

# Standoff between P'yats & PWD stalls action against encroachments

Confusion over who is responsible for removing illegal structures delays road widening

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** More than two months after the High Court issued directives on illegal roadside structures along highways, implementation remains mired in controversy as village panchayats and the Public Works Department (PWD) engage in a bureaucratic tug-of-war over responsibility.

Several Salcete panchayats have formally requested PWD's Roads division assistance for technical support in surveying illegal structures. Local authorities argue that while these constructions fall within panchayat jurisdictions, the land itself belongs to the PWD, making joint action necessary.

"The PWD cannot simply wash their hands of responsibility when the property in question was acquired by them specifically for road construction," remarked one Sarpanch who requested anonymity. "We need their technical expertise to properly identify encroachments on their land."

Cavelossim Sarpanch Dixon Vaz was more direct: "This is PWD property. They must participate in identifying structures built illegally on their land."

The April 6 High Court



FILE PHOTO

Comunidade authorities demolished a large number of illegal commercial structures on the Colva-Mungul road in February

ruling on a suo moto Public Interest Litigation (PIL) established guidelines for removing illegal structures but created confusion regarding agency responsibilities. Panchayats claim the court directed them to conduct surveys and compile lists for the Goa State Pollution Control Board (GSPCB) without specifically addressing PWD obligations, despite the department's ownership of the affected areas.

Meanwhile, local speculation suggests years of political tolerance allowed these roadside establishments to flourish, providing livelihoods for residents while ignoring land use regulations.

Elsewhere, the village

panchayat of Seraulim has scheduled inspections beginning from Tuesday. As stated in their public notice dated April 30, 2025, officials will conduct surveys of "illegal constructions on roadside/Highway/Major roads" and commercial operations in all seven wards under their jurisdiction.

Adding complexity to the situation, encroachments on Moti Dongor in Margao have also come under scrutiny following the court's ruling. These settlements on Comunidade lands have allegedly received political support over the years, further complicating enforcement efforts.

Despite the court or-

## MORMUGAO COUNCIL TO VERIFY LEGALITY OF 262 STRUCTURES

Team Herald

**VASCO:** The Mormugao Municipal Council (MMC) has issued notices to 262 houses and establishments across its jurisdiction, acting on directions from the High Court of Bombay at Goa. MMC Chairperson Girish Borker told reporters that the notices are part of a court-ordered drive to identify and verify encroachments along highways and internal roads. "As per the circular, all properties or encroachments adjacent to roads must be examined. We

have instructed our staff to issue notices and verify the legal status of these structures," he said. Borker said that more than 260 notices have already been served, asking occupants to furnish relevant ownership and approval documents. The verification process will include hearings, expected to begin next month. "We will assess whether the concerned parties had applied for or obtained the necessary permissions at the time of construction. Based on this, the court will determine the legal status of each property," Borker explained.

der's clear intent, little has changed on the ground. Near the Comba railway crossing, makeshift shops (gaddas) continue to operate in areas previously designated for PWD road widening, highlighting the gap between judicial directives and their practical implementation.

As this bureaucratic standoff continues, the

illegal structures in the taluka that prompted the High Court's intervention remain largely untouched. Whether authorities can resolve their jurisdictional disputes and coordinate effective action remains the pressing question for communities across Goa affected by these longstanding violations.

# Tribunal quashes Verna Comunidade election, orders fresh polls

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** The Administrative Tribunal has invalidated the elections to the Managing Committee of Comunidade of Verna, ruling that presiding officials violated mandatory open ballot requirements under the Code of Comunidades. In the judgment, Tribunal President Dvijle V Patkar upheld the appeal filed by Adv Savio J F Correia, who had contested for the post of President.

The Tribunal held that the electoral process was compromised when the Presiding Officer distributed ballot papers randomly rather than sequentially by serial numbers, effectively conducting a secret ballot instead of the statutorily mandated open ballot system.

"The violations of the mandatory requirement of open ballot go to the root of the election process and renders the entire election void ab initio," the Tribu-

The Tribunal held that the electoral process was compromised when the Presiding Officer distributed ballot papers randomly rather than sequentially by serial numbers, effectively conducting a secret ballot instead of the mandated open ballot system. To make matters worse, one ballot went missing after the election, tallying only 112 votes instead of 113

nal observed, interpreting the Portuguese term "escrutinio aberto" used in the original Code to mean votes must be open, transparent, and available for scrutiny.

