

Arossim rly protest case: Court raps prosecution for delays

'Tarikh pe tarikh': Activists facing trial as criminals for protesting double-tracking in 2020 slam public prosecutor's absenteeism prolonging the case; say they will not be silenced

Team Herald

MARGAO: In the third criminal case filed against anti-double-tracking activists, the Margao District Court took up the hearing of a matter filed by the Railway Police regarding the protest against railway expansion in Arossim village in 2020.

Abhijit Prabhudesai, Diana Tavares, and 11 others are among the accused, including Benaullim MLA Captain Venzy Viegas.

While the matter was adjourned to June, the activists and the MLA criticised the government for dragging the case on for the past three years.

Speaking to the media after the hearing, the counsel for the accused said that the



court had strongly criticised the prosecution for the delay in the case and directed the Public Prosecutor (PP) to be present at the next hearing.

The counsel also pointed out that there have been multiple hearings over the last three years, yet the PP has appeared only twice or thrice.

Both Prabhudesai and Viegas criticised the PP's

The Supreme Court itself has recommended that coal transportation not be conducted through Goa and routed via Krishnapatnam Port, AP, instead. Still, the state government is pushing ahead with double tracking, while filing cases to deter public opposition to projects detrimental to the environment

— Abhijit Prabhudesai, activist

the Railway Police and Goa Police had filed criminal cases against the protestors. Incidentally, these two other cases are also scheduled for hearing this week, South Goa MP Captain Viriato Fernandes is accused in those cases.

Prabhudesai pointed out that the Supreme Court itself had recommended that coal transportation should not be conducted through Goa and should instead be routed via Krishnapatnam

Port in Andhra Pradesh. He lamented that despite this, the state government is pushing ahead with double tracking and coal transport through Goa while filing cases to deter public opposition to projects that he said are detrimental to Goa and its environment.

Viegas asserted that the government cannot silence their voices and criticised the government's "tarikh pe tarikh" (date after date) approach in these court cases.

MP Viriato urges Union Tourism Minister to scrap project at Old Goa, restore dug-up site in heritage zone

Team Herald

MARGAO: South Goa MP Captain Viriato Fernandes has urged the Union Minister for Tourism and Culture to immediately and permanently halt all construction activity in the heritage zone of Old Goa and scrap the proposed project under the PRASAD scheme.

In a letter dated March 27, Fernandes flagged large-scale excavation at the UNESCO World Heritage site, carried out without adhering to norms and regulations governing development in the No Development Buffer Zone under the jurisdiction of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). The MP expressed concern over the distress caused to heritage lovers, villagers, and citizens following this incident.

According to Fernandes, preliminary investigations revealed that the project involved the construction of a centrally sponsored building under the PRASAD scheme. However, he pointed out that the lack of adherence to established norms for protected areas



demonstrated a disregard for the preservation of historical monuments and cultural heritage. He emphasized that the proposed site, designated as a No Development Zone, holds immense archaeological significance, with historical artifacts spanning centuries. He further noted that objections had been raised against the project through resolutions passed by the Gram Sabha and religious authorities.

Fernandes condemned the use of heavy machinery by contractors, which had led to the destruction and displacement of heritage objects. He described the site as a "treasure trove" containing remnants of an existing church structure, cannonballs, and other valuable archaeological ar-

tifacts. The excavation, he said, had not only damaged the site's sanctity but also resulted in the destruction of a 400-year-old wall to make way for an illegal road for transporting excavated material.

While acknowledging that work has been temporarily halted, Fernandes called for a permanent stop-work order to prevent further damage. "The PRASAD scheme is well-intentioned, but unsuitable for a site rich in archaeological heritage," he said.

In addition to halting the project, he demanded that the missing truckloads of historically valuable materials be located and returned to the site. He also pressed for ASI to restore the area to its original state and initiate an inquiry into those responsible for violating ASI regulations by undertaking construction in a protected zone.

Fernandes attached letters from the Village Panchayat of Se-Old-Goa and the Save Old Goa Action Committee, along with photographs documenting the destruction at the site, to support his appeal.

'Budget has failed Goan fisherfolk'

Team Herald

MARGAO: Goenchea Ramponkarancho Ekvott (GRE) has slammed the budget announced by Chief Minister Pramod Sawant for failing to address the pressing concerns of the small traditional fishermen in Goa.

