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Anguish as ancestral paths, way of life vanish under rubble



Earthmovers dump rubble in front of Velsao homes, forcing them to park their vehicles far away and walk through piles of mud

The situation has worsened in recent days, with railways erecting new barriers at the usual crossing spots in just the last 10 days. Villagers point specifically to the destroyed crossover at 'Bhavteakode'. This crossing point, used for generations, has been completely obliterated by Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL), forcing residents to take dangerous detours or risk climbing unstable mounds.

The daily indignities mount. One villager who has travelled abroad has been informed by the villagers that her car — parked on what has always been community land — forcibly towed by railway officials to Verna police station. "This is criminal trespass and theft," fumed a neighbour. Others describe the impossibility of parking near their own homes, forced to leave vehicles at distant spots and walk precarious paths usually in the dark at night to their doorsteps.

Even as they mourn their vanishing way of life, residents recognize this Holy Week marks not an end, but the beginning of a harsher reality. The an-

The (alleged) illegal occupier of our land, SWR, has put up notices warning against trespassing on what they falsely claim as their property. This is our ancestral land they've laid claim through fraudulent means without a single legal document

— Orville Dourado Rodrigues, founder of Goencho Ekvott

cestral homes that once proudly faced the railway tracks now stare at towering mud walls, their entrances sealed. The familiar rhythms of village life — children walking to school, elders visiting neighbours, vendors making their rounds — have been disrupted by the railway's tracks project advances, primarily benefiting what critics call "the coal mafia." With the tacit support of the State administration, the railways continue the work despite a Stop Work Order issued by the village panchayat of Velsao-Pale-Issorcim.

The situation threatens to worsen

as monsoon season approaches. The same pathways now blocked by construction debris once served as critical stormwater drains, channeling floodwaters toward River Sal tributaries in Pale village. With these natural drainage systems compromised, both Velsao and neighbouring communities face potential flooding disasters.

The bitter truth hangs heavy over Velsao's Holy Week observances: while Goa celebrates Christ's triumph over death, these villagers fight a daily battle against being erased from their own land. Their Easter miracle would be simple: to walk freely again on the paths their grandparents built.

"When we pray during this Holy Week," one villager remarked, watching children struggle up a muddy incline to reach church, "we're witnessing the systematic destruction of our community's way of life." It's a far cry from the times when these ancestral houses had their entrances facing the railway tracks, homes to precious memories and a way of life that is now being crushed under the rubble.

KALA ACADEMY FROM ICON OF CULTURE TO CRUMBLING LEGACY

Here's a look at how poor planning and botched renovations have plagued Goa's premier arts institution for over half a century

FEBRUARY 28, 1970

Goa govt establishes Kala Academy to promote the arts. The iconic building is designed by renowned architect Charles Correa

2004

Upgraded to serve as a venue for International Film Festival of India

OCTOBER 30, 2017

Minister Govind Gaude announces major face-lift for Kala Academy

MAY 23, 2021

Techton Buildcon Pvt. Ltd. awarded contract for renovation work. Performances come to a standstill

JULY 17, 2023

A large portion of open-air auditorium collapses, raising safety concerns

NOVEMBER 10, 2023

Building reopens after repairs, but concerns about construction quality persist

APRIL 22, 2024

Part of newly-renovated false ceiling crashes due to water leakage



MAY 20, 2024

Heavy downpour causes auditorium roof to leak during a performance of the Konkani tiatr 'Girgirem'

SEPTEMBER 27, 2024

State govt forms task force led by theatre artist Vijai Kenkre to assess state of building and recommend improvements

tance, citing lack of structural audit

APRIL 13, 2025

Technical failure in stage lighting causes temporary stoppage of a Marathi play starring Sharad Ponshe, who apologises to audience

JULY 8, 2024

Heavy rains inundate Kala Academy

OCTOBER 25, 2024

Charles Correa Foundation withdraws from offering assis-



The famed Kala Academy has faced several ignominious setbacks, including flooding from a roof collapse during rains (above) and the partial collapse of its open-air auditorium (right)

The sound system they have is not something normally used in an auditorium. Boss is a company known for home and car audio, but they don't specialise in sound for auditoriums or theatres."

