

# Velsao's Santos Passos on elevated road highlights pathway crisis

Lenten procession wound via the route towering over their now-inaccessible gateways; residents vow to protect what their ancestors preserved

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** A centuries-old Lenten procession has laid bare the devastating impact of railway construction on Velsao residents, with the traditional "Santos Passos" march forced to navigate on elevated road stretch that has left hundreds of homes landlocked.

The crisis stems from an ongoing dispute between villagers and South Western Railway (SWR), which has been dumping construction material along the tracks despite a panchayat stop-work order and pending court hearings at the Inspector of Survey and Land Records (ISLR). Previous reports revealed how SWR's actions have blocked access to 400-year-old heritage homes and destroyed pre-1890s stormwater drainage systems.

The South Western Railway's (SWR) dumping of mud, construction debris, and industrial waste has destroyed the village's ancestral Right of Way (ROW) - a vital access path used for generations. "For over a century, this route served our community,"

For over a century, this route served our community. Now we must fight to protect what our ancestors preserved. This same pathway serves as a critical stormwater drain during monsoon, channelling floodwaters toward River Sal tributaries in Pale village. The railway's reckless filling has created a ticking time bomb for both villages.

— Orville Dourado Rodrigues, Goencho Ekvott founder

said Orville Dourado Rodrigues, founder of Goencho Ekvott. "Now we must fight to protect what our ancestors preserved."

The raised roadbed, standing up to 9 metres higher than original ground level in some areas, has severed access to homes on the western side of the tracks. Emergency vehicles - including ambulances, fire trucks, and even mobile mortuary vans - can no longer reach properties. Local salt vendors and LPG suppliers have also lost their traditional delivery routes.

Rodrigues warned of impending disaster: "This same pathway serves as a critical stormwater drain during monsoon, channelling floodwaters toward River Sal tributaries in Pale village. The railway's reckless filling has created a ticking time bomb for both

villages." Residents watched helplessly as this year's Santos Passos procession wound through what has become a symbol of their displacement - the elevated road towering over their now-inaccessible gateways. "Our children can't even walk to school safely anymore," said one villager, pointing to the steep, unstable slopes created by the construction.

With monsoon clouds gathering, Velsao's families face dual threats - complete isolation from essential services and potential flooding from the compromised drainage system, all while their legal battle against SWR continues. The next hearing at the ISLR court is scheduled for April 15, where villagers hope to challenge SWR's controversial land claims.



A resident of Velsao stands at the entrance of her residence whose access has been blocked

# Margao civic workers set fire to dry waste at Pajifond

Residents, who witnessed the incident, demand strict action against those involved

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Despite repeated warnings and growing concerns, workers of the Margao Municipal Council (MMC) on Monday were found burning the dry waste in the wee hours, drawing the ire of the residents, who criticised the civic body for being indifferent to the environmental harm caused by such actions.

In Pajifond, despite dustbins provided for disposal, the workers were seen burning dry garbage including plastic piled up along the roadside while carrying out cleaning activities.

A group of concerned citizens, who witnessed the incident, has now called for strict action against the workers involved in setting fire to the dry waste.

It is pertinent to note that similar incidents have been reported in the past, but no significant action has been taken by the civic body.

Santosh Naik, a concerned citizen, pointed out that burning waste has become a routine practice



Despite dustbins provided for disposal, dry garbage piled up along the roadside in Pajifond, was burnt

among municipal workers. "Instead of collecting the waste and disposing of it properly in the dustbins, they just set it on fire. What's worse is that they are burning plastics and other waste along with the dry materials," Naik claimed.

Krisna Borkar, another local resident, mentioned that such incidents of waste burning are prevalent not just around the municipal garden, but in every ward. "This is contributing

to pollution, and it must stop. The Pollution Control Board needs to intervene immediately," Borkar said. Savio Coutinho said that there is a legal ban on burning such waste due to its detrimental effect on the environment, and authorities need to be vigilant.

"The MMC has failed in managing waste. The ongoing issues at the Sonsoddo site are proof of this, and now they're creating more problems at the grassroots level," he alleged.

# POSITIVE TREND: Olive Ridley turtle egg counts surge at Agonda, Galgibag

In her study, Prof Sayali says turtle conservation success at Agonda Beach proves tourism & environmental protection go hand in hand

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** An independent study has highlighted a positive trend in the increase of Olive Ridley turtle egg counts at Agonda and Galgibag beaches, despite human activities pertaining to tourism.

A study carried out by Sayali Krishnanand Gaunkar, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Government College of Arts, Science and Commerce, Quepem has recorded the data on the nesting activity of Olive Ridley turtles at Agonda and Galgibag beaches in South Goa from 2020 to 2025 (till date).

