

# LOUTOLIM FARMERS TAKE NEW BORIM BRIDGE BATTLE TO HC

Tenants associations whose tribal members stand to lose hundreds of acres of fertile fields & fishing grounds allege hidden coal agenda, appeal for stay on land acquisition

KARSTEN MIRANDA

**MARGAO:** Farmers from Loutolim and Borim villages have approached the High Court of Bombay at Goa, contesting the construction of the new Borim Bridge project through their traditional khazan fields. The action escalates their year-long legal battle following attempts to secure relief through the National Green Tribunal.

The petitioners, predominantly from tribal and indigenous communities, are challenging land acquisition notifications issued under the National Highways Act on October 19, 2023, and October 11, 2024. At stake is the protection of over 157,000 square metres of ecologically sensitive khazan lands.

The economic impact on local communities could be devastating. The Carbot, Cantor, Macasana & Bebedo Tenants Association alone produces 273,000 kg of organic brown rice annually from the affected lands, valued at over Rs 2.18 crore. Additionally, fishing rights at just two sluice gates - Carbot and Cantor -

### DEVELOPMENT OR DECEIT, ASK RYOTS

- SCOPE REDUCTION RAISES RED FLAGS**
  - > Land acquisition area cut from 393,184 sq.m to 340,253 sq.m
  - > Key arm serving Margao-Ponda traffic dropped
  - > Petitioners say this exposes real intent: coal transport, not public use
- VIOLATION OF SUPREME COURT GUIDELINES**
  - > Land acquisition initiated without environmental or forest clearances
  - > No proper social impact assessment
  - > Local panchayats not consulted, violating mandatory norms
- FLAWED ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**
  - > EIA conducted in August 2020 - 3 years after alignment was fixed
  - > Petitioners say it was a paper exercise, not a real evaluation
- NO JUSTIFICATION FOR NEW BRIDGE**
  - > Existing Borim Bridge approved for 20 more years
  - > No major traffic issues, especially after Zuari Bridge opened
  - > No urgency or public demand established
- MISSING DETAILED PROJECT REPORT (DPR)**
  - > Land acquisition began without a DPR

generate nearly Rs 60 lakh in annual revenue for the community.

Seven Tenants Associations currently cultivate the khazans of Loutolim. The proposed construction will destroy about 10 hectares of khazans belonging to the Carbot Cantor Macasana and Bebedo Tenants Association and the entire khazans of Atliom Khazan Tenants Association, while severely impacting the remaining five Tenants Associations' lands, making their cultivation financially

unviable. Over 4,000 indigenous residents, fully dependent on these khazans for survival, face displacement or loss of livelihood. Many of these affected individuals belong to Scheduled Tribes, whose rights are protected under various laws, including the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

Court documents suggest the bridge construction may actually be part of a larger plan to expand

coal handling capacity at Mormugao Port from 12 MTPA to 50 MTPA by 2025. Coal is likely to be moved through various jetties along the Zuari River, potentially affecting multiple villages including Sanvordem, Panchawadi, and Shiroda, the petition points out. The petitioners argue that the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways and other respondents have bypassed mandatory environmental clearances and failed to consider viable alternatives that would

cause less environmental damage.

The petition also brings to light historical injustices in land ownership. While the khazan lands have been cultivated by tribal and indigenous communities for generations, their names are only recorded as agricultural tenants in land records. The ownership remains with the Comunidade of Loutolim, which was originally the Gaonkari (community land) of these communities but was allegedly usurped by other communities in what the petitioners describe as a historical injustice.

According to the Goa State Action Plan on Climate Change, approximately 15% of Goa's land is already under threat of frequent floods, storms, and submergence. The khazan lands play a crucial role in climate adaptation, and destroying these lands could compromise Goa's ability to face climate challenges.

The petitioners have sought immediate interim relief to stay the land acquisition process and protect their continued possession of the lands.

