

NGT fines Union Environment Ministry over delays in new Borim Bridge case

MoEFCC delays response, seeks adjournment citing related case in Supreme Court; Tribunal also slams govt for failing to provide details of the SC writ petition

Team Herald

MARGAO: The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has imposed a Rs 5,000 cost on the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) for its failure to provide essential information in the ongoing Borim bridge case. This action highlights the NGT's growing impatience with delays that continue to plague the legal challenge brought by concerned local farmers.

The NGT's order, dated April 23, 2025, reveals the tribunal's clear frustration. The MoEFCC had been directed to submit its opinion on whether the bridge project, if exceeding 150,000 square metres, would fall under category 8(b) of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006 – a classification that would mandate environmental clearance.

Instead of providing the requested affidavit, the MoEFCC sought an adjournment, citing a related case

The case, initially filed in May 2024, revolves around the fundamental question of whether the Borim bridge project requires environmental clearance. The concerned farmers argue that the project will inflict irreparable damage on their vital Khazan fields and assert that the project's scale exceeds the 150,000-square-metre threshold that triggers mandatory EC requirements

before the Supreme Court. The NGT, however, deemed this explanation insufficient. The tribunal specifically noted the Ministry's failure to provide details of the Supreme Court writ petition or adequately explain its potential impact on the proceedings before the NGT.

Furthermore, the order addresses the Public Works Department's (PWD) continued failure to provide

crucial project details. The Executive Engineer, Works Division XV (NH), PWD, Government of Goa, has been given a week to explain the reasons for withholding this information and to provide a firm timeline for its submission, particularly as the project's Detailed Project Report (DPR) is currently under revision. The NGT explicitly stated that the absence of a timeline was "objectionable" and mandated that the explanation be submitted in writing via affidavit.

As a direct consequence of the MoEFCC's non-compliance, the NGT has imposed a cost of Rs 5,000 on the Union Ministry, to be deposited with the NGT Bar Association, WZB, Pune, within eight days. The tribunal has granted the Ministry a final week to submit the required affidavit, making it clear that it will be compelled to rule on the farmers' request for an interim stay on the project even without the Ministry's input.

The next hearing is scheduled for June 5, 2025.

Loutolim farmers welcome fine, decry govt's 'delay tactics'

Team Herald

MARGAO: Loutolim farmers have cautiously welcomed the National Green Tribunal's (NGT) decision to fine the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC), but remain wary of what they see as ongoing attempts to delay a final ruling on the controversial Borim bridge project. Speaking after the latest NGT hearing, Albert Pinheiro, president of the Carbot, Mascasana & Bebdos Tenants Association in Loutolim, reiterated the farmers' determination to protect their ancestral lands.

"We have pointed out to the NGT that the 3D notification issued by MORTH is in violation of Supreme Court orders," Pinheiro stated, referring to the P. V. Krishnamoorthy case. He argued that the 3D notification was issued without the necessary environmental and forest clearances, expressing confidence that this would lead to a stay and the quashing of land acquisition proceedings.

Pinheiro also accused government authorities of employing delay tactics, asserting that they have "no defense against our factual and legal submissions." He highlighted the fact that the ministry has mentioned revising the project, yet no revised plan has been submitted via an affidavit.

The core issue, according to Pinheiro, remains whether the project requires environmental clearance due to its size exceeding 150,000 square metres and its location on Khazan land, where only agriculture and pisciculture are permitted. "Even if the bridge is built on stilts," he explained, "the roads required to construct it and move materials will inevitably damage the land." He also reiterated the farmers' challenge to the land acquisition itself.

Regarding the Vanashakti case, which the Ministry has cited in its arguments before the court, Pinheiro clarified that it is a separate matter, although it also involves environmental concerns and land acquisition potentially exceeding 150,000 square

metres. He suggested that authorities might be referencing the Vanashakti case in an attempt to address the environmental clearance issue, but emphasized that the application in that case is still pending.