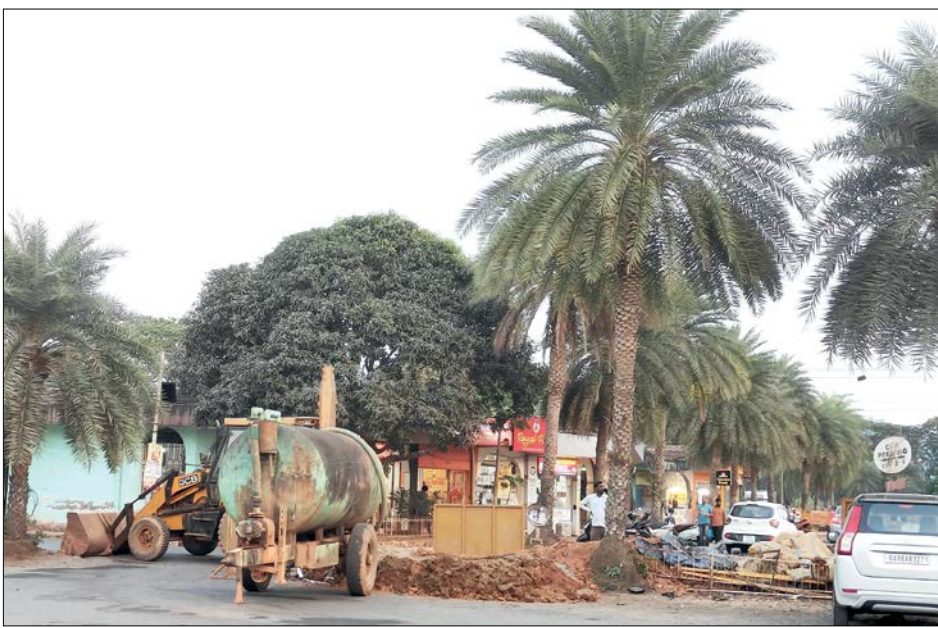
On Thursday, GRE General Secretary Olencio Simoes, questioned the priorities of the State and Central government in focusing funds for aquaculture, crab culture, cage-fishing and the like when there are other real problems that the fishing community is facing, like infrastructure or the fuel

subsidy, which has been a consistent demand.

Simoes said the major financial thrust should have been in providing functional boats to the coastal police so that they can stop illegal fishing that takes place from neighbouring States and act against boat owners from Goa using illegal fishing equipment.

Simoes also touched upon how the government spoke of improving jetties in the State but did not mention which jetties have been earmarked for such repairs. He questioned why the government has neglected the Kharewado jetty in Vasco.

SEWER SENSE PREVAILS



After years of operating without proper sewage disposal, the SGPDA market in Margao is finally getting soak pits as a stop-gap measure, as directed by the High Court. Several chicken and meat shops were sealed earlier this year as they did not have sewerage connections

No subsidies, support for canoe fishers, rues Union

Team Herald

MARGAO: The National Federation of Small-Scale Fishworkers (NFSF) Goa unit has sharply criticized the recent State budget announced by Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, claiming it completely overlooks the needs of traditional fishers.

NFSF General Secretary Sebastiao Rodrigues labelled the budget's

fisheries sector allocations as insensitive and inadequate.

Rodrigues highlighted critical gaps, including no support for canoe-based fishers, unaddressed subsidy concerns, and continued permissions for marina projects and sand mining in crab breeding grounds. The federation particularly emphasized the lack of funding for patrol boats to

combat illegal fishing and the continued disruption of fishing activities by water sports. "The budget is totally disappointing and shows no understanding of small-scale fishing communities' challenges," Rodrigues stated, underscoring the NFSF's deep frustration with the State Government's financial plan's approach to the fishing sector.

75-day fishing ban must apply to Maha, K'taka coast too, say Cutbona fishers

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Cutbona Fishing Boat Owners Association has rejected the proposed extension of the fishing ban unless two key conditions are met.

At a media briefing, association president Savio D'Silva and other leaders opposed extending the annual ban from 60 to 75 days (June 1-August 15 instead of June 1-July 31).

