

Parched in Salcete: P'yats slam govt for water crisis

Betalbatim village grappling with poor water supply for 15 days; authorities accused of ignoring pleas while continuing to approve commercial projects

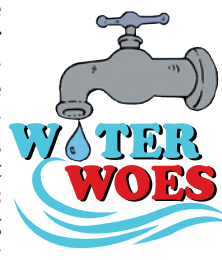
Team Herald

MARGAO: Against the backdrop of a 15-day-long water shortage, the Betalbatim panchayat has strongly criticised the Public Works Department (PWD), Town and Country Planning (TCP), Water Resources Department (WRD), and other concerned authorities for failing to respond to their repeated requests for holistic solutions to the village's infrastructure issues.

While the water shortage remained the most pressing concern, panchayat members — including Deputy Sarpanch Ilma Dias, panch member Viola Pacheco, and others — blamed various government departments for consistently failing to act on public grievance complaints in a timely manner.

They noted that the public often blames the panchayat, without realising that it has limited powers. Water supply falls under the purview of the PWD and WRD, while the TCP continues to push for clearances of commercial projects that are further straining the village's already overstretched resources.

Later in the day, Sarpanch Anthony Fernandes briefed the media and expressed frustration that despite the panchayat's decision to withhold project licences due to shortages of water, power, and other essentials, government departments continue to return the files and insist that the panchayat secretary approve them on technical grounds



RESTRICTED WATER SUPPLY TODAY

Due to a leak in the 1200 mm pipeline of the Selaulim Water Supply Project at Verna, water supply will be restricted on May 15, 2025, across Mormugao taluka (Cortalim, Dabolim, Vasco, Mormugao constituencies) and parts of Salcete (Benaulim, Nuvem, Curtorim) and St. Andre constituencies

IF STATE HAS ENOUGH WATER, WHY IS IT NOT BEING RELEASED, ASKS SOUTH GOA MP

Team Herald

MARGAO: Amidst the growing water scarcity affecting the state, South Goa MP Captain Viriato Fernandes met with Public Works Department (PWD) officials on Wednesday to address the urgent issue.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting at Altinho in the city, he said, "The entire state of Goa is facing a shortage of drinking water. We keep hearing statements that there is no need to worry as there is sufficient water available. If that's the case, then why isn't it being released? What we're seeing is a pick-and-choose system being adopted in every constituency — while some areas are receiving water, others are left dry."

"A few months ago, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant stated that every

household would receive water for four hours a day. Earlier, the same CM had promised 24-hour water supply. This situation arises because the government has no vision. It has completely failed," he added.

The MP pointed out that even the constituency of the Water Resources Minister is facing a shortage, yet the minister continues to claim there is adequate water storage in the State. "This cannot continue. We will review the situation and demand that the government come out with a comprehensive master plan. We are being denied basic necessities like water and electricity. The government's only intention is to fool the people," Fernandes said. Meanwhile, Pernem MLA Pravin Arlekar, who also visited the PWD office, claimed that there was no water shortage in his constituency.

— or face suspension.

Fernandes said this system was flawed and urged the authorities to take greater cognisance of public concerns.

On the water shortage issue specifically, the panchayat said it has been consistently following up with

authorities, but has only received unreliable assurances. Residents remain without water and continue to call panchayat members seeking answers.

They noted that while some locals are managing by drawing water from community wells, the situation

is not sustainable for much longer.

The members added that the issue isn't new — it has persisted for over two and a half years — but it has come into sharp focus in the last two weeks.

The Sarpanch explained that the current shortage was due to a breakdown at Verna. After residents protested on the roads on Wednesday, water was briefly restored that night, but supply stopped again by Thursday.

He also criticised the way contractors have been handling pipeline repairs, alleging that faulty pipe joining results in low pressure, which then affects the entire village's supply. While authorities may consider their job done once water is restored, Fernandes said the weak pressure means water doesn't reach the first or second floors of many houses.

