

REC nixes Goa govt push for Mollem forest land transfer to rlys

Environmentalists hail decision of Bengaluru-based Regional Empowered Committee to uphold abeyance order disallowing diversion of 15.6 hectares of forest land for the Kulem-Margao rail double-tracking

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Regional Empowered Committee (REC) of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) has upheld the abeyance order disallowing the diversion of 15.6 hectares of forest land for the Kulem-Margao railway double tracking project. This decision, which rejects the Goa government's request to remove the order, has been welcomed by environmentalists who warn that the project threatens the fragile ecosystem of the Western Ghats.

Goa Foundation (GF) director Claude Alvares stated, "The Central Empowered Committee (CEC) appointed by the Supreme Court had strongly criticised the railway double-tracking project, finding no justification for jeopardising the fragile ecosystem of the Western Ghats. The Wildlife Institute

"We welcome REC's decision, and we have also asked them to look at the Kulem-to-Kalem stretch and conduct a study. The Supreme Court has clearly told them that this is only for coal and asked the railway to bring coal from Krishnapatnam. It is very clear that, only for a few rupees of extra profit from the coal corporation, the Goa government is pushing the project, which is against the public interest. People of Goa have been fighting against it since 2015, and all credit goes to the common man of the state who has realised the threat to Goa and the world

— Abhijit Prabhudessai, environmental activist

of India should consider the CEC recommendations. Also, the High Court of Bombay at Goa has directed the State government to establish a Tiger Reserve that includes the proposed railway line."

The Federation of Rainbow Warriors (FRW) founder and environmentalist Abhijit Prabhudessai added, "We welcome the REC decision and have asked them to study the Kulem to Kalem stretch as well. The Supreme Court has clearly stated that this project is

meant solely for coal transport—from Krishnapatnam, no less. It is evident that the Goa government is pushing this project for marginal extra profit, against the public interest. People of Goa have been fighting this since 2015, and all credit goes to the common man who recognises the threat to our state and the world."

Goencho Ekvott founder member Orville Dourado Rodrigues commented, "It is shocking that, despite widespread opposition to

"This is a decision in favour of the people of Goa and Goa's rich cultural and ecological heritage. Thousands of people have been consistently raising their voices to safeguard Mollem's forests and biodiversity. This is a win for all of them. I hope that the REC's decision will also favourably impact the ongoing railway double-tracking work in the villages of Velsao, Pale, Issorcim, Arossim, Cansaulim, and Utorda

— Malaika Mathew Chawla, Amche Mollem

the proposed South Western Railway (SWR) double tracking – designed primarily for coal, coke, and hazardous cargo – the Goa government tacitly supported RVNL's request to reconsider the abeyance order. The REC not only rejected this

request but also directed an expanded study on the Kulem-Kalem section, part of the Bhagwan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary. We demand that the CEC recommendations not be diluted to suit corporate greed at the expense of our environment. Why push for double tracking through pristine areas when the bottleneck at Mollem remains unresolved?"

Amche Mollem Campaign volunteer Malaika Mathew Chawla stated, "This decision is in favour of the people of Goa and our rich cultural and ecological heritage. Thousands have consistently raised their voices to safeguard Mollem's forests and biodiversity, and this is a win for all of them. I hope the REC's decision will positively impact the ongoing railway double tracking work in villages like Velsao, Pale, Issorcim, Arossim, Cansaulim, and Utorda."

Team Herald

MARGAO: Goa's roads continue to witness a high number of accidents and fatalities, with 211 road accidents reported in January 2025, resulting in 23 deaths. While the total number of accidents has decreased compared to January 2024, fatalities have only seen a slight decline.

As per police data, 264 accidents were reported in January 2024, whereas January 2025 recorded 211 accidents, marking a drop of 53 incidents. The number of fatal accidents has marginally decreased from 24 in January 2024 to 23 in January 2025.

Fatal accidents continued in Ponda, Verna, and Margao, while minor accidents were frequently reported in Ponda, Verna, Maina Curtorim, and Cuncolim, which have emerged as some of the most acci-

"Drunken driving is one of the leading causes of road fatalities. Alcohol impairs judgment and reflexes, leading to unavoidable tragedies. Drivers must take responsibility while driving. There is a need for adopting preventive measures such as, public awareness campaigns, safe driving education and encouraging alternatives like ride-hailing services to curb drunk driving incidents.

— Madhukar Baiker, Retired Police Sub-Inspector

dent-prone areas.

Out of the 23 fatal accidents recorded in January 2025, the highest numbers were reported in: Ponda (3), Verna (4), Anjuna (3), Old Goa (2), Margao (2), Bicholim (2)

One fatal accident each was reported in Porvorim, Mapusa, Collem, Calangute, Mandrem, Vasco, and Mopa.