They insisted that the ban must apply uniformly across Goa, Maharashtra, and Karnataka, and that mechanised boats above 9.9 horsepower must be

completely barred from use during the period.

The association also condemned a sharp hike in parking fees at SGPD's South Goa wholesale fish market, where charges have doubled from Rs 150 to Rs 300 per hour. Calling the increase exploitative, they urged the government to intervene.

The briefing concluded with the association's clear position that their acceptance of the extended fishing ban remains strictly conditional, while emphasizing the need for resolution of the parking fee issue affecting their members' livelihoods.

Melon-aire dream fading: Verna watermelon farmers report big yields, but costs bite

Say spend on labour, seeds eat into their juicy profits; appeal for training, seed money from govt

Team Herald

MARGAO: Farmers in Verna and surrounding villages are sporting big smiles this summer as they harvest a bumper watermelon yield this year, but are calling on authorities for greater support to expand cultivation and reduce costs.

Watermelon farming in the area remains labour-intensive and costly, with farmers sourcing seeds from neighbouring states such as Karnataka, due to the lack of locally available varieties. They have urged the Agriculture Department to raise awareness about subsidies and schemes that could ease financial burdens.

A visit to Verna revealed that while farmers are pleased with their crop and profits, the high cost of seeds and labour charges continues to pose challenges.

Dumianha Menezes, a local farmer, shared that this year's yield has been better than in previous years, with fewer issues related to rind worm pests. However,



In Verna, over 100 farmers grow watermelons and sell them on the roadsides

sourcing seeds remains a concern.

"Most of us buy seeds from Belagavi because local varieties are unavailable. The quality is good, but the prices are high. Labour costs also make it difficult to expand farming," she said.

Florina Pereira from Dulapem-Verna highlighted that a small packet of watermelon seeds costs around Rs 1,000, adding to their financial strain. Despite this, she noted that profits this season have been promising compared to previous years.

Clarina Mendes, another farmer, emphasised

the need for training programmes to help cultivators better manage their crops.

"We need more guidance on pest control, efficient farming techniques, and available government support," she said.

In Verna alone, over a hundred farmers are engaged in watermelon cultivation, selling 250 to 300 watermelons daily along the roadside on Verna Highway.

Farmers remain hopeful that with better government assistance and awareness programmes, watermelon farming in Goa can flourish further.



PANJIM: The IPSDL had through the Advocate General submitted before the High Court that the Smart City road works will be completed by March 31, 2025. Herald Media has been tracking the incomplete works with a count-down.

DO YOU BELIEVE THE SMART CITY WORKS WILL BE COMPLETED IN THREE DAYS?

More than anything, we've all been talking about how terrible the Smart City work has been. Asking them to complete it quickly would only make things worse because the work is already so slipshod. I've seen cement not being cured, I've seen tremendous negligence. In fact, the heads of Smart City should resign—they are doing a disservice to the country. I know some of them are good people, but at whose behest are they carrying out such poor work? They should be held criminally accountable. It's no joke that our hard-earned money is being wasted like this. I hope that in the next elections, the people in power are shown their place and voted out

— Armando Gonsalves, Resident of Panjim

Will Panjim's Smart City project meet its March 31, 2025 deadline? Maybe—by hook or by crook. But with the constant digging, breaking, and redoing, the city looks like a war zone. A deadline was given last year too, and work was done. But after the rains, everything that was 'repaired' was dug up again because they couldn't even locate the drains. They're literally throwing public money down the drain. Neither the contractors nor the planners care—it's not their money being wasted. If KTC can buy buses and launch shuttle services, maybe they should also invest in boats to prepare for the monsoons

— Mariano Ferrao, Social Activist



YouTube

Watch Street Voices on Herald Media on YouTube by scanning the QR code

It is highly impossible to complete the tasks within three days with the present heat wave. And many other roads are left incomplete. The debris of the dug up roads is still lying around. Such deadlines have been given before by Smart City mission and not complied with. We are used to that. They are totally misleading the people of Panjim, misleading the courts and they are doing works without any accountability, without any responsibility and without any quality of work. There are many roads which are incomplete. For instance — the road in front of Don Bosco High School, in front of the Panjim Municipal Market. At the pace the work is going on is very slow. Hopefully, at least before the monsoon, the works will be complete

— Adv Rui Ferreira, Panjim local