

Cuncolim IDC scrambles to clear 35k tonnes of toxic waste before rains

NEERI study confirms waste remains hazardous; pushes for urgent disposal at Pissurlem facility; govt approaches Centre for funds as transportation alone to cost Rs 14-15 cr

Team Herald

MARGAO: With the monsoon expected to start in June, the Goa State Pollution Control Board (GSPCB) faces a race against time to initiate the long-overdue transportation of 35,000 tonnes of hazardous waste from the Cuncolim Industrial Estate to the Pissurlem disposal facility.

For over a decade-and-a-half, the annual ritual of covering the waste with tarpaulin sheets has been a temporary fix, but concerns persist over its environmental impact.

The urgency has grown following a study by the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI), which reaffirmed that the waste left behind by Ms Sunrise Zinc nearly two decades ago remains hazardous and must be removed.

The GSPCB had commissioned the study last year to determine if the waste could be remediated, but NEERI's findings confirmed that safe disposal at a designated hazardous waste facility was the only viable solution.

The study, completed



in November last year, involved detailed sampling to assess the waste's characteristics.

While speaking to the media, GSPCB Chairman Mahesh Patil stated that the Board has formally approached the Union Environment Ministry for financial assistance, estimating the transportation costs at Rs 14-15 crore. He noted that the Ministry has agreed in principle to part-fund the project under a 60:40 cost-sharing scheme.

"We recently met with the Union Environment Secretary to request the inclusion of Cuncolim's waste site in the national list of hazardous waste sites requiring urgent intervention. We are opti-



mistic that the Centre will share the financial responsibility," Patil said. While the Board had initially expected to start the transportation process last year, delays in securing funds from the state government stalled progress.

In November 2023, the government had approved Rs 5 crore for the pro-

ject, but the funds never reached the GSPCB, leading it to focus instead on conducting the NEERI study. Now, with the study complete and the Centre's preliminary nod, the Board is pushing to expedite the process before the monsoon rains make transportation more difficult.

Patil explained that the

estimated quantity of hazardous waste at the site is around 35,000 tonnes, though the exact amount may change once transportation begins.

"The quantity of the waste may vary when it is being taken up for transportation," he noted. With just two-and-a-half months left before the monsoon sets in, questions have been raised about whether the GSPCB will be able to complete the formalities and initiate transportation in time. If the process is not started in the next two months, the Board will have to resort to the familiar practice of covering the dump with tarpaulin sheets before the onset of heavy rains.

"If we can begin within the next two months, we will proceed. Otherwise, as in previous years, the waste will have to be covered once again," Patil said.

Authorities are under mounting pressure to resolve the long-standing issue, especially as the site has remained under High Court scrutiny for years. This issue is likely to be raised by MLAs during the upcoming Assembly session.

Loutolim ryots seek tenancy rights over khazan fields

Want their children and grandchildren to continue centuries-old farming, fishing tradition on the marshy land

Team Herald

MARGAO: Farmers from Loutolim, represented by the Carbot, Mascasana & Bebdo Tenants Association, are pinning their hopes on the Goa Legislative Assembly session beginning on Monday, to address their decades-long struggle to secure tenancy rights over khazan lands. The issue, which affects 150 farmers cultivating approximately 6,50,000 square metres of land, centers on the enrollment of legal heirs as members of the Khazan Land Association—a process that has been mired in bureaucratic hurdles and lack of documentation.

The problem traces back to the original tenants, many of whom were illiterate and did not preserve lease papers or foro receipts. Their heirs, now cultivating the same fields, are unable to prove their rights as the Comunidade of Loutolim refuses to issue registration certificates based solely on Form 1&14 records. These forms, generated during land surveys in the 1970s, list the names of the original tenants but are insufficient for the current managing committee to recognise the claims of their descendants.