A total of 211 accidents in January 2025 resulted in injuries across the state. Some of the most affected areas include: Ponda (16), Old Goa (15), Cuncolim (15), Verna (14), Panjim (13), Porvorim (12), Colvale (11), Mapusa, Maina

Curtorim, and Fatorda (10 each), Margao (9), Anjuna and Bicholim (8 each), Colva (7), Collem and Curchorem (6 each), Calangute and Mardol (5 each), Mandrem, Canacona, and Vasco (4 each), Agasaim, Valpoi, Saligao, Pernem, and Quepem (3 each), Mopa and Mormugao (2 each).

Retired Police Sub-Inspector Madhukar Baiker highlighted drunken driving as one of the leading causes of road fatalities. He emphasised that alcohol impairs judgment and reflexes, leading to unavoidable tragedies.

Junk vehicles, trucks fuel traffic woes in Margao, residents demand action

Team Herald

MARGAO: Old vehicles, including heavy trucks, abandoned on roadsides and public areas in Margao is causing severe traffic congestion and minor accidents.

A recent survey conducted by the authorities identified numerous abandoned vehicles scattered across Margao's highways and the ring road. The commercial town sees a high influx of visitors for shopping and other activities. The surge in vehicles entering the town, combined with unclaimed vehicles blocking roadways and highways, has turned this into a pressing problem.

"These vehicles occupy the already limited park-



ing spaces in Margao, particularly in the heart of the city. A few years ago, public notices warned owners to remove their abandoned vehicles within 15 days or face removal and auction by the authorities," said Savio Coutinho, former Margao municipality chief.

"What was once promised to be action within

15 days has now stretched to 45 months with no real progress. This is exactly why the public in Margao has lost faith in these warnings," he stated.

Another concerned citizen, Snehal Onskar, echoed these sentiments. "In the past, residents have filed multiple complaints with the authorities, but all we

heard were excuses. They claimed that removing the trucks could lead to insurance issues. So, we took matters into our own hands—pasting a notice on the vehicle, and after two weeks, we removed it ourselves and disposed of it at Sonsoddo. It was eventually sent for scrap," Onskar said.

Damodar Shirodkar, Chairperson of the Margao Municipal Council, claimed that action is underway. "We have started removing the abandoned vehicles from the roadsides and have notified the concerned authorities to impose fines on the vehicle owners. Public notices have also been issued, giving similar warnings," he stated.

LENTEN SERVICE



Parishioners of Our Lady of Livrament Church, Arlem, participate in the way of the Cross atop the hill in Arlem-Raia, on Ash Wednesday. Later, a Mass was held at the church

W Bypass culverts being built sans plan: Banalkars

Team Herald

MARGAO: During an inspection of the illegal filling of low-lying areas and water bodies for the construction of a culvert along the Western Bypass in Benaulim, citizens have demanded that work should not proceed unless a proper plan is submitted.

On Wednesday, the Cana-Benaulim panchayat, along with Public Works Department (PWD) officials and in the presence of local residents, conducted an inspection near Umiya Mercado mall along the Western Bypass.

Speaking to reporters after the inspection, local man Santan Pereira, who has complained against the landfilling, said, "Currently, it seems that the authorities have no clear plan for constructing the culvert. Even during the inspection, they failed to bring a proper plan."

"We have been raising concerns about filling water bodies and destroying agricultural land for the Western Bypass. The workers constructing the culvert have illegally dumped mud into this traditional water body, which is completely unacceptable," he added.

Xavier Pereira, Sarpanch of the Cana-Benaulim Village Panchayat, also called on the PWD to submit a proper plan regarding the culvert's construction to ensure that the water bodies are not destroyed in the process.

Goa water stories: Lessons on water, livelihoods, and culture

Through this collaborative series, O Herald invites readers to journey through Goa's wetlands & waterways, uncovering the histories, struggles, and hopes tied to this vital resource

Team Herald

PANJIM: Water has always been the lifeblood of Goa—shaping its landscapes, sustaining its communities, and embedding itself deeply in cultural traditions. Yet, as modern development and climate change disrupt this delicate balance, urgent questions arise about conservation, sustainability, and the role of indigenous knowledge. Goa Water Stories, an initiative that has taken nearly two years to develop, delves into these complexities through 18 interactive projects that document Goa's relationship with water, in all its forms.

Curated by artist and documentary filmmaker Wency Mendes, this series is a result of extensive research and storytelling by over 30 young researchers—some of them Goa University students, some of them artists or scholars with deeply personal connections to the community and the terrain.

