

# Despite ban, LED fishing still rampant in Goa, say fishers

Produce video evidence to substantiate claims; question govt's silence over violations

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Despite the government providing official assurances of initiating stringent action against destructive fishing practices using LED devices to the High Court of Bombay at Goa, trawlers continue to operate illegally and are causing immense damage to the marine eco system, lament traditional fishermen in Goa.

In the latest incident, fishermen spotted trawlers using LED lights near Bat Island in Vasco on Sunday night around 8.30 pm, with video evidence of the violation being submitted to **O Herald**.

They have now questioned the government for failing to keep up to its word

and now allege that many boats including trawlers, employ high-powered artificial lights to aggregate fish schools and ensure a bountiful catch.

Traditional fishermen say that this practice is depleting the marine resources and affecting their livelihoods.

In the latest incident, fishermen spotted trawlers using LED lights near Bat Island in Vasco on Sunday night around 8.30 pm, with video evidence of the violation being submitted to **O Herald**.

The footage, shared by sources on condition of anonymity fearing retaliation, emerges as the HC is expected to deliver its judgment shortly on a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed



by Goa Foundation and various fisher associations regarding the illegal use of LED lights in fishing.

The controversy surrounding LED fishing has intensified following the court's stern criticism of State authorities dur-

ing previous hearings for their lenient approach to enforcement. The HC expressed concern over authorities letting violators off with "paltry" fines of Rs 5,000 without equipment seizure, stating that such nominal penalties would render the ban ineffective.

The court's rebuke came after the Indian Coast Guard reported identifying 17 fishing boats engaged in LED fishing, though the Coast Guard's jurisdiction limited them to only reporting violations to the Directorate of Fisheries.

The impact of LED fishing on traditional fishing communities has been severe. Local fishermen report significant business downturn over the past three years, with many work-

ers abandoning the trade due to diminishing catches. The bright LED lights attract various marine species, including baby king prawns, kingfish and crabs, disrupting natural fishing patterns and affecting the livelihoods of traditional fishing communities.

The enforcement challenges are complicated by evolving tactics of those engaging in illegal LED fishing. Reports indicate that vessels now operate between midnight and dawn to avoid detection, often using multiple dinghies and conducting operations in deeper waters. Despite video evidence being presented to the Fisheries Department, traditional fishermen claim that meaningful action remains elusive.

# Hearing adjourned, Velsaokars call it as harassment pattern

Say they expected ISLR to inform them in advance to avoid waste of time; hearing postponed to Feb 28

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** The railway construction continues unabated on the disputed lands of the locals at Velsao and to add to their woes, the Inspector of Survey and Land Records (ISLR) Margao adjourned the hearing to February 28.

The adjournment came as a shock to villagers gathered at the South District Collectorate, as many had availed leave from work to attend the hearing.

They termed the postponement as pattern of harassment aimed at wearing down local resistance.

The delay has particularly impacted residents like Dax Rodrigues, whose family is now landlocked by the ongoing construction.

Rodrigues noted that his family has submitted documents to the ISLR showing their property extends to the existing railway track, including inscription/description and Matriz records. These records also detail how his ancestors had ensured villagers would have a Right of Way, a practice followed by landowners on both sides of the railway track.

The postponement has raised serious questions amongst the villagers of Vel-



sao about the functioning of government departments.

Villagers expressed concern over the informal nature of the adjournment notice, which was handwritten and lacked both an official stamp and signature.

One resident questioned the possibility of ex-parte orders being issued, citing the lack of transparency in the Survey Department's dealings.

"We expected at least the ISLR, being a Government of Goa department, to act responsibly and inform us beforehand to avoid such waste of time and resources," said one of the affected residents.

Another villager, who requested anonymity due

to workplace concerns, suggested that the casual approach to the postponement indicated a pattern of harassment aimed at wearing down local resistance.

The delay is particularly concerning for residents as South Western Railway (SWR) and Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL) continue their construction work under Goa Police protection, despite the ongoing legal dispute over land ownership.

"Is there any worthwhile governance in Goa?" questioned Rodrigues, highlighting the stark contrast between the rapid pace of construction and the slow movement of administrative justice.

## Navelim residents petition govt over traffic violations along NH 66

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Frustrated by persistent traffic congestion and frequent accidents, residents of Navelim have submitted a petition to the government and relevant authorities, demanding strict enforcement of traffic restrictions on heavy vehicles along National Highway 66 (NH 66) during peak hours.

