. He clarified that Town and Country Planning (TCP) clearances are only NOCs, not permissions, and can be overridden by Panchayats. He pointed to Kerala's model, where Zilla Panchayats play a key role in land use planning, and suggested that Goa adopt a similar decentralized approach

velopment Plans (CDPs) enables unregulated and potentially harmful development. "This is a recipe for disaster," he warned. "We must question the lack of political will for planned development."

Addressing misconceptions, Noronha clarified that planning areas aren't limited to cities—any rapidly growing area

can be designated for detailed planning under a CDP. However, citing the Margao ODP, he argued that current policies convert slopes and fields into commercial areas, prioritising real estate interests over environmental sustainability. He labelled this practice as fundamentally "anti-planning."

A key issue raised was

the conversion of protected lands—including orchards, paddy fields, steep slopes, and land within the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ)—into settlement zones under Sections 39A and 17/2.

"A large amount of land has been converted through these provisions, without assessing their impact on local infrastructure and community resources," Noronha asserted.

The speakers advocated for a bottom-up planning approach, where Gram Sabhas would guide local development decisions. The state government, in turn, would designate "touch-me-not" zones based on scientific and ecological considerations, ensuring a balance between development and environmental sustainability.