# Protest against MMC's 'fraudulent fee hike' in Margao today

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Upset over the recent hike in fees imposed by the Margao Municipal Council (MMC), a group of citizens under the banner of "Citizens and Taxpayers of Margao" have announced plans to hold a massive protest in front of the municipal building on Wednesday.

The protest, spearheaded by former MMC chief Savio Coutinho, demands a rollback of what he describes as an unjustified fee increase and a refund of the additional fees collected from April 2 onwards. Citizens have called upon all taxpayers, regardless of political affiliation, to join the protest in large numbers to oppose what they allege is a fraudulent hike in municipal charges.

Coutinho, the Convener of the Shadow Council for Margao, strongly criticised local officials, including Margao MLA Digambar Kamat and MMC Chairperson Damodar Shirodkar, accusing them of misleading the public by claiming that citizens are satisfied with the revised fee structure and have willingly paid their dues.

Protesters also raised concerns about discrepancies in the fee hike rates, claiming they do not match the resolution passed in the MMC meeting held on February 27. According to them, video evidence clearly shows that the proposed hike was meant to range between 10-15 per cent, but the minutes of the meeting were allegedly tampered with afterwards.

According to Coutinho, those still paying the new fees are either unaware of the protest or require trade licence receipts for the renewal of other permits. He also clarified that many people at the payment counters were only settling their house tax, which has not been increased.

Coutinho urged citizens to compare fee collections from the first week of the new financial year in April 2024 to see the impact of the ongoing Civil Disobedience Movement initiated by aggrieved taxpayers.

Citizens have further criticised Chairperson Shirodkar for claiming that trade licence fees had not been increased for the past

10 to 15 years. According to traders' receipts, however, the fees have been hiked annually by approximately 10 per cent, making the recent increase an additional financial burden.

Local resident Clifford Dias condemned both Shirodkar and MLA Kamat for remaining silent on the alleged Rs 18 lakh fraud, instead justifying the fee hike as necessary to fund municipal staff salaries. Dias questioned why Kamat has not addressed the issue of recovering the allegedly defrauded funds, yet continues to defend the increase in fees.

Meanwhile, Andrew Sequeira urged both Kamat and Shirodkar to engage directly with protesters and explain how the hike was supposedly minimal and did not affect the common man.

The issue has drawn wider public attention after MLA Kamat recently stated that the people of Margao have no issue with paying the new fees, provided the civic body delivers quality service. He also dismissed rumours that the hike was as high as 500-1000 per cent, calling such claims false propaganda.

## South Goa Collector orders crackdown on child begging

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** In a move to address the growing menace of begging in South Goa, the District Collector's office has directed authorities to identify hotspots and carry out rescue and enforcement operations, with a focus on protecting children from exploitation.

The order, issued Tuesday by South Goa District Magistrate Egna Cleetus, mandates a comprehensive survey to map areas where child begging is prevalent—such as tourist sites, markets, traffic signals, and religious places. "Targeted rescue operations will be carried out, and all rescued children will be produced before the Child Welfare Committee without delay and placed in appropriate care institutions for rehabilitation," the order stated. Fortnightly reports on the number of children rescued, FIRs filed, and rehabilitation progress have also been mandated.

Margao Town Police Inspector Tulsidas Naik said that although beggars are routinely produced before court, the lack of a rehabilitation centre means many return to the streets.

He also noted that well-meaning NGOs distributing food may inadvertently be enabling begging.

## AVIAN HARMONY

DOLCY D'CRUZ



Flocks of distinct migratory bird species peacefully hunt for fish in Choroa Island's quiet mangroves, known to house the Dr Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary

## CCTV cameras to be installed across Margao to deter crime

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** A key meeting was held at the South Goa Collector's office to discuss the installation of CCTV cameras within Margao Municipal Council (MMC) limits, with the aim of enhancing city-wide surveillance and public safety.

The meeting, chaired by Margao MLA Digambar Kamat, brought together MMC Chairperson Damodar Shirodkar, Margao Town PI Tulsidas Naik, and other officials, including representatives from the Col-

lector's office.