Agnelo Mendonca, a resident of Sinquetim-Navelim, sent a letter on Monday to Chief Minister Pramod Sawant and other officials, highlighting a notification dated 1st January 2023, which clearly prohibits heavy vehicles from plying during peak hours—specifically from 7 to 8 am and 12.30 to 1 pm.

"Despite this notification, heavy vehicles continue to operate freely during peak hours, causing severe traffic congestion in Navelim," Mendonca wrote in his letter. Mendonca further alleged that although traffic police personnel are often present along NH 66, they fail to enforce the restriction, allowing heavy vehicles to pass during the prohibited hours.

"This ongoing issue has caused significant inconvenience to the public. On several occasions, I have personally witnessed traffic police ignoring or failing to take appropriate action against heavy vehicles during peak hours," he added.

Despite multiple complaints from villagers and media reports urging action, Mendonca stated that no concrete measures have been taken to address the problem.

## UNDER REPAIRS



A road milling machine, also known as a cold planer, pressed into service on the Old Mandovi Bridge to remove asphalt. The bridge is expected to be closed for 15 days.

## NGT adjourns Borim Bridge hearing to April-end, farmers disheartened

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Farmers from Loutolim and Borim, who had petitioned the National Green Tribunal (NGT) against the construction of the proposed Borim bridge were left dejected after their hearing was adjourned to April 23. The delay has fuelled concerns that the Public Works Department (PWD) may use the extended time to proceed with the project despite pending legal challenges.

The petitioners, who filed their case in May 2024, were expecting clarity on the next steps. However, before proceedings could begin, the case was marked as adjourned due to the tribunal's packed schedule in February and March. Their lawyer urged the bench to reconsider and set an earlier date for arguments to continue, but with technical resource personnel from Chennai unavailable, the bench only advised submitting objections and demands next Monday.



Farmers remain skeptical that the matter will be brought forward and fear that repeated adjournments are part of a strategy to allow the state and central authorities to push ahead with the project unhindered. They have already blocked multiple attempts by authorities to carry out site demarcation, but with land acquisition completed and no legal stay in place, they worry that PWD may proceed with construction.

Adding to their frustration, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) did

not submit a fresh affidavit as requested in the last hearing, which was meant to clarify environmental clearance (EC) requirements. Similarly, the State government, via PWD's National Highway division, has yet to file its reply to the farmers' demand for an interim stay on construction work.

At the core of the case is whether the bridge project exceeds 150,000 square meters, a threshold that would require mandatory EC under the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006. The NGT had earlier directed PWD to submit exact project dimensions, but the information remains pending. Without these details, the MoEFCC has stated it cannot determine whether the project falls under category 8(b) of the EIA Notification.

With their hopes for an early ruling dashed, the farmers are now considering approaching the High Court. They plan to discuss their next legal steps before issuing a formal statement.

## NFF, fishing outfits call for ban on construction of ports

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** The National Fishworkers Forum (NFF) has expressed strong opposition to the construction of new ports along India's coastline and called for stricter enforcement of bans on illegal fishing equipment during its three-day general body meeting in Alibag, Maharashtra. The meeting, hosted by Maharashtra Machhikar Kruti Samiti (MMKS), saw participation from nine coastal states.

The forum's member unions from nine coastal states also demanded strict implementation of existing bans on LED fishing, bull trawling, and pair trawling methods, which are considered harmful to marine ecosystems and traditional fishing practices.

Earlier, during the meeting, Goa-based Olencio Simoes, was re-elected as NFF's general secretary for a second term, while Ramkrishna Tandel was appointed as the new chairperson.

Simoes highlighted that the Union government's shift in focus from capture to culture fisheries over the last five budgets poses a risk to the livelihoods of 20 million fishers. He emphasized that marine fishers have been crucial in ensuring the nation's food security, sustainably harvesting approximately 4 million tonnes of fish annually at affordable prices.

The forum identified port development as a critical concern, with new projects planned across Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala threatening to displace small-scale fishing communities. Of particular concern is the proposed Rs 76,200 crore all-weather deep-water port at Vadhavan in Maharashtra's Palghar district, which could potentially affect the livelihoods of one million fishers. In response, NFF and MMKS organized a mass rally at Navegoan Ground in Alibag to protest the project.

## Areal residents join hands against proposed railway station

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Following strong opposition from Sarzora, villagers of Sao Jose de Areal have also raised objections to the government's proposal to set up a railway station in the area.

