

Sao Jose de Areal station not for coal handling, says Konkan Rly

Station will facilitate train crossings, help ease congestion at Margao Railway Station, which has reached maximum capacity, say officials; villagers not convinced

Team Herald

MARGAO: Amid growing opposition to the proposed railway station at Sao Jose De Areal, the Konkan Railway Corporation (KRC) has reiterated that the station is being developed exclusively for passenger traffic and not for coal movement. The corporation maintains that the project is necessary to ease congestion at the Margao railway station, which has nearly reached full capacity and cannot be expanded further.

Resistance to the project has intensified, with the Sao Jose de Areal village panchayat recently convening an urgent gram sabha where residents unanimously opposed the proposed new station plan. The panchayat decided to formally communicate their objections to the authorities. In Sarzora, villagers organised a signature campaign, submitting a petition to the Chief Minister via Velim MLA Cruz Silva, while the village panchayat also re-



solved to write to the Union Railway Minister, expressing their opposition. "We're worried about the influx of migrants, unregulated commercial activity, and increased crime which will accompany the railway station. Our village has remained peaceful because we have resisted such projects in the past. We will not allow any unplanned or unwanted development that threatens our way of life," said Sabita Mascarenhas, a Sarzora panch member.

While responding to queries from media persons, KRC Deputy General Manager for Public Relations, Baban Ghatge, said that Margao railway station has reached a satura-

tion point, operating at near-full capacity. Over the years, he explained that the station has expanded from a single platform to six, but that space constraints make further expansion unfeasible. With Indian Railways adding new trains annually, KRC needed an alternative solution to manage the growing passenger traffic, leading to the decision to establish a new station at Areal, which is just 2.5 kilometres from Margao, he said while justifying the need for another station.

Ghatge said work on the Areal station is already underway and that it will feature a platform and two railway lines. He explained that the

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Sabita Mascarenhas, Sarzora P'yat member

"Our 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?"

Freddy Travaso, activist

primary purpose of the station is to facilitate train crossings, particularly during peak hours when Margao struggles to accommodate additional rail traffic. Addressing concerns raised by opponents, he dismissed claims that the station was being built to facili-

tate coal or goods transportation, clarifying that handling goods requires a dedicated yard, which cannot be set up at Areal due to space limitations. He reiterated that the new station will cater solely to passenger movement, ensuring smoother rail operations.

Citizens decry MMC's decision to hike service fees, demand accountability

Team Herald

MARGAO: Citizens of Margao have voiced strong opposition to the recent decision by the Margao Municipal Council to increase fees and service charges. The residents condemned the hike and demanded a white paper detailing the various services provided by the civic body.

The move to hike various fees, including house and trade taxes, as well as service charges, was made during a special meeting held by the municipal council. In response, Margao residents have raised concerns about the lack of transparency and accountability from the civic body.

Speaking to reporters, Prabhav Naik, a Margao local, expressed frustration over the decision and called for a comprehensive white paper on the services offered by the council.

He demanded clarity on the functioning of key municipal services, including scientific waste management, the availability of hygienic toilets and changing rooms, drinking water kiosks, as well as the maintenance of traffic islands and public areas.

Naik also criticized the municipality for its failure to address illegal activities within its jurisdiction.

"There are numerous illegal activities occurring under the municipality's nose, yet they continue to turn a blind eye and fail to take any action," he said.

Radha Kavlekar, another concerned resident, condemned the fee hike, describing it as an attempt to exploit loyal taxpayers.

"There are several businesses operating without trade licences, yet the municipality continues to allow them to function unchecked. These businesses are also receiving full municipal services, including door-to-door garbage collection, despite being illegal"

Radha Kavlekar, Margao local

"The civic body is looking to take more money from traders, but the conditions in the market remain deplorable"

Shop keeper, Margao market

"There are several businesses operating without trade licences, yet the municipality continues to allow them to function unchecked. These businesses are also receiving full municipal services, including door-to-door garbage collection, despite being illegal," Kavlekar pointed out.

A vendor from the local market also spoke out against the fee hike, highlighting the lack of basic facilities, including proper toilets, and the absence of market maintenance.

"The civic body is looking to take more money from traders, but the conditions in the market remain deplorable," the vendor lamented.

In light of these concerns, the citizens have collectively demanded that the municipal council roll back its decision to hike fees and charges, calling for greater accountability and transparency from the civic body.

Betalbatim resort fined for dumping, burning garbage

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Betalbatim village panchayat has imposed a penalty on a hotel for disposing of garbage in an open area and has given the establishment a 10-day deadline to clear the accumulated waste from the site.

