

'BETRAYAL OF TRUST': Scrapping of free water scheme sparks outrage

Civil society and local leaders term the decision as unjust and detrimental to people's welfare; want scheme restored immediately

Team Herald

MARGAO: The government's sudden scrapping of the scheme providing 16,000 litres of free water per household each month has intensified public anger across Goa.

The decision has provoked strong condemnation from the civil society and local leaders, who have denounced it as unjust, undemocratic, and detrimental to the welfare of the people.

Criticising the move, youth leader Prabhav Naik termed it "a betrayal of public trust".

He questioned the government's priorities, saying, "It is ironic that while the Central Government makes headlines talking about stopping water to Pakistan to send a message, we Goans are not outsiders—we are citizens who deserve dignity, not denial."

WATER IS A RIGHT, NOT PRIVILEGE, SAY CITIZENS

- Citizens described the move as a 'betrayal of public trust'
- Questioned the gov't priorities and emphasised the scheme's crucial relief to many families facing rising living costs
- Accused the gov't of being more concerned with image-building than actual governance
- Stressed that water is a right, not a privilege and taking it away without warning or accountability is unacceptable
- Demanded that the scheme be restored immediately
- Sought a clear and transparent explanation from the gov't as to why the scheme was withdrawn
- Urged people of Goa to voice their opposition to this decision

the Goa government is punishing its own people by denying them access to something as essential as water. We Goans are not outsiders—we are citizens who deserve dignity, not denial."

Naik pointed out that the scheme had offered crucial relief to thousands of families struggling with rising living costs. "This wasn't a luxury; it was a basic necessity. Ending it without

any public consultation or transparency shows complete disregard for the common citizen," he said. "If the government can spend crore on extravagant events and publicity, surely it can afford to continue a scheme that directly benefits the people."

Echoing these sentiments, social activist Anthony Dias said the move reflects misplaced priorities. "You can't slash welfare for the poor and then host grand celebrations with taxpayers' money. This government seems more concerned with image-building than actual governance," Dias said.

Community organizer Prashant Shirodkar also weighed in, warning that such decisions alienate the very people the gov-

ernment is meant to serve. "Water is a right, not a privilege. Taking it away without warning or accountability is unacceptable. It shows the administration is out of touch with ground realities," he stated.

All three leaders have demanded the immediate reinstatement of the scheme, along with a clear and transparent explanation from the government on why it was withdrawn. They also urged Goans across the State to voice their opposition.

"This is about more than water. It's about broken promises, misplaced priorities, and the everyday struggles of ordinary people. The government cannot expect silence in return," Shirodkar added.

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— Prabhav Naik, youth leader

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Betalbatim farmers accuse hotel of 'blocking' access to their agricultural fields

Claim that the hotel encroached upon the nullah by erecting a gate recently

Team Herald

MARGAO: Tensions escalated in Betalbatim as farmers and residents protested against a hotel for "illegally" obstructing traditional access to their agricultural fields and encroaching upon a nullah.

The issue has reportedly been persisting for years with limited intervention from local authorities.

The point of contention is a gate recently erected by the hotel across the nullah.

The villagers asserted that this gate blocks a centuries-old pathway essential for nearly 40 farmers to reach their fields. They emphasised that this access route is ancestral and has been crucial for their agricultural activities for generations.

"This path has been in use for several decades, possibly centuries. Blocking it has severely impacted our farming. There have been several inspections, but they've resulted in no action," said Fidal Pereira, a local farmer and resident.

Farmers and locals further allege that the hotel has unlawfully encroached upon the nullah, violating

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— Fidal Pereira, a farmer

The building does not have occupancy permissions. There are several illegalities, yet the panchayat has failed to act

— Another farmer

environmental and land-use regulations. Their demands include the immediate removal of the gate and punitive measures against the hotel owner for these multiple violations.

The residents claim to have lodged complaints with various government departments and the local panchayat, since 2004. Despite these efforts and repeated follow-ups, no substantial measures have been implemented to address their grievances.

