

Deadline looms, but miles to go as Smart City works drag on

Residents complain about haphazard digging and re-digging, often without notice; say contractors frequently return to areas where work was claimed to be finished, only to excavate once again

Team Herald

PANJIM: With the March 31 deadline pledged by Imagine Panaji Smart City Development Limited (IPSCDL) fast approaching, Panjim's discordantly named 'Smart City work' continues at a sluggish pace, its progress marred by chaos, disorganisation and bureaucratic hurdles.



Despite IPSCDL's assurances of timely completion, a large chunk of the work is still pending. Last month, IPSCDL admitted that in Central Panjim alone, 3,450 metres of road work remains unfinished. According to an affidavit filed before the High Court of Bombay at Goa, only 200 metres of roadwork is pending in St Inez out of a total of 3,000 metres, but Rua de Ourem still has 13,800 metres of incomplete roadwork.

Residents complain that haphazard digging and re-digging, often without notice, has become routine.



“The entire exercise has become a joke. Roads across the city are a mess. Look at the condition of the stretch near Cafe Bhosle or the incomplete works at Mala, Altinho, EDC, D B Marg, and 18th June Road – they are a mess. I believe over 40% of the work is still pending. This delay will only inflate the contractors' bills”
– Odette Lobo, Panjim resident

“Both roads and footpaths have been dug up, making it difficult to even walk, especially for children and senior citizens. Even where roads have been relaid, there are gaps between the road and footpath. I have no idea when they'll finally fix it”
– Shalini Naik, Panjim resident

“This is a very bad phase for us; most shops are struggling. We have salaries to pay and expenses to cover. With no customers, how will we survive? Roads are dug up without notice, left closed for days, and even when reopened, they remain incomplete”
– Shopkeeper, Atmaram Borkar Road

Contractors frequently return to areas where work was claimed to be finished, only to excavate once again. Recently, key points like the UCO Bank-Govinda Building junction, Vishal Mega Mart Junction, and Atmaram Borkar Road were dug up despite previous claims of completion.

The ongoing mess has frustrated residents and business owners alike. “The

situation is very bad. The number of customers visiting our shops has reduced. I'm getting some business only because I've been here for years,” said a shopkeeper on Atmaram Borkar Road, speaking on condition of anonymity.

“This is a very bad phase for us; most shops are struggling,” added another shopkeeper. “We have salaries to pay and expenses to

cover. With no customers, how will we survive? Roads are dug up without notice, left closed for days, and even when reopened, they remain incomplete.”

Ironically, even workers on the ground remain sceptical about meeting the March 31 deadline, and say they aren't sure of when they will wrap it up. “Only works that have received clearance from the

authorities will be completed on time,” one worker admitted.

City resident Dr Odette Lobo expressed her frustration, stating, “I don't think the work will finish before March 31. The entire exercise has become a joke. Roads across the city are a mess. Look at the condition of the stretch near Cafe Bhosle or the incomplete works at Mala, Altinho, EDC, D B Marg, and 18th June Road – they are a mess. I believe over 40% of the work is still pending. This delay will only inflate the contractors' bills.”

Sharing similar concerns, Shalini Naik added, “Both roads and footpaths have been dug up, making it difficult to even walk, especially for children and senior citizens. Even where roads have been relaid, there are gaps between the road and footpath. I have no idea when they'll finally fix it.”

Don't allow ore handling within wildlife sanctuary: Greens to Goa govt

Wildlife Board meets today; activists say unloading iron ore at Kalem Rly station will cause air, water & noise pollution, disrupt ecology in protected area, also violates Wildlife Protection Act

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Save Mollem group has expressed hope that the government will not grant permission to handle iron ore at Kalem Railway Station within the Bhagwan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary and Mollem National Park, as a critical meeting of the Goa State Board for Wildlife approaches on March 20. The board, chaired by Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, is set to discuss several agenda items, including a controversial proposal submitted by South Western Railways and Vedanta Ltd.

The proposal seeks approval for unloading and transporting iron ore from Karnataka at the Kalem Railway Station, which environmental activists emphasize lies firmly within the sanctuary boundaries. This fact was officially acknowledged by the Chief Wildlife Warden in a letter dated April 4, 2024, strengthening the activists' position that such activities would directly impact protected land.

