

Romi Lipi Abhiyan slams Edu Dept for ramrodding April school start

Says govt acting like a dictatorship; calls for student-centric implementation of National Education Policy after dialogue with parents, teachers and school managements

Team Herald

MARGAO: Criticising the government for unilaterally imposing a new school calendar without consulting parents and students, the Global Romi Lipi Abhiyan (GRLA) has condemned the education department for issuing a fresh notification announcing that schools will begin on 7 April, despite a court order.

The implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) is seen as a glaring example of how political decisions can undermine well-intended initiatives. While the NEP includes several progressive policies, it requires careful consid-

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

OPPOSITION FROM PARENTS
A petition signed by over 13,000 parents, teachers and school managements, opposing the government's unilateral decision to start schools on April 7, has been submitted to the Goa Education Department. The petition, titled 'Petition for the Government to Reconsider the School Start Date', was submitted to the Education Minister, Dr. Kennedy Afonso, on Saturday.

CONCERN ABOUT
The petitioners expressed their concerns about the government's decision to start schools on April 7, which is against the court order. They stated that the government's decision is a violation of the court order and is a disregard for the rights of parents and students. They also expressed their concerns about the government's approach to implementing the NEP, which they felt was top-down and did not involve parents and students in the process.

eration and input from all stakeholders, said Kennedy Afonso, President of GRLA. Afonso further criticised the government's approach, highlighting what he called the irony of enforcing a dictatorial system under the guise of implementing the NEP. He stressed that the policy should be student-centric and that the opinions of students and

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– Kennedy Afonso, president, Global Romi Lipi Abhiyan

school management must be prioritised. "What kind of government fails to respect the genuine demands of parents to the point that they have to seek court intervention for relief? Why isn't the education department engaging in dialogue with parents to resolve the issue? Aren't governments supposed to be of the people, by the people, and

for the people?" he questioned. The GRLA also emphasised that the NEP encompasses much more than school timings and called for a comprehensive seminar to discuss its implications with students, parents, teachers, and school management.

Afonso pointed out that no schools had been con-

Govt silencing Oppn in Lok Sabha, stalling Bill to give tiatr UNESCO tag, says South Goa MP

Team Herald

MARGAO: South Goa MP Capt. Viriato Fernandes on Saturday lamented that he was unable to table a Private Member's Bill on tiatr due to the government's alleged attempts to silence the Opposition in Parliament.

Stating that there is a lack of discussions on urgent public issues under Rule 193 in the Lok Sabha, Fernandes said he had intended to introduce a Private Member's resolution urging the government to grant a UNESCO tag to tiatr, which will complete 133 years on April 17 this year.

"Tiatr is an integral part of our culture and has played a crucial role in society by delivering social messages through acting and songs," he said, adding that he had been struggling for the past eight days to table the resolution.

His resolution also sought government pension for veteran tiatr artistes and state sponsorship for tiatr to strengthen ties with the Goan diaspora, Fernandes told reporters.

He added that the INDIA Bloc, comprising Opposition parties, had submitted a 12-point letter to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, highlighting concerns such as the switching off of Opposition members' microphones and the exclusion of key ministries from Union Budget discussions.

Fernandes alleged that Opposition members' microphones are turned off when they raise important issues, while ruling party members are allowed to speak freely. He further claimed that

RISE ABOVE PARTY LINES, UNITE FOR GOA'S CAUSE, VIRIATO URGES GOAN MPs

Team Herald

MARGAO: The South Goa MP on Saturday urged Union Minister of State for Power Shripad Naik and Rajya Sabha MP Sadanand Shet Tanavade to unite in Parliament to fight for Goa's cause, regardless of their party affiliations.

Speaking to reporters at the Congress office in Panjim, Capt Viriato Fernandes said that Goa's MPs should work together in the same way that MPs from other states unite in Parliament to push for their state's development. "I was the lead speaker on the National Disaster (Amendment) Bill, 2024. During my speech, I strongly opposed the diversion of Mhadei river waters. I saw how Karnataka MPs stood together, setting aside party politics. Similarly, we three Goan MPs must come together to protect Goa's interests," Fernandes said.

He added that after his speech, several groups from Karnataka reached out to him, offering their support. "They heard my speech, contacted me, and provided information that will help us in our fight to save the Mhadei river. There are people in Karnataka itself who oppose the diversion of Mhadei's waters," he said.

