

# RETAINING WALL GIVES WAY AT ST INEZ SMART CITY WORKSITE

Repeated (col) lapses, no lessons learnt: Gutter wall falls next to Taad Maad shrine, devotees and labourers escape unhurt

Team Herald

**PANJIM:** The shoddy execution of the Smart City sewerage project at Taad Maad, St Inez, came crashing down - literally on Thursday evening when a portion of the retaining gutter wall collapsed. Miraculously, devotees and workers escaped unhurt. The collapse, which occurred during the laying of the 710mm HDPE pipeline, is the second such incident in less than a year - exposing glaring lapses, lack of oversight, and the reckless endangerment of public safety.

This marks the second such incident within a year. In June last year, a newly built retaining gutter slab adjoining the Taad Maad shrine partially collapsed, raising concerns over the lack of supervision by engineers and Smart City officials. The sewage chamber had been dug directly in front of the Taad Maad shrine, while a trench close to the gutter filled with water, ultimately leading to a partial collapse.

In response to the latest incident, Imagine Panaji Smart City Development Ltd (IPSCDL) CEO, San-



jit Rodrigues, dismissed claims of a collapse, stating that only a portion of the retaining gutter wall had loosened.

He further asserted that no damage had been caused to the shrine or the banyan tree.

"A team from IPSCDL has assessed the site, and necessary reinforcement and restoration measures are underway to ensure stability and public safety," he said.

"The shrine and banyan tree are totally safe and we are already 10-12 metres away from it. The work is being carried out 12 metres below sea level and we

must prioritise the safety of human resources. Once it gets dark, we do not allow workers to go down into the drains. People may say we have abandoned the work, but that is incorrect—it is a completely distorted version. We are following our timelines."

Rodrigues also refuted allegations that a retaining wall had collapsed.

"People are saying that the retaining wall has collapsed, but in fact, there is no retaining wall here. There is a gutter and also a live gas pipeline. We have cut the gutter in certain areas to avoid conflict with the gas pipeline. The gas pipe-

line, along with the sewage pipeline, water pipeline, and BSNL line, are all live. People must understand the complexity and challenges of the work being carried out here."

IPSCDL, in an official statement, reiterated that there had been no damage to the shrine or the banyan tree.

"The shrine at St Inez remains completely intact, and there has been no impact on the nearby tree. Comprehensive shoring work has been undertaken, and all measures are in place to prevent any imminent danger," the statement read.

It further clarified that while a portion of the retain-

“People are saying that the retaining wall has collapsed, but in fact, there is no retaining wall here. There is a gutter and also a live gas pipeline. We have cut the gutter in certain areas to avoid conflict with the gas pipeline. The gas pipeline, along with the sewage pipeline, water pipeline, and BSNL line, are all live. People must understand the complexity and challenges of the work being carried out here

– Sanjit Rodrigues, IPSCDL, CEO

The organisation also stressed that work at such depths is prohibited after sunset to ensure worker safety.

However, locals have voiced dissatisfaction with the manner in which the work is being carried out.

Suresh Karapurkar, a resident, said, "The work is not being carried out responsibly. One incident happened last year, and now this. This time, they have dug too close to the temple. The temple, which was built around 60 years ago, is at risk and could collapse at any moment. The contractor is being irresponsible. They do not care about the complaints we make. They need to complete the work quickly. Most of the time, there are no responsible officials present at the site."

Another resident, speaking anonymously, highlighted concerns over the deteriorating condition of the surrounding soil and its impact on the banyan tree.

"Day by day, the soil is losing its grip on the areas surrounding the tree. The tree is losing support, and its branches have spread across the road, putting pressure on its roots," he said.

## SC issues notices to eight rebel Cong MLAs

Petitioner granted liberty to file application seeking early hearing of Special Leave Petition

Team Herald

**PANJIM:** The Supreme Court on Friday issued notices to eight rebel Congress MLAs, while hearing a special leave petition filed by former Congress president Girish Chodankar. The Court also allowed to tag the earlier pending disqualification petition against 10 Congress MLAs who had defected to Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in July 2019.

The petitioner had challenged the Goa Assembly Speaker's order and the consequent the High Court of Bombay at Goa judgment giving a clean chit to the eight rebel MLAs who defected from Congress to the BJP in September 2022. The question of law raised in the petition is that, "Whether two-third majority of a legislature party constitutes a valid merger within the meaning of the Tenth Schedule without the consent of the original political party on whose symbol the individuals stood elected?"

After some arguments, the bench headed by the Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar observed that the matter required consider-

ation. In view of the same, the CJ directed that notices be issued to eight defecting MLAs and the Speaker to respond to the SLP.