Betalbatim Deputy Sarpanch Ilma Dias, along with the Panchayat secretary, led the enforcement drive against the hotel, citing its improper disposal of waste generated on the premises. She pointed out that the garbage was dumped at a location connected to a creek, which eventually feeds into the Arabian Sea.

"We have cracked the whip against the hotel after we have learnt that they have also disposed of some garbage by burning. The waste seemed to have been lying for many months now. It is not just waste disposal, but the pollution it will cause the creek water as well," she said, while speak-

ing to the media.

She added: "These hotels have been doing business in the village for many years now and are violating the rules of garbage disposal. The hotel was twice warned by the Panchayat. Now, we have to fine them. They have been told to clear the waste within 10 days."

Dias also acknowledged that local farmers have raised concerns about skin infections, which they believe are linked to the alleged release of sewage and wastewater from hotels into agricultural fields. She emphasized that Betalbatim is grappling with this issue at a time when multiple development projects are being proposed in the area.

"We are trying to resolve the issues at hand, but there are many proposals coming up. We have recently rejected three projects, but what if the promoters go to the higher authorities," she questioned.

Will physically defend our khazans if we have to: Loutolim ryots vow to nix Borim bridge

With their NGT case scheduled for hearing in April, farmers and fisherfolk worry that the govt may push ahead with land demarcation once the khazans dry up

Team Herald

MARGAO: Farmers from Loutolim have pledged to physically resist any attempt by the Public Works Department (PWD) to proceed with demarcation work for the controversial Borim bridge project while their case remains pending before the National Green Tribunal (NGT).

With the tribunal adjourning the case to April 23, 2025, tensions have escalated among farmers who fear the government may use the delay to push forward with construction despite unresolved environmental concerns. The core dispute revolves around whether the bridge requires Environmental Clearance (EC) under existing regulations. Farmers argue that their Khazan fields—integral to their livelihoods—would suffer irreparable damage if the project proceeds in its current form.

Albert Pinheiro, president of the Carbot, Mascasana & Bebo Tenants Association in Loutolim, voiced skepticism about the PWD's intentions, alleging that officials might wait for the Khazan lands to dry before attempting demarcation.

"The Khazan fields are currently filled with saline water for pisciculture and weed control. Once they dry, the PWD may take advantage of the situation to begin demarcation," he warned.

Pinheiro reaffirmed that



The NGT case, initiated in May 2024, hinges on whether the bridge project exceeds the 150,000 square-metre threshold, which would mandate Environmental Clearance under the 2006 EIA Notification

the farmers were prepared to resist any premature demarcation efforts.

"We have already protested and physically stood by our fields when the PWD attempted demarcation. If they proceed despite pending legal issues, farmers will have no choice but to take direct action to protect their lands," he said.

He stressed that the farmers' concerns could be resolved if authorities altered the bridge's alignment to avoid the Khazan lands. "We are relying on government-issued notifications that prohibit construction on Khazan fields. If the government does not honour its own rules, then depending on regulations becomes meaningless," Pinheiro remarked.

The NGT had adjourned

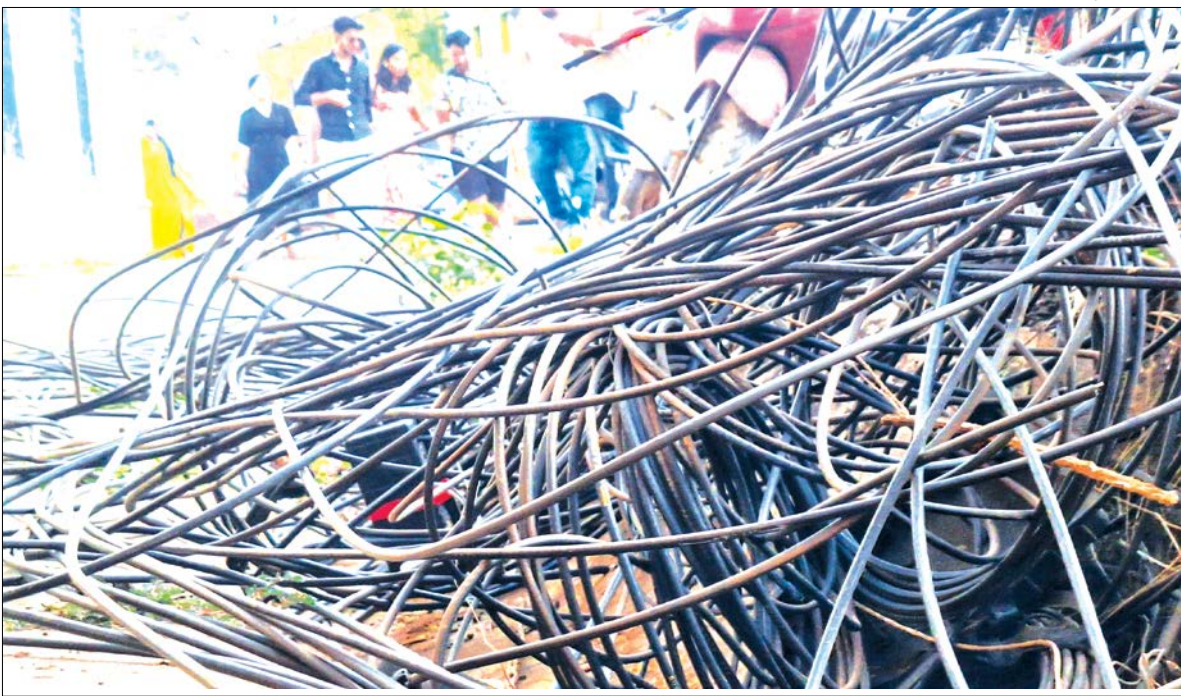
the hearing due to a packed schedule and the absence of technical experts from Chennai.

