

South Goa fishermen threaten stir over market 'mismanagement'

Fisherfolk clash with SGPDA members at closed-door meeting; complain of exorbitant hourly charges, filthy surroundings, parking crunch and harassment from contractors

Team Herald

MARGAO: Tensions are mounting among traditional fishermen and boat owners across South Goa, from Betul to Vasco, who met South Goa Planning and Development Authority (SGPDA) Chairman and Vasco MLA Krishna 'Daji' Salkar to voice their grievances over the mismanagement of the Margao wholesale fish market.

Though Salkar defended the SGPDA and its contractor, claiming that complaints came from only a few and that many were satisfied with market operations under his watch, the closed-door meeting turned heated, with angry exchanges audible to media outside.

Fisher leaders Savio D'Silva (Cutbona), Jose Philip D'Souza (Vasco), Olencio Simoes (Velsao), and Pele Fernandes (Benaulim) listed a host of issues, warning that



protests would intensify if demands are ignored. They agreed to await the outcome of the April 21 SGPDA board meeting before deciding their next move.

One of their core complaints was the steep hike in market charges and the new hourly rates being levied. "This market was built for us, the local fishermen, but we're being pushed out and harassed," said one of the leaders.

They also criticised poor

cleanliness at the market and requested a dedicated office space for local fishermen. Another flashpoint was parking—key spaces were allegedly being reserved for traders and non-Goan fishermen. Salkar later denied this claim.

Fishermen also said they were being fined by the Margao Municipal Council (MMC) contractor when operating outside the market premises, raising the issue of dual charges by both SGPDA

and MMC.

Salkar clarified that the SGPDA only levies charges for activities within its premises. "Anything outside falls under MMC, and fishermen will have to take it up with them," he said. The group said they would now approach both the MMC and District Collector, citing prior correspondence with the civic body.

On allegations that the contractor was not issuing receipts, Salkar said receipts are provided. Regarding verbal spats between the contractor and fishermen, he said, "I cannot comment as I don't know both sides of the story."

Salkar assured that the fishermen's demands—including reducing rates and scrapping hourly charges—would be presented at the upcoming SGPDA board meeting. He added that earlier demands, such as market timing adjustments, had already been accepted.

On the request to hand over the sopo contract to the fishermen, Salkar said it must go through an open tender, as directed by the High Court. "If local fishermen win the bid, it's a win-win, but the process must be fair," he said, adding that objections to the earlier tender were resolved and a new one would soon be floated.

Salkar also said that the proposed new phase of the market would offer more space, but fishermen argued for a two-zone model—reserving one section for local fishermen and the other for wholesale traders—to end long-standing clashes and curb the dominance of vested interests.

They reiterated their demands for improved market maintenance, cleanliness, and a small office space dedicated to local fishing operations.

Khareband blaze exposes glaring fire safety lapses

Team Herald

MARGAO: A recent fire at a residential building in Khareband has reignited public outrage over the city's chronic neglect of fire safety measures, exposing serious lapses in enforcement across both residential and commercial properties.

Citizens and civic activists have slammed authorities for repeated inaction, pointing out that Margao—despite being one of Goa's busiest commercial hubs—remains woefully unprepared for fire emergencies.

"Every time there's an incident, there is some noise and talk of inspections, but after a few weeks, everything dies down," said civic activist Savio Coutinho. "People are living in buildings that are ticking time bombs."

Fire and Emergency Services officials in Margao admit that many older buildings lack even basic fire safety systems. "Several buildings that were constructed decades ago do not have any fire safety provisions in place. Even in some newer buildings where equipment has been installed, we have observed that the systems are either non-functional or poorly maintained," said a senior officer, speaking on condition of anonymity. He

BUILDING DECLARED UNSAFE, RESIDENTS RELOCATED

MARGAO: Senior officials, including South Goa District Collector Egnas Cleetus and Margao MLA Digambar Kamat, visited the gutted house on Thursday. The building was officially declared unsafe, and it was decided that a structural stability report would be commissioned.

As a precautionary measure, all residents are being relocated. Many families have moved in with relatives, while the district administration has assured alternative arrangements for those without such support.

"In case residents are unable to find a place with their relatives, temporary facilities at the local stadium will be made available," confirmed MLA Kamat. Kamat said engineers and technical experts will conduct a thorough inspection to assess the damage and determine the building's structural integrity.



added that builders often install fire safety systems merely to obtain completion certificates, with little regard for their upkeep. "Routine inspections, if conducted at all, rarely lead to penalties or enforcement action," he said.

