

Smart City works lead to unprecedented chaos and confusion, claims petitioner

Submits photographic evidence of ongoing disruptions to substantiate claims in HC; demands accountability over haphazard road works

Team Herald

PANJIM: Christus Cecilio Lopes, one of the petitioners, has submitted an affidavit along with photographs documenting the ongoing Smart City works being carried out by the Imagine Panaji Smart City Development Limited (IP-SCDL), which has led to an unprecedented level of chaos in the city for nearly three years.

In his affidavit, Lopes presented 25 photographs of the ongoing works at various locations in the capital city, including stretches of roads that are completely blocked for vehicular traffic due to the ongoing construction.

The petitioners have provided photographs of works taking place at Azad Maidan, Bhatlem, Mala, Miramar, and the Chimbel Junction area.

During the last hearing on February 17, the petitioner's counsel, Adv Abhijit Gosavi, informed the Court that additional materials would be submitted, showing that more roads had been dug up, causing significant inconvenience to residents and road users. The petitioners' counsel also claimed that the road works were being carried out in a haphazard manner, causing immense distress to both motorists and the general public.

In its affidavit, IPSCDL stated that the road works in Panjim will be completed by March 31, 2025, and the roads will be made operational. The affidavit also mentioned that other ancillary works, such as landscaping and tree plantation, would be completed by June 30, 2025. Additionally, it included a status update with a timeline of the works carried out under the Smart City project/AM-RUT 1.0.

The High Court is currently hearing two public interest litigation (PIL) writ petitions filed by Pi-yush Panchal, Alwyn D'Sa, and Neelam Navelkar, as well as Christus C Lopes and Sadanand Vaingankar.



CORROBORATIVE EVIDENCE
Affidavit filed; 25 photographs of ongoing works at various locations in capital city, including stretches of roads completely blocked for traffic due to ongoing construction submitted in HC



Three arrested in North Goa gambling raids

Team Herald

PANJIM: Three individuals were arrested in separate gambling raids in Panjim, Porvorim, and Colvale.

In the first raid, which took place on Tuesday night at the Tinto, Nerul market, the accused, Parana Rikate, 24, from Betim, was caught red-handed

LOSING GAMBLE

while accepting gambling bets from members of the public in an open space and issuing slips with numerical figures. The police Rs 2,360 from his possession.

In another raid, conducted near Shantadurga Garage in Madel, Thivim, the accused, Rupesh Naik, aged 45 years from Thivim, Bardez, was apprehended while accepting money from the public in a game of chance, commonly known as the "number game," in an open public place. The police seized Rs 1,810 in different denominations, along with other gambling paraphernalia.

In the third raid, carried out by the Panjim police at Taleigao Bandh, the accused, Laxman Kumtangi, 28 from Taleigao, was caught red-handed while accepting bets on numerical figures from the public. The police seized Rs 1,130 in different denominations, as well as other gambling items, from his possession.

All three individuals have been arrested and charged under the Prevention of Public Gambling Act.

Saligao woman arrested with narcotics

Team Herald

PANJIM: A woman from Saligao was arrested by Anjuna Police for possessing methamphetamine worth Rs 80,000 in a raid carried out on Tuesday.

CAUGHT IN THE ACT

Acting on reliable information, the Anjuna Police conducted a raid near the football ground in Arpora on Tuesday night.

The accused, Deepa Dilip Kadam, 37, a resident of Saligao and a native of Maharashtra, was found in illegal possession of psychotropic drugs, suspected to be methamphetamine, weighing 8.45 grams, valued at approximately Rs 80,000.

Deepa Kadam was arrested on Wednesday and is currently under investigation.

Internet services in Panjim restored after change in electricity dept nodal officers

Team Herald

PANJIM: Internet services in Panjim have started to return to normal after urgent changes were made to the Nodal officers on Tuesday. Service providers have assured that 95 percent of services will be restored by Thursday evening.

The Chief Minister has also promised that an underground system for laying cables will be implemented as a permanent solution in the near future. However, questions are being raised as to why government agencies did not make use of the utility ducts already laid on the Smart City roads.

Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and cable operators began restoring connections to subscribers late on Tuesday night and continued throughout Wednesday. They were temporarily authorised to do so following a strong backlash from subscribers and industry professionals who were affected by the disconnections.



Representative of an internet service providing company carrying out restoration work in Panjim, on Wednesday

Speaking to the press, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant stated that the government had instructed the ISPs to restore connections, and they would be granted the necessary permissions once they formally applied.

"Temporary arrangements have been made, but in the long term, we are moving towards underground cabling, where private operators can participate. The Chief Secretary held a high-level inter-departmental meeting, and we will come up with a final solution," said the Chief Minister.

Meanwhile, the recently replaced Executive Engineer, Kashinath Shetye, said he had been superseded by new appointees, and it remains to be seen how revenues will be managed and how internet services will be provided. "I am satisfied with the work I have done," he remarked.

