

MMC fee hike: Angry Margao locals picket municipal building

Tensions flare as chairperson refuses to budge on fee hike, tells citizens to go to court; police called in to disperse protesters, who threaten to not to pay taxes

Team Herald

MARGAO: A large group of Margao residents staged a protest outside the Margao Municipal building on Wednesday, demanding a rollback of the recent hike in fees imposed by the civic body.

The protest quickly turned chaotic as tensions flared between the demonstrators and the Chairperson of the Municipal Council, Damodar Shirodkar, who was confronted by angry citizens calling for the immediate reversal of the fee increase.

Protesters, including local traders, expressed their frustration over the fee hike and demanded a refund for those who had already paid the increased fees. However, Chairperson Shirodkar stood firm, reiterating that the civic body would not roll



back the decision.

He told reporters that the council's actions were in line with legal requirements, adding that protesters were free to take the matter to court if they wished.

The situation escalated further when a police team, led by inspector Tulidas Naik, intervened to disperse the protesters. Tensions between the protesters and the police intensified as

the demonstrators accused the authorities of attempting to silence the voices of taxpayers.

"The police are working under pressure to suppress our voices," one protester remarked.

In response to the police's actions, the protesters were forced to move to the municipal garden area, where they continued to voice their discontent.

“What we have done is according to the law. The protesters can go to court – Damodar Shirodkar, Chairperson, MMC”

Savio Coutinho, a prominent figure among the protesters, accused Shirodkar and other political leaders in Margao of misleading the public and attempting to stifle peaceful protests.

He claimed that the fee hike was actually much higher than the 10 to 15 percent increase stipulated in the council's resolution and accused the Chairperson of manipulating the minutes of the council meeting to hide the truth.

Coutinho further claimed that Shirodkar's comparisons to the fee structure of the Panjim Corporation

were misleading; asserting that Panjim's fees were, in fact, lower than those of Margao.

Another protester, Andrew Sequiera, demanded the immediate resignation of Chairperson Shirodkar. "As taxpayers, we have the full right to demonstrate," he asserted.

Sequiera also warned that in the coming days, local traders would file individual objections and refuse to pay the increased fees.

The situation reached a boiling point when a delegation of five protesters, led by Coutinho, held a meeting with the Chairperson in his chamber. A heated argument ensued, but Shirodkar maintained that the fee hike would stand. "What we have done is under the law," he asserted. "Let the protesters go to court."

124 begging cases booked in North Goa over 5 years; children rescued in Calangute

Team Herald

PANJIM: North Goa police registered 124 cases related to begging over the last five years, with Calangute police rescuing three children found begging in the coastal belt this year alone and lodging them at Apna Ghar, Mercedes.

According to official data, up to March 24, three children were rescued and placed in the state-run protective home. A similar number were rescued in 2024 by the same police station.

In 2024, Mapusa police registered one case under the Goa Daman and Diu Prevention of Begging Act, 1972, along with Section 8 of the Goa Children's Act.

In 2023, North Goa police rescued 10 juveniles, including a woman and her seven-month-old child, for begging. The Mapusa police charge-sheeted one of the juveniles, and the case is currently pending trial in the Goa Children's Court, Panjim.

That same year, Calangute police also detained a woman with her seven-month-old child for similar offences. In total, nine juveniles were rescued by Calangute police in 2023. Police said mobile patrolling has been intensified at traffic signals to curb begging. Meanwhile, public-spirited advocate Moses Pinto from Margao approached the High Court of Bombay at Goa, seeking intervention to



SPIKE IN BEGGING CASES ALARMS MARGAO LOCALS

MARGAO: Margao is witnessing a disturbing rise in begging-related cases, with police data revealing 201 cases in 2024 and 38 already recorded in the first few months of 2025. Citizens and officials attribute the rise to a mix of economic distress, inadequate rehabilitation services, and a lack of coherent policy to address the root causes of begging.

"This isn't just a law-and-order issue—it's a social crisis," said social worker Milagres Fernandes, calling for a holistic approach that combines enforcement with long-term support systems.

Residents, particularly in areas like Old Market, say the growing presence of beggars is fuelling insecurity.

"We see beggars sleeping outside shops, causing disturbances, and some are even involved in thefts," alleged Cajetan Dias, a local resident. "It's affecting our safety."

