

Garbage piles up at Betalbatim as P'yat and Tourism Dept pass buck

Picnickers leave garbage strewn across beach; villagers complain that contractor's clean up efforts aren't effective; P'yat mulls charging picnickers a fee to aid waste disposal

Team Herald

MARGAO: Once a favoured spot for locals and tourists alike, Betalbatim Beach in Salcete is now reeling under a mounting garbage crisis, raising serious concerns about public health, tourism, and civic responsibility.

A large stretch of the beach is strewn with waste—plastic, paper plates, cups, food scraps, diapers and other debris—transforming the once-pristine shore into an eyesore. The situation only came to light after alarmed villagers spoke out, prompting the Betalbatim Village Panchayat to scramble into damage control mode.

At the heart of the issue is a glaring lack of clarity over



who is responsible for beach upkeep—the panchayat or the Tourism Department—leaving a vital public space neglected.

Panchayat members pointed fingers at the Tourism Department's newly appointed contractor, who has

failed to install even basic dustbins on the beach. With no proper waste disposal infrastructure in place, visitors are left with little option but to litter, compounding the problem.

However, even in the few spots near the beach where

there are dumpsters for visitors to leave their trash, the dustbins are not used—they are often seen tipped over, surrounded by piles of garbage.

Despite workers being deployed by the contractor, clean-up efforts have been half-hearted. Several areas just 100 metres from the waterline remain untouched, with garbage piling up daily. Locals say the workers are visible but ineffective, focusing on limited zones while ignoring the worst-hit parts.

"The condition is disgraceful," said Franklin Fernandes, a Betalbatim resident. "If tourists see the beach like this, they'll never return. It's embarrassing." He added that during

a recent gram sabha, the panchayat had proposed stationing security personnel to monitor picnickers and ensure they clean up after themselves, but no such system has been implemented yet.

Deputy Sarpanch Ilma Dias confirmed that the panchayat had launched a clean-up initiative. However, she admitted that the high weekend footfall has made it nearly impossible to keep up with the waste generation.

To address the problem long-term, the panchayat is considering imposing a fee on picnickers, with the funds earmarked for regular cleaning, dustbin installation, and improved waste management.

Betul villagers demand closure of explosives unit

Say P'yat did not approve of company's operations as stockpiling gunpowder puts neighbourhood at risk; worried about chemicals leaching into water bodies

Team Herald

MARGAO: Frustrated by continued inaction from the authorities, villagers from Naquerim-Betul panchayat staged a protest outside the South Goa District Collector's office in Margao on Friday, demanding immediate intervention against Hughes Precision Manufacturing Pvt Ltd.

The villagers, angered by what they claim is a serious threat to public safety, issued a seven-day ultimatum for the authorities to act. They warned that if no steps are taken, larger agitations would follow.

At the heart of their concern is the significant quantity of explosives still stored at the company's premises, which they say poses a danger to thousands living nearby. The villagers have also indicated that they will approach the National Green Tribunal (NGT) if the issue remains unresolved, citing environmental and safety concerns.

The protest follows the explosion on March 20, when a fire at the company's gunpowder propellant storage unit triggered a blast. An FIR was subsequently filed by the deputy collector against the company's management and staff for alleged negligence



The locals of Naquerim-Betul raise slogans like, "Guilty should be punished", during their protest in Margao

and endangering human life. But villagers argue that this is not enough—they want the company shut down permanently.

"The company's presence is a direct threat to the village. We submitted a memorandum 17 days ago after the blast, but there has been no action," said a villager.

Naquerim-Betul Sarpanch Pritam Deulkar expressed her frustration over the lack of response. "There is no word from the authorities. It seems like the government is least bothered about our safety," she said.

One villager, speaking at the protest, claimed there was growing fear among residents and accused the government of colluding with the company. "It feels like the government is hand-in-glove with the company. With the monsoon ap-

proaching, there's a real risk that the chemicals stored inside could leak into residential areas," he said.

