

Greens file contempt plea to stop 'illegal' sand mining

Knock on court doors again as authorities turn Nelson's eye to illegalities; govt seeks time to file affidavit

Team Herald

PANJIM: The Goa Rivers Sand Protectors Network has filed a contempt petition against the State authorities for failing to stop illegal sand mining in the State.

This was the second time the Goa Rivers Sand Protectors Network through its secretary Claude Alvares filed the contempt petition against the State government for failing to comply with the Court's order to stop illegal sand mining in the State.

The first contempt petition filed in January 2021 was disposed of by the High Court of Bombay at Goa in April last year, after the Court stated that it was satisfied with the measures taken by the government authorities to stop illegal sand mining across the State.

In December 2019, the High Court while hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) writ petition had directed the State



CAUSE OF ACTION

■ Petitioner produced photographs as corroborative evidence that indicate illegal sand mining activities were still rampant.

■ Brings to Court's notice of illegal sand mining being carried out at Jua, Virdi where stacks of sand were piled up.

government through its police machinery as well as Department of Transport to regularly patrol these areas and check the transport vehicles carrying sand to verify whether the same was backed by valid permissions and authorisations.

The Court had also di-

rected the police to prosecute the transporters under the relevant sections of the IPC as well as MMDR Act if they were unable to indicate the source from where such sand or gravel was mined and to produce necessary permissions/authorisations for transportation.

On Tuesday, the petitioner produced photographs indicating that illegal sand mining activities are persisting and ongoing. He brought to the notice of the Court that even on Monday, some illegal sand mining was carried out at Jua, Virdi, where there were stacks of sand kept. He also gave details of places where sand mining was taking place.

However, Additional Government Advocate Deep Shirodkar sought time to take instructions on this aspect from the concerned authorities who are tasked with monitoring and patrolling the rivers. He also sought two weeks' time to file an affidavit indicating the action that has been taken from time to time as well as details of the monitoring that is being done to curb illegal sand mining. He further submitted that the orders of the Court are complied with.

The matter has now been posted for further hearing on March 4.

Olive Ridley hatchlings at Agonda spark joy tinged with concern

Significant decline in hatchling releases raises questions about conservation and rescue efforts in Goa

AUGUSTO RODRIGUES

AGONDA: Joy was tinged with scepticism on Wednesday morning as the first batch of 50 Olive Ridley turtle hatchlings was released into the sea at Agonda Beach. While foreign tourists gathered to witness the moment, turtle enthusiasts voiced concerns over a noticeable decline in the success rate of hatchling releases in recent years.

The hatchling release, which began at 1.30 am and concluded an hour later, was met with concern by conservationists who are questioning the effectiveness of current conservation methods.

"Based on the data from the Forest Department, it appears that more eggs are not hatching or are found dead, which could indicate several factors," said Aaron Victor Fernandes, a conservationist and reptile enthusiast. "Changes in weather conditions at both the nesting and relocated sites could have a significant impact on the hatching success rate. Temperature and humidity are critical factors in the



Turtle Guard Ankush Karakpur releasing the first hatchlings at Agonda beach

Data released under RTI from the Forest Department and presented to the High Court on Tuesday revealed that in the 2021-2022 season, **91.13%** of hatchlings were released based on the number of eggs laid at Agonda Beach. In the recent season, that percentage dropped to just **51.91%**, with an interim period showing an improvement to **85.6%**

development of the eggs, and if relocated to an unfamiliar site, it could jeopardize the hatchlings' survival."

Fernandes also noted that sand compaction at nesting sites could prevent hatchlings from emerging, leaving them trapped below the surface.

Turtle guard Ankush Karakpur, explained the nesting process: "Once the turtle lays its eggs, we wait about 50-55 days. When

we see the sand sinking in, we know it's time for the hatchlings to emerge." At 1.31 am, the first two hatchlings made their way out of the pit, followed by the rest. They were then placed in a container filled with sand for observation.

"We keep them for about an hour. Once they turn from black to white, we know it's time to release them," Karakpur said. "Fifteen eggs are still waiting to

hatch, and we will continue monitoring them, along with other nests."

So far, the Forest Department has recorded 85 pits in Agonda, with 8,043 eggs laid. The nesting sites in Agonda also include eggs from Palolem, Cabo de Rama, and Cola Beach. Additionally, 20 nests have been reported at Galgibaga Beach, with 2,361 eggs, including eggs from nearby beaches such as Rajbag, Patnem, and Talpona.

Fernandes emphasized that when eggs are relocated, it is crucial to maintain the correct orientation. "If the eggs are moved from their original nesting site, the embryos must be positioned the same way. If not, they could die." Fernandes, who works with both government and non-government groups on turtle conservation, stressed the importance of proper handling.

The turtle nesting site at Agonda Beach had made headlines in January 2025 when *O Herald* highlighted a letter from the Range Forest Officer to the police highlighted concerns over unauthorised activity near the nesting area.

Youth held in hit-and-run case at Siolim

PANJIM: The Anjuna Police arrested Archit Sangelkar, 21, from Park Hill Appts, PDA Colony Porvorim, a driver of a Mercedes bearing no registration number GA 07 Q 0990, which was allegedly involved in a hit-and-run accident case at Siolim on Tuesday.

Police stated that the accused drove his car in a rash and negligent manner and knocked down one Judith Fernandes near the Sao Joao Chapel who was proceeding from Gudem to Fernandes Vaddo.

