

'Goans deserve better': Activist rallies support for autonomy, economic justice

Cyril Fernandes urges govt to mandate 'Inner Line Permits' for all visitors by 2027; not to allow non-residents to purchase land freely and reserve jobs only for persons of Goan origin

Team Herald

MARGAO: In a compelling call to action, renowned human rights activist Cyril Fernandes galvanized Goan citizens with demands for greater autonomy and policy reforms during an event organised by Goenchi Fudle Pingi Khatir (GFPK) in Margao on Wednesday evening. The session, which drew prominent community leaders and concerned citizens, offered a critical examination of Goa's development trajectory since its liberation in 1961.

Fernandes took the audience on a nostalgic journey through Goa's history while highlighting pressing contemporary issues facing the State. "Goans should be treated as equal partners in this nation, enjoying benefits like exemption from personal income tax and the right to protect our lands and resources. It's time we demand what is rightfully ours," he stated emphatically during his presentation.

Among his bold proposals was a call for the Goa Assembly to mandate Inner Line Permits for all visitors by 2027, arguing that "protecting our culture and environment must be paramount, just as it is for North Eastern states." His demands



extended to the restoration of Comunidade lands to Goans, returning control over six rivers to the State, and bringing strategic assets like the Dabolim airport and Mormugao Port under State jurisdiction.

Fernandes highlighted numerous challenges currently impacting Goa's development, including agricultural decline affecting local farmers, educational sector issues, widening economic disparity, concerns over revenue allocation by the Central Government, demographic shifts, employment challenges for qualified youth, and soaring land prices driven by arbitrary zoning changes that threaten industrial

growth, employment, and cultural integrity.

He emphasised that despite Goa being among India's top-performing States economically, "comparable to some European nations in terms of purchasing power," the State continues to be denied benefits granted to regions like Jammu & Kashmir and the North East. "This disparity is unjust, and it's time for change," he declared.

On employment protection, Fernandes stated, "All jobs should be reserved for Persons of Goan origin, just as special protections are given in regions like Ladakh. Non-residents should not be allowed to buy land freely, which threat-

“Our Comunidade lands, which are the backbone of Goan identity, must be restored to the people. The six rivers that sustain our land should be returned to Goa's control, and our strategic assets like the airport and Mormugao Port must be brought under State jurisdiction to ensure Goa's development and security – Cyril Fernandes, human rights activist

ens our cultural fabric and environment."

GFPK founder Jack Mascarenhas inaugurated the session, explaining that the presentation emerged from a recent brainstorming session inspired by Professor Mariano Pinheiro's article on Goa's "Lost Opportunities" – which argued that with better leadership since 1961, Goa could already have world-class universities and hospitals, with Goans leading global corporations alongside figures like Sundar Pichai or Satya Nadella.

Notable attendees included renowned Konkani writer Uday Bhembre, former Minister Alina Saldanha, Velim MLA Cruz Silva, ex-MLA Carlos Almeida, and other distinguished personalities.

Fernandes' presentation featured powerful visuals and historical insights that illustrated Goa's rich heritage and the need for proactive measures to

protect it. His call to action resonated strongly with the audience, inspiring many to envision a self-reliant Goa where its people's rights and identity are safeguarded.

In his conclusion, Fernandes warned that unless political parties incorporate these demands into their manifestos, Goans must unite to advocate for their rights. "Our history, our culture, and our dignity are at stake," he declared, urging collective action.

President Jack Mascarenhas closed the session by emphasizing that Goa's future depends on dedicated individuals committed to selfless service. He highlighted the extraordinary contribution of people like 85-year-old Uday Bhembre, who serve their communities without seeking personal gain, and stressed the urgent need to identify and nurture such leaders to guide Goa toward sustainable growth.

11 months after fair, scam-accused MMC staffer subjected to first inquiry

Team Herald

MARGAO: Nearly a year after funds from the Holy Spirit feast fair failed to reach municipal coffers, the Margao Municipal Council (MMC) has launched an internal inquiry against suspended employee Yogesh Shetkar, who is accused of misappropriating approximately Rs 18 lakh.

On Tuesday, Shetkar recorded his statement before Municipal Engineer Deepak Desai in what civic officials described as a preliminary inquiry under service rules. This marks Shetkar's first formal response since the council issued him a notice regarding the allegations.

Sources within MMC clarified that the current probe is a departmental process to determine further disciplinary action, and is not linked to the recovery of the embezzled funds. A senior official stated that separate legal or administrative proceedings would be required to initiate recovery.

