

# Velsao villagers endure 'living hell' as Railways ignore P'yat's stop-work order

Dust pollution, blocked accesses, unmotorable roads and bone-jarring vibrations from heavy machinery make life miserable for Velsao residents; double-tracking work continues despite ongoing court case

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** The residents of Velsao are facing an uphill battle as railway construction work continues unabated, despite an ongoing court case and a stop-work order issued by the local panchayat. The petition filed by the villagers against South Western Railway (SWR), Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL), and the contractor before the District Court in Margao was adjourned yet again to Saturday, 15 March, leaving the community in distress.

At the site, heavy machinery is being used in full swing, causing vibrations that are damaging centuries-old heritage homes and disregarding the boundaries of private properties. Residents, who possess documents proving their ownership, feel helpless as their pleas for relief go unheard.

Sandra Rodrigues, a resident, described the situation as "living hell." "For the past eight days, life for my family has been unbearable. The dust pollution is choking us to the extent that we can't even cook our meals. Mud and stone metal are dumped right in front of our gate, spread across the area,

## South Goa MP talks about plight of Velsao locals in Parliament, demands action against RVNL for encroaching private land

Team Herald

**MAPUSA:** South Goa Member of Parliament (MP) Captain Viriato Fernandes on Wednesday raised the urgent issue of alleged encroachment by Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL) on private land in Velsao during the Zero Hour in Parliament. He highlighted the plight of villagers, including the elderly and children, who have been left isolated and landlocked due to the dumping of mud and construction activities by RVNL for the double-tracking project. In his address, Captain Fernandes drew attention to the forceful occupation of private property by RVNL, which has blocked access to several homes. "One lady lost her father a few days ago and couldn't even bring his body out because the gate was blocked by dumped material," he said, emphasising the dire situation faced by residents. He also pointed out that Velsao Sarpanch

Diana Gouveia had issued a stop-work order, which RVNL had ignored. Instead, the administration filed complaints against the Sarpanch and residents for protecting their rights. "The private property owners have to be respected. The ownership of their land has to be respected, and the powers of the Sarpanch have to be respected. Otherwise, there will be no respect for Panchayati Raj or the 73rd Amendment," he asserted.

Captain Fernandes urged the government to take immediate action against those responsible for the encroachment and to address the grievances of the villagers. Incidentally, North Goa MP Shripad Naik was present in Parliament when Captain Fernandes raised the issue. It may also be recalled that the South Goa MP had recently intervened directly in this matter when he visited the site in Velsao to assess the situation firsthand and engage with residents, RVNL contractors, and local officials.

and compacted with heavy industrial machinery. The vibrations are so severe that the roof of our 400-year-old heritage home creaks heavily, forcing us to move outdoors for safety," she said.

Rodrigues also highlighted the emotional toll of the crisis. "The panchayat, Goencho Ekvott members, and our neighbours have been supportive, but I'm not even allowed to grieve the un-

timely passing of my father less than a month ago. The only access to our home is completely blocked, and my car has been stuck in our compound since January," she added.



Trucks dump mud outside villagers' gates, blocking their entrances (below) Residents of Velsao and activists at the court



The panchayat's stop-work order, issued to protect the villagers' rights, has been blatantly ignored by the railways. To make matters worse, there are concerns that an FIR is being registered against the residents by railway officials, further escalating tensions. The situation has left the community feeling betrayed and helpless. "We have approached

the court for relief, but the adjournments and delays are only prolonging our suffering. The railways are acting as if they are above the law, and the administration is turning a blind eye," said another resident.

With an FIR potentially being filed against them, the villagers' fight for justice and relief has become even more challenging.

# Won't allow trees to be axed for road widening: Nuvem locals

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Concerned about potential biodiversity loss, residents of Nuvem have urged the South Goa District Collector and the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests to reject a proposal to cut down 50 trees for the expansion of National Highway 66 (NH 66) at Nuvem.

On Wednesday, a group of concerned citizens discussed the issue following a Public Works Department (PWD) proposal to fell nearly 50 trees as part of the old NH 66 expansion project.

