

Traffic chaos on Mandovi Bridge

Old Bridge closed for maintenance, traffic diverted on new Bridge & Atal Setu; Class XII students urged to start early to answer Board exams

Team Herald

PANJIM: The closure of the Old Mandovi Bridge for resurfacing has caused major traffic congestion, prompting traffic police to advise parents of students answering the XII board exam to leave early and, wherever possible, use the Atal Setu—except for two-wheelers.

On Saturday, motorists experienced long queues and gridlock at the junction where the old and new Mandovi bridges merge, with hundreds of vehicles stuck in a bottleneck. The situation led to delays for several students appearing for their board examinations, adding to their stress.

The Traffic Cell has urged all motorists—except two-wheelers—traveling



(TOP) Traffic congestion at the new Mandovi Bridge (BELOW) Old bridge closed for maintenance from Porvorim towards Ponda, Bambolim, and South Goa, and vice versa, to use the Atal Setu to reduce congestion on the New Mandovi Bridge.

After two previous delays, one of which was due to the Goa Legislative Assembly session, the Public Works Department (PWD) finally implemented the temporary closure of the Old Mandovi Bridge from February 8 to 23. The maintenance work includes resurfacing the bridge with asphalt, installing safety measures, and painting under the NH-66 Annual Plan 2023-24.

Local activist Rajesh Dabolkar criticized the PWD for starting the work during board examination days, calling it poor planning. "It is shocking that the PWD has repeated the same mistake as last year by closing the bridge at such a crucial time. This lack of foresight is affecting students and daily commuters alike," he said.

Teachers' Assn appeals for June start amid concerns over student well-being

Urges government to consider alternative enrichment programmes in April instead

Team Herald

PANJIM: The All Goa Secondary School Teachers Association (AGSSTA) has appealed to the State government to retain the traditional start of the academic year in June. The association argued that an immediate shift to an April start, without a break to refresh students, would cause significant mental stress and strain. Furthermore, schools are expected to assign homework during the May vacation, which would only add to the burden.

The AGSSTA executive committee, in its recent meeting, unanimously expressed concern over a circular from the Directorate of Education proposing the academic year begin in April. The current June start was established by the Goa Legislative Assembly, which considered the region's geographical and climatic factors, and has been effective without issue until now. The sudden change to an April start, without consulting key stakeholders like parents and teachers, was described by AGSSTA president Savio Suraj Victoria as "unreasonable and incomprehensible."

He pointed out that neither the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 nor the National Curriculum Framework for School

Education (NCFSE) 2023 mandates the start of the academic year in April, nor does it require state boards to align their academic calendars with those of CBSE or ICSE. "There is no law or act of the Government of India that mandates the start of the academic year in April or makes it compulsory for state boards to align the academic year calendar with CBSE/ICSE Board calendar timings," Victoria said.

Victoria also noted that the NCFSE 2023 specifies 1,045 annual hours of instruction for the secondary stage and 955 hours for the middle and preparatory stages. In Goa, there are 242 working days for teachers and 220 school days for students. With an average of 5 hours and 45 minutes of instruction per day, including assembly, Goa already completes 1,046 instructional hours annually in 182 days, well within the

required number. Therefore, he argued, there is no need to increase compulsory instructional hours.

He further explained that starting the academic year in April would mean compulsory half-day sessions during the hot month of April, which contrasts with the CBSE pattern that allows for assessment in February/March followed by two weeks of full-day holidays. Similarly, ICSE schools finish their exams by mid-February and take two weeks off before starting results preparation.

"The immediate start of the academic year without a break to refresh the minds of students will cause mental stress and be torturous. The schools will give homework during May vacations too," he claimed.

In the interest of students' holistic development, the AGSSTA has appealed to the government to keep the traditional June start.

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Inspection for safety barrier along Consua-Verna railway route

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Konkan Railway Corporation (KRC) and the state government will conduct a joint site inspection at Consua-Verna next week, following demands from local residents for a safety barrier along the railway route in that area to prevent fatal accidents.

Environment Minister Aleixo Sequeira confirmed this development after meeting with a delegation from Consua during his public grievance hearing at the South Goa Collectorate. He added that their concerns were brought to the attention of KRC officials who were present as

well, and that the locals are seeking a barrier along a stretch of approximately 30 to 40 metres to enhance safety in the area.

The meeting also covered other issues raised by various delegations. Farmers from Loutolim met with the Minister to advocate for a traditional method of bandh construction, highlighting its importance in preserving agricultural practices.

Another pressing matter discussed was the plight of 40 families in Nuvem, who are facing the threat of demolition. Sequeira assured the affected residents that efforts would be made to find a solution.

SPRING IS IN THE AIR



The Mandovi promenade at Campal, along the Yog Setu bridge is covered with the vibrant flowers of the Copper Pod tree, creating a beautiful yellow carpet

Govt moves to dispose of 17 unclaimed bodies in morgues

Team Herald

MARGAO: Seventeen unclaimed bodies, which have been lying in the morgues of Goa Medical College and Hospital (GMC) and South Goa District Hospital (SGDH) for nearly two years, will soon be disposed of, following intervention by Law Minister Aleixo Sequeira.

Speaking to the media, Sequeira confirmed that he would seek government approval to facilitate the disposal. "I will obtain government sanction for the disposal of these 17 unclaimed bodies," he stated.

The minister explained that the South Goa Collector had previously instructed the Margao Municipal Council (MMC) to address the matter, but the civic body had expressed its inability to do so due to financial constraints.