Pinheiro concluded by expressing the farmers' disappointment that they have not yet received the interim relief they believe they deserve. "Justice is delayed, which appears to be denied presently," he lamented. Despite this, he affirmed the farmers' continued faith in the judicial system and their unwavering commitment to preserving their heritage Khazan lands. "Our work of preparing for the cultivation is in full swing, and nothing can disturb us," Pinheiro declared.

The farmers were also disappointed over the long wait for the next hearing, as they feel it leaves them in stress and suspense. They continue to voice concerns that authorities may attempt to move forward with the project despite the pending legal challenges.

South Goa MP denies being feted by Lairai Temple Committee

Team Herald

PANJIM: South Goa Member of Parliament Capt Viriato Fernandes and four others on Monday clarified that there was no felicitation by the Shree Lairai Devi temple managing committee, and alleged that his visit to the temple was misrepresented by vested interests seeking to divert attention from the State government's failure.

Responding to a news report appearing in the media, Capt Viriato said, "It is wrong news and twisted to create sensation by vested interests. There was no felicitation but I along with my friends, as decided earlier, had gone to the temple for darshan. I had visited the Lairai Devi temple last year before the counting of votes for the Lok Sabha election and had decided to visit again if elected."

He explained that after taking darshan, he and his companions were leaving the temple when a Shirgao panchayat member approached and requested him to visit the office of the managing committee, which is located adjacent to the temple. There, the managing committee president Dinanath Gaonkar voiced several grievances, including the need for a flyover, the Konkani Railway's failure to provide employment to local youth—particularly land losers—and the delay in pensions for retired Central government employees. "I requested him to write a letter to me so that I can take it up with the Union Railway Minister and other Central authorities," said Capt Viriato.

During the discussion, Gaonkar also lamented the State administration's lack of support in managing the increasing turnout of people during the zatra. He urged the government to ensure proper arrangements to guarantee public safety.

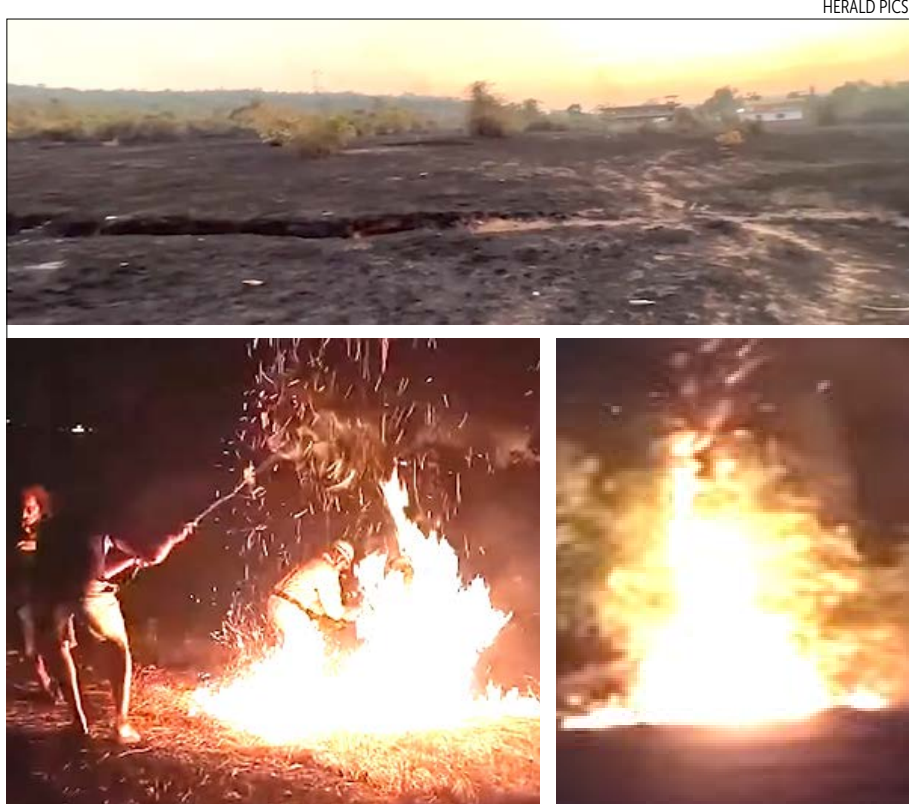
"I told him that, as per the Disaster Management Act, if the presence of a crowd is 30,000 or more, then the role of the disaster management authority comes into play. As I was coming out of the temple, the panchayat member requested me to wait for two minutes, and the committee president offered me a bouquet, shirphal, and a shawl," said Fernandes.