The recorded egg counts indicate a consistent increase at Agonda, with the Agonda-to-Galgibag ratio rising from approximately 1.2-2:1 in 2020 to 4.1:1 in 2024.

In 2024, Agonda recorded 18,011 eggs, while Galgibag recorded 4,369 eggs. The 2025 projections estimate egg counts of 10,000-14,000 at Agonda and 3,000-4,500 at Galgibag, with a projected ratio of 3-4:1. The number of eggs laid has increased over the past five years.

It is pertinent to note that Agonda Beach, a critical nesting site for the endangered Olive Ridley turtles, has recently come under legal and environmental scrutiny. The

KEY FINDINGS	
■	Consistent egg count increased at Agonda
■	The Agonda-to-Galgibag ratio rose from approximately 1.2-2:1 in 2020 to 4.1:1 in 2024.
■	In 2024, Agonda recorded 18,011 eggs, while Galgibag recorded 4,369 eggs.
■	2025 projections estimate 10,000-14,000 eggs at Agonda and 3,000-4,500 at Galgibag, with a projected ratio of 3-4:1.

High Court of Bombay at Goa ordered the closure of 67 businesses violating regulatory guidelines, citing concerns over environmental compliance and the authorities' failure to prevent commercial developments in areas protected under the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972. These closures have led to uncertainty and distress among local business owners, particularly those in the tourism sector, which plays a crucial role in the region's economy.

In response to these closures, locals staged a silent protest to express both their solidarity and the hardships they were experiencing.

The success of turtle conservation at Agonda Beach proves that tourism and environmental protection can thrive together. By encouraging sustainable practices and supporting businesses that respect wildlife habitats, Agonda can continue to be a model for ecotourism while preserving its rich biodiversity and ensuring that local communities can sustain their way of life

— Sayali Krishnanand Gaunkar, Asst Prof of Sociology, Govt College of Arts, Science & Commerce, Quepem

Speaking to *O Herald*, Prof Gaunkar said that she had participated as an unbiased observer, documenting the community's response to these changes.

"Agonda Beach, despite being a tourist hotspot, has recorded higher Olive Ridley turtle nesting numbers than the more secluded Galgibag Beach. This challenges the common belief that human activity always harms wildlife. Agonda's case suggests that when managed responsibly, human presence does not always lead to ecological decline but can sometimes support conservation in unexpected ways," she stated.

According to her study, the recent increase in Olive Ridley turtle nesting at Agonda Beach, particularly the significant rise in 2024 with 18,011 eggs laid, suggests that tourism activities have not disrupted the natural nesting process.

"For many families in Agonda, tourism is the primary source of income, supporting employment in hospitality, transport and food service. The closure of 67 establishments due to alleged CRZ violations seriously threatens these livelihoods, affecting not only business owners, but also numerous workers and their families who rely on tourism for their survival," she added.

However, she is of the opinion that concerns surrounding Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) compliance persist; a balanced approach is necessary—one that enforces environmental protection while safeguarding the community's economic interests.

Gaunkar's study suggests that instead of a blanket closure, the authorities could implement a collaborative framework that ensures compliance with CRZ norms while allowing responsible tourism to continue.

# Loutolim gram sabha discusses annual budget

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** The annual budget for the forthcoming financial year was discussed at the Loutolim village gram sabha held on Sunday.

Sarpanch San Francisco Fernandes said that the gram sabha members were satisfied with the budget that the panchayat had presented. However, the panchayat has to incorporate certain proposals that have come in and clear some other technical matters first.

He then explained that some of the proposals involved coordinating with PWD regarding the walking track for the village including extending its length.

There was another issue where the panchayat proposed to increase the garbage tax by Rs 100, but he added that the panchayat would collect sanitary waste as well. Other taxes that will impose such as house tax, etc, were also discussed at the gram sabha.

He pointed out that they have received a letter from GIDC regarding compensation for the Verna Industrial Estate that also comes under the jurisdiction of the panchayat.

# Romi Lipi Abhiyan backs protest against April 7 school reopening

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** The Global Romi Lipi Abhiyan (GRLA) has extended full support to the parents and students protesting at Lohia Maidan against the decision to start schools on April 7. The organisation has demanded that the decision be scrapped, along with the resolutions passed regarding the academic calendar.

In a statement, the organisation also called for a full-day seminar on the National Education Policy (NEP), emphasising that the NEP is student- and teacher-centric.

It stressed that suggestions must come from students, teachers, NGOs, and school managements, urging the Education Department and the government to listen to stakeholders before making decisions.

According to the organisation, the NEP is not a top-down model where the Education Department can impose policies unilaterally. Instead, it is a bottom-up policy where reforms should be initiated by students, teachers, and school managements, with the Education Department ensuring

Suggestions must come from students, teachers, NGOs, and school managements. The Education Department and the government should listen to stakeholders before making decisions — Global Romi Lipi Abhiyan

that these suggestions align with the NEP framework and are implemented accordingly.