"The building does not have occupancy permissions. There are several illegalities, yet the panchayat has failed to act," said another protesting farmer.

Frustrated by the inaction from the authorities, the community has now sought the intervention of the higher authorities to re-

solve the critical issue.

They have demanded the restoration of their traditional right of way and the protection of the natural water channel, which they believe has been damaged due to private development.

The villagers have vowed to continue their protest until justice is delivered and their ancestral access is reinstated.

Sarpanch Anthony Fernandes, who was present during the recent inspection, acknowledged the villagers' concerns. He said that the Town and Country Planning (TCP) Department officials failed to turn up for the inspection despite being notified. Fernandes assured that the inspection report would be submitted to the relevant authorities.

CHARRED WASTELAND



(Top) Fire department personnel engaged in dousing operations in the fields at Taleigao. (Below) Firefighters evacuate residents from their apartments as a massive fire engulfed the fields in Taleigao. (Right) Reptiles including snakes and tortoises besides frogs perished in the blaze which turned the lush green fields into a charred wasteland

Margao municipality moves ahead to enhance urban greenery

Sonsoddo among three potential sites identified for afforestation

Team Herald

MARGAO: Moving forward with the State-wide directive to enhance urban greenery, the Margao Municipal Council (MMC) has identified three potential locations for afforestation, including the well-known Sonsoddo area.

Recently, a joint inspection was conducted at the Sonsoddo site, which involved both municipal officials and representatives from the Forest Department to assess the feasibility of this location.

The initiative stems from the Forest Department's instruction to all municipalities across the State to find suitable sites for afforestation. The overarching aim is to increase green cover within urban areas and lessen the negative impacts of rapid urbanisation.

Former Chief Minister and current Margao MLA, Digambar Kamat, also participated in the site in-

FOCUS ON INCREASING GREEN COVER

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spection and highlighted the critical role of such initiatives in today's environmental context.

Kamat noted, "The Margao Municipality has proposed three possible locations for afforestation, and we visited these sites today. Sonsoddo, in particular, has been identified as a priority area due to its potential for green development."

During the inspection, each proposed location was evaluated based on factors like soil quality, accessibility, adjacent land use, and the long-term viability for tree growth. The objective is to create tailored plantation plans emphasising native species, biodiversity preservation, and sustainable urban landscaping.

This initiative is in line with the broader state policy aimed at counteracting the urban heat island effect, improving air quality, and restoring ecological balance in densely populated urban centres.

Officials believe that focused afforestation efforts within municipal limits will not only enhance the aesthetic appeal of cities but also provide lasting benefits for climate resilience.

The Forest Department will make the final decision on the sites after a thorough evaluation and will then work with the respective municipalities to carry out the plantation work. Community participation is also anticipated in the ongoing maintenance of these green spaces.

Dr Carlos takes charge as TAG member secy

Team Herald

MARGAO: Dr Carlos Fernandes, a distinguished librarian, tiatr enthusiast, and researcher instrumental in establishing numerous public and academic libraries in Goa, assumed the role of Member Secretary of the Tiatr Academy of Goa (TAG).

He succeeds Suresh Divkar, who held the position for over four years. The Government of Goa appointed Dr Fernandes in recognition of his extensive contributions and dedication to preserving and promoting Goan culture.

Dr Fernandes' career began in 1989 at the Gomat Vidya Niketan Public Library in Margao. He was crucial in establishing libraries at institutions such as the Goa College of Engineering in the mid-1990s, where he worked for a decade. In 2006, he became the Curator of the Goa Central Library, where he spearheaded efforts to modernise its services.

Outgoing Member Secretary Suresh Divkar, TAG President Anthony Barbosa, Vice-President Marcos Gonsalves, TAG Member Antoneta D'Souza, and others congratulated Dr Fernandes.