According to the Save Mollem group, Bhagwan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary along with Mollem National Park constitutes Goa's oldest and largest Protected Area, spanning 240 square kilometres. The area is part of the Western Ghats, recognized globally as a biodiversity hotspot. Environ-



PIC COURTESY NIRMAL KULKARNI

“We call upon the government to reject this harmful proposal made by Vedanta in collaboration with Southwestern Railway, and stand up for a future full of forests”
– Save Mollem Group

mentalists estimate that approximately 16,000 species inhabit this protected region, many of which have global significance and play crucial ecological roles that benefit the people of Goa.

The activists argue that using sanctuary land for commercial activities like transporting ore would violate Section 29 of the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972. They warn that such operations would cause significant ecological disruption through various forms of pollution. “Such disturbance to the Protected Area will deeply impact the ecology of this place, with risks of noise, air and

water pollution,” noted the group in their statement.

With the meeting scheduled for Thursday, Save Mollem has launched an urgent public campaign, calling on citizens to immediately contact members of the wildlife board. They have circulated an email template urging authorities to reject the proposal, stating that handling and transportation of mineral ores “will have devastating long-term effects in Goa's largest protected area.”

The Goa State Board for Wildlife consists of 31 members, including representatives from State and central government departments as well as environmental NGOs. The Save Mollem group has publicly shared email addresses for key officials, including the Chief Minister, forest department officials, tourism authorities, and police representatives, facilitating public participation in their campaign.

Banalkars convene extraordinary gram sabha, reject housing project

Pass resolution against amendment of TCP Act that relaxes Floor Area Ratio limit, allowing construction of taller buildings in villages

Team Herald

MARGAO: At an extraordinary meeting, the Benaulum gram sabha unanimously passed a resolution opposing an application submitted by the proponent of a proposed multi-housing project in the village.

The project, which included buildings, villas, a clubhouse, and a swimming pool, was rejected in its current format due to strong community opposition.

The resolution, proposed by Geraldine Fernandes and seconded by Roque Fernandes, also called for denying permissions for similar projects in the village.

Several other resolutions were passed during the meeting. For instance, the gram sabha resolved that the Benaulum Biodiversity Management Committee (BMC) should conduct a biodiversity assessment of the project site and submit its find-

OPPOSITION TO MEGA PROJECTS

→ **STRAIN ON INFRA:** No sewage network in place; inadequate land for wet garbage treatment; dry waste collection site near the panchayat insufficient
→ **WATER WOES:** Proposed

project with swimming pool will require additional water supply
→ **ROAD EXPANSION:** The proposed 15m road may require house demolitions, villagers fear

ings to the panchayat.

Additionally, the gram sabha unanimously passed another resolution opposing the amendment to the TCP Act, which grants additional Floor Area Ratio (FAR) and increased building height. The resolution stated that these amendments are not people-centric and are designed to benefit the real estate and builder lobby, thereby undermining the purpose of the Regional Plan guidelines and participatory planning.

Speaking at the well-attended meeting, local resident Rudolf Barretto warned that such pro-

jects could worsen the village's existing infrastructure and service challenges. He highlighted the absence of a sewage network and the lack of sufficient land for a wet garbage treatment site. He also pointed out that the temporary site for dry waste collection near the panchayat ghar is inadequate for segregation and related activities.

Barretto emphasised that the project would further strain the village's water supply, recalling the Chief Minister's recent statement that only four hours of water per day could be guaranteed in the future. He ques-

tioned how the village would manage once the project, which includes a swimming pool, becomes operational. He further noted that constructing a 15-metre-wide road to accommodate the project could potentially lead to the demolition of houses. Barretto stressed that local priorities, such as providing pathways for farmers to transport machinery to their fields, must be addressed first.

Raising additional concerns, Barretto cited instances of large real estate projects in neighbouring villages allegedly discharging sewage into open areas. He urged the village to assess its carrying capacity before approving any large-scale developments.

Finally, Barretto referenced reports about rising sea levels and urged Benaulum to consider the future, warning of potential seawater ingress that could impact the village's groundwater.

