

A year on, promised Comunidade reforms still stuck in limbo

Stakeholders blame administrative apathy; say government assurances since January 2024 Convention remain largely on paper; Gaunkari Day on April 15 passes unnoticed

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MARGAO: Stakeholders of Goa's centuries-old Comunidade system are calling out the "administrative inertia" and "lack of political will" to implement long-promised reforms. Despite amendments to the Code of Comunidade passed in August 2024 following a statutory convention, representatives claim that these changes have yet to translate into meaningful action on the ground.

Avinash Tavares, a shareholder of the Colva and Margao Comunidades and a member of the five-member commission that coordinated the 2024 Comunidade Convention, listed out ongoing problems. "Files remain pending and it's difficult to track them. There is a severe staff shortage in the Administrator's office," he said, adding that recent government assurances offer little comfort. "The actions that have been taken are only on paper. For example, regarding the revival of defunct Comunidades and agriculture on Comunidade land, the government claims amendments were passed—but has

RESOLUTIONS PASSED AT 2024 CONVENTION

- Empower attorneys to act against illegal constructions on Comunidade land
- Replace government-appointed administrators with more accountable representatives
- Oppose regularisation of encroachments on Comunidade land
- Hold attorneys accountable for inaction or negligence
- Revert land misused by tenants under the Tenancy Act back to Comunidades
- Exclude Comunidade buildings from the Rent Control Act
- Conduct a fresh land resurvey to update and correct records
- Address gender discrimination in enrolling women as jonoeiros

anything changed on the ground?"

In the recently-concluded Assembly session, Revenue Minister Atanasio 'Babush' Monserrate responded to a question by Curtorim MLA Aleixo Reginaldo Lourenco, stating that multiple amendments had been passed: Article 41-A for election reforms, Article 181-A for revival of defunct Comunidades, and Article 31A addressing land conversion. The government also said that issues related to alleged illegal staff appointments in the Office of Administrator of Comunidade (South

Zone) remain sub judge before the High Court.

Earlier this month, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant met with Comunidade officials and promised expedited staff recruitment, the appointment of full-time administrators, and complete computerisation of operations. "All Comunidades will be 100% streamlined. A full-time administrator will be appointed. Recruitment will be expedited. All processes will be 100% computerised," he had said, while pointing out that North Goa alone has 75 Comunidades needing attention.

Responding to these assurances, Savio J F Correia, president of four Salcete Comunidades—Margao, Aquem, Davorlim, and Dicapale—and Secretary of the South Goa Comunidades Forum, struck a cautious tone. "Appointing full-time administrators is a step in the right direction given the increasing and complex workload," he said. However, he warned that clerical appointments must be financially viable for each Comunidade. "This must be done only after assessing the financial position of each Comunidade, and in consultation with them, as undue burdens have already been seen in South Goa," Correia noted.

On the computerisation front, Correia pointed out that while many affluent Comunidades are already technologically equipped, broader implementation requires alignment with the Code of Comunidades and necessary legislative backing.

"If the Chief Minister truly wishes to reform the Comunidades, he should begin by implementing the recommendations of last year's statutory Comuni-

dade Convention in letter and spirit," he said.

As part of its efforts to push for long-standing demands, the South Goa Comunidades Forum had also written to the government requesting the official observance of April 15 as 'Comunidades Day'. In a letter dated March 31, 2025, addressed to the Secretary (Revenue), Correia offered to conduct the function at the Margao Comunidade hall without any financial burden to the government. However, the lack of a response from the authorities has further fuelled perceptions of official apathy.

April 15 marks the anniversary of Legislative Diploma No. 2070 of 1961, which governs the Comunidades system, and is observed informally by stakeholders as Gaunkari Day. This year, the absence of an official function has become emblematic of the community's broader frustrations.

"As Gaunkari Day passes without recognition, our core demands remain unaddressed," said one stakeholder. "The real issue isn't that a function wasn't held—it's that our system is being ignored."

MMC GIS survey faces hurdles over illegal shops, raises questions on follow-through

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Geographic Information System (GIS) survey initiated by the Margao Municipal Council (MMC) has run into serious hurdles, particularly over the issue of illegal business establishments and unauthorised property transfers. Yet, civic officials maintain that these issues can be addressed once the survey is completed.

Currently, the GIS survey—covering four wards—is aimed at boosting revenue collection through enhanced monitoring of trade licences, property taxes, and waste disposal fees. This is not MMC's first attempt at such a project. A similar survey conducted in 2015 in Ward 14 identified massive revenue losses due to official apathy. However, the report was never implemented and later mysteriously disappeared from MMC records. At the time, public pressure led Urban Development Minister Vishwajit Rane to order an investiga-

MMC officials added that the survey would also help identify unauthorised residential structures and unregistered commercial properties. Nearly 3,000 establishments have been surveyed so far, and a progress report has been prepared for internal review

tion.

Speaking to O Herald, MMC Chief Officer Melvyn Vaz said the council's immediate focus is on completing the survey. "Yes, there are issues that need attention. But our primary goal right now is to complete the survey. Once we have that in hand, we will address problems related to illegal establishments, and the unauthorised transfer of council-owned shops," he said.