The community is also outraged that the company was allowed to operate without panchayat approval. "The panchayat never gave consent. Yet the government bypassed us and gave them permissions," he added. Local MLA Altono D'Costa, who joined the protest, levelled serious allegations. "If the stored chemicals are adulterated, it could become a national security threat," he warned. "We strongly suspect powerful individuals are shielding the company."

D'Costa also raised fears of contamination of natural springs and rivulets in the area, adding that more explosions could occur if immediate steps aren't taken.

Officials inspect alleged illegal construction on Betalbatim paddy field

Team Herald

MARGAO: In the wake of a recent High Court order directing the State to act on complaints of illegal construction, officials from the South Goa Deputy Collector's office, the local Talathi, and the Betalbatim panchayat inspected an alleged unauthorised construction site in a paddy field in the village.

Locals had earlier flagged the issue with the panchayat, but claim that action was delayed. They alleged that a "stop work" order was only issued much later, allowing work to continue unchecked for some time.

Residents further claimed that such illegal constructions are often a front for high-end real estate transactions, with

bungalows reportedly being sold for as much as Rs 4 crore to buyers from Delhi, Haryana and other States.

Activists Xavier Cota of the Betalbatim Civic and Consumer Forum, Joe Cota of the Betalbatim Farmers Club, and local resident Hilary Cota were among those who raised the alarm. They pointed out that multiple complaints had been filed regarding the ongoing activity.

Villagers have expressed concern that if immediate action isn't taken, it could set a precedent for more such violations. They also stressed the need to protect Betalbatim's remaining paddy fields from irreversible damage and urban encroachment.

FINISHING TOUCHES



Repairs on the new Mandovi bridge are nearly complete, with workers surfacing the road and cleaning up debris. The bridge, which was closed to traffic for 15 days, will open today

Shack owners push CM for single-window clearance for licences

Team Herald

MARGAO: The All-Goa Private Shack and Hut Owners Association met with Chief Minister Pramod Sawant at his Altinho residence to discuss their grievances and push forward their demand for a single-window clearance system for licences.

The association's president Dharmesh Saglani recalled the efforts of former Chief Minister (late) Manohar Parrikar, who had assisted them in 2017 despite his illness, and acknowledged that the current state government under CM Pramod Sawant has also been supportive.

However, the shack owners lamented the delays in obtaining licences due to the multi-step process involving over 10 government departments. They explained that they can only approach the next department after receiving approval from the previous one, leading to a prolonged gap between applying for the licence (after making the required

Complain that they are forced to approach 10 different government departments separately for approvals, causing unprecedented delays and affecting their livelihoods

payment) and actually receiving it. They said a single-window clearance would expedite such processes and they hoped it would be completed during the June-August period when they shut down their premises for the monsoon season.

They also clarified that they are distinct from regular shacks, as these are private shacks and huts with licences valid for five years.

Additionally, the association expressed concern that their issues regarding the CRZ 2011 and 2019 notifications were not incorporated into the final Coastal Zone Management Plan (CZMP), despite their presentation during

the CZMP public hearings. They urged the government to address this matter at the earliest.

The association also referenced the recent situation in Agonda, where around 67 structures were sealed by the High Court. They pointed out that there have been no noise pollution complaints at the beach in the last decade and that shack owners and other tourism stakeholders had been coordinating with the Forest Department for turtle conservation. Despite this, the court order has severely impacted their livelihoods.

They further noted that Agonda is recognised as one of Asia's best tourist destinations by TripAdvisor, largely due to the beach's tranquil and clean atmosphere.

Some structures have already been de-sealed after owners proved they had all necessary permissions, while the process is underway for others where owners are submitting proof of approvals.

Sewage from Fatorda contaminating fields in Raia

Team Herald

MARGAO: Authorities inspected fields at Manora-Raia to assess the discharge of sewage into agricultural land.

Curator MLA Aleixo Reginaldo Lourenco, who called for the inspection, confirmed that sewage from Fatorda was flowing via Arlem into the fields. "This contaminated water is causing serious problems for our farmers who can't irrigate their vegetables properly. It's causing skin rashes and infections," Lourenco said. He warned that continued contamination would destroy local farming, forcing dependence on pesticide-heavy vegetables from Karnataka.

