

No water for Ponda despite pleas, protests and police plaint

Residents of Prabunagar-Curti have now gone 12 days without water supply; promises from CM Pramod Sawant unfulfilled; PWD officials claim 80% of issue solved, promise to replace choked pipes if needed

Team Herald

PONDA: As the summer heat intensifies, residents from various parts of Ponda have been flocking to the PWD office in Daag, Ponda, to seek answers to the severe water scarcity they have been facing. While the PWD assistant engineer (AE) and his team have managed to resolve some issues, residents of Prabunagar, Curti, continue to struggle after enduring 12 days without adequate water supply. Ironically, Ponda houses two large water treatment plants, fed by the multiple rivers that flow through the taluka.

On March 13, frustrated locals, led by MGP leader Dr Ketan Bhatikar, visited the PWD office to demand immediate action. They



complained of surviving on bottled and tanker water, which proved expensive and insufficient. Some residents were forced to use a pay toilet one kilometre away from their homes, at the Ponda Bus Stand. The residents warned of a rasta roko protest if the issue was not resolved.

PWD AE Kashinath Saraf had assured the group that the matter would be addressed soon. However, as the crisis persisted, resi-

dents filed a police complaint on March 16, alleging that the water shortage could be intentional and requesting an investigation.

On the same day, parched citizens approached Chief Minister Pramod Sawant at his residence in Sankhali. Sawant assured them that the issue would be resolved by Monday and directed officials to restore the water supply immediately.

After 5 days without water, Ponda locals threaten 'rasta roko'

Within the same week, the PWD office in Daag has witnessed desperate residents from different parts of Ponda—Usgao, Bethora and now, Prabunagar-Curti—demanding an explanation for the water scarcity



Despite these assurances, their taps remain dry. On March 19, residents, this time led by BJP-backed councillor Vishwanath Dalvi, returned to the PWD office to meet AE Saraf.

Saraf informed them that over 80% of the supply issue had been resolved and assured them that full restoration would occur within a day or two. He added that his team was actively identifying faults in the supply line

and, if necessary, would replace the pipeline if blockages or technical issues were detected.

The parched residents, when asked why they have been meeting politicians from various parties, emphasised that their concerns are not political. "We are not playing politics — we just want water," they stated, adding that political leaders, regardless of affiliation, are welcome to assist in resolving the issue.

Loutolim farmers fight for their khazans

Refuse to pay for zoning blunder in Regional Plan 2021 after HC ruling on TCP Act

Team Herald

COSTLY MISTAKES

■ **KHAZANS MISCLASSIFIED:** Incorrect marking in RP2021 enabled PWD to propose a new Borim bridge through these lands; with no provision left to correct it

■ **BURDEN ON FARMERS:** Farmers will be charged Rs 1,000 per sq metre to correct errors despite it being a government mistake

■ **LAND USE ISSUE:** Morod fields wrongly marked as settlement zones, encouraging plotting Small land pockets between homes misclassified as orchard zones

■ **GRAM SABHA'S STAND:** Members have resolved not to issue zoning certificates based on RP2021 due to multiple errors

MARGAO: Following the recent High Court ruling that invalidated certain amendments under Section 17(2) of the Town and Country Planning (TCP) Act, farmers from Loutolim are hopeful that the government will now address their long-standing concern.

The regional plan has mistakenly marked their khazan lands as something else, allowing the PWD to push forward with its proposal to construct a new Borim bridge through these lands. Correctly marking these fields as khazan would have safeguarded them from such development.

Albert Pinheiro, president of the Carbot, Mascasana & Bebedo Tenants Association in Loutolim, questioned why farmers must bear the financial burden to correct the government's error.

"It was supposed to be a correction of RP2021 errors, yet applicants are charged Rs 1,000 per square metre. If it's the government's mistake, why should the applicant pay?" Pinheiro asked.

He stressed that the faulty RP2021 had left Loutolim's khazan farmers struggling. "Our fields are not shown as khazan in RP2021, and now they are marked for acquisition for the new Borim bridge. Praising RP2021 as Goa's best plan is unacceptable. Section 17(2) can't be defended either," he said, calling for RP2021 to be scrapped and replaced with a new regional plan based on expert input.

The farmers' association had written to the TCP requesting corrections, but no

response was received. With Section 17(2) now invalidated, Pinheiro pointed out that farmers have no viable way to fix these errors.

"There's no provision to correct zoning other than 17/2, but paying ₹1,000 per square metre is unfeasible for agricultural fields. Farmers are already burdened with rising labour costs, and even after correcting the error, only agricultural activity would be permitted," he explained.