Everson Valles, speaking on behalf of the residents, voiced strong opposition to the plan, emphasizing that the trees marked for removal are not only several decades old but also fruit-bearing and vital to the village's ecological balance. "We understand that the PWD has sought permission from the forest department to cut down nearly 50 trees for the proposed NH 66 expansion. However, there are already objec-

tions from local residents who believe this expansion is unnecessary, given that major traffic has shifted to the western bypass of NH 66," Valles stated.

He added that the trees marked for cutting have been part of Nuvem's environment for over 35 years, playing a crucial role in the local ecosystem. Removing them would cause irreversible environmental damage, he warned.

Valles urged authorities to reject the proposal, noting that residents had submitted memo-

Residents argue that the trees marked for the axe are fruit-bearing and several decades old. They believe that the ongoing expansion of the highway is unnecessary, since most of the traffic has moved to the 4-lane Western Bypass that runs parallel

randums and alternative suggestions to both the NH authorities and the Collector's office. Their proposals advocate improving the existing road without expansion to preserve the trees and protect the environment.

Residents fear that if the expansion proceeds, it will not only damage the environment but also bring the highway dangerously close to their homes, posing safety risks.

## SALTED AND STRANDED

ATISH NAIK



Farmers walk through their fields near Dadeshwar Temple, Nerul, which have been rendered uncultivable by sea water ingress during high tide. A white layer of salt can be seen on the soil. In 2020, the anguished farmers had written to the authorities about the damage of the bandh along Sinquerim River, but no action was taken

# Civic inaction leaves Margao's unsafe buildings standing, fume locals

Disaster waiting to happen: 23 buildings identified for demolition years ago

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** The town of Margao continues to harbour a serious safety threat as the matter of crumbling, precarious buildings remains unresolved, even as the issue has reached the High Court. Despite directives from the district collector issued two years ago, several identified unsafe buildings in the commercial capital have not been demolished.

The Margao Municipal Council (MMC) has claimed that they have completed their process, and building owners have been instructed to demolish their structures, considering the instability and safety risks posed by these buildings.

One concerned citizen, Colin Coelho, has taken the issue to the High Court, seeking judicial intervention in the matter.

Speaking with O Heraldo, Damodar Shirodkar, Chairperson of the Margao Municipal Council, stated that the civic body had followed through with its process after receiving directions from the district collector in 2023.



An old building on the verge of collapse in the heart of Margao town

"We are not the authority to carry out demolitions ourselves. Therefore, we have reached out to the Public Works Department (PWD) for assistance. Additionally, the owners of the unsafe buildings have been notified about the issue," Shirodkar explained.

He added that the MMC had also informed the owners to either demolish the structures voluntarily or face legal action from the relevant authorities.

Savio Coutinho, convenor of the Shadow Council, expressed grave concern over

the issue and accused the civic body of neglecting its duty to address the problem. He noted that there are approximately 23 such unsafe buildings in Margao, which urgently require attention.

"The Margao Municipality conducted a survey years ago to identify these unsafe buildings, but no substantial action has been taken to either repair or demolish them," Coutinho said.

He highlighted the serious safety risks posed by the neglect of these buildings and warned of the potential for a tragic incident.

## OBC leaders demand caste-based census

Last census was conducted in 2011; updated info required for equitable allocation of resources, schemes

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Leaders of the Bhandari Samaj, led by former Tourism Minister Dilip Parulekar, have urged BJP State President Damu Naik to conduct a caste-based census for Other Backward Classes (OBC) in Goa.

On Wednesday, Parulekar, accompanied by former Minister Mahadev Naik, Shree Rudreshwar Devasthan President Yeshwant Madkar, and others, met Naik to submit a memorandum outlining their demands.

The memorandum stressed the urgent need for a comprehensive OBC census, pointing out that the last such exercise took place during the 2011 census. The leaders argued that updated

data is crucial to ensure equitable allocation of resources and improved representation in government schemes, welfare programmes, and political platforms.

"The accurate representation of OBCs is vital for their upliftment and socio-economic development," the memorandum stated. "An updated census would reflect current population figures and address the community's specific needs.

The leaders emphasized that outdated data has hindered effective policy formulation and deprived the OBC community of rightful benefits. They believe a new census will enable better planning and targeted welfare initiatives for the OBC population.

## Goa Seva Dal commemorates 95th anniversary of Dandi march

**PANJIM:** Seva Dal, Goa, organised a commemorative event at Mahatma Gandhi Circle, Old Goa, to mark the 95th anniversary of the Dandi March, a landmark protest led by Mahatma Gandhi in 1930 against the British salt tax.