While there are calls for stricter enforcement of anti-begging laws, community leaders stress that policing alone won't solve the problem. They advocate for investment in rehabilitation, mental health support, housing, and poverty alleviation.

ensure the protection of underprivileged children.

In his plea, Pinto highlighted key concerns including endangerment of children's lives and dignity, denial of free and compulsory education under Arti-

cle 21A of the Constitution, and the State's failure to prevent child exploitation. He called for immediate rescue, rehabilitation, and provision of educational opportunities for children forced into begging.

FDA raids Madel shop, seizes dodgy chicken from Hubballi

Team Herald

MARGAO: Unhygienic chicken brought from Hubballi to Goa was seized by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) following a complaint from concerned citizens.

The chicken, which had been brought in a rickshaw and stocked at a shop in Madel, was found packed in plastic bags and stored in a facility that lacked the necessary licence to store food items.

The issue came to light when local residents and media raised the alarm about the unsanitary handling and storage of the chicken. According to reports, the poultry was transported without adhering to safety protocols, or cold storage requirements



raising serious concerns about potential health risks associated with consuming the meat.

FDA officials confirmed that the seized chicken could not be sold in the market under any circumstances. "Such food items, which are stored improperly and without proper licenses, violate food safety laws and regulations. They pose a serious threat to public health and cannot be allowed to reach consumers," said an FDA official.

UNSEEN LIVES



At Panjim's bustling Kadamba bus stand, few notice a vagrant passed out between autorickshaws—right beside the police booth meant to keep order

GTDC floats tender for Rs 18.91 cr Colva Beach development project

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Goa Tourism Development Corporation (GTDC) has floated a tender worth Rs 18.91 crore for the development, operations, maintenance, and management of a 'Beach Experience' project at Colva Beach. The initiative falls under the central government's Swadesh Darshan 2.0 scheme,

with GTDC serving as the State's implementing agency.

According to the tender document, the project aims to boost tourism and support the local economy by enhancing visitor facilities. Proposed developments include construction of a beach deck, shopping complex, food and shopping plaza, designated hawker zone, and a dedicated secu-

rency block. The corporation will oversee all aspects of the project. It may be recalled that a meeting was in the recent past at Colva Beach with the Tourism Minister, stakeholders, panchayat representatives, Benaulim MLA, and government officials to discuss the proposed plans under this scheme and some concerns that were raised too.

Housie ban takes effect: Villagers fume as Varca event gets cancelled

Police intervene; citizens say housie not a profit-making venture but a community-driven game

Team Herald

MARGAO: A day after the South Goa District Magistrate issued an order banning housie under the Goa Public Gambling Act, the first fallout was felt in Varca, where a Wednesday night musical programme and housie event had to be cancelled.

Attempts were reportedly made to go ahead with the event, but by evening, the organisers called it off after police intervention.

The cancellation has sparked outrage among residents and organisers across South Goa, many of whom had lined up similar events through April and May. Local clubs and church committees, who often conduct housie as part of community entertainment, said the sudden clampdown was harsh and unfair.

The directive to ban such activities was issued by South Goa District Magistrate Egna Cleetus, IAS, who has issued urgent instructions to all Deputy Collectors and Sub-Divisional Magistrates (SDMs) to take immediate action against illegal gambling activities, specifically naming housie, a popular community game in the district. The Collector cited the Goa Public Gambling Act, 1976, which makes such activities cognisable and punishable offences, prohibiting gam-

bling in public or private spaces without lawful authority.

A weekly report of all actions taken under this order must be submitted to the District Magistrate, and a copy of the directive has also been sent to the Superintendent of Police (SP), South Goa, for immediate coordination and enforcement.

“This is a traditional event, part of our village gatherings for years. How can you suddenly equate it with illegal gambling? People look forward to this as a social get-together – Housie organiser”

The news of the ban was met with shock and anger by a section of the public that has for years been either participating in or organising housie. Locals argued that this has been a traditional event and has not only been happening for years but also happens in every village that has a minority population.

"It has come to the notice of the undersigned that certain illegal gambling activities, including but not limited to housie and other unauthorised gambling activities, are being organised in various parts of South Goa," the memorandum states. The Collector's directive instructs all SDMs and

Deputy Collectors to monitor their jurisdictions closely, coordinate with police for inspections and raids, and initiate legal proceedings against individuals or groups found organising or participating in such events.

The order has triggered widespread criticism from residents, who questioned why other forms of gambling—like matka or casinos—remain untouched.