Speaker Om Birla repeatedly denied Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi the opportunity to speak without any explanation, violating the parliamentary convention of allowing the Opposition leader to address the House.

Fernandes accused the government of disregarding Business Advisory Committee (BAC) decisions. He cited a recent instance where Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a statement in the House without prior scheduling or intimation. Additionally, he said adjournment motions are routinely disallowed by the

Speaker. He also alleged that Sansad TV deliberately avoids showing Opposition MPs when they speak, shifting the camera away from them. Furthermore, parliamentary consultative committee meetings are not being held regularly.

Fernandes pointed out that since 2019, a Deputy Speaker has not been appointed in the Lok Sabha, which he described as detrimental to democracy. He said the INDIA Bloc floor leaders have urged the Speaker to take appropriate steps to uphold the integrity of parliamentary democracy.

Govt lays unclaimed bodies to rest

Team Herald

MARGAO: Authorities have disposed of 17 unclaimed bodies in South Goa, said Additional Collector-I Srinet Kothwale. He also confirmed that there are no pending cases related to unclaimed bodies.

Earlier, the Margao Municipal Council had written to the South Goa District Collector's office after the Colva police station requested the civic body to dispose of a dead body.

Police often find unclaimed bodies, which are kept in morgues until disposal is ordered by the district collector. As per the collector's office, such

orders are issued after a required inquiry by the district magistrate.

Among the 17, one deceased person was identified through his Aadhaar card, but their family, hailing from Kerala, was unable to claim the body due to financial constraints, police sources said.

Recently, when the matter was discussed, it was revealed that the bodies had remained in the morgue for the past two years due to financial constraints on the civic body, despite instructions from the district collector. Law Minister Aleixo Sequeira assured that government sanction would be obtained for their disposal.

SELF SERVICE



A stray kitten steals a quick snack of salted fish left to dry unattended near the fish market at Colva. Fish vendors have begun to dry surplus stocks for sale and consumption during the monsoon fishing ban

Listen to the river: A conservationist's plea for Chorao's khazan lands

Team Herald

MARGAO: Water has shaped Goa's landscape, culture, and livelihoods for centuries. But for Rhea Lopez, 31, a researcher and conservationist, it is not just about the rivers and wetlands—it's about the intricate human and ecological relationships woven around them.

Lopez, who grew up in Delhi but traces her roots to Goa, moved to the State in 2019 to study the interactions between khazan fisheries and their environment. Her research for the Goa Water Series took her deep into the island's khazan lands—Goa's ancient, man-made estuarine ecosystems—where she spent time with farmers, fishers, and salt panners, observing how their lives were interwoven with the tidal rivers, mangroves, and marshes.



choked with garbage, and wetlands filled in for concrete infrastructure projects. The sounds of the landscape, too, have changed—bird calls and the gentle chatter of fisherfolk have been replaced by the rumble of jet skis, honking cars, and construction noise.

"Where we once lived with the river, we now seem to be fighting it," she observes. "Concrete bundhs replace

traditional site of the munge thapni puja, an annual crocodile worship ritual. "A concrete temple was built to replace it, complete with a concrete crocodile. But what about the real crocodiles? What about the actual river and its role in people's lives?"

These experiences have shaped Lopez's project—an immersive exhibition on Chorao Island's khazans, designed to make people slow down and engage with their surroundings. By recreating the sensory experience of walking along a bundh, she hopes visitors will feel, hear, and witness the shifting landscape for themselves.

"I want people to notice the small things—a fiddler crab scuttling among mangrove roots, the way water flows through a sluice gate, the scent of freshly harvested rice. I want them to stand still and listen—to the river, to the sounds of change, and to what we are losing," she says. For Lopez, the hope is that

AGAINST THE TIDE

■ The khazans are an agro-fishery system comprising of a network of embankments (called bundhs), fringing mangroves, sluice gates (manos), ponds (poiem), and agricultural fields (xett)

■ The land is traditionally farmed with indigenous, salt-tolerant varieties of rice, and irrigated via small channels and furrows from the poiem

■ Farmers follow seasonal farming cycles, dependent on the monsoon showers for the influx of freshwater that flushes the soil of salt, and harvest the crop in the winter

■ Poorly maintained khazan bundhs crumble under the continuous impact of waves from large boats on the river – most notably, barges carrying iron-ore



such mindful engagement can spark deeper conversations about conservation and sustainable planning. "Rivers are more than just sources of water. They are living systems—shifting, breathing, sustaining life. If early communities could live in harmony with them, surely we can, too. But only if we choose to listen."

