

People's power prevails in Curtorim, P'yat to revoke nod to 'mega project'

Villagers protest against the panchayat's approval to a large residential building without a pre-body meeting or mandatory site inspection by local ward member

Team Herald

MARGAO: Bowing to intense pressure from villagers, the Curtorim Panchayat has revoked its approval for a controversial mega housing project at Gogalli, Maina-Curtorim.

The move came after a strong protest staged by former Zilla Panchayat Member and Congress leader Moreno Rebelo, who was joined by anxious villagers during the General Panchayat Body meeting.

The project drew public backlash following allegations of illegal tree felling, which caused significant and permanent damage to the land. Upon receiving a complaint, the Forest

COSTLY MISTAKES	
■ Project drew backlash after the landowner allegedly felled trees illegally, causing permanent damage to the land	■ Villagers question how the mega residential construction project received approval without even a site visit by the authorities
■ None of the panchayat members—including the local panch who resides just 100 metres from the site—admitted to having any knowledge of the project	

Department launched an investigation, registered a case against the landowner for illegal activities, and instructed the panchayat to issue a stop-work order.

What particularly angered villagers was the manner in which the project was approved. Residents questioned how such a large

construction project received permission without a pre-body meeting or the mandatory site inspection by the local ward member.

In a startling revelation during the meeting, none of the panchayat members—including the local panch who resides just 100 metres from the site—admitted to

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having any knowledge of the project.

Under sustained public pressure and widespread criticism, the panchayat ultimately revoked the construction approval. The decision was met with applause from residents, who saw it as a victory for grass-

roots activism and environmental protection.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Moreno Rebelo stated, “This is not just a victory for the people of Maina, but a strong message that the villagers of Curtorim will not allow illegal constructions or backdoor approvals that harm our environment and violate democratic processes.”

The incident is being seen as a turning point in Curtorim, where increasing public awareness and community participation are holding local authorities accountable. Villagers have vowed to remain vigilant against any future attempts at unauthorised development.

Water crisis: MP demands WRD Minister's resignation

Activists, citizens blame 'rampant construction' for scarcity, slam govt for not providing basic amenities

Team Herald

MARGAO: Several parts of South Goa have been reeling under acute water shortage over the past few days, with residents continuing reporting that only a trickle, if any, is coming through their taps.

The crisis has led to growing public frustration and criticism, particularly directed at the government's handling of urban development and resource management.

Reacting to the issue, South Goa's Member of Parliament Viriato Fernandes remarked that the government has no vision on the water crisis. “Har Ghar Jal, Har Ghar Nal” has gone to dust. Even the Water Resources Department Minister's own constituency is facing water shortage — schools don't have water. If this continues, a day will come when people will beat up MLAs out of frustration,” he said.

He demanded Minister Subhash Shirodkar's resignation over mismanagement. Social activist Judith Almeida accused the authorities of prioritising unchecked development over the basic needs of residents.

Speaking to reporters, Almeida blamed the proliferation of mega construction projects and an ever-increasing number of hotels and guest houses for placing an unsustainable burden on the region's already strained water infrastructure.

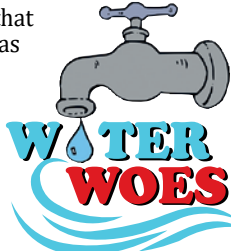
“The government has given a free hand to builders and developers, allowing large-scale projects to mushroom all over South Goa,” Almeida said. “These projects are consuming massive amounts of water, while common Goans are left to suffer with dry taps. It's shameful that the basic right to water is being denied to residents in their own homes.”

Almeida also pointed out that areas like Colva, which historically never faced water scarcity, are now struggling. “In the past, Colva village never used to experience water shortages. Today, the situation is completely different. The government of Goa should be very conscious that the entire State is facing a water shortage crisis,” she warned.