"This is a traditional event, part of our village gatherings for years," said a local organiser. "How can you suddenly equate it with illegal gambling? People look forward to this as a social get-together."

The move is expected to draw sharper reactions from residents, especially in villages, where housie has long served as a source of entertainment and social bonding.

Residents argue that housie is not a profit-making venture but a community-driven game often tied to church feasts or club activities. Many pointed to similar lottery-style games held during festivals in villages with majority populations.

They added these events have already happened in some villages in the previous month and are expected to continue until May, as has been the schedule for the last many years, though the current cancellations suggest otherwise.

Govt eases house repair rules in P'yat areas

To auction 250 govt vehicles at Scrap Mela; inks MoU with Indian Oil for fuel stations

Team Herald

PANJIM: The Goa government has simplified the process for obtaining permission to repair existing single-dwelling houses in panchayat areas, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant announced on Wednesday.

Speaking at the Secretariat, Sawant said panchayat secretaries have been directed to issue No Objection Certificates (NOCs) within three days of receiving applications. "If no response is received within three days, the NOC will

NOC WITHIN 3 DAYS

- Applicants must submit house tax receipt, Form 1 and 14, old photograph of the house, new plan, estimated cost, and structural stability report from a certified engineer or architect to the Panchayat
- P'yat secys have been

directed to issue NOCs within 3 days of application, if the applicant fulfils certain conditions

- If there is no response within three days, NOC will be deemed 'issued'
- This applies strictly to existing houses built on existing plinths

be deemed granted," the CM said, clarifying that the policy applies only to existing houses built on existing plinths. The panchayat

will serve as a single-point clearance, and the proposal need not go before the full panchayat body.

The government will also

organise a "Scrap Mela" to auction about 250 old government vehicles across Porvorim, Margao, and Mapusa. While 34 of these vehicles are under 15 years old, the rest have crossed that mark.

In other announcements, the State signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) to develop tourist-friendly fuel stations, EV charging and battery-swapping infrastructure. IOCL will also study the feasibility of LNG bunkering, compressed

biogas (CBG) plants, and plastic waste recycling in Goa. Another MoU was signed with The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) to set up a Centre of Excellence for Natural Resource Management and Ecotourism. The centre will focus on areas such as climate change, marine conservation, water and energy sustainability, the blue economy, and eco-tourism. The Chief Minister also launched the Viksit Goa Portal, inviting citizens to submit suggestions for the State's Vision Document.



The menace of begging is growing in almost all the towns of Goa including the capital Panjim. Margao however is dogged with numerous beggars. Herald Media asked people of Margao whether it is time that the police to act against begging and beggars in Margao

SHOULD POLICE ACT AGAINST BEGGARS AND BEGGING IN MARGAO?

“There is an NGO which feeds these beggars. Some of them eat the food, others take it away and still others leave it in the garden itself. The Margao garden was such a beautiful garden where senior citizens used to relax. Now after looking at the swollen faces with bottles in their hands, the senior citizens have given up coming to the garden. They have even stopped taking evening walks in the garden due to the beggars. The municipality and the police should take action against these beggars. The police say they take action, but once evicted, the beggars return to the place. Even on the station road there are frequent deaths of beggars. This may start happening in the municipal garden too – Dinesh Kakodkar, Margao resident”



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“This work (of chasing the beggars) has to be done by the Margao municipality by appointing an agency. They have to detain these beggars and make provisions to rehabilitate them. Only then will this problem be solved. This is the only solution. Going to Municipal garden was like going to the Bangalore garden. The garden was so beautiful with fountains, lights and huge roses. There were also small bridges with water under it with fish. Even match making would be done in the garden since those days people could not afford to go to hotels. If the police show them some fear, the beggars will stop sitting in the garden. The police are negligent. I have never seen the police going to the garden to shoo beggars – Mahesh Nayak, social worker”

“There was a fight in front of the Margao Municipality between migrants. The Margao MLA had made a statement that he had given instructions to ensure that henceforth nobody will be allowed to sleep in the garden or do any nefarious activities. He also said that nobody would be allowed to sleep on the pavement of the comunidade building. One day we saw people chasing away beggars. But now the situation is back to normal. So was it only for one day? So this is playing on the minds of the people of Margao. Also those hawkers and migrants are back near the comunidade building. So is this only tall talk, or will see some action against the beggars – Savio Coutinho, former Margao Chairperson”