"I would have followed all the procedures to recover the money owed to the Electricity Department (ED). I issued over 200 notices to ISPs who had ille-

gally strung wires on electricity poles," he added. Activists and concerned citizens in Goa have questioned the removal of the Executive Engineer, who had been adhering to the rules and working to recover previously uncollected revenue. Activist Mariano Ferrao commented, "Simple street lighting fees and FPPCA charges are being levied on ordinary citizens, yet the person who was attempting to recover money from corporations has been removed."

Traffic Police advisory for Carnival floats parade in Panjim

Team Herald

PANJIM: The Goa Traffic Police have issued an advisory in light of the Carnival floats parade in Panjim on Saturday, March 1.

The floats will assemble and line up along the Ribandar Causeway, starting from Santa Monica Jetty, with the parade set to begin at approximately 3 pm. As the causeway road from Divja Circle to the Ribandar-Merces bypass junction will be used for the floats' line-up, it will be closed to general traffic from 10 pm on Friday until all the floats have crossed Divja Circle.

Incoming traffic to Panjim city will follow the usual route via the new Patto Bridge, Divja Circle, and the MLCP parking facility route. It will be diverted inside the city at the Dayanand Bandodkar statue, proceeding via Church Square and the Cross Road junction. Vehicles coming from

Bambolim will be allowed to enter Panjim via the new Mala Bridge, Four Pillar Junction, and Bhatlem.

Traffic coming from Ribandar towards Panjim will be diverted at Ribandar Causeway to the Merces underpass, where drivers will take a right turn and proceed to Panjim via NH-4A.

Outgoing traffic, including route buses from the Miramar side, will take a right turn at Campal Ganesh/Kala Academy and proceed via the Fire Brigade Junction, St Inez Junction, Caculo Island, 18th June Road, Church Square, and Cortin. From there, vehicles will continue on either the Old Patto Bridge or Mala Bridge.

Traffic coming from Rua-de-Ourem, near Hotel Sona, will not be allowed to turn left. This traffic will be diverted to the right and directed towards Kaju Darbar to reach its respective destination.

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Human Rights Commission asks North Goa Collector to amend memorandum on compensatory off

Team Herald

PANJIM: The Goa Human Rights Commission (GHRC) on Wednesday asked the North Goa Collector to withdraw the part of the memorandum that no compensatory off will be granted to the staff attending the offices on Saturday.

As per Central Civil Service Rules, a government servant other than a Gazetted Officer working on holidays, has to be given compensatory leave in lieu of duty performed on holidays, as a rule, which generally has to be availed of within a month, the Commission said.

The anonymous staff in the jurisdiction of North Goa Collector and five offices of Mamlatdars of Bardez, Pernem, Tiswadi, Bicholim and Sattari Talukas by a letter dated December 18, 2024, had complained about the unfair treatment meted out to some of the staff members thereby infringing their rights.

The North Goa Collector Sneha Gitte, IAS, by a Memorandum dated October 30, 2024, has asked the staff of offices of the Deputy Collector and Mamlatdars to at-

CAUSE OF ACTION

▶▶ North Goa Collector Sneha Gitte, IAS, by a Memorandum dated October 30, 2024, asks the staff of offices of the Deputy Collector and Mamlatdars to attend office on Saturdays

▶▶ Memorandum stated that no compensatory off shall be granted for the same

▶▶ The anonymous staffer complains of unfair treatment; says rights infringed in 5 Revenue offices; seeks justice

tend office on Saturdays as directed by the Presiding Officers of the Revenue Courts, in order to assist them for conducting hearings for disposal of Tenancy and Mundkar cases, in a time-bound manner.

The Memorandum stated that no compensatory off shall be granted for the same, which according to the complaint was a clear violation of the law which stipulates that the extra hours work must be compensated in the form

of overtime pay or compensatory leave. In the reply, the respondent - North Goa Collector stated that the Office Memorandum was issued in pursuance of the Order dated 14/09/2022 of the Revenue Department and the Order dated 31/03/2023 of the High Court of Bombay at Goa, to clear the pending backlog of cases.

After going through the complaint and considering the reply of the respondent and arguments advanced, the Commission took note of the Central Civil Services (Leave) Rules 1972, which govern the grant of leave applicable to all government servants.

One of the provisions of the Rules is as under: "Compensatory off can be availed of by a government servant in lieu of his/her working on a holiday, provided no other financial incentives are granted (OTA/Honorarium) for that day. Normally, it should be availed of within a month and in that case there is no limit to the number of compensatory off. In case it could not be taken within a month, a government servant in the subsequent calendar month

could avail of a maximum of two compensatory off, with special permission from the Joint Secretary in-charge of Administration/Head of Department."

It also took note of the Office Memorandum, dated 11th August 1976, of the Ministry of Finance, Government of India, on the subject of "Overtime Allowance", to Government Employees.

The Commission however appreciated that the Collector, in view of the directions of the High Court dated 31/03/2023 in two writ petitions had issued directions to strictly implement the Goa government's order dated 14/09/2022 and dispose of the pending cases under the Tenancy and Mundkar Acts, as expeditiously as possible and in any case within the timeline set out in the government's order dated 14/09/2022. But the Commission observed that there was no whisper in the High Court order, interalia, that in lieu of the same, no compensatory off would be granted to the government servants. So also the government in its order dated 14/09/2022 did not state that compensatory off was not to be granted.

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