

# AS THE SACRED BANYAN TREE CAME DOWN, WHERE WERE THE NETAS?

Activists slam Opposition leaders for not standing by them during Sunday's massive agitation

Team Herald

**PORVORIM:** Even as the 200-year-old sacred banyan tree was mercilessly cut on Sunday morning at Porvorim for translocation and activists gathered to protest, a significant and controversial absence marked the proceedings – none of the top Opposition leaders were present at the site to lend their weight to the agitation.

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**TIME : 10.30 a.m. To 8.30 p.m.**

With PWD and police authorities overseeing the translocation armed with a court order, activists and local residents did what they could, calling for the preservation of both the tree and the Khapreshwar Temple next to it and passionately pleading with the authori-

ties to halt the cutting. Activists were quick to criticise the lack of political engagement. Dipesh Naik, an environmental activist, expressed frustration over the situation: "If you go to the roots of the political parties, they have nothing to do with the Khapreshwar Devasthan. Political leaders only showed up later, when they saw a political opportunity."

Naik clarified that the activists' demands had been focused on preserving the specific site where the banyan tree and temple stood, not relocating the temple or shifting the tree. "Politics and religion cannot be mixed," he stressed. "Though we fought this battle without political party support, we later saw party leaders come in only after realising the public outcry. Their statements were more about political mileage than about the cause we were fighting for."

Environmentalism Avertino Miranda, who has been at the forefront of the protest, echoed Naik's sentiments. He remarked, "We never sought political support.

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The 200-year-old banyan tree and the Khapreshwar Temple, before their uprooting, on Sunday

## ORAL HISTORY OF KHAPRESHWAR TEMPLE

- The banyan tree has been there for 200 years, but according to a senior citizen from Porvorim, the temple was built a few years ago to remove the taboo around Vodakode, which was considered accident-prone
- Locals say that the plot behind the banyan tree and Khapreshwar temple remained unsold for many years due to the taboo
- About 15 years ago, a hote-

lier purchased the land and put up a tall building visible from the main road, which is where the newly renovated Khapreshwar temple was constructed

- The state government has dismantled and razed obstructions along the national highway, including the ancient St. Anthony's chapel with cross at Porvorim and the 1935 'Gulo' near B B Borkar Road, which was relocated to the art park

**"We never sought political support. We don't align ourselves with any party because they're all the same. Politicians show up when they see an opportunity to make a statement. None of them supported us during our struggle. It was a people's protest, not a party protest – Avertino Miranda, environmentalist"**

## FIGHT TO SAVE SACRED BANYAN TREE: A TIMELINE

**7 DEC** Concerned citizens and environmentalists gathered for a candlelight protest, voicing their opposition to the proposed translocation of the banyan tree at Porvorim, believed to be over 200 years old. Protesters argued that moving the tree would effectively spell its demise

**12 DEC** The High Court of Bombay at Goa directs the State government to implement additional safeguards for the remaining trees impacted by the construction of the six-lane elevated corridor project in Porvorim. The court allows the petitioner to include the transplantation agency, Doctor Trees from Telangana, as a respondent in the ongoing Public Interest Litigation (PIL)

**16 DEC** Citizens and

activists hold another candlelight protest to save the centuries-old massive banyan tree at Vodakode which will soon be translocated as it comes in the way of the elevated corridor in Porvorim

**15 JAN** In an order cheered by green activists, the High Court issues an interim stay on the translocation of the heritage banyan tree at Vodakode, Porvorim. The stay is to remain in effect until the next hearing on January 21

**29 JAN** State government tells the high court it will arrange a joint meeting of stakeholders to ensure that the last banyan tree at Porvorim is translocated in the best manner possible. The division bench comprising justices M S Karnik and Nivedita Mehta orders the authorities to ensure

the tree is translocated with minimal damage and instructs the agency not to cut costs when it comes to the translocation of the tree

**25 FEB** A part of the lone banyan tree at Vodakode, Porvorim is allegedly damaged by the contractor building the elevated six-lane corridor on Monday night.

**MARCH 2** Police and PWD officials face the wrath of activists and residents of Porvorim when they arrive to translocate the age-old banyan tree. Residents keep guarding the shrine and temple late on Sunday

**MARCH 3** Workers arrive around 3 am on Monday in a mini truck, take the idol and demolish the shrine. The banyan tree is uprooted for translocation

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