

Margao locals decry MMC fee hike, say it will 'crush livelihoods'

Residents, traders demand rollback & consultation; say increase of taxes, trade licence fees by 60% to 550% unjustified, plan protest outside Municipal Council next weekend

Team Herald

MARGAO: Residents of Margao are strongly opposing the Margao Municipal Council's (MMC) proposed hike in service fees, demanding an immediate rollback. The sharp increases in trade licenses, construction permits, sanitation fees, and other municipal charges have sparked outrage, with many calling the move unjustified and excessive.

Small businesses, traders, and middle-income families are expected to be the hardest hit. A small shop owner who previously paid a modest fee for a trade licence could now face costs several times higher. Homeowners

planning minor renovations will also bear significantly increased permit expenses, while street vendors fear their livelihoods will be at risk. Many warn that the hikes will lead to higher prices for essential goods and services, affecting the entire community.

Savio Coutinho, convenor of the Shadow Council of Margao (SCM), criticized the MMC for failing to justify the increases. "The Council is using this as a cover-up for its inefficiencies and mismanagement. It hasn't even completed the survey of unlicensed premises, which account for 45% of the city's properties," he said.

Coutinho also exposed

'Scrap hike, or will raise issue in Assembly'

MARGAO: Fatora MLA Vijai Sardesai has come down heavily on the Margao Municipal Council (MMC) for its proposed hike in taxes and service fees, following a meeting with a delegation of Margao citizens and taxpayers. Sardesai warned that if the government fails to address this issue promptly, he would raise the matter during the upcoming Assembly session through a calling attention motion or during the Governor's address. Emphasising that the Fatora constituency, which falls under MMC's jurisdiction, is also affected by the hike, he insisted that the decision must be withdrawn or withheld to protect the interests of the people.

discrepancies in MMC's public notice, which claimed the hikes were capped at 20%. "In reality, the increases start at 66%

and go up to 550%. There isn't a single instance where the hike is just 20%. This is a blatant attempt to mislead the public," he said.

Anger has also grown over the lack of transparency in the decision-making process. Residents argue that the MMC failed to consult or properly inform the public before proposing the hikes. "This isn't just about money—it's about governance. The Council must engage with the people it serves," said a local resident.

Determined to fight the hikes, citizens have planned a large-scale protest on March 28 at 10.30 am in front of the MMC building. They are calling for improved municipal services, greater accountability, and a review of existing inefficiencies before imposing financial burdens on the public.

Vijai questions govt support for NGO over local self-help groups in providing noon meal

Team Herald

MARGAO: Goa Forward Party (GFP) chief and Fatora MLA Vijai Sardesai visited Ravindra Kelekar Dnyanmandir School on Friday to inspect the quality of mid-day meals provided by local women's self-help groups (SHGs). He assured that he would question Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on why the government is favouring Akshaya Patra over these local groups.

Accompanied by GFP leaders Prashant Naik and Durgadas Kamat, Sardesai interacted with students, asking if they were satisfied with the meals. Several students said they received good-quality homemade food. Sardesai also joined them in tasting the meal.

Speaking to the media,



Sardesai praised the local SHGs for providing nutritious, homemade meals. "This scheme was introduced in Goa by Manohar Parrikar to empower local women. Goans are known for their high-quality food, and the students are clearly happy with what they're getting. So why is the Chief Minister pushing to replace

them with Akshaya Patra?" he questioned.

He further argued that while local SHGs work hard to deliver quality meals, Akshaya Patra relies on donations. "I want to understand why the CM is supporting this move. I will raise this issue in the upcoming Assembly session," he asserted.

Raia's Sonarvaddo spring tainted with sewage: BMC chief

Team Herald

MARGAO: Former Sarpanch and Raia Biodiversity Management Committee (BMC) Chairman Xavier Antonio Fernandes has alleged that untreated sewage from suburban buildings is contaminating groundwater, which is polluting Raia's Sonarvaddo spring.

While speaking to reporters, Fernandes, who is presently a panch member, pointed out that this spring, which was once a beautiful lake, was important for agriculture, as it was a feed-

er for kharif crops in the village. However, he said the spring is now under threat due to the seepage of polluted water. Fernandes claims that the sewage discharge from nearby developments is flowing into low-lying areas, damaging the village's ground water. "This pollution is destroying our water bodies, which are crucial for agriculture and the environment," he said. "Authorities must take immediate action to stop this contamination."