The fire has forced residents to vacate their homes and seek shelter with relatives or in temporary government accommodations—laying bare the human cost of

negligence. "This is a wake-up call," said Margao local Krishna Naik, pushing for a comprehensive fire safety audit of all buildings, particularly high-rises, commercial complexes, and ageing residential blocks. Fire officials have also reiterated the need for regular fire drills, maintenance of equipment, and strict penalties for non-compliance.

Declare coconut shortage in Goa, farmers urge govt

Copra prices have doubled; coconuts cost Rs 40 a piece

Team Herald

MARGAO: Taking serious note of the sharp drop in coconut availability in Goa, local farmers and the Adarsh Krishi Sahakari Kharedi Vikri Prakriya Sauntha Maryadit, Balli, have urged the State government to officially declare a coconut shortage and formulate a concrete support policy for growers.

Prakash Velip, Chairman of the cooperative society that runs nearly 10 procurement counters across Goa, said the situation is becoming critical and warned of further price hikes unless urgent action is taken.

"There is a pressing need for the government to identify the exact reasons behind the shortage and come up with a policy to support farmers.

The price of copra, which was earlier procured at Rs 80 per unit, has now surged to Rs 160. This is a clear indication of the shortage. Simultaneously, the price of a regular coconut is hovering around Rs 40," said Velip.

Among the reasons cited for the drop in coconut supply are the large-scale sale of tender coconuts, disease affecting trees, monkey

menace, and rising input and labour costs. Velip stressed that the government must use its agricultural and scientific resources to diagnose the crisis and provide timely relief.

"We have a network of nearly 3,000 copra suppliers. If the government doesn't act now, the situation will only worsen, and prices will become unaffordable for consumers," he said.

Velip called for the introduction of either a direct support mechanism or a government-facilitated bulk procurement system to stabilise the market. "At the moment, there is no system in place to regulate or support coconut procurement. We need that change," he added.

On a more positive note, Velip said the cashew crop this season has shown improvement. "Compared to last year, we've already procured 866 tonnes of cashew, while last year's total was just 556 tonnes. We're confident of surpassing that figure in the next few days."

Nine out of the ten procurement counters run by the society have recorded strong cashew purchases this year. The only exception is Valpoi, where activity has been relatively low.

Large scale sale of tender coconuts, diseases and pests blamed for shortfall; growers push for bulk procurement

SUNBEAMS ON THE ZUARI

UPENDRA NAIK



Clouds momentarily block out the harsh summer sun, scattering crepuscular rays, also called 'God rays', that make for a breathtaking view from the Cortalim-Madkai ferry on Thursday evening

Benaulim Congress seeks urgent road safety fixes

MARGAO: The Benaulim Constituency Block Congress on Thursday submitted a petition to South Goa MP Captain Viriato Fernandes, raising concerns over deteriorating road safety in the area.

Led by Block President Keith Gracias, the delegation flagged the danger posed by faded, unmarked speed breakers across Benaulim, especially at night. They warned that poorly visible speed breakers risk accidents, particularly for elderly residents and tourists unfamiliar with local roads.

The petition called for immediate repainting with reflective markings, installation of proper reflectors, and warning signboards. Fernandes, who chairs the Road Safety Committee, assured the delegation that he would intervene.

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MARGAO: South Goa District Collector Egnas Cleetus cancelled the No Objection Certificate (NOC) issued to Hughes Precision Manufacturing Pvt Ltd following the March 20 fire and explosion at its gunpowder storage facility in Naqueri. The cancellation follows an investigation by the Petroleum & Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO), which found that the company had stored explosives in an unlicensed magazine—an offence under Rule 7 of the Explosives Rules, 2008.

The Collector's order cited a communication dated April 7 from PESO's Joint Chief Controller in Mumbai, which detailed the violations and concluded that the company had failed to follow proper storage protocols, posing unacceptable risks to public safety and the

environment.

This action comes amid growing public pressure, including protests by Naqueri-Betul villagers outside the South Goa Collectorate. It also aligns with CM Pramod Sawant's assurance that the company would not be allowed to resume operations until full compliance with safety norms is demonstrated.

PESO had earlier suspended the company's storage and transport licences on March 21, a day after the incident, while local police registered an FIR against the facility's management for alleged negligence and endangerment of life. Preliminary findings point to violations of Rules 118(2)(ii) and 131 of the Explosives Rules, 2008. The company may reapply for certification after addressing the identified deficiencies.