In a bid to escalate their demand, a busload of farmers, including senior citizens and women, travelled from Loutolim to Mayem to meet



Senior farmers from Loutolim, including 95-year-old Domingo Costa, meet Mayem MLA Premanand Shet, who will raise the matter in the Assembly session starting Monday

Mayem MLA Premanand Shet, who has taken up their cause. Among the delegation was 95-year-old Domingo Costa, one of the oldest members of the association, who has been cultivating khazan fields for most of his life. The farmers sought the MLA's intervention to simplify the process of enrolling legal heirs as tenants. MLA Shet, who is also the Chairman of the State Horticulture Corporation has submitted a question to be discussed during the assembly session. Directed to the Revenue Minister, the question seeks clarity on whether the government has a policy to enroll legal heirs, the criteria for such enrollment, plans to simplify the procedure, and whether the process will be time-bound to provide relief

to the heirs of farmers. The farmers see this as a critical step toward resolving their long-standing grievances.

Albert Pinheiro, president of the tenants association, expressed cautious optimism about the Assembly discussion. "We are hopeful that the government will clarify the process and make it easier for us to secure our rights," he said. Pinheiro highlighted the challenges faced by the farmers, including the Comunidade's refusal to issue registration certificates, and their inability to access government schemes like Krishi cards. "Many of us are senior citizens, and we want to ensure that our children and grandchildren can continue farming without these legal battles," he added.

Chinchinim-Deussua P'yat launches leak reporting system to save water

MARGAO: On World Water Day, the Village Panchayat of Chinchinim-Deussua launched a community-driven initiative to tackle water leakage and promote water conservation. The program encourages residents to report leaks from public pipelines or community taps to their respective ward members, enabling timely repairs and reducing water wastage.

The Panchayat has urged villagers to remain vigilant and promptly report any signs of leakage. These reports will be coordinated with the Public Works Department (Water Supply) to ensure swift action. The initiative aims to address the growing need for water conservation and prevent the loss of valuable water resources.

Sarpanch Frank Viegas, along with panch members, emphasized the importance of community involvement in addressing water scarcity. "Every drop counts. The climate crisis is a water crisis. Let's save water. By acting together and addressing leakages promptly, we can save tonnes of water and contribute to a sustainable future for our village," Viegas stated.

FESTIVE ENERGY ON THE STREETS



Goans of all ages converge in Panjim for the spectacular Shigmo parade, showcasing vibrant folk dances and majestic floats that bring Hindu mythology to life, celebrating the eternal triumph of good over evil



PICS: ELSA ROSE AND UPENDRA NAIK

Tourist taxi assn complains of harassment from local cabbies, meets Collector

Team Herald

MARGAO: Members of the All Goa Tourist Taxi Unity Association recently met South Goa Collector Eгна Cleetus, IAS, demanding strict measures against local taxi drivers, whom they accused of obstructing their services and creating a hostile environment.

With a membership of over 500 operators, the association claimed that despite functioning through online booking platforms, they faced interference from local drivers. According to them, some local taxi drivers have been intimidating hotel staff and, in certain instances, even forcibly removing passengers from their taxis.

"We are facing constant harassment, especially in coastal areas

as where local drivers prevent us from picking up or dropping off customers at hotels. The transport department has authorized us to operate statewide, and our bookings are made online," said association president Salim Shaikh after submitting a memorandum to the district collector.

Citing a recent case, Riyaz Shaikh alleged that a few days ago, a foreign tourist was forcefully removed from a taxi by local drivers in Varca. He added that despite repeated complaints to senior police officials, the transport department, and other authorities, no action had been taken. "If the authorities do not intervene, we will organize a protest at Azad Maidan in Panaji," he warned.

Once a lifeline for agriculture, Ponda's main nullah now a polluted dump

SANTOSH NAIK

PONDA: Once the lifeline of agriculture, Ponda's main nullah has turned into a dumping ground for waste and garbage, with its water now highly polluted, appearing green and black in many areas.