— Roger Drego, 'Sound Man of India'

The work at Kala Academy hasn't even met basic standards. It needs to regain its status, and there's a lot of work ahead."

— Vijai Kenkre, Chairman, Kala Academy Task Force

The original sound system in the auditorium was replaced with cheaper versions. Kala Academy was once known for having the best sound system, but after three years of renovation, audiences can't enjoy performances because artists are struggling with poor equipment."

— Rajdeep Naik, Renowned Actor and Dramatist

Citizens rubbish CM's 'resolved' claim on Sonsoddo dump, say real issues neglected

Team Herald

MARGAO: A group of concerned citizens from Margao has refuted Chief Minister Pramod Sawant's recent claim that the Sonsoddo waste management issue has been resolved, calling the statement misleading and based on "false inputs" from local political leaders.

"The Chief Minister's statement appears to be based on misleading information provided by political leaders in Margao, who seem more interested in earning praise for doing nothing than addressing the real issues," said activist and former MMC chief Savio Coutinho.

The CM had made the statement just a day earlier, declaring that the Sonsoddo waste problem had been resolved. However, citizens say the reality on the ground paints a very different



picture.

Coutinho alleged that the Chief Minister may not have even visited the site recently to assess the situation firsthand. He stressed that the partial clearing of legacy waste at Sonsoddo was not a political accomplishment but a result of the High Court's intervention.

"While political leaders try to put words in the Chief Minister's

mouth, the reality is that it was the High Court's directive that forced action at Sonsoddo," he added.

Echoing these concerns, Pooja Dessai, a resident, pointed to several unresolved issues. "Dry waste continues to mysteriously catch fire almost every week. Garden waste is piling up with no disposal mechanism in place, and wet waste is being

transported to the Cacora plant, adding an unnecessary financial burden," she said.

Residents also expressed frustration with what they described as "false narratives" being pushed by the ruling BJP and local leaders.

"It's baffling how they try to take credit when nothing meaningful is happening at Sonsoddo," said Custodio Fernandes, a Margao local. He added that apart from dry waste segregation, there is little to no activity at the site. "Most of the waste is simply being sent to Cacora. Sonsoddo remains neglected, and there's still no permanent solution for the leachate flowing onto the road," he said.

Residents say the situation calls for real, transparent, and sustained action—rather than political grandstanding—to address Margao's long-standing garbage crisis.



The Food and Drug Administration seems to spring into action only a few times a year, typically during sporadic crackdowns on restaurants and fruit vendors. But given that the FDA is a full-time regulatory body, Herald Media asked the public: Should strict action be taken against all eateries serving unhygienic food, rather than selectively targeting a few?

SHOULD STRICT ACTION BE TAKEN AGAINST ALL RESTAURANTS SERVING UNHYGIENIC FOOD?

This department needs to be alert and create such an impact that every restaurant fears an FDA inspector could walk in for an inspection at any moment. But with inspections taking place only once a year—and no one knowing where the department is the rest of the time—unhygienic conditions persist in many restaurants and eateries. This is largely due to the lethargic manner in which the FDA functions. Many are now questioning whether these raids are driven by ulterior motives, especially since there are far more serious, ongoing issues that the FDA appears to ignore. Take the formalin-in-fish issue, or the year-round problem of artificially ripened fruit. There are also countless restaurants operating in unhygienic conditions.

— Trajano D'Mello, political commentator

Restaurants serving unhygienic food or operating in filthy surroundings deserve to be penalised. But before that, it's the officials at the FDA—who are supposed to be monitoring these places—who should be held accountable. If restaurant owners are fined Rs 10,000 or face a year's punishment, then FDA staff should be fined 20,000 and face double the penalty. These are the people sitting in air-conditioned offices, collecting their salaries while doing next to nothing. The real issue is their apathy—they seem completely unconcerned about public health.