In the first phase, 15 CCTV cameras will be installed at critical locations across Margao, including busy junctions, commercial areas, and public spaces. The project will be implemented in phases, with the second phase focusing on "black spots"—areas identified as prone to crime or accidents.

Over the past year, Margao and Fatorda have reported a spree of unsolved gold and cash thefts, including many perpetrated by common impersonating policemen. Kamat emphasised the im-

portance of strategic placement and inter-departmental coordination to ensure maximum impact. Shirodkar added that enhanced surveillance would improve response times and help address security concerns in high-risk zones.

The initiative is part of a broader push by the MMC to strengthen Margao's security infrastructure. Real-time monitoring through these cameras is expected to deter criminal activity, support law enforcement in maintaining order, and provide crucial evidence when needed.

## South Goa fishers threaten to shut market over harassment, high fees

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** In a strong show of unity, traditional fishermen and boat owners from Vasco to Betul—spanning the Salcete and Mormugao coastline—protested at the South Goa Planning and Development Authority (SGPDA) office, warning they will shut down the wholesale fish market if their grievances are not addressed.

Their main concern is alleged harassment at the market, despite being nix Goemkars and primary stakeholders. They complained of exorbitant and irrational fees levied for various activities, along with steep penalties that make operations unsustainable.

They also objected to being charged by both the SGPDA contractor and the Margao Municipal Council (MMC) contractor—inside and outside



the market—which they claimed is illegal double taxation.

Though they arrived in the morning, the fishermen had to wait until afternoon to meet the Member Secretary (MS) of the SGPDA. They also spoke over the phone with Chairman and Vasco MLA Krishna Daji Salkar. A meeting has been scheduled for April 10, with the demand that the old fee structure be reinstated until then.

Key protestors included Savio D'Silva, Chairman of the Cutbana Fisheries Cooperative Society, and Jose Philip D'Souza, President of the

Goa Fishing Boat Owners Association. They also met Fatorda MLA and SGPDA Board Member Vijai Sardesai. The fishermen highlighted the illegality of being taxed by two bodies. Sardesai advised them to file a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) within a month if the dual fee collection continues.

He acknowledged similar complaints from wholesale traders and criticised the BJP government for ignoring the issue, alleging that BJP-backed individuals handle the current market contracts. Sardesai questioned the SGPDA's decision to hike wholesale market

fees, noting that the last board meeting he attended in January had only approved a fee hike for the retail market. He also urged the fishermen to meet the District Collector, stressing that this is a public interest issue, especially with customers also affected.

He criticised the delay in the tender process, despite High Court directives, alleging it's a deliberate move to allow contractors to continue controlling the market. Sardesai pointed out that the current tender's fee structure is unviable, deterring potential bidders.

Later, D'Silva and D'Souza accused the SGPDA of ignoring their concerns, stating they would also approach the MMC if necessary. They demanded reduced fees and an end to the current restrictions and alleged "extortion" by contractors.

## A maestro's melody ends: Tiatr fraternity bids farewell to Caridade 'Babush' Fernandes



Team Herald

**MARGAO:** The Tiatr Academy of Goa on Tuesday mourned the passing of legendary Konkani stage musician Caridade Fernandes, popularly

known as Babush, whose soulful compositions and decades-long contribution to tiatr left an indelible mark on Goan cultural history.

Born on September 18, 1940, in Arambol, Babush received his early education in Portuguese at Primeira Grao and in English at Mount Carmel High School in the fishing village. At the tender age of 12, he began learning music under the guidance of Mestri Caetano D'Souza of Arambol, marking the beginning of his long and illustrious musical career.

Babush became a household name in the world of tiatr, first performing in 1967 for late C. Alvares' tiatr. Over the years, he performed and contributed music to numerous tiatr productions by some of the most famous writers and directors, including M. Boyer, Alfred Rose, Jemmie Colaco, Rico Rod, Joe Rose, Robin Vaz, Roseferns, Willy Rebbimus (Mangalore), Henry D'Souza, and Melvin D'Souza, among others.