Despite a request for an earlier date, farmers were advised to submit objections and demands the following Monday.

Meanwhile, the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has yet to submit a fresh affidavit clarifying EC requirements, and the State government has not responded to the farmers' request for an interim stay on construction.

The case, initiated in May 2024, hinges on whether the bridge project exceeds the 150,000 square-meter threshold, which would mandate Environmental Clearance under the 2006 EIA Notification.

POWER PLAY



Following the Electricity Department's cable removal drive, a jumble of discarded wires now occupies the footpath next to the Adilshah Palace in Panjim, posing a tripping hazard and forcing pedestrians onto the road

Villagers aghast as cross vandalised in Curtorim

Team Herald

MARGAO: Repeated acts of desecration at a cross in Maina, Curtorim, have caused deep concern among villagers, prompting them to demand stricter measures to safeguard religious sites. The cross, which has stood since 1959, has been targeted three times in the past two months, sparking frustration and outrage in the community.

The first incident occurred on January 16, 2025, followed by another on February 19, and yet again on February 21.

Residents are struggling to understand the motive behind these recurring attacks. Xavier de Maina, speaking on behalf of the villagers, expressed dismay over the situation.

"It is distressing to see someone trying to create unrest. We have no clue about the perpetrators or

their reasons. A police complaint has been filed, and we have urged authorities to step up patrolling in the area," he stated.

Nadia Fernandes also voiced her shock at the repeated desecration and emphasized the gravity of the situation, warning that if such acts are not addressed firmly, larger religious structures could be at risk.

"If miscreants can damage a small cross today,

tomorrow they might attempt to harm a church. The police need to act swiftly to prevent such incidents from escalating," she asserted.

In response to these alarming events, villagers recently gathered at the site in a display of unity, reaffirming their commitment to protecting the religious landmark and pressing for decisive action from the local police.

No end in sight: Unfinished roadwork at Gogol-Borda causes traffic snarls, sparks commuter frustration



Team Herald

MARGAO: Ongoing road digging work along the Gogol-Borda stretch leading to Margao is causing severe traffic congestion, especially during peak hours, leaving commuters frustrated. Large pits dug for sewage or pipeline work have made travel through Borda difficult, with multiple sections of the main road blocked.

In Xelvona, roadwork has been ongoing for over a year, further adding to congestion. With traffic bottlenecks wors-

ening in the mornings and evenings, citizens have demanded that police or home guards be deployed to manage the flow and prevent accidents. Several minor mishaps have already been reported in Borda due to the chaotic situation.

Commuters traveling from Gogol to Margao, including government and private sector employees, are often stuck in long queues of vehicles, including buses, trucks, and two-wheelers. The absence of traffic personnel has exacerbated the situation, with

scooter riders maneuvering haphazardly, worsening the congestion.

Adding to the chaos, stray cattle can be seen sitting on the dug-up roads, creating further obstacles.

Gopal Naik, a company employee in Verna, expressed frustration over the prolonged work in Margao and Fatorda. "The department has been digging roads for a long time, causing daily inconvenience. The work must be expedited, especially since many office-goers travel to Curchorem in the morning and return home in the evening," he said.

He also stressed the need for officials to be present on-site to supervise the labourers. "Often, workers are seen sitting on the road, obstructing vehicles," he added. A supervisor at the site assured that work is in progress and will be completed as soon as possible. However, residents remain skeptical, urging authorities to speed up the project and deploy traffic personnel to ease congestion.

MAX. TEMP 35 °C
MIN. TEMP 23 °C

idharudhar



We missed an opportunity to cleanse our sins