In a show of protest, residents gathered at the Sao Jose de Areal Panchayat Ghar, making it clear that they do not support the plan.

Social activist Freddy Travasso highlighted that the village has already borne the brunt of various poorly planned projects, including railway track doubling, a carbon factory, scrap yards, and stone quarries.

"If the government considers a railway station essential infrastructure, what has it done to improve healthcare for villagers who have been struggling with pollution?" he asked.

Travasso called on CM Pramod Sawant to either visit the village himself or send a minister to witness the environmental damage caused by these developments.

## Benaulim residents want PWD to rectify faulty culvert near Western bypass

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Residents of Benaulim have submitted a petition to the panchayat demanding that the PWD rectify the poorly designed culvert near the Western bypass, close to the Mercado Mall. They pointed out that work on the culvert has been stalled for the past nine months, raising concerns about potential hazards once the monsoon season begins.

Social activist Santan Pereira, speaking on behalf of the residents, highlighted the risks posed by the incomplete culvert. "Today, we have lodged our formal complaint with the Benaulim panchayat regarding the danger this structure poses to commuters due to the PWD's flawed design. It has been nine months, and the rectification work is yet to resume. We hope the authorities complete the work before the onset of the monsoon," Pereira stated.

He cited several accidents at the site that had resulted in serious injuries, attributing them to the culvert's faulty alignment and the absence of speed breakers on the service roads. Pereira stressed that public safety was at stake and urged the Benaulim sarpanch to intervene. He further insisted that the PWD should not merely resume work on the existing design but instead come up with a new, more suitable plan. Frustration was also expressed over the authorities' inaction despite media coverage of past accidents.

It may be recalled that Benaulim MLA Venzy Viagas had recently raised similar concerns during the recently-concluded Assembly session, urging the government to take immediate action.

## Carmona, Orlim villagers oppose jetties at River Sal to protect biodiversity

Both gram sabhas unite against unauthorised development, environmental threats and budgetary challenges

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** The Carmona and Orlim gram sabhas, convened separately on Sunday, passed strong resolutions against the government's move to construct jetties on the River Sal saying that it could threaten their village bio diversity.

In Carmona, villagers voiced their opposition to unauthorised developments, particularly concerning a notified bandh within the Coastal Regulatory Zone (CRZ). Allegations were raised that the bandh was being developed without the necessary approvals from the village panchayat.

"These bandhs are legally protected, and we are questioning whether the necessary permissions were obtained and if any soil testing was carried out before proceeding with the work," said gram sabha member Savio Santos.

Sarpanch Sandra Fernandes clarified that the panchayat had not granted any approvals for the development. Consequently, members resolved to seek clarification from the Goa Coastal Zone Management Authority (GCZMA) on whether the work had been authorised and how public funds were allocated for it. They also noted that CRZ regulations empower the panchayat to issue a stop-work order in ecologically sensitive areas such as mangroves and khazan lands.

The gram sabha also discussed other pressing matters, including the installation of an underground cable and an 11kV transformer. Additionally, they passed a resolution to protect a communidade pond by recommending its designation as a command area under the Goa Command Area Development Act. Members stressed that the pond plays a crucial role in irrigation due

to the natural gradient of the region and must be safeguarded against encroachment. They warned that any obstruction to the pond's sluice gates and emergency overflow channel could lead to flooding in adjacent residential areas.

A key decision taken at the Carmona gram sabha was the rejection of the Centre's proposal to declare MDR-43—stretching from Velsao junction on NH17B to Mobor Beach junction—as a national highway under the 'Get Set Goa' initiative. Villagers expressed concerns over the project's potential impact on the local environment and community.

Meanwhile, the Orlim gram sabha also took a strong stance against the proposed construction of jetties in the River Sal. During the meeting, chaired by Sarpanch Simon Pereira, members highlighted the environmental risks associated with the

project and unanimously passed a resolution opposing it.

In addition to this, the gram sabha discussed and approved an amended annual budget proposal. Members scrutinised various allocations and recommended ways for the panchayat to improve revenue collection, particularly through house and commercial taxes. They also urged the panchayat to upgrade its website to enhance transparency and efficiency.

Concerns were raised over the high costs of hiring legal advocates to represent the panchayat in various cases, prompting discussions on alternative approaches to managing legal expenses.

With both Carmona and Orlim opposing large-scale development projects along the River Sal, villagers remain committed to protecting their land, water bodies, and ecological balance.