Most of the bodies belong to unidentified individuals, including beggars and those who died under unnatural circumstances. Authorities had preserved the bodies in the hope that they would be claimed by family members, but with no developments in this regard, efforts are now being made to clear space in the morgues. The issue of overcrowding was raised during the minister's recent visits to the facilities.

Sequeira met with additional collectors and MMC officials to discuss the issue, following which he assured that government funds would be allocated to ensure the process is carried out without delay.

GFP opposes private university in Mayem

Team Herald

PANJIM: Goa Forward Party (GFP) has opposed the establishment of a private law university in Mayem.

GFP General Secretary Santosh Kumar Sawant raised concerns about unresolved land issues, narrow roads, and water shortages in the area, urging the government to prioritise resolving the villagers' problems.

Sawant stated, "Land issues in Mayem have been ongoing for years. Despite this, there are plans to allocate land to private developers. The government must address the problems faced by the people of Mayem first."

He added, "What happened with the land in Zuari will happen to the land in Mayem. Manohar Parrikar had passed a law that took into account the sugges-

Our basic needs are food, clothing, and shelter. In Mayem, we have homes, but they are not in our names. We are warning the government that we will not allow a 'Zuari II' in Mayem — Santosh K Sawant, GS, Goa Forward Party

tions of the local people. The current government is doing the opposite."

Sawant expressed his and his party's full support for the Mayem Bhoo Vimochan Nagrik Kruti Samiti in their protest against the alleged allocation of land to private entities. "Our basic needs are food, clothing, and shelter. In Mayem, we have homes, but they are not in our names. We are warning the government that we will not allow a 'Zuari II' in Mayem," he added.

Romi Lipi Abhiyan to meet today to discuss future course of action

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Global Romi Lipi Abhiyan (GRLA) will hold a meeting for Romi enthusiasts on Sunday, February 16, at the Holy Spirit Church Hall in Margao at 4 pm. The meeting will focus on the way forward to obtain equal status for the Roman script in the Official Language Act, alongside Devanagari, and to explore the best possible approach for introducing Romi Script Konkani in schools under the new National Education Policy (NEP).

"We invite everyone interested in securing justice for Romi Script Konkani to attend," said GRLA President Kennedy Afonso, speaking to the media on Saturday. He added that GRLA is in the process of

The meeting will explore the best possible approach for introducing Romi Script Konkani in schools under the new National Education Policy (NEP)

forming various committees to further the cause.

"At the Sunday event, we will be selecting our cultural and youth committees, and we invite all Goans and young people to come forward and join. The advisory and literature committees will be launched next week. In addition to forming these committees, the Global Romi Lipi Abhiyan is working on establishing village groups in every village. These groups will actively promote Roman Script Konkani literature and cultural programmes in their respective areas," Afonso said.

High Court stays TCP's order allowing zone change in Salvador-do-Mundo

Warns any steps taken pursuant to issuance of impugned order will make situation irreversible

Team Herald

PANJIM: The High Court of Bombay at Goa has stayed an order dated March 7, 2024 issued by the Town and Country Planning (TCP) Department converting no development zone into a settlement zone at Salvador-do-Mundo village whereby under Section 17(2) of the TCP Act, the zone was changed from no development slope to the settlement zone.

The Regional Plan 2021 had clearly indicated the area as a no development slope. The petitioners counsel Adv Rohit Bras De Sa produced survey reports for submitting proposals under Section 17(2) of the TCP Act wherein the gra-

massive hill cutting. The petitioners Dhirendra Phadte and Alvito D'Silva had challenged the notification/order dated March 7, 2024 issued by TCP Department in respect to the land survey No. 292/1-1 of Salvador-Do-Mundo village whereby under Section 17(2) of the TCP Act, the zone was changed from no development slope to the settlement zone.

The Regional Plan 2021 had clearly indicated the area as a no development slope. The petitioners counsel Adv Rohit Bras De Sa produced survey reports for submitting proposals under Section 17(2) of the TCP Act wherein the gra-

dient in the contour plan was indicated as 19.10 per cent and that there was no slope above 25 per cent.

In another survey, the property as per the contour plan was shown as having gradient between 10-25 per cent and the area indicated was 7,500 square metres. Part of the property was already shown as settlement zone. What was surprising was that the conclusion records that although part of the property is having gradient of more than 25 per cent, the applicant Mohit Agarwal had sought to rectify the entire property of settlement as he will not do any construction on the no development

slope but he will use the floor area ration (FAR) of the same.

The Court observed that though major portion of the land was no development slope as per Regional plan 2021, prima facie, it appeared that the report indicated that the FAR in respect of the no development slope was permitted to be used by Agarwal. The question was whether the FAR in respect of the no development slope can be utilised.

Additional Government Advocate Siddharth Samant sought four weeks' time to file replies. The matter has now been posted for further hearing on March 17.

Kerala native dies in road accident

Team Herald

PERNEM: Unni Ramesh (36) from Kerala, who was riding pillion was killed after he was run over by a truck at Arambol on Friday night. The two-wheeler rider Benedict Richard (28) also from Kerala, sustained minor injuries.

The accident occurred when Gisle Merton, 66, a Norwegian national while proceeding from Arambol to Mandrem rode his motorcycle in rash and negligent manner at Kepkarwada, Arambol, collided against an oncoming two-wheeler ridden Benedict Richard along with pillion rider Unni Ramesh.

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