The water scarcity has affected areas including Benaulim, Colva, Navelim, Varca, and Fatorda. Residents have had to rely on water tankers and improvised storage solutions, with daily routines thrown into disarray. Shohail Furtado, a resident of Varca, expressed his frustration: “We've had to wake

“Har Ghar Jal, Har Ghar Nal has gone to dust. Even the WRD Minister's own constituency is facing water shortage — schools don't have water. If he (Subhash Shirodkar) cannot provide water, he should resign – Viriato Fernandes, South Goa MP

“The government has given a free hand to builders and developers, allowing large-scale projects to mushroom all over South Goa. These projects are consuming massive amounts of water, while common Goans are left to suffer with dry taps – Judith Almeida, social activist



TAKING A STAND



Congress functionaries and local activists hold up defaced photos of Madhya Pradesh Minister Vijay Shah during a protest held outside the Margao Municipal Council on Wednesday. The group demanded that he be sacked and arrested for his communal remarks against an Indian army colonel

Citizens protest MP minister's Islamophobic comments

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Margao Congress Block on Thursday staged a protest condemning the remarks made by Madhya Pradesh BJP Minister Vijay Shah, who allegedly referred to Indian Army officer Col. Sofia Qureshi as the “sister of terrorists.”

The protestors demanded Shah's immediate sacking and arrest, accusing him of making divisive and communal statements.

Led by Block Convener Savio Coutinho, a group of Congress leaders and supporters gathered outside the Margao Municipal Council building, shouting slogans and burning effigies of the Minister. Among the participants were Adv. Snehal Onkar, Arch Carlos Gracias, Lalan Parsekar, Anwar Naroo, Loyola Rodrigues, Agostinho Gama, Damodar Onkar, Mathin Carol, Anel Alvares, Anees Tanwar, Aziz Shah, and others.

Coutinho hailed the Madhya Pradesh High Court's decision to take suo motu cognisance of the matter. The division bench comprising Justice Atul Sreedharan and Justice Anuradha Shukla had ordered an FIR to be registered against Shah, sharply criticising his comments as “cancerous and dangerous.”

“The BJP should hang its head in shame. The court has rightly acknowledged that the armed forces are perhaps the last bastion of integrity and selflessness in this country, and such forces are now being targeted,” Coutinho said.

He quoted the court's observation that the Minister's statement could give the impression that, regardless of one's selfless service to the nation, a person could still be derided solely due to their Muslim faith.

Calling Shah's remarks an attempt to spread communal hatred, the Congress leaders asserted that such rhetoric has no place in Indian politics. “Vijay Shah deserves to be behind bars, not in office enjoying public-funded luxuries,” Coutinho added.

The protest concluded with a renewed call for Shah's dismissal from the Cabinet and for criminal action to be taken against him.

Goan drivers undercut by app taxis, complain cabbies

Team Herald

MARGAO: Taxi operators from across Goa on Thursday submitted a memorandum to South Goa MP Capt. Viriato Fernandes, voicing concern over the unchecked growth of app-based platforms like Goa Miles, which they say are threatening their livelihoods and destabilising the traditional taxi system.

The unions claimed that over one lakh local taxi operators are struggling to survive due to aggressive undercutting by app-based services. “These platforms charge nearly 30% less than the government's gazetted fares. If official rates are in place, why are they allowed to violate them?” asked Sunil Naik, a taxi operator.

He stressed that local drivers are not just service providers but community members — fathers, mothers, brothers — who follow legal norms but are now being sidelined by a system that allegedly favours “outside operators.”

A major grievance raised was that app-based taxis are largely run by migrants who allegedly receive permits with ease, while Goan youth remain unemployed. Safety was another concern,



TAXI UNIONS' DEMANDS

- Strict enforcement of gazetted fare rates for all taxi services
- Priority permit allocation for Goans
- Stricter regulation of migrant entry into the sector
- Mandatory consultation with local taxi bodies before introducing or expanding tech-based platforms
- A Goa-specific, sustainable transport policy
- A reassessment of the impact of app-based services on livelihoods and safety

with drivers of these platforms reportedly parking in

residential areas for hours, without proper verification. “We don't know who these drivers are or what their intentions might be,” the memorandum read.

The unions warned that the situation has left many Goan families in financial distress.

MP Fernandes assured the unions he would raise the issue at appropriate levels. Criticising the government's inaction on key issues including the water crisis and transport concerns, he warned that ignoring the plight of local taxi operators — who were once central to tourism — could spark public unrest. He said he would write to the Prime Minister on the matter and hold government officials accountable for failing to reform the taxi system.

Salgaocar begins operations at Shirgao, Goa's third active mining block

Team Herald

PANJIM: Salgaocar Shipping Company Private Limited has commenced mining operations at the Shirgao mineral block, making it the third operational block in Goa after Vedanta Limited's Bicholim-Mulgao block and Fomento Resources' Advalpale-Tivim block.

