

# Over 13,000 parents sign petition to nix early start to school year

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Parents in Goa have mounted a formidable campaign against the proposed changes to the school academic calendar, gathering at least 13,361 signatures as of March 18 to challenge the early start of the academic year. The grassroots movement has rapidly gained traction across the state's educational community.

Activist and parent Cecille Rodrigues has spearheaded an online petition urging authorities to reconsider the hurried implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP)

2020's proposed academic calendar changes. The petition argues that the proposed modifications fundamentally clash with both the NEP and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2023 guidelines.

The campaign's reach is extensive, with signatures collected through multiple channels. By March 18, parents had submitted 246 emails from parents and PTA heads, 109 physical copies delivered to the Directorate of Education, and launched an online petition on March 23 that quickly amassed 5,000 signatures and continues to grow.

## OPPOSITION FROM PARENTS

- Parents have gathered over 13,000 signatures against the move
- Claim the decision violates the Goa Education Act, 1984 and increases instructional days to 240+, exceeding NCF recommendations

## CONCERNS ABOUT

- Extreme heat in April affecting students
- Lost summer break impacting travel, extracurricular activities and sports
- Disruption to family and work schedules with early school hours ending at 11.30 am

While the government initially reported receiving around 200 objections, the parent-led campaign reveals a dramatically different picture, with over 13,361 signatures

demonstrating widespread opposition to the proposed changes. The opposition extends beyond parents, gaining significant support from key educational stakeholders.

Both the headmaster's association and teachers' association have submitted their own objections and suggestions, underscoring the broad-based resistance to the government's proposal to start the school year on April 1.

The proposed changes would dramatically alter the academic year, attempting to shift the start from the traditional June to April, affecting students from classes 1

to 12. The extended deadline for objections until March 27 provides further opportunity for parents to voice their concerns, with campaigners expecting the signature count to increase even further.

The High Court of Bombay at Goa has already acknowledged the need for careful consideration, noting the importance of proper notification and consultation in amending the Goa School Education Act. As the March 27 deadline approaches, parents remain hopeful that their collective voice will prompt a reconsideration of the proposed changes.

## Bikers skid as Sonsoddo garbage slurry turns road slippery

**MARGAO:** Multiple minor accidents were reported in Margao-Raia after the unexpected spell of rain on Tuesday evening led to leachate seeping out of the Sonsoddo garbage dump, forming a slick layer on the road and causing two-wheeler riders to skid and fall off their vehicles. The busy stretch of road that connects Margao with Raia, Curtorim and beyond became so slippery that firemen had to rush to the spot to hose the stinking slurry off the road. The clean-up effort at peak hour led to a traffic jam on the stretch.

The problem of leachate oozing from the hills of garbage emerges during the monsoon every year, leaving people who work and reside in the area feeling angry and helpless, as they are forced to spread dried leaves or sand to make the road motorable. While both the MMC and Margao MLA have, in the past, assured citizens that they would find ways to dispose of the slurry, locals asked if the government was waiting for a fatal accident to implement a more permanent solution.

## MMC's revenue woes deepen as tax dues pile up, recovery stalls

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Despite mounting financial distress, with total revenue arrears reaching a staggering Rs 36.83 crore, the Margao Municipal Council (MMC) appears to be making little headway in its recovery efforts.

A source within the civic body revealed that three teams had been deployed to visit households and business establishments to serve notices for pending dues. However, the recovery rate remains dismal, averaging just Rs 2 lakh per day.

When *O Herald* sought details about the recovery process, none of the municipal officials, including Chief Officer Melvyn Vaz, were willing to disclose specific figures. Meanwhile, MMC Chairperson Damodar Shirodkar insisted that the

TAXING TIMES	
■ Total arrears (as of July 11, 2024): Rs 38.19 crore	■ Arrears in June 24: Rs 36.83 crore (of which House tax & sanitation tax arrears alone come up to Rs 21 cr)
■ Arrears in 2020-21: Rs 24.59 crore	■ Daily recovery rate in March 2025: Rs 1.5 – Rs 2 lakh
■ Arrears in 2021-22: Rs 25.77 crore	■ Illegal businesses detected: 141
■ Arrears in early 2024 (before the spike): Rs 27.72 crore	

recovery drive was in full swing.

A major hurdle in revenue collection has been the lack of communication regarding businesses relocating, as well as a significant number of residents living outside Margao's jurisdiction or abandoning their properties—leading to unaccounted pending arrears.