DIGGING DISASTER

GREGORY D'SOUZA



Workers digging up a freshly hotmixed road in Marna-Siolim to repair an underground cable accidentally damaged a water pipe, wasting hundreds of litres of water

Construction in Candolim NDZ inspected

Team Herald

CALANGUTE: Officials from the Goa Coastal Zone Management Authority (GCZMA) inspected an alleged illegal concrete structure in the CRZ 1A no-development zone at Dando, Candolim beach.

The inspection followed complaints by the Calangute Constituency Forum (CCF). CCF member Agnelo Barreto claimed the construction destroyed sand dunes and beach vegetation, is barely 30 metres from the sea, and violates CRZ rules and the Environment Protection Act.

Barreto demanded its demolition, restoration of the site, and fines for the violators.

Activist group slams approval for hotel project

Team Herald

PANJIM: The Goa Green Brigade has strongly condemned the recommendation of the Goa State Level Expert Appraisal Committee (SEAC) under Union Environment Ministry's granting Environment Clearance (EC) to the Rs 250 crore, eight floor hotel building project by the Worldwide Resorts and Entertainment at Bambolim, in spite of objections raised by the locals. The

group demanded an immediate stop work order.

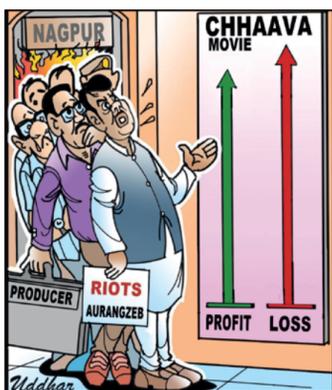
Bambolim residents, via their letter dated 28/02/2025 addressed to the Chief Secretary, Chief Town Planner, GCZMA and other authorities, had strongly opposed the project as it would cause irreversible environmental damage. The State Level Expert Appraisal Committee (SEAC) has recommended grant of EC to the hotel. Plans for the revised project which was ear-

lier proposed as a residential complex has a built-up area of 32,971.41 square metres with two basements, stilt parking and eight floors.

“After scrutinising the documents submitted by the project proponent and after conducting the site inspection by the Committee members, the SEAC decided to recommend the Authority for grant of amendment in the Environmental Clearance for conversion of residential project to commercial use.

MAX. TEMP 34.0°C
MIN. TEMP 24.6°C

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We appreciate your profits, but look at our losses!



The Chief Minister on Sunday made a statement while inaugurating the Betul Panchayat ghar - he said that it is okay to pollute as long as it brings development. Herald Media asked people in the mining belt of Bicholim if they agree.

DO YOU AGREE WITH THE CM'S STATEMENT THAT POLLUTION IS INEVITABLE FOR DEVELOPMENT?

“We need to know where the money from mining goes. It's supposed to go to the government treasury, but does it reach those affected by mining? I don't think so. Instead, it's used for development elsewhere, leaving those who breathe the dust daily without support. Every morning, our women struggle to clean the thick dust that settles everywhere - utensils, windows, vehicles. It's a daily ordeal.”
– Vasant Gad, Bicholim resident

“For years, we've been breathing and eating dust, and the government tells us to accept it, promising compensation. But we've yet to receive any money. We continue to suffer, and our children have contracted tuberculosis. The government hasn't provided us with basic facilities or health check-ups. Instead, they encourage us to take up agriculture and horticulture. However, with mining operations nearby, wild animals invade our village, threatening our crops and safety. Monkeys and other animals destroy our fruit trees, leaving us with no yield. In the past, we grew mangoes, jackfruits, and cashews, which we shared with the animals. But now, the animals descend upon our village in large numbers, forcing us to abandon cultivation”
– Putolo Gad, Bicholim resident

“When the Dempos operated the mines, locals had jobs and life was manageable. Although they worked for daily wages, they earned a living. However, since the mines closed, people have abandoned farming. Houses near the mining area should be exempt from the lease. To understand the dust's impact, officials must visit and see for themselves. Government representatives responsible for mining should survey the area immediately and witness our suffering. They must act to end our ordeal. We're plagued by relentless dust pollution. Every corner of our homes is covered in dust. Our houses, trees, and entire village are shrouded in dust, posing severe health risks. The dust's impact on our well-being is alarming and extremely hazardous”
– Pandurang Bhagat, Bicholim resident

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