The organisation also raised concerns about the three-language policy adopted for Goa, insisting that it must be thoroughly debated. It emphasised the need to discuss the issue of Devanagari and Roman script Konkani, noting that students find the Devanagari script difficult to learn. As a solution, the organization called for the introduction of Roman script Konkani in schools under the NEP framework.

Kennedy Afonso, GRLA president, reiterated these demands, emphasising that the voices of students and teachers must be prioritised in shaping education policies.

# Horizontal Directional Drilling tech to transform Margao's sewerage infrastructure

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** The State's commercial capital is set to undergo a significant transformation in its sewerage infrastructure with the introduction of Horizontal Directional Drilling (HDD) technology.

This advanced method will help modernise the sewerage network while minimising disruption to roads and existing utilities.

On Monday, two major projects aimed at improving sanitation and connectivity were launched by Margao MLA, Digambar Kamat. One of the primary initiatives is the development of the sewerage system at Monte Hill, which will benefit key healthcare facilities, including TB Hospital, AYUSH Hospital, and Aster Hospital. This project, being executed by Tejman Infrastructures

**FIRST PROJECT:** Executed by Tejman Infrastructures at Rs 4.79 cr is to develop the sewerage system at Monte Hill, benefiting TB Hospital, AYUSH Hospital, and Aster Hospital, includes installing a 200 mm diameter pipeline, manholes, & road crossings for house connections over 1,238 mtrs

**SECOND PROJECT:** Managed by NST Eng Projects LLP at Rs 8.48 cr extends the network across Military Camp & Monte Hill areas, installing pipelines, manholes, & road crossings for house connections over 2,009 mtrs

at a cost of Rs 4.79 crore, involves the installation of a 200 mm diameter pipeline, the construction of manholes, and the provision of road crossings for house connections. With a total network length of 1,238 metres, this initiative is expected to significantly enhance the area's sanitation and public health standards.

At the same time, a second crucial project is underway to extend the sewerage network across the Military Camp and Monte

Hill areas. This project, managed by NST Eng Projects LLP at an estimated cost of Rs 8.48 crore, will see the installation of pipelines, manholes, and road crossings for house connections, covering a network length of 2,009 metres. This expansion will address long-standing sanitation issues and help modernise essential infrastructure, ensuring a cleaner and healthier living environment for the local community.



The Goa government, on behalf of Imagine Panaji Smart City Development Ltd (IPSCDL) had submitted before the High Court that the road works in Panjim would be complete by March 31, 2025. Seeing the condition of Panjim roads, *O Herald* asked people, do you think the government kept its promise of completing Smart City roads by March 31?



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

# HAS THE GOVERNMENT KEPT ITS PROMISE OF COMPLETING SMART CITY ROADS BY MARCH 31?

They have not met the deadline today, nor have they kept the deadlines fixed earlier. I think that Smart City has assured at least 10 times previously, to complete the project. Now, they are saying they will complete the roads. Till now what have they done? Only footpaths and drainage. The roads should have been made of concrete, instead they have just put a layer of tar. Why do people have to suffer all the time? Because they promised to do good work, people gave them time. So much time you can't imagine. Do you know who is suffering? Those living in Panjim, the businessmen and the senior citizens and children are suffering due to pollution. Secondly, there is noise pollution. Thirdly, and most importantly there is no place for parking

— Tanoj Adwalpalkar, social activist

The answer to the question whether they have completed the work on time, I'm giving you right from the site. The Smart City work is being done using primitive tools. There is not smart or modern equipment being used by the Smart City contractor. Today engineering has taken rapid strides. Civil engineering is using advanced equipment. Work which can be used in 15 days is taking months since they are using age old tools and hired labourers. The contractor should be immediately penalised since he has crossed the time limit. The contractor has underestimated the government and taken it for granted. There is no supervision. Do you see any supervisors here? The work is left to the wisdom of daily wage labourers

— Mariano Ferrao, social activist

Is there a government in place, or is this a joke on the people? All this work should be immediately stopped. The work is incomplete, especially at the Café Bhonsle square. Do they feel that there is no one to question them? Do the Panjimites have to go to the Court again and again? And if the Court gives the directions, what is the use of the Smart City officials? What is the use of the government? All the work should be stopped, the debris should be cleared and stop this nuisance and nonsense, since it has not improved the lives of the citizens of Panjim and the entire state of Goa. Smart City is only an expenditure of funds and a waste of public funds, without any accountability and responsibility. No one knows what is going on and above all it is poor quality work

— Rui Ferreira, Advocate