The Tribunal critically noted that the minutes of the election merely stated that "open ballots were issued" without documenting how votes were cast, counted, or verified. This contrasted with practices in three neighbouring Comunidades—Dicarpale, Davorlim, and Margao—where voter identities and choices were transparently recorded.

Another irregularity highlighted was the discrepancy in ballot counting. Though 113 mem-

bers were registered and received ballots, only 112 votes were accounted for in the final tally.

"The fate of one ballot paper and/or the identity of the member who did not place the ballot issued to him/her into the ballot box is unknown," the judgment stated.

Citing Supreme Court precedents, the Tribunal emphasised that when statutes prescribe specific procedures, "the thing must be done in that way and not contrary to it at all." The Tribunal has directed authorities to conduct fresh elections for all positions on the Managing Committee (except Attorney) in accordance with the Code of Comunidades.

## Officials meet to discuss public concerns in Benaulim

Security, drug control and monsoon preparedness on the agenda as authorities draw up action plan

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** A coordination meeting was held to address several pressing issues affecting the Benaulim constituency. The meeting brought together the Colva Police Inspector (PI), Tourism Police, Traffic Police Inspector, and Fire Department Chief.

Key topics discussed included village security patrols, measures to combat drug-related activities, illegal operations on local beaches, and the installation of road safety signage throughout the area.

Benaulim MLA Captain Venzy Viegas convened the gathering to formulate strategic responses to these community concerns. Authorities agreed to implement enhanced monitoring systems and increase coordination between departments.

Later, Viegas held a separate meeting



Benaulim MLA Venzy Viegas meets with PWD and electricity Department officials to discuss pre-monsoon work

with officials from the PWD's Roads, Water, Sewerage, and Electricity divisions, as well as the Water Resources Department, to review pending work and ensure preparedness ahead of the monsoon season.

Officials present at the meeting declined to provide specific details about enforcement actions but confirmed that regular progress reports would be shared with residents in the coming months.

# Salcete reels under major water shortage

Fresh disruption hits coastal and inland areas; citizens step out in protest; tanker supply arranged in some parts

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Several parts of Salcete faced a fresh spell of water shortage on Tuesday, with residents in Majorda, Betalbatim, Fatorda, Raia and Verna reporting dry taps for hours. The unannounced disruption sparked public anger, with many locals stepping out in protest and demanding answers.

In Majorda, residents of one ward where the shortage was particularly severe said that water supply had stopped as early as May 5, and they were still waiting for it to be restored. Locals gathered on the streets on Tuesday, demanding clarity from the authorities. Betalbatim too witnessed similar scenes, with even the sarpanch seen on the road as villagers waited for updates.

In Fatorda, Raia and Verna, residents reported severe inconvenience throughout the day, with no prior intimation from the water department and no immediate relief measures in place.

Water issues have been recurring in parts of Salcete in recent days. In Colva, homes and businesses have both been facing erratic water supply since last week. While workers have been digging the roads in several parts of the village to complete sewerage work, locals claim they have seen them releasing large amounts of water into fields and other low-lying areas. Still, residents did not receive any intimation about restricted water supply, catching them unawares.

Meanwhile, in the Cur-torim constituency, water tankers had to be deployed

to ensure basic supply.

Officials said that a leakage was detected on the new JICA pipeline at Verna, in a section that runs through a field. They explained that the location of the leak made it difficult to trace quickly, and some pipeline parts had to be replaced. To carry out the repairs, the line had to be dried temporarily.

However, they assured that supply through this pipeline would be restored by late Tuesday night. They also clarified that the old parallel pipeline remained open and functional during the repair work.

With no clear communication earlier in the day, affected citizens across Salcete were left anxious and inconvenienced, awaiting the full restoration of supply.

# Maddel locals protest against dug up roads

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Residents of Maddel, Fatorda, have demanded urgent restoration of roads dug up for the Adani gas pipeline works, warning that the damaged stretches pose a serious threat to commuters ahead of the monsoon.

Locals staged a protest on Tuesday to highlight the poor condition of the roads, particularly pointing out the danger to two-wheeler riders. They expressed concern that during the rains, reduced visibility will make it difficult for

motorists to spot the broken patches, increasing the risk of accidents.

"This is a busy thoroughfare connecting Margao to Colva, with Maddel lying along the route. The internal roads of Maddel have also been affected," said one of the residents, urging authorities to take immediate action.

They also questioned why the contractor responsible for the gas line work had not been held accountable for restoring the roads to their original state, adding that the situation reflects a lack of oversight by the authorities.