Babush was felicitated on numerous occasions and received awards such as the Gulab Award and the Kala Mogi-Candolim Award. Following his passing, Anthony Barbosa, President of the Tiatr Academy of Goa, expressed his profound grief over the loss, describing Babush as a "real legend in the field of Konkani music."

## Cong slams 'eviction' of Campal fisherfolk, demands ramp, parking



Team Herald

**PANJIM:** The Congress on Tuesday submitted a memorandum to Corporation of the City of Panaji (CCP) Mayor Rohit Monserrate, alleging the denial of traditional rights to fishermen at Campal. In response, Monserrate clarified that the issue does not fall under the CCP's jurisdiction and lies with the Forest Department and Smart City authorities.

Pratibha Borkar, President of the Panaji Block Congress Committee, stated in the memorandum that the livelihoods and dignified existence of over 30 traditional Goan fishing families at Campal beach are under threat due to "short-sighted and insensitive" development by the Goa State Infrastructure Development Corporation (GSIDC) and CCP.

"For generations, these fishermen have anchored their canoes and stored their nets

along the Campal shoreline—a practice deeply woven into the cultural and economic fabric of Panaji," Borkar said. "However, in the name of urban beautification and Smart City projects, their rights have been bulldozed—quite literally."

She said the construction of a retaining wall and a pathway to Miramar, while promoted as progress, had come at the expense of the traditional fishing community that has long supported the city.

Borkar further alleged that despite repeated assurances from authorities, including GSIDC, that a dedicated ramp or docking area would be built, no such facility has materialised. Instead, the fishermen's traditional parking spaces have been encroached upon, and even the temporary space near Yog Setu, opposite the Entertainment Society of Goa (ESG), is now being taken away at the behest of CCP and Forest Department officials.

## STREET VOICES

WHERE GOANS ARE HEARD

As strong winds and unseasonal showers lashed Panjim, bringing down trees and exposing the chaos of ongoing Smart City works, Herald Media asked residents the pressing question - is the city truly ready for the monsoons? Here's what they had to say.

“On Monday we witnessed heavy rain showers and strong winds and the electricity went out in Dona Paula. It is crazy to see such weather on April 7, due to the extreme heat. And to see Panjim in such a bad state when such unseasonal showers lash the city, and the works of Smart City still not completed! They have been promising us every year that by the end of May, the work will be completed. It is scary because the roads are not done up, shoddy work is being done, there are gaping holes on the footpaths. My mother, who is a senior citizen, has fallen from the bike at least three times due to gravel on the road. The works will not be over before the monsoon

— Cecille Rodrigues, Resident, Dona Paula

“I think that Panjim will definitely flood this year. Just outside our office near Mahalaxmi temple, while breaking and reconstructing the manhole, the entire manhole has been blocked with debris. They have given cosmetic finishing touches. In previous years, the flooding used to subside within about two hours. This time the water will not recede. Nobody is ready to take the responsibility for this. Infact (Mayor) Rohit Monserrate has declared that they have laid the city waste and we are waiting for them to finish and move out of the city. We want to ask Rohit, every year your father gets you re-elected unopposed as the mayor. You are blaming the Smart City, you are the mayor, what were you doing all these years?

— Francis Coelho, Resident, Taleigao

## WITH ROAD AND GUTTER WORK INCOMPLETE, IS PANJIM READY FOR THE MONSOON?

“If you want to see the real situation, you can come with me to see the work done by Smart City. Smart City is only on paper and to fool the people by telling them that Panjim will become smart. The CEO Sanjit Rodrigues, told us when we went to meet him, that Panjim should become a role model. Nobody is happy. The mayor himself has told the media that he himself is fed up. Today they dig here, the next day some other place is dug up. When they patch up the surface is dangerously uneven. I don't believe claims that there will be no flooding this year. The gutters are incomplete, there are heaps of mud which will seep into the gutters. All the road works are substandard.

— Pratiba Borkar, President, Panjim Block Mahila Congress

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