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properties. Nearly 3,000 establishments have been surveyed so far, and a progress report has been prepared for internal review.

Interestingly, a 2019 GIS report conducted by a private agency had already flagged substantial revenue leakage—particularly in the form of uncollected trade licence fees amounting to crores of rupees. However, like the 2015 survey, its recommendations were never acted upon.

"Conducting surveys is not new for MMC, but what's lacking is an action plan," said Margao resident Savio Dias. "There's a history of these reports gathering dust. The municipal leadership must ensure that this survey leads to concrete outcomes."

As the survey nears completion in several wards, the spotlight is now on whether the MMC can break past patterns and take decisive action to regulate and tax unauthorised operations—finally plugging the revenue leaks that have persisted for years.

Retired IAS officer Tino de Sa's story shortlisted for Commonwealth Prize

Team Herald

PANJIM: 'Tamarind', a short story by Tino de Sa—former Madhya Pradesh Chief Secretary and a native of Divar—has been shortlisted for the prestigious Commonwealth Short Story Prize.

The story is among 25 finalists chosen from over 8,000 entries submitted by writers across 54 countries. The shortlist was announced in London on Tuesday, April 15. The final winner will be selected by a panel of five eminent international judges and announced in June this year.

The Commonwealth Short Story Prize is awarded annually for the best piece of unpublished short fiction from the Commonwealth's 56 Member States. "Just appearing on the short list is considered a mark of high recognition



for a writer," said De Sa.

Set in a fictional village in rural Madhya Pradesh, "Tamarind" reflects De Sa's signature style—meticulously crafted narrative with a twist at the end. The judging panel noted that they were "genuinely captivated by the depth of the work."

Tino de Sa is the pen name of Anthony de Sa, a retired IAS officer who served as the Chief Secretary of Madhya Pradesh. His distinguished career included deputation to the United

Nations, and key roles in the Union Ministries of Environment & Forests and Commerce & Industries. He holds a postgraduate degree from Harvard and a PhD in the Built Environment. He also served as Chairman of RERA in Madhya Pradesh and is currently the Liquidator of the Mapusa Urban Co-operative Bank of Goa Ltd.

This isn't his first brush with literary recognition. De Sa has twice won the first prize in The Times of India national short story competitions—in 2017 and 2019.

In addition to short stories, De Sa also writes poetry. Two of his recent poems were published in JRLJ, a reputed literary journal edited by fellow Goan writer Selma Carvalho and published in London. He is an active member of the Goa Writers group.

GOLDEN GLORY



Margao's Aga Khan garden bursts into colour as its Cassia Fistula trees, locally known as Bayo, bloom with clusters of brilliant yellow flowers. These are Kerala's state flowers and are an integral part of Vishu festival

Margao locals threaten to go to court over MMC fee hike

Team Herald

MARGAO: A group of concerned citizens from Margao plans to move court against what they call an "exorbitant" fee hike imposed by the Margao Municipal Council (MMC).

The group claims the civic body failed to implement a council-approved resolution that had proposed a modest 10-15% hike. Instead, the actual increase reportedly ranges between 500-600%, triggering out-

rage among residents and business owners.

"This is nothing short of betrayal. The council had agreed on a reasonable fee hike, but what's been implemented is excessive and arbitrary. We have no choice but to seek legal intervention," said Savio Coutinho, a representative of the group.

Coutinho also alleged that Chairperson Damodar Shirodkar misled them during a recent meeting by stating the sanitation fee

hike—from Rs 600 to Rs 900—was implemented during the previous council's tenure. "At that point, we were convinced he was telling the truth. But the fact remains, it was he who raised the fees in April 2023," said Coutinho.

The group contends that MMC's move not only contradicts the democratic decision taken by elected council members but also places an unjust financial burden on citizens, and they now seek judicial relief.

'Insult to Goan families': Housie community outraged over GFA chief's 'mafia' jibe

Organisers decry 'disrespectful' language, question motive behind Fernandes' outburst

Team Herald

MARGAO: Housie organisers and volunteers have slammed Goa Football Association (GFA) President Caitano Fernandes for referring to a "housie mafia" and accused him of maligning a cherished Goan entertainment tradition that plays a vital role in supporting grassroots football and cultural events.

Fernandes, who recently submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister calling for an enquiry, spoke about a few "housie mafias" that tarnished the 70-year-old tradition of the popular game—also known as Tambola—and triggered the recent ban imposed in South Goa under the Gambling Act. He claimed certain high-stakes housie events, with prize money running into tens of lakhs, warranted government scrutiny and investigation into their funding sources.

But his remarks have not gone down well with those involved in organising housie events. "GFA's Caitano Fernandes has crossed all lines by calling our proud Goan brothers 'mafia.' This is not just an insult—it's a disgrace," said Warren Alemao, an activist from Benaolim. "These are the same people

To refer to the organisers of such events as criminals is offensive, and damages the spirit of Goan community life – Housie game volunteer

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who use housie as a means to fund village-level football tournaments and cultural events, especially when government support is lacking."