Upon further being apprised that an identical question of law was pending adjudication before the Apex Court in SLP (C) 5305 of 2022 also filed by the petitioner in respect of defection by 10 MLAs led by the then Leader of the Opposition Chandrakant 'Babu' Kavalekar, the Court directed that the present petition be tagged and heard along with the earlier petition. The Court also granted liberty to the petitioner to file an application seeking early hearing of SLP (C) 5305 of 2022.

Stating that the defections are being orchestrated under the garb of mergers, the petitioner said, "It is the need of the hour that this practice of horse trading under the pretext of a merger is stopped and anti-defection law is strengthened to prevent future misuse. We hope and pray that the Supreme Court puts a quietus to this issue by passing a landmark verdict, and settling the law of the land in this regard."

## Bengaluru court acquits Tourism Min in illegal mining case

Team Herald

**BENGALURU:** Tourism Minister Rohan Khaunte, his brother and others were acquitted by a Bengaluru City Civil and Sessions Court in a case related to illegal iron ore mining and transportation. The verdict brings closure to a high-profile case that was under scrutiny since 2016.

The Karnataka Lokayutka had chargesheeted 16 persons including the mining firm owned by one of the accused from Hosapete, Ballari, Karnataka, for allegedly entering into a criminal conspiracy to illegally transport nearly 17 metric tonnes (MT) of iron ore from the lease area of M/s S B Minerals, Vyasanakere plot, and other mines thus causing loss to the government exchequer to the extent of Rs 153,26,395 and caused illegal gain for themselves.

Of the 16 accused, three died during pending of the trial.

The prosecution had alleged that the accused wilfully overlooked regulatory norms, leading to revenue losses for the State and environmental degradation.

The Court examined extensive evidence and testimonies over several months. The defence argued that they had adhered to all requisite procedures and that the allegations were politically motivated.

In its verdict, the Court stated that the prosecution failed to provide conclusive evidence linking the accused directly to the illegal activities.

## WOOD SCRAP



Several trees have been felled and left uncleared at Bhasaheb Bandodkar's Samadhi in Miramar, where renovation work is underway by GSIDC at a cost of Rs 9.48 crore. Due to the ongoing construction, his Birth Anniversary on March 12, will be observed at the Secretariat Complex in Porvorim

## Govt firm on starting academic yr from Apr 1

Team Herald

**PANJIM:** The government will proceed with its decision to commence the new academic year from April 1 despite concerns raised by some parent-teacher associations (PTAs).

Speaking to reporters, Zingde stated, "Schools have not objected to the academic year beginning on April 1. Some parent-teacher associations (PTAs) have made suggestions—some propose starting a week later, while others suggest starting from June 15."

He reiterated that the decision was made

by a committee of educationists and has received government approval.

The Director also assured that physical copies of textbooks will be available before the school year begins.

Addressing concerns about holidays, Zingde clarified that there is no change in the summer vacation schedule and schools will continue to have a break in May. He urged people to remain open-minded about the new schedule. "At least we should try it. Why speak negatively from the start? Let us try. Let us be positive," he said.

## Education Dept to crack down on illegal pre-primary schools

Team Herald

**PANJIM:** The State Education Department has issued a stern warning to pre-primary schools in Goa (Nursery to KG) operating without permanent or provisional permissions and approvals, stating that strict action will be taken against them.

Speaking to reporters, Director of Education Shailesh Zingde said that schools functioning without approval will face a fine of Rs 50,000 initially, followed by a penalty of Rs 10,000 per day if they continue to operate despite warnings.

He also urged parents to verify whether a school has the necessary permissions before enrolling their children.

“I request those running schools illegally to shut them down because our taluka-level and zone-level officers will soon carry out surveys and take action against schools operating without approval. As per the rules, running an unapproved school is a punishable offence. Schools found operating illegally will be fined

– Shailesh Zingde, Director of Education

The department is considering conducting taluka and zonal-level surveys to identify schools running without ap-

proval. Schools are required to register on the designated app for permissions.

"I request those running schools illegally to shut them down because our taluka-level and zone-level officers will soon carry out surveys and take action against schools operating without approval. As per the rules, running an unapproved school is a punishable offence. Schools found operating illegally will be fined Rs50,000, with an additional fine of Rs 10,000 per day if they continue to run despite our warnings," Zingde stated.

He emphasised that while the department does not intend to harass anyone, strict action will be taken against those "playing with the future of children."

## Police rule out black magic as motive in Usgao child murder

Accused couple remanded to 6 days in police custody

Team Herald

**PONDA:** The murder of a four-year-old girl in Usgao was not linked to black magic rituals, as initially suspected, but was the result of a heated argument between the victim's mother and the accused, South Goa Superintendent of Police (SP) Tikam Singh Verma confirmed on Friday.

Meanwhile the Judicial Magistrate First Class (JMFC) court has remanded Babasaheb Alhat (52) and Pooja Alhat (38), residents of Usgao and originally from Gokak, Karnataka, to six days in police custody in connection with the brutal murder. Police retrieved the child's body from the

backyard of the accused couple's house, where it had been buried.