Pinheiro warned that the issue extends beyond khazan lands, with many morod fields wrongly marked as settlement areas, encouraging plotting activities. In response, Loutolim's gram sabha passed a resolution instructing authorities not to issue zoning certificates based on RP2021 due to its numerous errors.

Highlighting further inconsistencies, Pinheiro pointed to small, 1,000 sq m pockets of land between houses incorrectly marked as orchard zones. "How can a small patch between settlements be called an orchard? A zone should cover a larger, continuous area," he

questioned.

Despite his criticism of Section 17(2), Pinheiro acknowledged it provided some relief, as there was no alternative method for correcting zoning errors until the next regional plan. "Now, with 17(2) invalidated, farmers are left with no recourse at all," he said.

Pinheiro revealed that two recommendations had been sent to the TCP office from Loutolim — one by the Village Level Committee and another involving an FIR filed by villagers. To maintain green cover, some settlement areas were reclassified as orchards, even in cases where sanads had been obtained, due to RP2021 errors.

He suggested that future zoning corrections should involve consultations with authorities such as the ZAO, Forest, and Biodiversity departments. Property owners should be allowed to apply for corrections by paying only a processing fee, with site inspections and clear documentation to ensure accountability and the right to appeal if requests are rejected.

Cong launches awareness drive on 'steep' MMC fee hikes

MARGAO: The Margao Congress Block has launched a door-to-door awareness campaign against the proposed hike in taxes and fees by the Margao Municipal Council (MMC). The campaign plan includes meeting with the Fatorda and Curtorim MLAs, holding meetings in all wards, and ultimately organizing a protest in front of the Municipal building on March 28.

Holding a banner with the caption, "Jab Tak DK hai, Tab Tak Vasooli sirf taxpayers se," Congress leader Savio Coutinho, along with Adv Snehal Onskar, Lincoln Gomes, Aziz Shah, and others, visited various commercial establishments in Margao. Copies of the revised rate chart were distributed, with explanations on the additional financial burden businesses are likely to face from April 1.

Congress strongly criticised the MMC Chairperson for allegedly misleading Margao residents by claiming that the proposed hike was only 20%, when in reality, they said the increase ranges from 50% to 500%. It may be recalled that the MMC Chairperson recently defended the hike, stating that it was long overdue and lower compared to other municipalities.

"There will only be 'full swing' extortion starting from April 1 through these hiked taxes," Coutinho alleged.

"There is an ongoing survey of all premises within the Municipal limits. Once the survey is completed, it will be possible to determine the additional revenue that can be collected from unassessed or unlicensed premises. Based on this, the Council can decide whether a hike is necessary in the first place," Coutinho suggested. "The Chairperson has stated on record that, through a survey conducted, it was found that in his own ward, 40% of premises have no trade licenses and are operating illegally. This itself is a good reason to hold off on the hike until all such premises are brought under the tax net," Coutinho said.

SOLITARY REAPER



A lone farmer harvests sweet corn from his field near Betalbatim beach

Romi script activists back NEP stance on language flexibility

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Global Romi Lipi Abhiyan (GRLA) has welcomed the recent statement by Union Minister of State for Education, Sukanta Majumdar, in the Rajya Sabha, affirming that no language will be imposed on students under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020's three-language formula. The Minister's clarification comes in response to widespread opposition from Tamil Nadu citizens, who protested against the perceived imposition of Hindi under the guise of the three-language policy.

According to GRLA, the NEP provides states across India with the flexibility to choose three languages for school curricula.

They pointed out that in Goa, the proposed language options include Konknni as the first language, English as the second, and Marathi as the third. However, the GRLA has emphasised that while Konknni as a first language is acceptable, students should have the freedom to learn it in a script of their choice—Devanagari or Roman. This demand aims to resolve the ongoing script controversy and promote the use of Roman Script Konknni, which has played a significant role in preserving the language.

In his statement, the Union Minister reiterated that the selection of languages under the NEP lies with the state governments and students, not the central government.

The GRLA has urged the Goa government to take proactive measures by introducing legislation or resolutions to incorporate Roman Script Konknni into school curricula alongside Devanagari. The organization argues that the NEP's framework already allows schools to design their curricula within prescribed guidelines, making it feasible for institutions to teach Konknni in the Roman script if they choose to do so.

Kennedy Afonso, President of the Global Romi Lipi Abhiyan, stressed the importance of involving all stakeholders—students, parents, and school management—in discussions about the NEP's implementation.

