

# Prodded by Goan parents, Viriato urges Union Edu min to scrap April school start

Parents argue that shifting to an April start disregards Goa's climatic conditions and follows a one-size-fits-all approach modelled on Delhi's calendar, where peak summer occurs later

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** In a five-page memorandum, South Goa MP Captain Viriato Fernandes has formally urged Union Minister of Education Dharmendra Pradhan to review the decision to start the new academic year in April for government and aided schools in the State. His appeal follows protests from students and parents who argue that the shift is impractical and detrimental to children's well-being.

Parents, who recently submitted a memorandum to the MP opposing the change, said their primary concerns include extreme summer heat and inadequate school infrastructure.

"Traditionally, even before Liberation, schools in Goa concluded by the first week of April, allowing students to travel, rest and enjoy time with family before reopening in June with the onset of the monsoon. In Delhi, summer sets in later, and there is extreme heat in June and July - hence, schools begin the academic year in April," explained Viriato.

"Educationists in our State (Goa) government are blindly following the Centre's directives, without applying logic.



The Goa education department appears defunct, failing to consider the local climate. That's why I have urged the Union Minister to review this decision," the MP told reporters outside the Lok Sabha on Wednesday.

Cecile Rodrigues, a parent representative, expressed gratitude for Fernandes' intervention. "We are thankful that Captain Fernandes has taken up our cause. We hope our voices will be heard and a solution found that prioritizes our children's health, safety, and education."

The parents' memorandum also criticises the hasty implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in Goa. They argue that stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and school admin-

istrators, were not consulted before the calendar shift. Additionally, the Directorate of Education has not adequately oriented schools about the policy changes. The parents are likely to file a second petition before the High Court of Bombay at Goa, challenging the Goa government's March 28 circular notifying the reopening of schools on April 7.

A critical issue they raise is the lack of essential infrastructure in most schools, many of which lack sufficient washrooms, drinking water stations, and cooling systems. Parents fear that the extreme heat in April could lead to dehydration and heat-related illnesses among students. They also point out that schools are ill-equipped to support the vocational and multidisciplinary learning approaches promoted by NEP.

The memorandum flags the increased academic burden resulting from the revised curriculum structure, which, according to them, contradicts NEP 2020's objective of holistic development. They argue that the shift fails to accommodate enrichment programmes, extracurricular activities, and sports camps that students usually enjoy during the summer break.

## S Goa MP objects to Coastal Shipping Bill, suggests tweaks

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** South Goa MP Captain Viriato Fernandes (INC) has raised serious concerns over the Coastal Shipping Bill 2024, citing excessive discretionary powers, lack of transparency, and hurdles for Indian seafarers.

Speaking in Parliament, Fernandes warned that the bill grants sweeping authority to the Director-General and Central Government, potentially fostering favouritism and undermining transparency. He also criticised the absence of clear criteria for exemptions and penalties, arguing that this could disadvantage smaller operators. "The lack of independent oversight and transparency in decision-making processes heightens the risk of market distortion," he stated, questioning the Bill's accountability measures.

A key issue raised was the difficulty Indian Deck Officers and Engineers face in obtaining Certificates of Equivalent (COE) when holding foreign competency certificates. Fernandes stressed that amendments were needed to support Goan seafarers. The MP also drew attention to the certification and training obstacles that inland vessel crews encounter when attempting to transition to coastal shipping operations, suggesting these barriers need urgent addressing.

### To strengthen the Bill, Fernandes proposed several measures

- Encouraging Indian ship-builders to use domestically manufactured equipment.
- Delegating ship certification to the International Association of Classification Societies for streamlined regulation.
- Introducing fuel subsidies for coastal vessels to enhance viability.
- Supporting hybrid vessel infrastructure with battery stations at reduced tariffs and specialized port facilities.
- Providing shore power at ports to lower carbon footprints and aid ship maintenance.
- Implementing collateral-free loan schemes for coastal vessel construction, using the vessels as collateral under government affiliation.

## Collector issues 6-month deadline to clear abandoned vehicles off streets

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** In response to growing public concern, South Goa Collector Egna Cleetus has issued a directive to address the issue of abandoned vehicles on roadsides across the district.

The order grants vehicle owners a six-month window to claim their abandoned vehicles. If no claims or objections are received within this period, the state government will seize and dispose of the vehicles through a public auction.

Citizens, especially in areas like Margao and Vasco, have repeatedly raised concerns about abandoned vehicles, which not only mar the surroundings but are also linked to illegal activities. Authorities have identified nearly 55 such vehicles in Margao alone, creating significant public inconvenience.

These abandoned vehicles pose serious health risks, particularly due to stagnant water accumulating in them, providing ideal breeding grounds for mosquitoes that spread vector-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue. With the monsoon season approaching, authorities fear the situation could worsen.

Beyond health hazards, abandoned vehicles obstruct public roads, causing traffic congestion and safety concerns. Many re-



55 vehicles identified in Margao, 60 in Vasco; unclaimed vehicles will be seized and auctioned in October

main parked for extended periods, making them susceptible to criminal use or other unlawful activities, further endanger-

ing public safety. The District Collector has reiterated that after the six-month period, no further claims will be entertained. Any unclaimed vehicles will be forfeited to the State government and auctioned off, with the proceeds retained by the government.