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.

Halt illegal constructions within 1 hr of receiving complaint, Collector orders deputies

Team Herald

MARGAO: In directions issued by South Goa District Collector Egna Cleetus, all deputy collectors have been warned of strict action if they fail to take necessary measures against violators under the relevant provisions of the Goa Land Revenue Code, 1968.

The order follows a directive from the High Court, which took suo motu cognisance of rampant illegal constructions across Goa.

As per the court's directions, the district collector's office has instructed deputy collectors to initiate immediate action by constituting additional flying squads in every taluka. Each squad will comprise a police inspector, mamladar, talathi, and a representative from the block development office.

According to the order, a dedicated official number shall be assigned to every flying squad and will be operational from April 5 for public com-

Dy Collectors directed to form additional flying squads, to handle complaints from the public via Whatsapp. Citizens can file complaints via text in no more than 30 words, accompanied by pictures/videos and the location of the illegal construction

plaints. Citizens will be able to file complaints via WhatsApp in no more than 30 words, accompanied by pictures/videos and the location of the illegal construction.

The WhatsApp number shall be operated by an assigned member of the flying squad, and a WhatsApp group shall be created, including the flying squad members and the deputy collector. The assigned member managing the official number shall forward all complaints received to this group.

The flying squad is required to halt any illegal construction reported via WhatsApp within one hour of receiving the complaint. Each squad will be supervised by the respective deputy collector, who must ensure immediate action is taken. If the flying squad

fails to respond within one hour, the complainant may escalate the matter to the Additional Collector-II, who shall immediately intervene to stop the illegal construction, the order states.

Additionally, deputy collectors at the taluka level and BDOs have been instructed to submit weekly reports to the collector every Monday, detailing all complaints received and the actions taken by the flying squads.

The deputy collector will oversee the flying squads' functioning, the formation of additional squads at the taluka level, and ensure timely action and submission of reports from the relevant sections/offices. Monthly compliance reports must be submitted to the collector's office by the 5th of every month.



"What struck me most was the deep, instinctive knowledge that traditional communities have about the land and water," says Lopez. "They understood the tides, the lunar cycles, the shifting river. For 3000 years, their practices were built around working with these natural rhythms, not against them."

But over the past few years, particularly during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, Lopez has witnessed drastic changes. In once-thriving khazan fields, she now sees farmlands abandoned due to seawater ingress, mangroves

through a mangrove patch to widen a bundh, sending birds scattering in distress over their destroyed nests. In contrast, she recalls seeing men in Chorao carefully reconstructing a bundh by hand, using traditional techniques—meticulously scooping silt from the riverbed, plastering it onto the embankment with reverence and precision.

Her work has also highlighted the cultural erosion that accompanies these environmental losses. She recounts reading about a high-way project that displaced a



Scan the QR code to experience Rhea Lopez's project, which simulates a walk along Chorao's bundhs and khazans

IS GOVT DOING ENOUGH TO RAISE AWARENESS ON CYBER FRAUD?

Awareness is one part, but what is the government doing to arrest these types of crimes? Now, when you make a call, suddenly you hear voices—sometimes in Marathi, Hindi, or English. The audio is so bad that having heard it a thousand times, I still do not understand what it is. Also, if I am in a state of emergency, vis-à-vis my health, and I need to contact someone urgently, but for 20 seconds, I am kept on hold by this message—I could even collapse. This mode of awareness is incomprehensible and a disturbance. Hence, there has to be a mechanism for face-to-face interaction at the municipality, panchayat, or ward level to create awareness

– Trajano D'Mello, political analyst

Cyber frauds can be described as economic terrorism. But while terrorists are external forces, this is internal terrorism—where some citizens are economically terrorising others within the nation. The government must increase the pace and reach of cyber awareness. Every district should have a cyber cell. Laws should be amended to impose stringent punishments. Cyber crimes are governed by the IT Act, but the punishments under this Act should be more severe. – Rui Ferrera, advocate



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