Capt Viriato added that he later spoke to some media persons, during which he called for an enhancement in the ex-gratia compensation to the families of those deceased and injured in the stampede.

Orville Dourado Rodrigues, Jayesh Shetgaonkar, Sanjay Redkar, and Rupresh Shinkre also endorsed the MP's version of events. Shetgaonkar said, "It was a token of love that the temple committee offered a shawl and shirphal to Capt Viriato," while Shinkre described the gesture as "absolutely impromptu."

"It was a gesture of appreciation by the temple committee to Capt Viriato, who also helps from neighbouring Assonora village. The temple committee also wants proper arrangements to avoid recurrence of such an unfortunate incident," said Sanjay Redkar.

WRATH OF FIRE



Massive fire destroys cashew plantation at Naikwaddo, in Mandrem, causing extensive damage and resulting in an estimated loss of Rs 20 lakh. The exact cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained

Road Safety Committee recommends revival of daytime traffic challaning

Team Herald

PANJIM: The North Goa District Road Safety Committee has recommended to the State government the reintroduction of daytime challaning of motor vehicle violations by the Traffic Police and District Police through officers of the rank of Police Sub-Inspectors (PSIs). The committee noted a significant rise in traffic violations since challaning powers were restricted to officers of the rank of Police Inspector.

The committee also resolved to convene a joint meeting with officials of the Konkani Railway Corporation Ltd and the Mopa International Airport to discuss plans for the installation of Road Safety Awareness Signage at the railway stations of Karmali,



Absence of police on the road leads to traffic jam

Tivim, and Pernem, as well as at Mopa Airport, with an aim to reach out to arriving tourists.

Further, the committee proposed to explore modalities for providing compensation

through the Directorate of Transport to road accident victims who suffer severe injuries resulting in permanent disabilities, and to enhance the compensation amount in the event

of death.

It was decided to observe Global Road Safety Week from May 12 to 17, with a particular focus on the safety of pedestrians and cyclists.

The Excise Department informed the committee that, as per DRSC's recommendation, all bars and liquor retail outlets will be required to submit the following undertaking along with their application for licence renewal for 2025-2026: "I shall display a painted 'Don't Drink & Drive' board in the premises."

Additionally, the committee resolved to work in coordination with the Department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services to prepare awareness material on the appropriate action to be taken in cases involving animals injured in road accidents.

CCP mayor bats for return of Missionaries of Charity home

Team Herald

PANJIM: Corporation of The City of Panaji (CCP) Mayor Rohit Monserrate on Monday met the committee members of the Assistencia Goa in an attempt to restart the home of the Missionaries of Charity at St Inez, Panjim.

However, much would depend on the extraordinary general body meeting of the Assistencia to be convened soon.

When contacted, Monserrate said, "I met the committee members of Assistencia and we spoke about the issue. It would be in the interest of Panjim to give a chance to the Missionaries of Charity to restart the home. The Assistencia are in favour of their coming back and we all would like Sisters to be

If the extraordinary general body decides to recall Missionaries of Charity then I will fly to Kolkata and speak to its Superior General. The people of Panjim want home of Missionaries of Charity – Rohit Monserrate, CCP Mayor

in Panjim. I want them to come back. The Assistencia will now convene their extraordinary general body meeting and make their intentions clear.

According to Monserrate, he had already spoken to one of the Superiors at Kolkata and the latter was supposed to convey their decision to him. "If the extraordinary general body decides to recall Missionaries of Charity then I will fly to Kolkata and speak to its Superior General. The people of Panjim want home of Missionaries of Charity."

On the other hand, Assistencia Goa president

Neville Monteiro said that the CCP Mayor along with three others came to meet them out of concern and discussed the way forward. "We will now convene the extraordinary general body meeting by month end to discuss the issue."