Konkani parishad lauds Info Commission's call to deliver judgments in mother tongue

Team Herald

The AIKP noted that Konkani is already used in the proceedings of the Goa Assembly and is gradually being incorporated into government work

MARGAO: The All India Konkani Parishad (AIKP) has expressed its wholehearted appreciation for the State Information Commission's decision to deliver judgments in Konkani, the official language of Goa. In a press note issued today, the AIKP commended State Information Commissioner (SIC) Atmaram Barve and the Commission for their efforts to promote and disseminate Konkani through this significant move.

Chetan Acharya, working president of the AIKP, stated, "This decision is a crucial step towards the promotion and preservation of Konkani. It is highly appropriate that the State Information Commissioner has begun delivering judgments in Konkani, as it marks the language's growing use in judi-

cial proceedings." He added that delivering justice in a language well-understood by the people of Goa is a commendable effort that strengthens the connection between the administration and the public.

The AIKP noted that Konkani is already used in the proceedings of the Goa Assembly and is gradually being incorporated into government work. Acharya emphasized that the use of Konkani in judicial mat-

ters is a significant milestone in ensuring that the official language is actively utilized in all spheres of governance.

The AIKP further urged the SIC to continue this practice and called on all government departments to follow the example set by Goa's Chief Minister, Dr Pramod Sawant, and Information Commissioner Atmaram Barve. The organization stressed the need for effective implementation of the Official Language Act across all levels of administration.

The AIKP also reiterated its commitment to supporting the government in its efforts to conduct official functions in Konkani. "The AIKP will always stand by the government in promoting the use of Konkani in governance and judicial processes," Acharya said.

Sonsoddo dump burns yet again: Residents frustrated, critics cry arson

Team Herald

MARGAO: A fire broke out at the Sonsoddo dump yard in the early hours of Thursday, marking yet another incident in a series of recurring blazes at the site. The dry waste caught fire around 1 am and continued to burn for several hours before firefighters managed to extinguish the flames after a challenging and relentless effort.

Local resident Orlando Pacheco expressed frustration over the government's handling of the issue, particularly criticising the Margao Municipal Council (MMC) for its failure to prevent such incidents, which occur multiple times a year. Pacheco highlighted the serious health risks posed to the neighbouring community and passersby, who are forced to inhale toxic fumes emitted during the fire. He questioned whether the waste management practices at the site were adequate, given the frequent recurrence of these fires.



Adding to the concerns, Savio Coutinho, convenor of the Shadow Council for Margao (SCM), alleged that the fires might be deliberately set to expedite the disposal of dry waste, which burns faster and reduces the volume of garbage. Coutinho's allegations have raised suspicions about the motives behind the recurring inci-

dents and the lack of effective preventive measures.

In response, MMC officials stated that they are assessing the situation at the site. However, the recurring nature of the fires has left residents and activists demanding greater accountability and long-term solutions to address the root causes of the problem

Ponda locals annoyed with endless wait for late night Shigmo parade

Team Herald

PONDA: As the late-night float processions continue to stretch into the early hours, residents of Ponda are questioning the purpose of these midnight parades.

Ponda has the honour of hosting the inaugural Shigmo Parade competition in the state, attracting large crowds eager to witness the float processions, folk dances, and fancy dress contests. However, locals complain that despite the floats being the main attraction, they are often unable to enjoy them as the parade starts too late, with most spectators having returned home by then.

This year, the Shigmo festivities began at 5:30

pm, but the float procession only started around 10 pm, continuing past midnight and concluding early the next morning at 5 am. While judges and a handful of spectators witnessed the late-night floats, the majority missed out. Similar delays have been reported in other parts of Goa as well.

Local resident Nayan Naik shared her disappointment, stating that she and her children enjoyed the folk dances, romatmel, and fancy dress contest but couldn't stay long enough to see the floats. "It's not

easy to stand on your feet from 5:30 pm and wait until late night for the float parade," she said.

Naik pointed out that float troupes often fail to complete their displays on time. Since Ponda hosts the first parade in the state, participants reportedly arrive with unfinished floats, taking hours to assemble and add technical effects at the venue itself.

"This year, like last year, the float procession started so late that many people left disappointed without witnessing the main at-

traction," Naik added. "If these floats are meant for public enjoyment, why do they start when no crowd remains?" She urged organisers and authorities to streamline the event to ensure everyone can enjoy the floats.

Vishal Fadte, another local, echoed the sentiment, stating that the same issue occurs every year. "The float troupes should prepare earlier so the parade can start by 7 pm and end by 10 or 11 pm. Artists and organisers must remember that both they and the government invest significant money in these floats, which are meant for public enjoyment. If there's no crowd left, what's the point?" he asked.