Rape-accused doc hospitalised, Cong Mahilas want clinic sealed

MLA demands revoking clinic's licence

Team Herald

MARGAO: Following his arrest and remand in judicial custody at Colvale Jail in the alleged sexual assault on a nurse, Dr Samuel Arawattig has been admitted in the North Goa District Hospital at Mapusa citing health reasons with the Goa Pradesh Mahila Congress Committee demanding that his clinic be sealed immediately.

Cunolim Police sources indicated that Dr Samuel is currently in the hospital under day and night police guard. Four officers have been assigned for this duty.

His bail application before the Sessions judge has been adjourned for hearing on May 8. The court has directed the Cunolim Police, the defence lawyer, and the public prosecutor regard-

ing the bail application. Meanwhile the Mahila Congress strongly condemned the incident and called for urgent action.

"The crime committed by Dr Samuel is of a serious nature and cannot be tolerated. As an immediate step, the clinic should be shut. We will not remain silent and continue to raise our voice until justice is served," said Pratiksha Khalap, Mahila Congress president.

District Congress President Savio D'Silva, Zilla Panchayat member Michelle Rebello, former ZP Moreno Rebello, and several other party workers participated in the protest.

Highlighting concerns about women's safety in the State, D'Silva questioned the silence of the lo-

cal political leadership. "Our women are not safe. The local MLA should have taken a firm stand against such crimes in the Velim constituency," he stated.

Demanding justice for the victim, Michelle Rebello insisted that the safety and dignity of women should be non-negotiable. "We expect swift and strict action from the authorities," she said.

Meanwhile Velim MLA Cruz Silva demanded that Deusua-Chinchinim Village Panchayat revoke the licence of Dr Arawattig's clinic in Chinchinim.

In a letter addressed to the panchayat, Silva stated that Dr Samuel has been arrested and remains in police custody following allegations of molestation and rape of a nurse employed at the clinic.

'Concretisation' of Nuvem could lead to water crisis, fear villagers

Say village biodiversity is under threat from unregulated development

Team Herald

MARGAO: Residents of Nuvem are alarmed over the rapid and "unchecked" pace of construction and housing projects in their village.

Following similar concerns raised in Betalbatim, Nuvem residents warned that this uncontrolled development is pushing the village towards a potential environmental crisis.

During a recent gram sabha, the Nuvem Village Panchayat addressed these issues by passing a resolution urging the authorities to take immediate action to address the growing strain on the village's natural resources and existing infra-

UNSUSTAINABLE RATE OF PROGRESS

RTI data shows a significant increase in development between 2021 and 2024, with the issuance of 599 house numbers, 138 construction licences, 207 domestic and 34 commercial water connections, and 585 electricity connections

Warning of long-term environmental degradation, expert says this development rate is unsustainable for the village's environment

structure.

A primary concern among residents is the ongoing "concretisation" of Nuvem, which they fear could lead to a severe water crisis. They worry that vital water sources will either dry up or become contaminated due to this unregulated development.

Jose Roque Andrade, a local environmentalist and expert, presented a detailed study on the village's carrying capacity, stating, "The living creatures, including humans, may soon suffer due to the non-availability of clean water."

He highlighted Nuvem's significant size and rich

biodiversity, including forests, agricultural lands, hills, and water bodies, all of which are under threat from this rapid and unregulated development.

Data obtained through the Right to Information (RTI) Act reveals a significant surge in development between 2021 and 2024. The village panchayat issued 599 house numbers and 138 construction licences during this period. Simultaneously, the Public Works Department (PWD) provided 207 domestic and 34 commercial water connections, and the Electricity Department issued 585 connections across all categories.

Andrade said, "These numbers show a development rate that far exceeds what our village infrastructure and environment can handle."

He cautioned that if this growth is not curbed, future generations will inherit a severely degraded environment, suffering the long-term consequences of current decisions.

A growing number of villagers are advocating for a slowdown in the rate of development. They argue that the current trajectory disproportionately benefits wealthy outsiders, leading to the displacement of local residents and a decline in biodiversity.