The issue extends beyond Margao, as authorities have also identified around 60 abandoned vehicles in Vasco. These vehicles, left on public roads or carriageways, are occupying vital space and worsening traffic congestion. With the onset of the monsoon, officials warn that the problem could escalate, exacerbating both health and road safety concerns.

## 'Zagronnachi Rat' wins top honours at 50th group 'A' tiatr competition

Team Herald

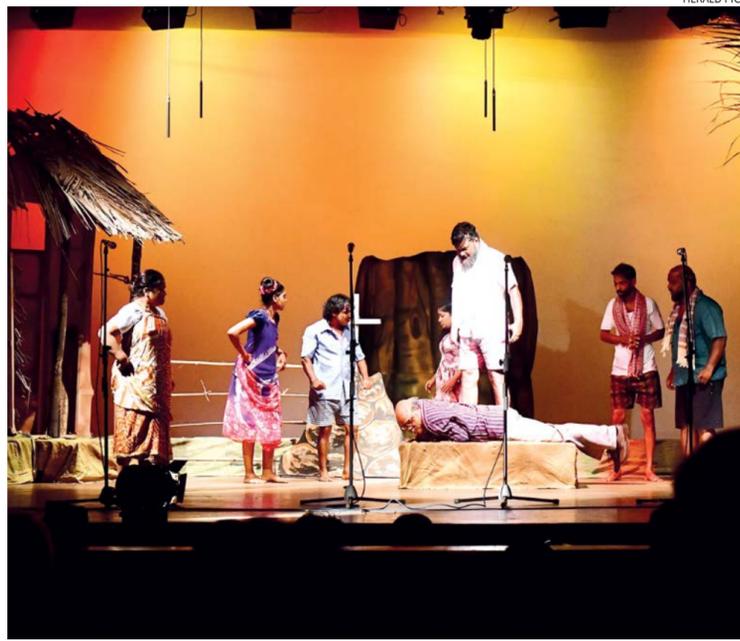
**MARGAO:** *Zagronnachi Rat*, staged by Barebhat Social & Cultural Association, Raia, and directed by Marcos Gonsalves, won the first prize of Rs 1 lakh at the 50th Group 'A' Tiatr Competition organised by Kala Academy. *Varear Ubtolo Kapus*, staged by Machi Mogi Morjim Cultural Sanskrutic Saunsta, Morjim, secured second place, while *Kelelem Urta*, by Drishti Entertainments, Curchoem, finished third. The consolation prize went to *Vavtoll* by Taleigao Dramatic Troupe.

In the Best Acting (Male) category, Salil Naik won first prize for his role as Salvador in *Tum Mhaka Zai*, staged by J J Productions, Santa Cruz. In the Best Acting (Female) category, Alisha Menezes won first prize for her role as Anjela in *Bognaar*, while Venita Salvina D'Costa secured second prize for her role as Natalin in *Zagronnachi Rat*.

The Best Negative Role (Male/Female) award was won by Avito Pires De Menezes for his role as Bhattkar in *Zagronnachi Rat*, while the second prize went to Prashant Paddekar for his role as Collin Raposo in *Vavtoll*.

The Barebhat Social & Cultural Association, Raia, also secured multiple individual awards. Marcos Gonsalves won first prize for Best Direction and Best Script. Ushank Parab won Best Background Music. Holly Henricus Rodrigues won Best Male Singer for his solo Onupkari Put, while Dinora Barretto won Best Female Singer for her solo Duddu Aslear. Risma Fernandes won Best Comedy (Female) for her solo Podra Bail. Nathan Pinto won Best Child Singer (Male) for Sumar Korcho Nhoi, and Naira Livia Fernandes won Best Child Singer (Female) for Eksurponn. The troupe also won the award for Best Choral Singing. A total of 14 institutions participated in the competition, with the judging panel comprising Teotonio Costa, Fr Eusico Pereira, and Carmin Barbosa.

## TIATR TRIUMPH



Artistes from the Barebhat Social & Cultural Association, Raia, deliver animated performances in their award-winning tiatr *Zagronnachi Rat* at Kala Academy. The troupe secured first place in the competition but also bagged nine individual awards.

## On Day 2, e-stamping process resumes smoothly

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** After a technical failure on its first day, the e-stamping system at the Margao Sub-Registrar office has been restored, ensuring smooth operations and relief for applicants. Sub-Registrar officer Suraj Vernekar confirmed the system was back online Wednesday, allowing transactions to proceed without issues. Introduced by Chief Minister Dr. Pramod Sawant, e-stamping aims to digitize stamp duty payments, replacing paper-based stamps with secure digital alternatives to enhance efficiency and prevent tampering. However, on launch day, technical glitches disrupted operations statewide, forcing many applicants to leave without completing transactions—some even missed flights due to delays. With the system now functioning, citizens hope for a smoother experience, signaling potential improvements in the efficiency and security of legal documentation moving forward.