Panchayat members further questioned how authorities continue to approve mega and commercial projects when the village is grappling with basic infrastructure problems. They expressed frustration over the disconnect between development approvals and the on-ground realities.

The water shortage issue, however, is not limited to Betalbatim or even Salcete, but extends to Mormugao taluka, where several areas continue to face similar problems.

Here too, residents have been dealing with erratic supply for nearly ten days, significantly affecting their daily routines.

While the PWD has identified the fault at the Verna pipeline and initiated repairs, locals are angry that authorities have not checked on how people are coping — especially during the peak summer heat.

Years of digging, no delivery: Colva STP connections delayed yet again

Team Herald

MARGAO: Locals are frustrated with the Sewerage Department over yet another delay in completing connections to the Colva Sewerage Treatment Plant (STP), especially in light of the relentless road digging that has gone on for years.

While the Colva STP was supposed to complete its connection drive to establishments by March 31, residents and commercial property owners have now been informed that the work will not be completed this month and will only resume after the monsoon.

This news has irked locals, many of whom have already carried out the masonry and plumbing work to connect to the STP. "We were told that the deadline was March 31 and our water connections would be cut if we didn't connect to the STP. I've spent over a lakh on masonry and even closed my business to complete this, and now they say we can only connect to the sewerage network next year," said an annoyed restaurant owner from Colva. During an inspection held earlier this week, they were informed that the roads would be temporarily restored and that the remain-



Ongoing sewerage work near the Colva fish market on Wednesday

ing connection work would be put on hold.

Speaking to O'Heraldo, Benaulim MLA Venzy Viegas was also critical of the Sewerage Department, stating that, unlike other departments such as the PWD, which may miss deadlines by a week or two, the Sewerage Department often overshoots deadlines by more than 10 months.

"The STP work was originally supposed to be completed two years ago," he said. Viegas also criticised the government for allegedly delaying payments to contractors, referring to a recent press briefing by PWD contractors highlighting this issue.

Regarding the Colva STP, Viegas said that establishments in the fourth ward, where the STP is located, have mostly re-

ceived connections. Two government-run toilets near the beach have also been connected. The pending issue, he said, involves completing manhole works along a 500-metre stretch starting from the main Colva circle. Of the 11 manholes that were to be constructed, only four have been completed so far, with work on two more expected to be done in the coming days. He assured that after this phase, the roads will be restored and tarred to avoid further deterioration during the monsoon.

Viegas added that he is personally monitoring the issue and pointed out that the Sewerage Department has failed to honour written assurances it had made to the court — let alone to the public.

Tiatrists upset as Ravindra Bhavan set to shut for repairs yet again

Team Herald

MARGAO: In order to upgrade the facilities at Ravindra Bhavan, Margao (RBM), and make it more suitable as a venue for hosting programmes of the upcoming International Film Festival of India (IFFI), a number of repair and renovation works are being undertaken at the premier cultural centre.

RBM Chairman Rajendra Talak confirmed this while speaking to media persons on Wednesday. Talak also addressed the immediate concerns of tiatrists, given that the main auditorium will remain shut for two months, from July to August.

While he explained that consultations with tiatrists have been held and that a system is in place to manage hall bookings in view of the heightened demand for slots, he emphasised that the repairs and refurbishments are the need of the hour.



RBM was also closed for renovations last October

He cited examples of areas requiring urgent attention, such as leaks in the roof and ceiling, which are currently being fixed.

Talak also noted that the screen, projectors, and other facilities have become outdated in light of technological advancements, and need to be upgraded if RBM is to serve as a suitable host for IFFI-related programmes.

He further stated that the PWD is carrying out works at the annexure building, and that plans for its utilisation will be announced after a forth-

coming committee meeting.