While the Margao Police had arrested and released Shetkar on bail last December, questions remain over whether he is solely liable for

This 'preliminary inquiry' is not linked to the recovery of the embezzled Rs 18 lakh. Questions remain over whether the clerk was responsible for appropriating the entire amount, since he is believed to have collected only Rs 3 lakh from vendors

the full Rs 18 lakh, especially as he is believed to have personally collected only around Rs 3 lakh from vendors. The case has exposed loopholes in the council's fee collection system, as the fair's revenue was never officially deposited. With the one-year mark approaching, pressure is mounting on the MMC to announce its recovery plan.

Despite earlier assurances from MMC Chairperson Damodar Shirodkar that all efforts would be made to recover the lost amount, no visible action has been taken over the past year.

NGT adjourns Borim Bridge case, gives govt a week to respond

Team Herald

MARGAO: The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has adjourned the hearing on the controversial Borim bridge project to June 6, granting the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and the Public Works Department (PWD) one final week to submit their responses.

Sources said the tribunal pulled up both departments for failing to file replies to crucial questions it had earlier raised—questions that will determine whether the project requires an

Environmental Clearance (EC). The PWD is the implementing agency for the high-level bridge that cuts through ecologically sensitive khazan fields along the Zuari River.

The case was filed in May 2024 by farmers from Loutolim and Borim, who have opposed the project on grounds that it threatens their livelihoods and traditional farming and fishing systems. With yet another delay in the proceedings, the petitioners were left dejected, as they were hoping for an interim stay on the project to safeguard their fields and heritage.

Madel locals cry foul over demarcation of traditional thoroughfare



Team Herald

MARGAO: Tensions flared in Madel-Fatorda on Wednesday as local residents strongly opposed the ongoing demarcation of a property they claim includes a centuries-old traditional access road.

The move, they allege, is an attempt to aid a private housing development, prompting calls for urgent intervention by Chief Minister Pramod Sawant.

Residents gathered at the site on Wednesday evening to voice their objections, stating that the road in question has long served as a public access route for the community. They expressed anger that government officials proceeded with the demarcation process without informing the local populace.

"How can a three-metre

“The road has served our community for generations. We are shocked to see the authorities ignoring this fact and siding with private interests – Milagres Fernandes, Madel resident

road suddenly be marked as 12 metres wide? And how can it now be claimed as property of a recently formed housing society when even the landowner's documents acknowledge it as a traditional access road?" questioned local resident Milagres Fernandes while speaking to reporters at the site. Fernandes further alleged that despite a formal case being filed with the relevant authorities, the concerned department has continued with the demarca-

tion, an action he described as "unjust and biased against the locals."

Residents claim that the builder and landowner involved in the proposed development have previously acknowledged the road as traditional public access in official documentation. They now accuse the housing society of attempting to claim ownership of the road in order to facilitate construction.

"The road has served our community for generations. It is not just a path; it is part of our heritage and daily life. We are shocked to see the authorities ignoring this fact and siding with private interests," Fernandes added. The community has issued a strong warning that they will launch an agitation if their concerns are not addressed and have appealed to the CM to halt the demarcation.

Edu Dept pushes career readiness, student progress tracking in schools

Team Herald

MARGAO: In a bid to improve student monitoring and career readiness, the Directorate of Education has issued two key directives to Goa's government and aided schools. Schools must now maintain records of students after they complete Standards X and XII for review dur-

ing inspections. Additionally, schools have been directed to arrange visits to nearby ITIs for Std IX and X students under NEP 2020. They are also encouraged to tie up with polytechnics and industries for hands-on learning. The dual initiative aims to better track student outcomes while offering early exposure to vocational and technical career paths.

Benaulim leaders, Varca P'yat back local taximen, question FIR by Colva police

Team Herald

MARGAO: Amid ongoing tensions over territorial taxi operations in South Goa, political representatives from Benaulim and members of the Varca panchayat joined hands to express strong support for the Varca tourist taxi operators, calling into question the fairness of a police FIR registered against them and reiterating allegations of extortion by outside taxi drivers.

In a rare display of unity that transcended political affiliations, Benaulim MLA Venzy Viegas, social worker Warren Alemao, and panchayat members from Varca led by Sarpanch Flavia Barretto accompanied a delegation of tourist taxi operators to meet South Goa Superintendent of Police (SP) Tikam Singh. Their main demand was a review of the FIR filed by Colva police against the Varca-based taxi operators for alleged extortion.