South Goa collector cancels NOC to gunpowder unit over safety violations

OFFICIALS ORDERED TO FENCE PITS, PRUNE TREES AHEAD OF MONSOON

MARGAO: With hardly two months left for the monsoon, the Collector has launched a district-wide preparedness drive. At a review meeting attended by South Goa SP Tikam Singh and officials from various departments, Cleetus directed urgent safety interventions, including fencing of open mining pits linked to past drowning cases, felling of unstable trees, and demolition of unsafe buildings. Departments were also instructed to strengthen emergency preparedness in landslide and flood-prone areas by appointing nodal officers and ensuring a rapid response mechanism during the rains.

In a separate initiative, the Collector reviewed the activities of Flying Squads set up to curb illegal sand mining. She stressed the need for more surprise inspections and swift action on complaints, though specific operational plans were not disclosed.

Sewerage upgrade at South Goa admin complex completed

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Sewerage and Infrastructure Development Corporation of Goa Limited (SIDCGL) has announced the early completion of a key sewerage project at the Mathany Saldanha Administrative Complex in South Goa.

The project involved relaying the sewerage line and servicing the entire sewer network and sump tank to improve sanitation and waste management at the government complex. For the past couple of years, government employees and visitors to the Collectorate had to endure smelly, non-functional toilets with clogged drains. SIDCGL awarded the

contract to Agasti Enterprises through a formal administrative process. In a proactive move, the contractor began work on February 11, 2025, even before receiving the official work order. The project was completed by April 7, well ahead of the stipulated deadline, officials confirmed. "The early completion of this important project reflects our commitment to delivering high-quality infrastructure and ensuring uninterrupted services at key government facilities," a senior SIDCGL official said.

The upgraded system is now fully operational and is expected to significantly enhance hygiene at the government complex.

New lift at Osia Complex in a week: SGPDA chief

MARGAO: In response to complaints over malfunctioning lifts at the Osia Commercial Complex, South Goa Planning and Development Authority (SGPDA) chairperson Krishna 'Daji' Salkar has assured that work on installing a new elevator will begin within a week.

Acknowledging the daily inconvenience faced by the public—especially senior citizens—Salkar said that while the SGPDA is only one of several entities operating from the complex, it has taken up the matter as a moral responsibility with the government.

The dysfunctional elevator has caused difficulty at the four-storey wing housing departments such as the Regional Transport Office (RTO), excise, commercial taxes, town planning, and the SGPDA. The only operational lift skips floors, forcing visitors to climb stairs, often multiple times.



WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE RS 50 HIKE IN LPG PRICES AMIDST RISING INFLATION?

"The Goa government had promised timely disbursement of Griha Aadhar. One side they are giving this money to housewives and on the other side they are hiking the prices of LPG. The main issue is inflation which is crushing the people. People are just recovering from the Covid situation, many people are still suffering financially. And now hiking the price of LPG by Rs 50. The price of diesel has also been hiked. This revenue is being squeezed from poor people and hefty loans are written off for the rich, classic trickery of the BJP government" - Savio Coutinho, activist

"The BJP government claimed to be a government of the poor. Rs 50 has been hiked per LPG cylinder, bringing the price to Rs 870. How will the poor be able to afford this cylinder? They have stopped the supply of rationed kerosene. At least during the Congress regime, ration was free. When Rs 2 was hiked on the LPG cylinder, BJP Mahilas would fall on the road. Today, where are these Mahilas? Doing BJP propaganda in houses. What will you go with to the houses - the hiked prices of cylinders? And see how the ministers' stomachs are full, see their posh cars. Yesterday, they asked the people to hoist the BJP flag. While the poor put the flags on tiled roofs, ministers hoisted the flags on posh bungalows" - Manisha Usgaonkar, General Secy, GPCC



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"Why have the women been forced to come out on the streets? It's because of the price rise. Can't the government see that it is hurting the women more than anyone? Where has the price of the LPG cylinder reached? Sometimes we require two cylinders. From where should the women get the money? The government is giving Rs 1500 to the housewives, that too is not regular. DSS too is Rs 200, that too does not come regularly. If a household requires two cylinders, it will amount to Rs 1700. The BJP government is out to loot the people. Will the women manage the house, education of their children, or deal with hiked gas prices?" - Alinda Lacerda, President, Mahila Congress Block Quepem