— Anthony D'Silva, Social Activist

This FDA drive against restaurants and way side eateries, which are unhygienic, is a welcome move. But the action should not be biased. They should check everyone on a random basis. Many entrepreneurs are out to make a fast buck, they are not worried about the health of the people. They are not bothered about maintaining hygiene nor quality. They don't comply with the FDA norms. There is an urgent need to take action against such operators. Because of such entrepreneurs without any conscience, people who put faith in their food and consume it, reach the hospital instead of their homes.

— Mariano Ferrao, Social Activist



Watch Street Voices on Herald Media on YouTube by scanning the QR code

Tiatr marks 133 years, with first-ever Goan Lenten production staged in UK

On Easter Sunday, April 17, 1892, Goans in British-ruled Bombay were anxious to see how a Konkani tiatr will be played on stage. It was the first-ever tiatr performance, 'Italian Bhurgo', adapted from the Italian play, staged by Lucasinho Ribeiro at the New Alfred Theatre, Bombay. Today marks the 133rd Tiatr Day

DOLCEY D'CRUZ

PANJIM: Tiatr is not just a stage performance in Konkani — it is an emotion that unites Goans, no matter where in the world it is performed.

This year, for the first time, a Goan troupe travelled to the UK to perform a musical Lenten tiatr titled Iadnik Tum Sasna-Sasnank, directed by Lenoy Gomenes and based on the life of a priest. Lenoy, who has been writing and directing tiatrs since 2017, has previously performed in the UK as part of other productions. However, this marks the first time a tiatr written and directed by him was staged there. The show was organised by Goan Art and Culture Limited Company in March.

The troupe was invited to perform three shows in Wembley, Southall, and Swindon. A team of 12 members, including actors and musicians, travelled for the performances.

"We made history — this is the first time a Lenten drama has gone from Goa to the UK. We received a great response for all three shows. People told me it was the first time they had experienced a good drama with music, songs, and comedy," says Lenoy, who is also a choir master and recording engineer. "I took along all the actors and musicians who performed in Goa. My aim is to proclaim God, and we got the opportunity to do that in the UK through tiatr." The script was written by Le-



THE MANY FIRSTS FOR TIATR

First original tiatr
Written by Pai Tiatrist João Agostinho Fernandes, 'Belle de Cavel' was staged in 1895 in Bombay

First Konkani woman tiatrist
Regina Fernandes stepped on stage in 1904, in 'Bhattkara'

First Konkani tiatr to complete 100 performances
'Divorce', a tiatr written and

directed by Airstides Dias, was the first to complete 100 performances in 1980

First and only Padmashree for a tiatrist
M Boyer was awarded the Padmashree in 2009

First tiatr in North America
DySP Sammy Tavares was the first director to stage his tiatr, 'Tim Thikam Sanddlolim', in 2014

noy and Alfie de Divar.

Tiatr has evolved over the years, with original themes, improved lighting and sound, and strong emphasis on the set design that supports the traditional saath podde (seven-act) structure. Its enduring relevance is largely due to its focus on contemporary social issues.

A few scholars have pursued doctoral research on tiatr and theatre-related topics. Among them are Prof Rafael Fernandes, Prof Cosma Fernandes, and Dr Luis Fernandes, all of whom have been awarded PhDs for their work on tiatr. "Tiatr was born in Mumbai during British rule and flourished in Goa under the Portuguese. Before liberation, tiatr was performed in both cities," says Prof Dr Cosma Fernandes,

who received the award for Best Literary Work in the Research category for his book Konkani Tiatr: Fattbhuim, Sankalpana ani Ithas. "The emergence of government bodies like the Tiatr Academy of Goa and Kala Academy provided a strong platform for budding artists. In 1974, Kala Academy launched the Tiatr competition, which celebrated its golden jubilee this year. These competitions served as a bridge between village tiatr and professional productions. A competitive spirit helped raise the status of tiatr."

To mark the occasion, the Tiatr Academy of Goa (TAG), in association with Kala Academy, will celebrate Tiatr Day on April 23 to avoid the clash with Maundy Thursday.