The programme, chaired by Socorro Menezes, Vice President of the North Goa District Committee, began with the patriotic song Vande Mataram. Rajan Ghate, Chief of Seva Dal, Goa, delivered the welcome address.

MK Shaikh, Senior Vice President of GPCC, inaugurated the event, stressing the Dandi March's role in uniting the masses and fostering resistance. Sharad Chopdekar, a past participant in the historic march, was felicitated for his contributions.

The event concluded with a tribute at Mahatma Gandhi's statue, where participants laid flower petals and rock salt before singing the National Anthem.

## Traffic chaos: Motorists annoyed with rogue bus stops at Old Market

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Concerned Upset with city buses making unscheduled stops at the Old Market traffic signal, Margao councillor Vitorin Tavares and local residents have demanded immediate action from the authorities.

Addressing reporters on Wednesday, Tavares highlighted the frequent traffic congestion and accidents caused by buses halting abruptly at the busy junction.

The Old Market circle is a key traffic hub where vehicles from Colva, Fatorda, Margao, and Panjim converge. Tavares pointed out that city buses from the KTC bus stand and Ponda make unauthorized stops here to pick up passengers, creating difficulties for vehicles behind them.

"Earlier, signboards were placed to prevent city buses from stopping here. Despite this, they continue to halt at the junction, inconveniencing commuters," said Tavares, adding that his earlier



A minibus makes an unauthorised stop at the turn into Margao to pick up passengers

appeals to the authorities had gone unanswered.

He urged the deployment of permanent traffic police at the junction to regulate city bus movement and improve vehicle flow. "We have witnessed repeated accidents here due to unauthorized bus stops," he warned.

Local resident Peter Souza echoed these concerns, calling for strict action

against buses that make sudden stops. "The lack of oversight has worsened traffic problems. Authorities must intervene," he said.

Meanwhile, resident Roland Fernandes demanded that signboards be reinstalled immediately to deter buses from stopping at the junction and ensure smoother traffic movement.

## 'Housie' craze sweeps S Goa with prize pools touching Rs 15 Lakh

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** The game of Housie, which was once just a fun crowd-pulling activity through competitions, has now become a massive craze across South Goa due to huge prize money.

What started as a small-scale pastime has transformed into a high-stakes event, with prize money now running into lakhs. Currently, South Goa is witnessing an unprecedented surge in Housie's popularity, attracting thousands of people to competition venues and musical events.

Several major events are already scheduled in the coming days. The Konkani musical shows in Navelim, Benaullim, and Verna will feature a "Super Grand Housie" with a prize pool of Rs 15 lakh. Meanwhile, Banavali will host Housie events with Rs 10 lakh in prize money on March 13 and Rs 6 lakh on March 14. The substantial prize



The craze has grown so much that Housie is now an integral feature at musical shows, football tournaments, and karaoke competitions

amounts have driven ticket sales, as participants flock to these events hoping to strike it rich in minutes.

The growing trend is being fuelled by aggressive promotion through social media and banners placed at key locations. The economic impact is significant, with local businesses benefitting from the surge in

footfall.

Housie competitions are now a staple at various events across South Goa. Numbers are announced throughout the competitions, while the full Housie results are revealed only at the event's conclusion — a format designed to keep crowds engaged and eager to win substantial cash prizes.

The craze has grown so much that Housie is now an integral feature at musical shows, football tournaments, and karaoke competitions.

While this boom has increased participation, concerns have also emerged

regarding the economic implications, with prize money often scaling into lakhs. The most popular ticket price is around Rs 1,000 for three tickets, giving players a shot at lucrative winnings.

The excitement lies not only in the game itself but in the immediate cash payouts, adding to the thrill. With the required permits from the District Collector and police, these large-scale events are conducted legally, ensuring compliance with regulations.

Housie, also known as Tambola, is a game of numbers played with a pool of 90 numbers. Participants receive tickets containing 15 numbers each. Organisers randomly announce numbers, and players mark their tickets accordingly. Popular formats include Top Line, Middle Line, Bottom Line, Quick Five, and Full House — with Quick Five being the most popular choice among players.