# Aquem residents push back against house tax hike

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Residents of Aquem Baixo compelled the local panchayat to backtrack on its proposal to substantially increase house tax rates, following widespread opposition at its gram sabha meeting.

The session, presided over by Sarpanch Floriano Danny Fernandes, saw tense moments as villagers vocally opposed the panchayat's plan to raise the house tax from the cur-

rent Rs 4 per square metre to Rs 40. Gram sabha members, including Siddesh Bhagat and Julio Quadros, led the charge, denouncing the tenfold increase as excessive and unreasonable for residents.

Several other attendees echoed their concerns, arguing that such a hike would financially strain the community. The overwhelming resistance prompted the sarpanch and the panchayat body to reconsider the proposal. Eventually, they agreed to revise the rate to Rs 8 per square metre, a compromise accepted by the members.

In addition to the rate reduction, participants demanded exemptions for certain categories of homes. Specifically, they called for relief for houses with traditional roof tiles and older structures owned by members of the Scheduled Tribes community.

On a different note, the gram sabha granted the panchayat permission to engage a contractor for handling solid waste management. The contractor will be responsible for col-

lecting both dry and wet garbage from the village, a move intended to improve sanitation services.

Sarpanch Fernandes later briefed the media, stating that the decision to appoint a waste collection contractor had received the full backing of the gram sabha. He added that Navelim MLA Ulhas Tuemkar has pledged his support to the panchayat in its efforts to tackle the village's long-standing garbage issue.

# NRI commissioner invites Goan-origin Aussie MPs to visit motherland

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Commissioner for NRI Affairs and former MP Adv Narendra K. Sawaikar has formally extended invitations to newly elected Australian MPs of Goan origin—Zaneta Mascarenhas and Leon Rebello—to visit Goa, the land of their roots.

In two separate congratulatory letters issued by the NRI Commissioner's office in Porvorim, Sawaikar praised both Mascarenhas and Rebello for earning the trust of voters in Australia and securing seats in the Australian Parliament.

Calling their victories a "matter of immense pride for Goans," he expressed admiration for their leadership and public service values.

"It is especially heartening to see young leaders of Goan heritage earn such recognition on the international stage," Sawaikar wrote, noting that their success inspires not only Australians but also the global Goan community.

The Commissioner em-



**It is especially heartening to see young leaders of Goan heritage earn such recognition on the international stage**  
— Adv Narendra K. Sawaikar, Commissioner for NRI affairs

phasised the significance of reconnecting with ancestral roots and invited both MPs to visit Goa. "We would be honoured by your presence in the land of your roots," he said, requesting their consent to plan an official visit.

Zaneta Mascarenhas represents the Swan Division in Western Australia, while Leon Rebello serves as the MP for McPherson, Gold Coast, Queensland. Both

have family ties to Goa and are seen as rising stars in Australian politics.

Sawaikar concluded his letters by wishing them continued success and reaffirming the State government's desire to strengthen ties with the Goan diaspora. "May your efforts bring comfort and progress to Australia and also benefit the Goan community living there," he said.



The Goa government started a "zero bill scheme" in August 2021. Under this scheme, households that used less than 16,000 litres (16 cubic metres) of water per month did not have to pay any water bill, their water was free. The Goa government has now stopped this scheme. Herald Media asked citizens for their opinion on this rollback

## WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE GOVT STOPPING THE FREE WATER SUPPLY SCHEME?

“This free water scheme was adopted by aping the AAP government. AAP government at that time had promised free water and electricity. This government adopted it just to ape them, without knowing how they will be able to manage it. And the promises which they had made, they had to bury them under the ground. The free water supply scheme has now been stopped. I'm not at all surprised, because I know that some politicians can promise you milk through the tap but it is for the people to understand who are those who are perennially telling lies to the common people.

— Anthony D'Silva, social activist

“They had initially initiated the scheme of free water but after the outside mega projects have come in, the investors have put farm houses and swimming pools for their mega projects. Because the water is less for them, because they are getting revenue from them, they want to divert the water at tax payers' cost. So is this the reason why they are stopping the free water scheme for the poor? Just a few days back they have proposed to hike the electricity charges and now the free water has been stopped.

— Mariano Ferrao, social activist

“Cancelling the free water scheme is absolutely the biggest disaster. It only exposes the cruelty of this government. Now the free water scheme was meant for the common man and the poorest of the poor. And water is the basic need of anyone. If the government is withdrawing it, what is the message the government is sending out? That you are not bothered about the downtrodden. You are out to crush the common man. The people should make a studied decision in 2027 without getting emotional.

— Trajano D'Mello, political commentator



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