The trend of rising dues is evident in the MMC's own

records. In the 2020-21 fiscal year, total arrears stood at Rs 24.59 crore, with house tax and sanitation tax being the primary contributors. By 2021-22, this figure climbed to Rs 25.77 crore. In 2023-24, it further surged to Rs 27.72 crore, with house tax and sanitation tax alone accounting for a staggering Rs 21 crore.

However, in a shocking escalation, these arrears

have skyrocketed by nearly Rs 10.5 crore in just four months, reaching Rs 38.19 crore as of July 11, 2024. Compounding the issue, the civic body recently discovered 141 illegal establishments operating without trade licences during the same period.

When contacted, the Chairperson admitted that the council was recovering a mere Rs 1.5 to Rs 2 lakh per day—an insignificant amount compared to the growing arrears. A senior MMC officer confirmed that three teams were actively engaged in recovering dues across all wards, yet refused to provide specific details, instead directing queries to the Chief Officer. The Chief Officer, in turn, deflected responsibility, stating that the "concerned officer" had all the necessary information.

## Velsao locals seek Opposition's backing against rail expansion

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** A delegation of distressed Velsao residents, joined by Goencho Ekvott (GE) activists, met Leader of Opposition (LoP) Yuri Alemão at the Secretariat on Tuesday, submitting a dossier detailing alleged violations by railway authorities. The locals highlighted what they call systematic land encroachment and environmental destruction by South Western Railway (SWR) and Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL).

GE Founder Orville Dourado Rodrigues presented damning evidence to the media after the meeting. "The Railways consider themselves a rule unto themselves," he said. "They act with complete impunity, destroying heritage homes and



blocking access routes." He pointed to mud dumping in traditional Rights of Way, leaving 400-year-old Portuguese-era homes landlocked, cutting off access to markets, schools, and healthcare.

The delegation's memorandum, covering Velsao, Pale, Issorcim, Sancoale, Cansaulim, and Arossim, outlined key violations, including the destruction of pre-1890s stormwater drains, raising flood risks as the monsoon nears.

Velsao panch member Rudika Antão described the human impact. "Emer-

gency services can't reach our homes. We've had ambulances stuck and families unable to transport deceased relatives," she said.

A particularly egregious violation in Survey No. 8/1 of Issorcim involves hill cutting and mud dumping, allegedly destroying mineral water springs and dense forest cover up to 20 meters high—despite incomplete land acquisition. The memorandum also details mass tree felling, with thousands of mature and fruit-bearing trees allegedly removed without permission.

## HC disposes of lawyers' petition on court facilities

Team Herald

**PANJIM:** The High Court of Bombay at Goa on Tuesday disposed of a petition filed by practising lawyers over inadequate facilities at the North Goa District and Sessions Court and the Civil and Criminal Courts in Altinho, Panjim, following their recent relocation to a new building in Merces.

Adv Ninad Kamat and others had filed a writ petition requesting the government to hand over the Advocates' building at Lyceum Complex to the Panaji Lawyers Forum in order to provide bar rooms and other amenities, which were lacking at the Altinho Court Complex.

They had also sought that traffic personnel be deployed to monitor and control the traffic at the Altinho Court Complex during Court working hours.

Advocate General Devidas Pangam argued that the petition was now infructuous, as the courts had shifted. Senior Adv S D Lotlikar, however, highlighted difficulties faced by lawyers at Merces. Pangam said that he will try his level best to see that the difficulties faced by the lawyers in the new premises are addressed by the State government.

A March 15 inspection with judges and bar association members reviewed the concerns. The court expressed trust that the North Goa Principal District and Sessions Judge would address the grievances and dispose of the writ petition.

## NOVENA PRAYER TO ST. JUDE

JUDE - O Holy St. Jude, Apostle and Martyr, great in virtue and rich in miracles, near kinsman of Jesus Christ, faithful intercessor of all who invoke your special patronage in time of need, to you I have recourse from the depth of my heart and humbly beg to whom God has given such great power to come to my assistance. Help me in my present urgent petition in return I promise to make your name known and cause you to be invoked.

Say three Our Fathers, three Hail Mary's and three Glory Be's. St. Jude Pray for us and all who invoke your aid. Amen.

Publication must be promised. (This Novena has never been known for fail. This Novena must be said for 9 consecutive days.)

- L. DA COSTA

## FAR FROM A PHOTO FINISH



The stretch of Cunha Rivara Road outside Café Bhonsle and National Theatre has become a maze of dirt, rubble, and construction debris, leaving residents and commuters bewildered. With only five days to go for the High Court deadline, the question on everyone's mind is: can the workers possibly complete the Smart City project on time?