## Navelim locals cry foul over 'sinking' sewage chamber

**MARGAO:** Residents of Nagmodem-Navelim are expressing frustration over never-ending issues with the sewerage network, specifically regarding a sinking sewage chamber.

The excavation work near the Western Bypass underpass, which was carried out to lay the sewage chamber, has resulted in the area continuously sinking. Locals have been raising this issue since 2018, yet the problem persists, causing significant hardship for the community. They are now calling for an investigation into the matter.

According to residents, the chamber continues to sink regularly, and no permanent solution has been attempted by the authorities.

Sarvesh Sinai Narvekar, a local resident stated, "At Nagmodem, the area excavated for the sewage chamber has

been sinking continuously, raising questions about whether the project can be completed when the surrounding area is unstable."

The residents also pointed out that despite being told in 2019 that the project would be completed soon, it has still not been commissioned. The sinking of the area has raised safety concerns, particularly for motorists travelling on the Margao-Nagmodem road, and there are growing fears about whether the project will be finished before the monsoon season begins.

In response, a senior official from SIDCGL clarified that the chamber itself is not sinking, but rather the soft soil at the site has "settled". The official assured that rectification is underway and should be completed in the next two to three days.

## Fallow to flourishing: Benaulim Comunidade all set to revive 1 lakh sq mtrs of paddy fields

Comunidade harks back to village's agrarian roots; plans to restore water bodies and community hall

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**MARGAO:** Once known for its lush green paddy fields that stretched across the landscape, Benaulim's agricultural heritage has gradually faded as tourism took centre stage and fishing remained the traditional livelihood. Now, the village's traditional governing body is determined to reclaim this lost identity through an ambitious revival of its abandoned farmlands.

The Benaulim Comunidade, having recently elected a managing committee after years without elections, has embarked on a mission to transform fallow lands back into productive agricultural spaces. Led by President Orlando Mesquita, Attorney Amancio Fernandes, Treasurer Caetano Fernandes, and Escrivao Nilesch Dessa, the committee has already identified 1 lakh square metres of dormant fields for immediate cultivation.

"We're bringing life back to our traditional fields 'Galpem Acsona pendolpem' that have been lying unused



Members of the Comunidade discuss farming techniques with experts like Fr George Quadros at their recent meeting

for too long," said Amancio Fernandes, an agriculturist himself.

The initiative gained momentum following a stakeholder meeting where Fr George Quadros of the Don Bosco Agriculture Unit, widely regarded as the "paddy man of Goa," offered crucial support. Fr George, who has successfully spearheaded what many call a "green revolution" by reviving farming in other parts of Goa's once-fallow fields, committed to providing assistance with ploughing, mechanical transplanting, and paddy nursery development for Jyoti brown



Voddli Tolo at Khareband Benaulim used for Rabi crop

rice varieties at a nominal cost.

Historically, Comunidades have been known for their agricultural practices and land management, making this initiative a fitting way to preserve this centuries-old legacy while addressing contemporary challenges of food



Abandoned fields that will be reclaimed to grow paddy again

security. The meeting saw discussions on various aspects of agricultural revival, including drying techniques. Fernandes mentioned that an agricultural unit run by Jose D'Costa in Nuvem could be utilized for these purposes, further strengthening the initiative's infrastructure support.

J Santano Rodrigues, who has been promoting Agro-Biodiversity through Goa PRLS Union, also participated in the discussions, offering valuable insights into sustainable farming practices that could be implemented in Benaulim. According to Fernandes, "The Zonal Agriculture Officer (ZAO) Rajesh Costa has been contacted and he of-

fered to guide and support the revival of farming in Benaulim." Fernandes added that after monsoon paddy crop, Rabi crop of vegetables, cowpea, Alsono and others will be tried in few pockets as farmers have shown interest.

As part of the agricultural restoration initiative, the Comunidade will also focus on restoring local water bodies including ponds and lakes. The borders of these water bodies will be protected through tree planting, with preference given to local species such as Jambul, Cocum, and Tamarind. This planting is scheduled for June with support from the Forest Department and involvement of local school students.

The Water Resources Department (WRD) will be approached to clear all natural nullahs (stormwater drains) to improve the drainage system, essential for successful agricultural revival. Additionally, the committee resolved to immediately repair and maintain the age-old pre-Portuguese Comunidade Hall of Benaulim for community use given that there is a lot of history attached to this hall too, which was once a cultural hub for the village.

The Comunidade is also reaching out to all Joneiros (Comunidade members) to renew their billette cards in the first week of May and is conducting a proper inventory of lands and assets to prevent fields from remaining fallow.

Fernandes emphasized the importance of these initiatives, stating, "We must keep traditions of cultivation alive for food security and food safety. Currently, imported food from other states is far from safe, often adulterated with pesticides, which is one major cause of diseases like cancer and tumours in humans today."

MAX. TEMP 35 °C  
MIN. TEMP 26.4 °C

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Let's save our jobs first, then the others.