

# New Margao market complex fire safety far from adequate, traders sound alarm bells

Lack of water tank, non-functional hydrants and encroachments leave over 450 shops vulnerable five months after major blaze; Disaster Management Authority recommendations lie in cold storage

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Despite a close brush with disaster last December, fire safety in Margao's New market remains woefully inadequate, putting over 450 shops and hundreds of lives at constant risk.

Traders and shopkeepers have raised serious concerns over the lack of basic fire fighting infrastructure, including a long-promised overhead water tank and functioning fire hydrants have remained conspicuously absent till date. This puts the lives of traders as well as those visiting the customers at risk.

On December 26, 2023, a major fire broke out in the vicinity of the market. While a larger tragedy was averted thanks to the swift action of alert traders and fire-fighters, the incident exposed the market's complete lack of preparedness.

In the aftermath, a joint inspection team under the Disaster Management Authority recommended the urgent installation of



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an overhead water tank to supply water to fire hydrants. However, nearly five

months later, no visible progress has been made.

“There is no water tank, no working fire hydrants. If a fire breaks out in the market, it will be a catastrophe,” warned Damodar

Gode, President of the Margao Market Association. He

## ‘PLAYING’ WITH FIRE

- Essential fire services woefully inadequate
- Overhead water tank essential for fire-fighting incomplete
- Traders brazenly encroach on market passages, evacuation routes blocked
- Most shops lack basic fire fighting equipment
- No structured parking
- Disaster Management Authority recommendations not adhered too

confirmed that the traders had submitted written requests to the Margao Municipal Council (MMC), but those appeals have gone unanswered. “A site for the water tank was identified, but nothing has happened on the ground,” he added.

Shopkeepers echoed the same concerns. “The market is in pathetic condition when it comes to fire safety,” said Sobha Gaonkar,

a local vendor. “In past incidents, it was found that there was no proper entry for fire engines, and the hydrants were of no use.”

Rajendra Azgaonkar, another shop owner, stressed the urgency of the issue: “We have been hearing for months that a water tank will be built. But to this day, there's not even a sign of work starting.”

Adding to the risk is the market's severe congestion. Roads and footpaths around the area are heavily encroached upon, and there is no structured parking, which traders fear could lead to chaos and a potential stampede in an emergency.

With fire safety measures remaining only on paper and no accountability from municipal authorities, shop owners say they are being forced to conduct business under constant threat.

The Margao Municipal Council is yet to respond to the growing concerns or provide a timeline for the long-delayed safety upgrades.

## Suspended PI granted conditional bail

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Suspended Police Inspector of Konkani Railway Police Station, Sunil Gudlar, was on Wednesday granted conditional bail by the High Court of Bombay at Goa. The order was passed by a single bench presided over by Justice Valmiki Menezes.

Gudlar is to be released on a bail bond of Rs 1 lakh with one surety of the same amount, to be executed before the South Goa Sessions Court in Margao. He was directed to furnish his Aadhaar details, full residential address, email ID and a functional mobile number to both the Sessions Court and the Investigating Officer (IO).

Conditions include a ban on contacting or influencing witnesses, a restriction on leaving Goa without court permission, and the surrender of his passport if he holds one. Gudlar was asked to report to the IO every Monday between 10 am and 1 pm, and on other dates upon 24-hour notice, until the chargesheet is filed.

The IO has stated that the investigation is nearing completion, with only the complainant's statement and Gudlar's voice sample pending. The complainant is expected to be examined within a week.

## Railways construct retaining wall at Hollant after public outcry

Team Herald

**VASCO:** A retaining wall has been constructed at Hollant, Sancoale, following sustained pressure from local residents and intervention by Chief Minister Pramod Sawant.

The move came after repeated concerns were raised by the public through the Velsao-Pale-Issorcim village panchayat. A meeting was held involving Chief Minister Savant, Cortalim MLA Anton Vas, and former panchayat member Roquezhinho D'Souza, which led to the Chief Minister directing Indian Railways to take immediate action.

The wall aims to prevent erosion and enhance safety

in the area, which had seen increased risks due to ongoing railway works.

Commenting on the development, D'Souza criticised some individuals who had previously protested against the Railways but later accepted compensation and left the affected areas, leaving others to face the unresolved issues. “Instead of clashing with the Railways, people should advocate for realistic solutions such as overbridges, underpasses, or retaining walls,” he said.

Local residents have welcomed the construction, which they had been demanding for a long time due to the hazards posed by the proximity of railway infrastructure.

## BRISK BUSINESS



With no traffic police deployed in the area, the newly renovated Chogm Road is gradually resembling a makeshift fish market, crowded with migrant vendors

## FLOOD FEARS: Seraulim inspection spurs urgent action on Western Bypass blockages

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** A joint inspection was held in Seraulim to tackle potential monsoon flooding at two key sites—beneath the Western Bypass flyover and near the SG-DPA wholesale fish market junction. Officials identified around 60,000 cubic metres of soil obstructing natural drainage, left behind during bypass construction for temporary service roads.

The meeting, attended by Benaulim MLA Venzy Viegas, Seraulim panchayat members, PWD officials, and the MVR contractor, confirmed a 20-day operation would be launched to clear the debris once machinery is mobilised.

A village-level committee with representatives from Seraulim, Benaulim, and the contractor has been formed to oversee the work. Locals pointed out areas where water flow has been disrupted, causing stagnation and backflow into fields and residential zones. Damaged bundhs and fallen construction rubble near water channels were also flagged for immediate repair.