"This initiative engages and intersects with local and indigenous communities in Goa, shedding light on the challenges of water and its intersection with livelihoods, cultural practices, and the environment," says Mendes.

The project began in March 2023 as a civil initiative, launched through an Open Call fellowship that provided



grants for research on water, ecology, and climate change. With institutional support from the Centre for Public Policy and Governance at the Goa Institute of Management, the University of Goa, and the Sunaparanta Centre for the Arts, the initiative has fostered a growing cohort of scholars and practitioners dedicated to water advocacy.

The 18 projects featured in this series span Goa's diverse ecosystems, from the salt pans of Pernem to the khazan lands of Chorão, from the mangroves along the Mandovi to the wells scattered across its villages. The body of work includes research on the impact of tourism in Morjim, soil erosion in Chapora, and the pastoral traditions of the Gavli-Dhangar community in the Western Ghats. It also highlights Goa's rivers, wet-

lands, and coastal ecosystems, addressing the urgent need for sustainable water management.

"Apart from the importance of the research itself, these projects are also proof of the passion and competence of young Goan researchers. Goa hosts numerous exhibitions, summits and lavish film festivals, but most of them display the work of people from outside the State – Goa is often reduced to a venue," says Mendes.

"With a focus on interdisciplinary storytelling, Goa Water Stories is research for and by Goans, on a crucial subject. The project combines text, imagery, audio, and video, building a digital archive that is community-curated and freely accessible on an interactive platform," he adds.

On songwriter Ulhas Buyao's anniversary, calls to strengthen Konkani, Goan identity

Team Herald

MARGAO: An event was held recently to commemorate the 80th birth anniversary of Ulhas Buyao, during which a powerful call was made to protect and strengthen Konkani as a language, and Goemkarponn as a culture.

Fatorda MLA Vijai Sardesai, in his address, pointed out what he described as an "unresponsive generation" and emphasised the need to reignite the passion and

work of cultural icons like Ulhas Buyao. He stressed that while Goa has not undergone a political merger, a cultural merger is happening.

"If Ulhas Buyao were alive today, there would have been many cases filed against him for hurting sentiments," Vijai remarked. "We have a generation that is susegad, not waking up despite the influence of social media. This cul-

tural merger is happening, and Goa remains susegad. We need to change this."

Social Welfare Minister Subhash Phaladesai highlighted Buyao's efforts in safeguarding Goemkarponn.

"We need more such programmes, and through his songs, works, and writings, we must pass on this knowledge to the younger generations," he said.

Ravindra Bhavan, Margao Chairman Rajendra Talak, the editor of a special book released on the occasion, Sushant Kuncoliekar, and Ulhas Buyao's son, Siddanath Buyao, also shared their thoughts and memories.

South Goa Member of Parliament, Captain Viriato Fernandes, renowned Konkani writer Damodar Mauzo, and several musicians and authors attended the function, celebrating the legacy of Ulhas Buyao.

CULTURAL ICON



In a shocking disclosure, Former Power Minister Pandurang Madkaikar, who is still a BJP member has alleged that he paid Rs 15 lakh to Rs 20 lakh to get a file passed by a minister. In this edition of Street Voices, Herald Media asked people if they believe his claim

DO YOU BELIEVE PANDURANG MADKAIKAR'S CLAIM THAT HE PAID RS 15-20 L TO A MINISTER?

"He (Pandurang Madkaikar) is their ex minister, the opposition has not made this charge. And he has said that he has given the money and he sent it through someone. Giving and taking a bribe are both crimes. He has disclosed the name of the minister (to whom he gave the bribe) to Central Emissary B L Santosh. The entire act is an offence under Prevention of Corruption Act. It is a cognizable offence and immediately FIR should be registered. Arrest Pandurang Madkaikar or take his statement and arrest the minister

— Amit Palekar, Convenor, AAP-Goa

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"Pandurang Madkaikar from the BJP himself has blown the lid off, even as he is an ex minister. He has straight away told that Rs 15 lakh to Rs 20 lakh has been taken from him to pass a file by one minister and his PA. Madkaikar should have disclosed who is the minister and his PA, but I think in the future he may disclose. The CM who was claiming his is a Shivshahi government, then this Shivshahi government should immediately sack that minister.

— Rajan Ghate, social activist

"Palt is very difficult for the government to shake off this major and serious allegation. The government's name has been spoiled by the job scam and the land grab scam and a former BJP minister had made a serious charge. Firstly and ED inquiry should be made from where Madkaikar got Rs 15 lakh to Rs 20 lakh and secondly Madkaikar should be told to disclose the name of the minister involved and an FIR should be registered against him. It is all the more serious when he meets their central emissary and then makes this charge before the media.

— Rajesh Dhabolkar, social activist