It is learnt that Judith who had gone an evening walk was seriously injured after being hit by the car and had to be admitted to a private hospital as condition was critical. The alleged accused fled from the accident without intimating to the police nor referring her for medical treatment.

HOMeward BOUND

GISELLE FERNANDES



A migrant woman herds her young horses home at sunset in a field at Guirim

Officials fail to turn up at Oxel Spring site inspection

Locals term it clear violation of HC directive



Team Herald

ASSAGAO: In a latest development to the Oxel Spring case, the officials from Town and Country Planning and Land Survey Department remained conspicuous by their absence during the site inspection on Wednesday. The officials playing truant left the petitioners and residents dismayed, who termed it as clear violation of the High Court directive.

It is pertinent to note that the High Court in its last hearing had directed the TCP Department and the Department of Land Survey to conduct the inspection on February 19.

On Wednesday, no officials from the Land Survey department turned up while just a lone draughtsman Aditya Aroskar from the TCP Department arrived at the spot that too, 90 minutes late. Frantic

efforts to contact the officials from the land survey department turned futile.

The Oxel Spring case is being heard in the High Court of Bombay at Goa pertaining to a multi-dwelling project near a heritage well, with each department connected to the case being directed to conduct a site inspection.

The TCP draughtsman declined to conduct the inspection as it would take time.

Petitioners Suraj Chodankar and Avertino Miranda lambasted the government officials for disrespecting the High Court directive, adding that the officials, who were supposed to inspect the site on Wednesday, failed to turn up and should be hauled up for contempt of court.

"We have been waiting since 3.30 pm and just one official from the TCP Department arrives at 5 pm. This is nothing but a joke on the

High Court and the locals whose precious time has been taken for granted. We have been told by the lone TCP official that land survey officials got the letter three days back and needed more time. We fail to understand why they needed extra time. We are going to take this matter seriously before the Court and pray that these errant officials who take Court matter lightly will be dealt with sternly," said Miranda.

He said that the Court would be updated about the development of the day during the next meeting and then it was for the Court to decide.

It may be recalled that the locals opposed the project coming up next to the spring. Since then various other departments conducted site inspections, but there was no clarity about the last two inspections being carried out by the TCP Department and the PWD.

Govt monitoring overseas job scam case: CM

Department of Drinking Water gets Cabinet nod; section detached from PWD

Team Herald

PANJIM: Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said that his Home Department and the Non Residential Indians (NRI) Commission are monitoring the overseas job scam case.

Sawant's statement comes after two Goans, who were deported from the US, complained of being cheated of Rs 18.5 lakh by a re-

ruitment agency in Vasco.

Noting that Goans have lost over Rs 100 crore in the past one year in cyber fraud cases, he said that being cheated of hard-earned money by falling prey to job offers is synonymous to the cyber frauds. "People need to be alert on such kind of cheating by fake agencies," he urged.

Meanwhile, the Goa Cabinet approved the forma-

tion of the Department of Drinking Water (DDW) for effective supply of drinking water to homes. The drinking water section is now completely detached from the Public Works Department (PWD).

It may be recalled that the Chief Minister had recently announced the formation of an exclusive department to manage drinking water supply operations in Goa.

He informed that the Chief Engineer (CE) of DDW will head the department.

"PWD will now have only Roads and Buildings to look after," Chief Minister said.

He informed that very soon PWD's sewerage division will also be entirely put under the purview of the Sewerage and Infrastructure Development Corporation of Goa Ltd (SIDCGL), the decision of which CM

said is also coming up soon.

CM said that 100 per cent attention couldn't be given to the drinking water section. Now we can plan for the next 25 years. "WRD will bring in water and the DDW will have to lift it, treat it and supply it to people," he said.

He said that all PWD engineers will be offered to join the department, but currently the DDW will be run by deputation of existing staff.

Ponda pay parking scheme delayed as infrastructure work moves at snail's pace

PMC has identified around 1,500 parking lots, including 600 for cars and 900 for bikes

Team Herald

PONDA: The implementation of the Ponda pay parking scheme, announced by the Ponda Municipal Council (PMC), has been delayed due to slow progress in developing the necessary infrastructure. The lack of sufficient parking spaces has resulted in vehicles being parked along roadsides, leading to frequent traffic congestion.

PMC Chairperson Anand Naik had announced last year that the pay parking system would be introduced in Ponda city from the first week of January 2025. The initiative aimed



to regulate haphazard and long-duration parking, ensuring better availability of parking spaces for visitors to the town, which serves

as the taluka headquarters and hosts several government offices.

While some parking areas have been identified and

demarcated, the system is yet to be implemented. In certain locations, work on infrastructure is ongoing, with the Public Works De-

PAY PARKING RATES FINALISED

Two-wheelers: Rs 5 for the first hour, and Rs 5 for each subsequent hour

Four-wheelers: Rs 10 for the first hour, and Rs 10 for each subsequent hour

ditionally, abandoned and scrap vehicles have been removed, and the old Shastri Hall building has been demolished to make way for parking.

According to Naik, the delay is due to ongoing coordination with multiple departments, including Traffic Police, PWD, and Gas Authorities, to ensure that roads are not dug up after the pay parking system is introduced.

PMC has identified around 1,500 parking lots, including 600 for cars and 900 for bikes. Naik stressed that once implemented, the system should not be disrupted by roadworks.

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