Viegas warned of severe flooding if work is delayed beyond the June 10 deadline, noting that a similar meeting in November yielded no progress. “This time, we will hold officials accountable. The committee will document and monitor every step,” he said.

Residents of nearby Mungul have also voiced concerns about uncleared debris in their area. Kevin D'Souza said, “It's imperative that the haphazard filling done by PWD is reversed. Restoration must be completed before the monsoon to avoid further crop damage.”

Viegas stressed that no real estate development would be allowed on the low-lying land reclaimed for the bypass. “Our aim is to return this land to its original purpose—farming,” he added.

D'Souza echoed the sentiment: “We are not demanding anything new, only the fulfilment of original commitments made when the bypass work began.”



A joint inspection in Seraulim to tackle potential monsoon flooding at two key sites—beneath the Western Bypass flyover and near the SG-DPA wholesale fish market junction

## PWD to study feasibility of vacuum sewerage tech for Margao's congested zones

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** With the High Court monitoring Margao's sewage management through a public interest petition, the Core Committee overseeing compliance has directed the PWD's Sewerage Department to study the feasibility of vacuum technology in the city's most congested areas. The department must submit its report by 15 May, along with a detailed plan showing which localities are linked to the underground sewerage network and which remain disconnected.

At a recent meeting chaired by MMC engineer Deepak Desai, the committee also tasked the PWD with submitting an updated sewerage map of the city by 8 May, in coordination with the MMC and SIDCGL, as per the High Court's directive.

The committee reviewed replies from 154 households that received notices for allegedly discharging waste into storm water drains. While many claimed to be connected to the sewer network, the PWD has been instructed to verify these claims through physical inspection. The exercise follows growing concern

over unauthorised dwellings discharging untreated sewage into open drains. An inspection at Malbhat revealed multiple kutcha houses rented to migrant workers, completely disconnected from the sewerage grid and releasing waste into nullahs.

Municipal officials admitted that similar unauthorised hutments exist across the city, including along the River Sal embankments. In one case, subdivided rental units without sewer links were found to be discharging waste directly into open drains, raising serious environmental and public health concerns.

Despite these findings, the MMC has yet to create a comprehensive list of such structures or plan to integrate them into the sewerage network. This lack of coordination has been repeatedly flagged by the Court monitors.

While the MMC is expected to act on the pending notices by 15 May, the vacuum technology study is seen as a possible solution for areas where traditional pipelines are unviable. The committee will reconvene after the deadlines to assess progress, under the continued supervision of the High Court.

## Modified cars seized in Margao for violating vehicle norms

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** In a late-night enforcement drive, Margao police seized two extensively modified Honda cars for multiple violations of motor vehicle regulations. The cars were reportedly fitted with tinted windows,

### BREACH OF LAW

oversized tyres, modified exhaust systems, and illegal hydraulic suspension mechanisms.

The operation, led by Police Inspector Suraj Samant, is part of a broader initiative to clamp down on illegal modifications that pose safety risks and disrupt public order.

“We have seized two highly modified cars and will be taking strict action against such violations. These kinds of modifications are not just illegal but also dangerous,” said PI Samant. “We will continue such checks, especially at night when such vehicles are often seen on the roads.”

Both vehicles have been impounded and are currently in police custody. The owners of the vehicles will be issued challans for breaching multiple provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act.

Residents in several parts of Margao have raised concerns in the past over the increasing presence of heavily modified cars, particularly during nighttime hours.



## DO YOU BELIEVE THAT TALEIGAO MLA HAS FAILED TO ADDRESS THE FIELD FIRE ISSUE?

*The practice of setting fire in the fields in Taleigao has become an annual phenomena. The residents in the area have to suffer heat and unbearable smoke during the summer. Do you think the Taleigao MLA has failed to address and resolve the issue effectively, leaving the people to endure the consequences year after year?*

“The Taleigao MLA has been completely missing. In the last 10 days, Taleigao fields have seen fire thrice. Not once did we see the Taleigao MLA anywhere around. Never did we see a panch anywhere around. My open letter published in the press and social media asks whether she is interested, whether she cares or if she wants to do anything about this issue”  
– Francis Coelho, political leader



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“This is an old issue where in the olden days the farmers used to set the fire, remain there and put off the fire and go. Now the issue is whether the local MLA is involved or the elected panchayat members are involved? Now there are buildings come up around the fields and sewage is flowing into the fields and tall grass is growing. So who is to blame? So who is responsible for putting up these buildings? Is this not done by the elected representatives?”  
– Mariano Ferrao, social activist

“The fire lit in the Taleigao fields is not only dangerous to the reptiles in the fields, but it is also dangerous to human life. The other day the fire brigade personnel rushed up and rescued a child. If it was not for them, the child could have suffocated from the smoke. For that matter, it can harm so many, especially senior citizens. When will all this stop?”  
– Trajano D'Mello, political commentator

“By looking at the past, these fires do not take place by themselves. These fires are lit. They prepare a ‘vision document’ to grab the land and start construction. We have seen this in the Forest Minister's constituency and in other constituencies. The fires occur where there are large tracts of land. These are not small fires, it is like an inferno. I don't think she has anything much in her hands, because Babush Monserrate is the superpower above her. Then there is also the mayor, their son. So is this a tripartite agreement?”  
– Anthony D'Silva, social activist