Interestingly, later in the day, artist Vishal Pai Cacode — a former member of the Entertainment Society of Goa (ESG) governing body — strongly criticised RBM for undertaking yet another round of repairs. He alleged that the cultural institute was spending more on renovation than on fulfilling its core objective of promoting art and culture.

Cacode referred to repairs carried out not only last year, but over the past five years, and questioned the total expenditure,

claiming it could be as high as Rs 5-10 crore.

He called for transparency in the current repair works, including disclosure of the contractor's name. Cacode also questioned the plan to convert the main auditorium into an IFFI venue,

arguing that the Pai Tiatrist Hall was built specifically to host tiatrs and dramas, and expressed concern that such events may lose out if facilities are altered to suit film screenings.

He further asked why the RBM annexure building is not being used to conduct workshops in music, dance, and theatre for local artists.

Finally, Cacode criticised RBM for reportedly spending 60% of its budget on bringing in artistes from outside Goa for programmes, while sidelining local talent.

Only 10 Goan students make ISRO cut, sparking calls for edu reform

Team Herald

MARGAO: The recent announcement of student selections for the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) prestigious YUVIKA 2025 programme has sparked concerns in Goa over the State's minimal representation.

Of the 350 students selected nationwide, only 10 are from Goa — and just four of those bear distinctly Goan names — prompting criticism from youth leaders and civil society groups.

Prabhav Naik, spokesperson for the citizen group Madganvcho Awaaz, raised serious questions about the efficacy of Goa's educational outreach and mentorship programmes.

"This stark underrepresentation is not just a matter of numbers; it reflects deeper issues in awareness, access, and preparation for

Are we truly reaching every corner of Goa, or are national opportunities becoming accessible only to a privileged few? Systemic reforms are essential to ensure equitable representation on national platforms — Prabhav Naik, spokesperson, Madganvcho Awaaz

national-level academic platforms," Naik said in a press statement.

The YUVIKA programme, launched by ISRO to ignite scientific interest among young students, is regarded as a stepping stone for future careers in science and technology.

However, Naik argued that the state's dismal participation indicates a systemic failure to inform and equip Goan students — especially those from rural and underprivileged backgrounds — to compete on such platforms.

"Year after year, promises are made about improving coaching and support systems for students in Goa. But the results tell a differ-

ent story," he added. "Where is the accountability? What are the mechanisms in place to identify and mentor talent from across the state?"

Naik called upon the Directorate of Education and other relevant bodies to publish detailed data on student outreach, district-wise applications, and selection rates.

He also urged the government to implement stronger mentorship initiatives, awareness campaigns, and targeted coaching in government schools to bridge the gap.

While congratulating the selected students, Madganvcho Awaaz and citizens will submit a memorandum urging better science education and competitive prep for Goan students.

NIO to conduct new beach-carrying capacity study

MARGAO: Ahead of the upcoming tourism season, the Goa Coastal Zone Management Authority (GCZMA) has commissioned the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) to reassess the State's beach-carrying capacity. The study will determine how many temporary tourism structures—such as beach shacks, tents, and cottages—can be sustainably allowed without harming the fragile coastal ecosystem.

NIO will factor in ecological constraints, Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) norms, and no-development zones. The findings will help regulate the density of tourism structures while protecting sensitive areas like estuaries, creeks, and river mouths.

The last such study was conducted in 2017 by the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM), which recommended a cap of 1,131 shacks, though only about 360 are permitted annually. That report advised allocating no more than 33% of usable beach space for shacks, excluding ecologically fragile zones and areas reserved for public access or fishing.

Benaulim farmers harvest paddy despite western bypass slicing through Tolleaband

Team Herald

MARGAO: Three years after the western bypass carved a path through the Tolleaband water catchment area, Benaulim's farmers continue to return to their ancestral fields, reporting a moderate paddy yield this season thanks to a shift toward mechanised farming.

The massive embankment built to support the bypass has split the water body in two, but this has not stopped cultivation. Farmers were seen operating mechanical harvesters across the fields this week, signalling a quiet yet determined resilience.