According to the delegation, the FIR was registered without a proper verification of facts, and they alleged that the incident in question actually involved an 'outside' taxi driver (from Margao) attempting to

ALL TAXIS SHOULD COME UNDER APP-BASED AGGREGATORS: GOA CM

PANJIM: Declaring that all taxi operators should be under app-based aggregators, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on Wednesday said the government will soon come out with reforms for the taxi business. "I have strictly instructed the police and transport departments that no law and order issue should surface due to taxi operators. The government will soon come out with reforms for taxi business and related issues. All taxis should be under app based aggregators. Every taxi operator should be under aggregators. This will also address the issue of renewing taxi meters every year. There will be no need to fix meters in the taxis," Sawant told reporters.

extort Rs 20,000 from a local Varca taxi operator. The delegation maintained that the Varca taxi operators were being wrongly targeted on both social and print media.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, MLA Viegas said that the police appeared to have taken suo moto cognisance of a video and acted upon it without investigating the circumstances. "Our local tourist taxi operators have been transporting tourists safely to their destinations over the last 30 years. There is no complaint of extortion against them," he said. "On the contrary, the

local tourist taxi operator did not complain of extortion against an outside taxi man just to protect the image of Goa tourism."

He said local operators were deeply invested in preserving Goa's tourism image and had no reason to jeopardise their livelihood, which depends entirely on the safe and reliable transport of visitors. The MLA urged Chief Minister Pramod Sawant to intervene and ensure that the traditional, community-run taxi logistics outside starred hotels in Salcete are protected in the face of increasing outside interference.

Viegas also demanded that the government take action against unlicensed taxi operators who were allegedly conducting operations through unauthorised offices and parking spaces under the pretext of app-based services. "This is a battle for the survival and livelihood of the local taxi operators. We will not allow these outside illegal taxi operators to have their way in Varca or other villages since their operations are detrimental to the livelihood of the locals and the safety of the tourists," said social worker Warren Alemao.

Echoing the sentiment, Varca Sarpanch Flavia Barretto said the local drivers had been operating from the area for decades and should not be pushed out of their rightful place.

In response, SP Tikam Singh assured the group that his office would soon convene a joint meeting of Varca-based and Margao-based taximen to address the situation. MLA Viegas added that there would be another meeting involving hotel representatives, in an effort to find a resolution that preserves Goa's image as a tourist-friendly destination.

Betalbatim beach dog not aggressive, scratched Russian child during play: Lifeguards

Team Herald

MARGAO: Lifeguards have clarified that the 'community dog' involved in a recent incident at Betalbatim beach poses no threat to the public, and is both neutered and vaccinated.

The clarification follows concerns raised after a minor incident involving a young Russian girl, who sustained a scratch on her arm while playing with the beach dog. Lifeguards emphasised that the dog, known among regular visitors for its friendly behaviour, did not act aggressively.

"The dog is friendly and has never shown any signs of unprovoked aggression," said a lifeguard who was on duty at the time. "We want to reassure tourists and locals that the beach remains safe and welcoming to all," said Manjunath Girap, lifeguard.

The lifeguards also noted that the dog continues to be a beloved fixture of the beach community.

Meanwhile, Anthony Fernandes, Sarpanch of the Village Panchayat Betalbatim, acknowledged the rising number of stray dogs in the area. He reiterated the need for government intervention to address the issue effectively.

"Yes, the number of stray dogs has increased here. In the past, we had discussed this with the Department of Tourism. It is up to the government to come up with a permanent solution," Fernandes said. "The panchayat needs support to initiate these measures."

While expressing concern over the situation, Fernandes also highlighted the importance of animal rights. "Dogs cannot be kept in cages for long. They too have a right to move freely," he added.



“The terrorist attack in Kashmir will affect tourism badly and it will last for years now. The sad part is it will also affect other parts of India. And it is surprising that they have done this at this time when everything was going so well in the state, tourism was booming after so many years. Just this one attack has created so much damage and washed away so many years of hard work and goodwill. Attacking tourists is something very very uncalled for – Lyndon Alves, founder, Sunset Getaway

WILL THE TERROR ATTACK ON TOURISTS HAVE A SERIOUS IMPACT ON TOURISM IN J&K?

“The terrorist attack will definitely have an impact on tourism in Jammu and Kashmir. But the perpetrators should be immediately caught and brought to justice. There is a need to do this without polarising communities, which is the main aim of the terrorists - to see that the harmony which exists between the two communities is destroyed – Jack Sukhija, president, TTAG

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“Absolutely. Many people have lost their lives. This will definitely affect tourism in the whole of Jammu and Kashmir. Lots of cancellations have already started coming in and people who are already there they also want to rush back. So the impression is that it is a very scary situation and very dangerous situation and this will badly affect tourism which has grown manifold in the last few years – Ernest Dias, Chief Operating Officer, TCI

“Absolutely, this is the most heinous act which the terrorists have done. It is the worst attack on tourists in Kashmir in the last 40 years of insurgency since 1989. There are very few instances where tourists have been attacked. This will hit the livelihood of the Kashmiri people in general and it will affect tourism in a big way. Tourists always look for safe places where they go. Goa is a small place, but already many domestic tourists to Kashmir have already cancelled their tours. Those going to Srinagar also have already started cancelling in a big way – Nilesh Shah, past president, TTAG