Alemao further alleged that Fernandes may have an ulterior motive in targeting housie organisers. "Is he speaking for those who stand to benefit from a complete ban on housie? Or is he trying to distract from the serious issues plaguing the Goa Football Association, such as match-fixing and mismanagement?"

Others echoed similar sentiments, pointing out that housie is deeply embedded in Goan social life, from fam-

ily feasts to church fêtes and music festivals. "To refer to the organisers of such events as criminals is offensive, and damages the spirit of Goan community life," said a senior volunteer from Salcete involved in cultural programming.

However, Fernandes defended traditional housie as a modest fundraising tool—citing ticket prices of Rs 50-100 and prizes usually not exceeding Rs 5,000, apart from rare sponsorship-backed finals, when tournaments receive sponsorship from MLAs, ministers, or businesses with a prize kitty of Rs 50,000-1,00,000. The revenue generated helps clubs organise tournaments across first, second, and third divisions, especially important since many clubs face financial constraints. Fernandes noted that registered clubs submit audited financial statements to the Registrar of Societies.

The backlash comes in the wake of an order from South Goa District Collector Egna Cleetus, ordering an immediate ban on housie earlier this month, following reports of games offering prize money up to Rs 25 lakh. The Collector has appointed officials to monitor compliance and submit weekly reports.

Salpem Lake pollution: HC urges better coordination between govt depts

Team Herald

MARGAO: The ongoing Public Interest Litigation (PIL) concerning the contamination of Salpem Lake in Navelim and the subsequent pollution of River Sal was adjourned to May 10 by the Goa Bench of the Bombay High Court, which directed all government departments to speed up work on plugging sewage and wastewater discharge points around Margao. The waste flows into stormwater drains that empty into the river.

During Monday's hearing, government agencies assured the court that pending remedial work would be completed by May 15. However, the HC emphasized the need for broader, permanent solutions rather than temporary fixes and instructed the core committee—formed to address the issue—to convene for better coordination.

While speaking to the media after the hearing, the petitioner, Professor Antonio Alvares, expressed dissatisfaction with the committee's functioning, pointing out that the committee was self-appointed without judicial oversight and chaired

by the Margao Municipal Council (MMC) Chief Officer, who had not included him in meetings for over a year. He argued that the HC itself should appoint the committee and that it ought to be headed by someone at the level of Chief Secretary for greater accountability.

Alvares also criticized the MMC for acting without the intent of finding a holistic solution, citing instances where the civic body issued notices to residents in areas lacking sewage lines, threatening disconnections instead of coordinating with the PWD to resolve the issue. He highlighted another persistent problem—landlords refusing to grant NOCs for sewage connections to affected buildings—which authorities have failed to address.

The court's push for action comes amid long-standing systemic failures exposed in earlier hearings. On March 24, the HC had slammed multiple agencies, including the MMC, Sewerage Infrastructure Development Corporation (SIDCGL), and South Goa Planning and Development Authority (SGPDA), for years of inaction.



PANJIM: The Food and Drugs Administration has recently begun conducting raids in Siolim, Mapusa and Margao. Herald Media asked people if they believe the seasonal FDA checks for forced ripening of fruits is enough or should it do strict checking on a daily basis?

If we look around, there are a lot of cases where fruits and vegetables are injected for quick ripening. It is very harmful for children and senior citizens who consume them. If regular checks are done, people who indulge in forced ripening will be caught and they will avoid doing it. It will also protect the consumers, and we will be assured that the fruits we are buying are safe, and we are sure that these fruits will not have any carcinogenic effect on us due to the injections used. This is something that the FDA should look into and conduct regular checks. These checks need to be conducted continuously

– Cecille Rodrigues, Political Activist

SHOULD FDA CHECK FORCED RIPENING OF FRUITS ON A DAILY BASIS?

The raids initiated by the Food and Drugs Administration are a welcome step. However, the question remains: do these annual efforts have a lasting impact on vendors and restaurant owners to maintain good hygiene? Or are they just pulling wool over our eyes? A more serious concern is the formalin issue. Although a laboratory was established to test for formalin, it seems nothing substantial has come out of it. The government has inadvertently normalized the consumption of formalin-laced fish. There's speculation that this issue has resurfaced due to the closure of shops under Section 17(2) of the TCP Act. Will this lead to another loophole? We demand stricter enforcement of raids on forced ripening and restaurant cleanliness, ensuring vendors understand the gravity of putting lives at risk

– Trajano D'Mello, Political Commentator

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Conducting raids is a very good thing, since it is pertaining to edible stuff, people should not suffer. It's good that they ensure that people don't get any disease. But tell me one thing, why does the FDA wake up only when it is mango season? Throughout the year, they are not seen. Vegetables are sprayed, bananas are dipped in chemicals, then there are pineapples and other fruit. They never come to check these fruits. There is formalin-laced fish coming into Goa, they are not seen there either. We feel that they are out to do 'setting'. Why are they showing up only during mango season? Throughout the year are they sleeping? So people consume pesticide and chemical injected fruits throughout the year

– Tara Kerkar, Social Activist