Tension gripped Usgao on Thursday night when police recovered the remains of the child. Enraged locals gathered at the site, demanding strict action against the accused. Earlier speculation suggested that the murder was carried out as part of a black magic ritual to help the couple conceive a child. However, SP Verma ruled out this possibility, stating that forensic experts had found no evidence of occult practices at the crime scene.

"The deceased child's mother and the accused woman had a heated argument over a matter. In a fit of rage, the accused couple

took the child inside their house and killed her," SP Verma stated.

As per police investigations, Pooja lured the girl into their house by offering her sweets. The couple then killed her by immersing her head in a water-filled tub. The post-mortem examination conducted at South Goa District Hospital confirmed the cause of death as "asphyxia due to simultaneous compression of the head, nostrils, and mouth using blunt force, with signs of immersion in water."

Police tracked the suspects after reviewing CCTV footage, which showed the child entering the accused's home but never leaving.

## BITS Pilani student dies by suicide

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** A 20-year-old student, Atharva Desai, a resident of Bagwada-Assonora, Bicholim, was found hanging in his hostel room at BITS Pilani, Zuarinagar, Verna police have confirmed.

Police received a call from Arjun Halankar, from BITS Pilani, informing them that a student was found hanging inside the hostel room. Upon reaching the scene, officers found Desai lying on the floor inside his hostel room.

Preliminary investigations revealed that Desai had locked himself inside the room and was unresponsive despite multiple attempts to contact him. Concerned about his absence, his friends—Shaan and Ayush—went to check on him. Subsequently, fellow students Daksh, Ranjan Dey, and Kshitij managed to open the door latch using a cleaning mop through a ventilator above the door and lowered his body to the ground.

Police conducted a scene of unnatural death (UD) panchanama and an inquest panchanama before sending the body to South Goa District Hospital (SGDH) in Margao for a post-mortem examination.

## Anjuna noise pollution: HC appoints citizens to noise monitoring panel

Team Herald

**MORJIM/VAGATOR:** Residents of Anjuna and Vagator, long struggling for their right to peaceful sleep, breathed a sigh of relief as Justices MS Karnik and Nivedita P Mehta intervened to appoint retired Captain John Gerald Fernandes and Kamlakar Manohar Naik as citizen members of the Noise Monitoring Committee (NMC). This decision was made despite opposition from petitioner Desmond Alvares and the government in the case of the former. "The petitioner, as well as the learned Advocate General,

has some reservations about the name of Capt. Gerald John Fernandes as he has already filed a complaint regarding noise pollution. Further, the petitioner, along with the learned counsel for respondent no. 17 (House of Chapora), opposed his inclusion," stated the order on Contempt Petition 12 of 2023, uploaded on March 6, 2024.

However, petitioner Desmond Alvares categorically denied objecting to Fernandes' appointment, stating, "Gerald is a good family friend of mine. Why would I oppose him?" Meanwhile, Capt. Fernandes responded, "I met him many

years ago when I was a member of the PTA where my son and his studied."

"I want to first thank the people of Anjuna and Vagator for recommending me and assure them that the acoustical privacy of both residents and visitors will be respected," promised Capt. Fernandes.

The High Court order further stated, "There has been opposition to virtually every name suggested so far. Merely because Capt. Gerald John Fernandes has filed a complaint is not sufficient grounds to oppose his appointment, as his credentials are otherwise not in

doubt. We find it appropriate to include his name as a citizen member of the committee."

"I approach life with three guiding principles—fair, firm, and friendly—and it is with this mindset that I will handle the responsibility entrusted to me by the court and the people suffering from sleep deprivation," said Capt. Fernandes.

"The law is made by the people and must be followed. I do not see any conflict of interest in my position. Once we convene, I plan to propose a three-pronged approach, starting with edu-

cating citizens on the harmful effects of noise pollution and making them aware that, technically, what they are doing is a crime," he elaborated.

"My intention is to tackle the issue by involving both sides, as this is a matter of reducing both demand and supply in the market where noise is permitted to thrive. People can expect me to do a sincere job without fear or favour," he concluded.

Attempts to contact the other appointed member, Kamlakar Manohar Naik, proved futile as his phone was switched off.



**HINDUJA HOUSING FINANCE**

**WALK-IN INTERVIEW**

**SALES OFFICER**

Experience: 0-3 Years

Qualification: 12<sup>th</sup> or Any Degree

Age: upto 30 years

Salary: Upto 2.50 LPA

Incentive: Best in the Industry

**Location: Panaji**

Hinduja Housing Finance Ltd. No. 401, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Vagle Vision, Near Ritz Hotel, 18<sup>th</sup> June Road, Panaji, Goa - 403001.

**Walk in on: 8<sup>th</sup> March 2025 between 11am-4pm**

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