The spring incidentally is being maintained by the Raia BMC.

ANNUAL PILGRIMAGE



Devotees prepare to carry a sacred coconut (Shriphal) in a vibrant procession from late Pandurang Keni's residence in Comba, Margao to Shri Damodar Temple on the banks of River Kushawati in Zambaulim, ahead of the annual Gulalutsav festivities

Zambaulim gears up for Gulal festival on Tuesday

Team Herald

MARGAO: The centuries-old tradition of Gulalutsav, a joyful veneration of Lord Damodar in Zambaulim, will be celebrated with grandeur and fervour on March 25.

The festivities began with the Shigmotsav of the Mathgramastha Hindu Sabha, marked by the ceremonial worship of the sacred coconut on March 19 at this residence of late Pandurang Keni in Comba, Margao. The coconut was then carried in a grand procession from Margao to Zambaulim on March 20, with a large number of devotees

participating.

Throughout the week, various religious and cultural programmes, including dramas, will be held as part of the celebrations. For over a century, Zambaulim's Gulalutsav has been observed with great enthusiasm and devotion.

The main day of the festival will be on March 25, with celebrations commencing at 3 PM. This will be followed by the Navardeva procession at 11 PM. The seven-day festival will conclude on March 26 with the Dhoolpet ceremony, which will see the participation of numerous devotees.

Curtorim meet discusses civic problems

Team Herald

MARGAO: A meeting was held in Curtorim involving multiple agencies to address pressing issues related to roads, power supply, and water infrastructure. The discussions were led by Curtorim MLA Aleixo Reginaldo Lourenco, who called for collaborative efforts to resolve these challenges. Among the key participants were representatives from Adani Gas, which has been involved in digging up roads, the Public Works Department (PWD), the water supply pipeline section, and the electricity department. Local Margao Municipal councillor Babita Naik was also present.

Wells, water and a looming crisis: Goa's vanishing groundwater reserves

Team Herald

MARGAO: Water—just the sight of it has a calming effect on humans, research has found. It's no wonder we flock to beach resorts and riverside getaways, trek to waterfalls and camp out near lakes, hoping this miraculous liquid will wash away life's stresses.

Filmmaker and writer Rehaan Diaz has long been fascinated by wells. While traveling across Goa, photographing traditional wells in Goan homes, he decided to be a part of Goa Water Stories—in a bid to delve deeper into the relationship between humans and groundwater in his home state.

WORLD WATER DAY

His interactive project, featuring photographs, videos, drone footage and interviews, follows the journey of groundwater—from how rainfall percolates through porous laterite and red soil, recharging underground springs and aquifers, to how these aquifers feed our wells.

Diaz's research took him to wells of all shapes and sizes across Goa. He spent a day with well-diggers in Saligao, witnessing the creation of an agricultural well. On a rainy day, he joined São João revellers jumping into wells in Siolim, visited aquifers used for Ganesh Visarjan, trailed water tankers supplying hotels and homes without piped water, and tagged along with a team of traditional well-cleaners to document their pre-monsoon desilting, lime-coating, and potassium permanganate treatment of wells.



Revellers jump into a well, a celebratory tradition during Sao Joao, symbolic of St John's leap of joy in his mother's womb when Mary informed her of Christ's birth.



An elderly couple digs a square well in the Goan hinterlands



Rehaan Diaz

But his work also highlights the darker side of water consumption in Goa—tourism's insatiable thirst, the commodification of what should be freely available, and the people who suffer as a result.

"Human activities, particularly in coastal, mining,

and industrial areas like Calangute, Quepem, and Verna, have taken a toll on groundwater," says Diaz. "Mining operations cut through the laterite topsoil, reducing rainwater recharge areas and causing springs, wells, and streams to dry up—a trend evident in Goa's falling water levels."

His time in Assagao was an eye-opener. "The sudden influx of well-off migrants during the pandemic triggered a real estate boom. Market forces have turbo-charged a quiet village into a quasi-westernised suburbia," he rues.