Monteiro said that the first priority is to repair the premises. He said that three NGOs have shown their interest to run the home but they have not given their proposals. "We will discuss all these issues during the extraordinary general body meeting and we will proceed in the right direction," he said.

FDA food safety officer suspended over alleged corrupt practices

Team Herald

PANJIM: The Director of the Food and Drugs Administration (FDA) has suspended Food Safety Officer Vishwasrao Rane with immediate effect, in view of disciplinary proceedings being contemplated against him.

According to the order, Rane's headquarters during the suspension period will be the Directorate of Food and Drugs Administration in Bambolim. He has been instructed not to leave the headquarters without prior permission. However, he will be entitled to receive subsistence allowance as per rules, the order signed by FDA Director Shweta Desai stated.

Sources have alleged that Rane is suspected of involvement in corrupt practices. The suspension comes in the wake of a recent FDA crackdown on food safety violations across Bardez taluka, where several eateries were shut down for maintaining unhygienic conditions and breaching food safety norms.

The FDA has recently intensified inspection and enforcement activities across both districts of Goa, targeting malpractices in the food business sector. Last week, the South Goa team of the FDA conducted a comprehensive inspection drive in Salcete Taluka to examine the hygienic and sanitary conditions at various food business establishments.

It has also come to light that, over the past five years, on average, a complaint has been filed daily against government officials, underscoring growing concerns regarding official misconduct.

Shirgao 'gifted' to miners, say green warriors

PANJIM: The green warriors Claude Alvares and senior advocate Norma Alvares have blamed the State government for abandoning Shree Lairai Devi by signing the agreement handing over the entire Shirgao village for mining leases instead of restoring the ecology and environment of the village, ravaged by 50 years of mining.

The hypocrisy of the government's commitment to Shree Lairai Devi can be openly seen from its actions of including the temple and the entire settlement of Shirgao within the mining leases handed over to mining companies. These companies have left the ecology of the village in ruins and the entire production system of the village is almost zero, all productive lands are either destroyed or out of village control. Senior advocate Norma is now appearing on behalf of Shirgao villagers to ensure cancellation of the new leases handed out for fresh mining in the village.

Activist brands Shirgao tragedy as 'man-made disaster'

Demands judicial probe; says public was left vulnerable as administration failed in its duty

Team Herald

PONDA: Social activist Rama Kankonkar has strongly condemned the state government's handling of the Lairai Zatra, holding Chief Minister Pramod Sawant personally responsible for what he termed a "man-made disaster" and demanding his resignation.

Kankonkar called for a judicial inquiry led by a retired High Court judge to thoroughly investigate the incident. He dismissed the tragedy as an unfortunate mishap, stating instead that it was "caused by sheer administrative failure."

He pointed out that lakhs of devotees attend the Zatra annually, yet no adequate crowd control, safety mechanisms, or emergency response plans were in place. A violent clash between two groups, now widely circulated in viral videos, allegedly triggered the panic that led to the stampede. According to Kankonkar, the Presidents of the temple committee confirmed that certain individuals had deliberately instigated the altercation, yet police, despite a deployment of over 1,000 personnel, failed to intervene or make any arrests.

He lashed out at the Chief Minister

for prioritising his own security. "The CM visited the Zatra with full VIP security cover, using taxpayer funds to ensure his safety. However, there was no such seriousness shown towards public safety," he said.

Further criticising the administration, Kankonkar noted that the Chief Minister had not called a review meeting, assessed crowd management plans, or issued any safety directives prior to the event. "His presence would have ensured heightened preparedness; instead, the public was left vulnerable while the administration failed in its duty," he said.

He demanded an independent investigation into the role of the CM and the Home Department for failing to prevent the tragedy. "The CM should resign for dereliction of duty and breach of public trust," he stated.

Kankonkar slammed the CM's announcement of Rs 10 lakh ex gratia for the families of the deceased, saying it was insufficient. "This was not a natural calamity; it was a governance failure. The government must compensate Rs 1 crore to the family of each deceased and Rs 10 lakh to each injured person, depending on the severity of injuries."