Raymond Costa, one of the cultivators, said in a comment to the media that the season had brought in a decent harvest. "We're satisfied with what we've managed. It's the result of our collective effort," he said. Costa explained that the group had moved toward machine-assisted farming to reduce labour and increase productivity.

These fields were once killed by our elders. We've carried on despite new challenges. The bypass wall has changed the landscape, but it hasn't broken our spirit — John Barretto, Benaulim

"Fr George Quadros supported us by arranging mechanical transplanters, and we hired harvesters from Moreno Rebello. The outcome has been encouraging," he noted.

Elderly farmer John Barretto also spoke about the continuity of farming traditions in the area. In a comment to the media, he said, "These fields were once killed by our elders. We've carried on despite new challenges. The bypass wall has changed the landscape, but it hasn't broken our spirit."

Barretto recalled how local farmers had repeatedly requested that the bypass be constructed on stilts to protect the wetland's ecology and flow. "Those appeals were

not heeded. Still, we kept going. We've faced numerous hurdles, but we remain committed to farming," he added.

While farmers prepare to return to their fields after the monsoon, residents of Khareband and Benaulim are increasingly anxious about potential flooding. The bypass embankment has restricted water flow, and no flood mitigation steps have been put in place on the ground.

Although the expert, R K Pandey, who was deputed by the Union Highway Ministry, had recommended a detailed drainage plan for the area, including additional culverts, these proposals remain unimplemented. The Sal river also hasn't been desilted, raising fears of fresh inundation during the rains.

As another monsoon approaches, many worry that the consequences of the altered water system—and the government's inaction—will again be felt across the flood-prone lowlands.



PANJIM: Chief Minister Pramod Sawant has stated that the police investigation into the Lairai Zatra stampede will continue and that those found guilty will be punished. He also said that show-cause notices will be issued to government officials who failed in their duties. The Chief Minister attributed responsibility for the incident to the temple committee, district administration, village panchayat, district police, and even crowd behaviour. But is this enough?

IS THE ACTION PROMISED BY CM IN THE LAIRAI ZATRA STAMPEDE ENOUGH?

The Temple Committee is preoccupied with its own rituals, while the police are tasked with handling pickpockets and managing various aspects of crowd control. What the Chief Minister's statement fails to address is the interference by local politicians—possibly even area MLAs—who often override the safeguards recommended by the police and Disaster Management authorities. This kind of political interference can ultimately lead to disaster. The greatest responsibility, however, lies with all of us. In the case of the Lairai incident, I would place the blame not on any single organisation—they all did what they could. Instead, we must acknowledge the behaviour of the devotees themselves. What we often see is borderline hooliganism: people booing others, passing inappropriate comments—behaviour that is simply not acceptable at a religious event — Sanjeev Sardesai, hands-on historian

I hope that concrete action is taken and that this doesn't end up as a mere eyewash by simply transferring an SP or a few officers. Those responsible must be brought to book. This was the first time the Lairai Devi Zatra was declared a State festival, and it is the Chief Minister's duty to ensure that justice is served for the six lives lost. Many zatras take place across the state with large crowds. I myself visited the Lairai Devi Zatra just a few hours earlier, and we had a peaceful darshan. This tragedy should not be politicised. The Chief Minister must ensure a thorough inquiry is conducted and that strict action is taken against those found guilty — Dattaprasad Naik, independent politician

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Those who are responsible must certainly be brought to book. But before that—and equally, if not more importantly—the Chief Minister of Goa must take responsibility for the failure to implement precautionary measures in advance, for the lack of proper planning, and for inadequate disaster management at such large-scale events. Shifting the blame onto others does not help the State. This is not an isolated case; there have been multiple instances where the CM has failed to ensure that officials take adequate preventive steps. The blame should not stop at the grassroots level—the buck must stop at the top — Anthony D'Silva, social activist