## Quepem govt staffer secures loans worth Rs 37 lakh using forged documents

Police say multi-tasking staff defrauded three cooperative societies; submitted fabricated salary certificates, forged office seals, and falsified specimen signatures when the Deputy Collector was on leave

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** In yet another financial fraud perpetrated by a Goa government employee, a Multi-Tasking Staff (MTS) at the Deputy Collector's Office in Quepem, allegedly secured loans from multiple financial institutions using forged official documents.

The accused, Viresh Gaonkar, has been booked by the police after an internal inquiry exposed the extent of the misuse of official documents for personal financial gain.

According to the FIR, Gaonkar fraudulently obtained loans by submitting

fabricated salary certificates, forged office seals, and falsified specimen signatures—none of which were ever issued by the Deputy Collector's Office in Quepem.

The fraud came to light when the Branch Manager of Deendayal Multi-purpose Co-operative Society Limited, Quepem, approached Deputy Collector Manohar Karekar regarding unpaid EMIs on a loan obtained under false pretences. This triggered an internal verification, which confirmed that the documents in question had never been officially issued.

Further investigation revealed that Gaonkar misused these forged documents during the sanctioned leave period of the Deputy Collector, when the official was out of state. Preliminary inquiries indicate that he submitted fraudulent documents to at least three cooperative societies, securing financial benefits amounting to Rs 37 lakh.

Given the severity of the fraud, the matter was immediately escalated to the South Goa Collector, who issued a show-cause notice to Gaonkar and is considering

his termination. Following the complaint, Quepem police registered an FIR against Gaonkar under multiple sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) 2023, including Section 336(3) for fraudulently obtaining financial advantage, Section 337 - forgery with intent to cheat, Section 340, for criminal breach of trust by a public servant and Section 318(4) - using forged documents as genuine.

The investigation is ongoing, with authorities working to uncover the full extent of Gaonkar's fraudulent activities and whether any others were involved.



## Thousands flock to Zambaulim to venerate Dam Bab for Gulalotsav

Shree Damodar temple on the banks of the Kushawati comes alive in a riot of pink as devotees joyfully smear gual on each other, and participate in centuries-old rituals during the seven-day festival

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Gulalotsav, an integral part of Goa's Shigmo festivities, was celebrated on Tuesday in Zambaulim with great pomp and fervour, featuring the vibrant exchange of gual (coloured powder) and lively cultural events.

The renowned Gulalotsav, also known simply as Gulal, is dedicated to Lord Damodar, the patron deity of Margao and drew a large number of devotees from across the State and neighbouring Karnataka.

On the main day of the festival, religious ceremonies were performed in the afternoon, following which devotees smeared the idol of Lord Damodar with gual, marking the commencement of the traditional exchange of colours.

A major highlight of the celebrations was the Vokal Navro, an entertainment programme held late Tuesday night at 11 pm,



Devotees exchange gual and dance joyfully at Shree Damodar temple, Zambaulim

which remains a key attraction of the festival.

The palanquin procession of Lord Damodar was taken out

and stationed in front of the Lord Ramnath temple, where religious rituals were performed at 3.30 pm. Later, devotees from

Margao offered gual to the deity, an act considered highly auspicious. The sacred coconut (Shreefal)

was worshipped with religious rituals on March 19, marking the beginning of the festivities. The Shigmotsav of the Mathagramastha Hindu Sabha commenced with the ceremonial procession of the sacred coconut from the residence of late Pandurang Keni in Comba-Margao to Zambaulim on March 20.

Since March 19, the festival has featured various religious and cultural events, including dramas, folk performances, and Lavani dance shows. For over a century, the Gulalotsav at Zambaulim has been celebrated with great enthusiasm.

The seven-day festival will conclude on March 26 with the Dhoolpet ceremony. Following the exchange of gual, a large number of devotees were seen bathing in the Kushawati River; believed to possess healing powers. Notably, gual was not smeared on women during the celebrations.

Pandurang (Bhai) Naik, President of Mathagramastha Hindu Sabha, Margao, stated that the Gulal festival has been celebrated for over 500 years, while the Mathagramastha Hindu Sabha has hosted the event for over a century with grandeur. He emphasised that devotees of all ages, castes, and backgrounds actively participate in the celebrations with immense zeal.

Naik further highlighted that the week-long festival includes collective meals (Annasatra), dramas, musical performances, folk culture showcases, and Lavani dances. He noted that the Shigmo festivities commenced on March 19 with the 'Haldume' ritual and will conclude on March 26 with the 'Dhoolpet' ceremony.

Throughout the Shigmo festival, devotees arriving in large numbers to seek darshan of Lord Damodar were provided free meals as part of the celebrations.