The MLA issued a 24-hour ultimatum to PWD officials to stop the sewage flow, threatening that farmers would block the drainage with mud if no action is taken. Farmers reported crop damage and health issues due to the prolonged exposure.

State Commission to scrutinise functioning of South Goa Consumer Forum after citizen complaints

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Goa State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission has issued a notice initiating an inquiry into complaints filed against the functioning of the South Goa District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission. The inquiry was prompted by separate complaints lodged by three consumers — Joseph Vaz, Priyanka Talaulikar, and Vijay Kapoor — and follows a preliminary scrutiny conducted by the Department of Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs.

The department has forwarded its findings to the State Commission under Rule 9(2) of the Consumer Protection Rules, 2020, which govern the qualifications, conduct,

and removal of commission members.

The notice directed all three complainants to appear before the Commission on April 9 for further inquiry.

The complaints reportedly pertain to the overall functioning of the South Goa consumer forum and allege instances of improper conduct and discouragement of consumers seeking justice.

One of the complainants Joseph Vaz from Navelim had initially filed a complaint before the South Goa consumer forum over a faulty laptop purchased online but later shifted the case to the North Goa District Commission citing procedural difficulties. On July 31, 2024, the North Goa Commission directed Amazon India and Appario Re-

tail Pvt. Ltd. to refund Rs 26,490 and pay Rs 25,000 as compensation, with interest applicable if unpaid after the appeal period. Vaz confirmed receiving the amount with interest and praised the Porvorim-based commission for a fair and well-reasoned order, especially given that the manufacturer had exited the Indian market.

He also highlighted the challenges faced at the South Goa forum, where he alleged consumers were not treated respectfully. Vaz said his complaints to the Civil Supplies department and the national commission eventually led to the preliminary scrutiny and inquiry being initiated, along with the other two complainants' grievances.

STREET VOICES

WHERE GOANS ARE HEARD

The granting of official language status to Konkani was a triumph for the mother tongue of Goans. While Konkani was made the official language, Marathi was to be used for official purposes. Herald Media asked people since the language issue caused much division and violence, should the language controversy be reopened to divide Goans?

“This attempt by Subhash Velingkar and his gang is to divide Goan society on linguistic and religious lines. The Official Language issue was solved long ago. Since then, several attempts were made to rake up the issue, but these attempts were not successful. Subhash Velingkar wants to stay in the limelight at any cost. His attempt to create vote banks is absolutely rubbish. This controversy will go nowhere, since Goans have decided that their official language is Konkani. The status given to Marathi will remain. So Goans will not fall prey to this attempt to divide Goans on linguistic and religious lines.”

— Prashant Naik, Konkani activist

SHOULD THE LANGUAGE CONTROVERSY BE REOPENED TO DIVIDE GOA?

“It will not only divide people, it will destroy Goa. There are enough issues that Goa and Goans have to handle. This Velingkar who has once again raked up the issue, has already proved a fraud to the people of Goa. Because in 2012, this Velingkar was the main campaigner of the BJP which was led by none other than late Manohar Parrikar. By then they knew that there would be no takers for Konkani but a lot of takers for Marathi. By doing this, these elements were now allowing the downtrodden population to rise. English medium is the only way for prosperity. However, the party came to power, but they kept English as the medium of instruction, because they realised they were voted in due to anti-incumbency and not for 'Mai Bhas'”

— Trajano D'Mello, political commentator

“We know from the outset that Konkani is the language of Goans. But people were also speaking Marathi in Goa. And for many, primary education was in Marathi. But now should we break each other's heads because of language? Who has forbidden anyone to speak any language. I like Portuguese. Who can stop me from talking Portuguese? You want to play politics with language? This should not happen in Goa. You have already tried to divide Hindus and Muslims. Last time you killed people of the ST community. This time people have decided not to vote for them and they know that they will not come back to power. So now they have raised the bogey of language.”

— Tanoj Adwalpalkar, Social activist

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