"Urbanisation over the last 20 to 30 years has changed Goa's water consumption patterns. Surface water from lakes and rivers now contributes significant-

GROUNDWATER RESOURCES

■ **6,000 wells in Goa (80% are open wells for domestic/agricultural use)**

■ **160.33 MCuM – Annual extractable groundwater resources (as of March 2017)**

■ **53.71 MCuM – Groundwater extracted annually**

■ **34% – Ratio of annual groundwater draft to net availability (State Average)**

■ **Groundwater security**

ALL 12 TALUKAS CLASSIFIED AS 'SAFE' IN GROUNDWATER LEVELS

Talukas extracting **30% or more** of available groundwater:

- Ponda ■ Pernem
- Bardez ■ Tiswadi
- Salcete ■ Mormugao

ly to the piped water supply, reducing the importance of wells," Diaz points out.

The government claims Goa is the first State to provide piped water to every household through one of its nine water supply schemes. But Diaz's research in 2024 found both Panjim and rural Sanguem

grappling with erratic water supply. "Demand keeps rising, drying up wells faster than before. Borewells are then drilled to compensate, further depleting underground reserves and manufacturing a crisis. Goa faces a shortfall of 85 million litres of water per day," he says, quoting news reports.

When taps run dry, people turn back to their wells—so many of which are derelict or contaminated by industrial effluents. Their only recourse? Water peddlers—enterprising locals who own or have access to wells, extracting and selling groundwater by the tanker.

"Some locals take loans to dig wells under the guise of agricultural use. Once the wells start yielding water, it isn't used for irrigation but sold at a profit, filling swimming pools in gated communities and luxury hotels," Diaz explains.

"The natural bounty of Goa is disproportionate to its size—we cannot take its beauty, nature, and culture for granted," he says. "Goa Water Stories is designed as an immersive experience to sensitise people—especially millennials and Gen Z—about what's at stake."

"This isn't something that can be schooled or forced. It must be experienced to be cherished as Goan heritage," Diaz says. "I hope this project fosters appreciation for what we have and the realisation of what we need to protect. It is incumbent on our generation not to let Goa down."

Goa Water Stories is a collaboration with the Living Waters Museum, the Centre for Public Policy and Governance at the Goa Institute of Management, the Goa University and the Sunaparanta Goa Centre for the Arts.

DocuBay's 'The Dupatta Killer' to be screened in Panjim today

Team Herald

PANJIM: DocuBay's upcoming true-crime documentary, *The Dupatta Killer*, which delves into the chilling case of Mahanand Naik—accused of killing 16 women but convicted for two—will be screened at the Entertainment Society of Goa (ESG), Panjim, at 3.30 PM on Saturday.

The film premiered on DocuBay on Friday and will now be showcased for its makers, contributors, and the local media. Senior police officials and legal experts are also expected to attend. The screening aims to highlight the investigative efforts behind the documentary while engaging with the region that bore witness to Naik's crimes.

Director Patrick Graham described the experience of making the documentary as "fascinating, sometimes shocking and saddening, and often rewarding." He



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added, "With *The Dupatta Killer*, we sought to go beyond the crime itself, examining the systemic failures that enabled it."

Producer Samar Khan, CEO of Juggernaut Productions, emphasized the power of documentaries

in driving real change. "This film doesn't just narrate events—it compels audiences to question the systems that allowed such atrocities to persist. Screening it in Goa is significant, as it brings the story back to where it unfolded."

Mukesh Kumar, the documentary's researcher and creative consultant, played a crucial role in uncovering details of the case in Goa. His research helped shape the narrative, ensuring the film stays deeply connected to the region and its history.

Viriato raises Velsao 'land grab' in Parliament

MARGAO: South Goa Member of Parliament (MP) Captain Viriato Fernandes has brought the issue of forceful occupation of private property in Velsao to the forefront during the ongoing Parliamentary session. Moving a notice under Rule 377 in the Lok Sabha, Fernandes highlighted the alleged encroachment by Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL) on private land, accusing government officers of actively supporting the illegal activities.

In his notice, the MP drew the House's attention to the plight of Velsao residents, whose properties have been allegedly encroached upon by RVNL contractors for the double-tracking project.

He demanded immediate action against the RVNL contractor and the government officers involved in the encroachment.

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MIN. TEMP	24°C

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