As the world observes World Water Day, Ponda residents are increasingly concerned about the deteriorating condition of local water bodies. Springs that once provided clean water now carry pollutants into the main nullah, worsening the situation. Many believe that stronger efforts and greater awareness are needed to protect these water sources.

At least seven culverts along the Ponda main nullah serve as dumping points for garbage. While a steel net has been installed at the bus stand culvert to prevent waste disposal, similar measures are required at other locations, said Naresh Naik from Ponda.

Farmer Durgadas Naik highlighted that over the past two decades, rapid urbanisation and increasing population have led to heavy pollution of the nullah. Domestic and commercial waste, along with chemical effluents from indus-



tries, have contaminated the water, making it unusable for irrigation.

"Farmers in downstream villages like Kavlem and Bandora once depended on this nullah for paddy cultivation. However, with the water now highly polluted, many have abandoned their fields. The contaminated water causes skin rashes, making it hazardous for farmers to enter paddy fields," he said. He urged the government to implement filtration measures to ensure clean irrigation water, which could revive paddy farming.

Ponda resident Vishal Fadte recalled a time when people

relied on wells and springs for their water needs. "Today, people stage protests over water shortages, but we once depended entirely on natural water sources. The introduction of tap water led to neglect, with many wells being covered or filled with mud," he said.

Fadte stressed the need for public awareness to protect springs and urged authorities to conserve hills, which play a crucial role in recharging wells and springs located at their foothills.

Social worker Minguel Fernandes pointed out that despite the Ponda Municipal Council (PMC) implementing

a door-to-door garbage collection system, some individuals continue to dump waste into the nullah, leading to foul odours and water contamination. He advocated for installing steel nets on culverts to prevent waste disposal.

PMC Chairperson Anand Naik acknowledged the issue, stating that while fines are imposed for illegal waste dumping, some residents persist in this habit. He urged citizens to take sewage connections to prevent contamination of water bodies.

"To keep the city clean, it is everyone's responsibility to protect the environment," he said.

'Nitoll Goem, Nitoll Baim': GOACAN awareness drive towards well maintenance

Team Herald

MARGAO: GOACAN, a consumer rights organization, marked World Water Day with an awareness campaign in Betalbatim on Saturday. Volunteers from consumer forums across six villages—Betalbatim, Raia, Navelim, Davorlim, Cuncolim, and Paroda—participated, carrying placards, flags, buckets, and pots to emphasize water's essential role in daily life.

As part of the campaign, volunteers visited residential wells in Thonvaddo and Nagvaddo, engaging with homeowners on well maintenance and water conservation.

GOACAN Coordinator Roland Martins stressed the importance of the Goa Ground Water Act 2002 and its 2003 Rules, which mandate well registration. He also highlighted the "Nitoll Goem, Nitoll Baim" scheme by the Water Resources Department (WRD), which provides financial aid for well renovation. Martins urged villagers to raise well pro-



The campaign featured visits to residential wells in Thonvaddo and Nagvaddo areas of Betalbatim, where volunteers engaged with homeowners about well maintenance practices and water usage strategies. GOACAN Coordinator Roland Martins urged citizens to raise well protection issues at village gram sabhas

tection concerns at gram sabhas and to prevent water pollution through vigilance.

Betalbatim Deputy Sarpanch Ilma Dias pledged to activate the Village Water & Sanitation Committee with PWD involvement and to hold discussions on well water usage through the Village

Development Committee. She also committed to tackling water-related health issues via the Village Health, Sanitation & Nutrition Committee, in collaboration with the local Primary Health Centre.

Xavier Cota, convenor of the Betalbatim Civic and Consumer Forum, shared his family's three-decade

reliance on well water. He stressed the need for managing village lakes during the monsoon to recharge wells and urged panchayats and Comunidades to prioritize water conservation in a time-bound manner.

The campaign concluded with volunteers committing to future awareness drives under GOACAN for Earth Day (April), International Biodiversity Day (May), and World Environment Day (June) to promote sustainability and strengthen the consumer movement.