Director of Mines and Geology Narayan Gad said a 150-metre buffer zone around the Shree Lairai Devi temple and an 80-metre buffer from Dhondachi Tali have been mandated, with mining prohibited in these areas under lease conditions.

Two more blocks—one allot-

ted to Rajaram Bandekar Mining Private Ltd at Shirgao and another to Jindal Steel Works (JSW) at Cudnem-Cormolem—are expected to be operational within a month. Production agreements are signed and lease deeds will follow shortly.

Block No. 8 at Tivim-Pirna, awarded to Kai International, has secured all clearances and is awaiting final consent to operate. Blocks 4 (Fomento), 7 (Vedanta), and 9 (JSW) are awaiting environmental clearances from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. Gad said nine out of 12 auctioned blocks will be operational soon.

Three recently auctioned

blocks are also undergoing the permissions process. Chief Minister Pramod Sawant and Chief Secretary V. Candavelu are regularly reviewing progress with leaseholders and departments to expedite approvals.

Twelve blocks have a combined EC cap of 12 million tonnes annually, with an additional 8 million tonnes still available for auction under the Supreme Court's 20 million tonne limit.

The department has received around Rs 250 crore in upfront payments from the 12 blocks, and companies like Vedanta and Fomento have started paying royalties, said Gad.

Despite ban, road digging for cabling continues in Cuncolim

Local residents allege that contractors for the electricity dept have dug up both sides of the road; call for PWD officials to enforce their digging deadline

Team Herald

CUNCOLIM: The Public Works Department (PWD) had announced a State-wide ban on road digging starting from May 15, continuing until the end of the monsoon season. However, in a blatant violation of this directive, underground electricity cable work is being carried out in full swing in Cuncolim constituency, with the contractor showing no regard for the ban.

Heavy machinery has been used to dig roads from Cuncolim Industrial Estate to Ambaulim over the past two days—both before and after the ban officially came into effect. When questioned, officials present at the site claimed that the government order “does not apply to them.”

A copy of the PWD's ban on road digging has been sent to the Chief Minister and the Minister for Public Works. Yet, the contractor hired for laying underground power cables has continued to dig up both sides of the road, with no visible attempt by the authorities to stop the activity.



Locals allege that despite being fully aware of the ongoing violation, PWD officials have failed to take any corrective measures. “The officers are witnessing this unlawful work in broad daylight but lack the courage to intervene,” said a local resident.

Residents are also pointing out that the same contractor had carried out similar digging work during last year's monsoon, causing immense inconvenience to motorists. After the digging, the roads were poorly filled with loose soil, creating hazardous driving conditions. The situation now threatens to repeat itself.

With road surfaces destabilised and soil spilling onto thoroughfares, the risk of accidents

has increased, prompting renewed calls for accountability.

Locals are demanding that the PWD take immediate action against the contractor for defying the government's directive. They have also urged that the damaged stretch be properly restored using hot-mix asphalt, instead of temporary or unsafe patchwork.

“The PWD must enforce its own orders, penalise the contractor for flouting the rules, and ensure that no further digging takes place until the monsoon is over,” said another resident.

There is growing public pressure for strict enforcement and visible deterrents to prevent such violations from continuing unchecked.

Unsafe bus halts, poor regulation: Awareness drive flags hazards at Margao KTC bus stand

Team Herald

MARGAO: A Global Road Safety Awareness Drive was recently held at the KTC Bus Stand in Margao, aimed at improving safety measures and streamlining bus operations.

The initiative was organised by GOACAN (Goa Civic and Consumer Action Network) and supported by officials from the relevant government departments.

The drive focused on highlighting several pressing issues related to road safety and the functioning of the bus stand.

Lorna Fernandes, a representative of GOACAN, expressed concern over the current state of affairs at the bus terminal.



GOACAN activists and local policemen at the awareness drive at Margao bus stand on Wednesday

“We have observed that some buses remain parked at the stand long after picking up passengers, causing congestion and operational mismanagement. Moreover, the practice of private buses stopping along the roadside to pick up passengers is extremely dangerous and requires urgent attention,” she said.

Such unauthorised

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halts by private buses not only disrupt the flow of traffic but also pose a serious risk to both commuters and

pedestrians. Fernandes emphasised the need for strict enforcement of designated stopping areas and improved coordi-

nation among transport authorities.

Officials present during the drive took note of the concerns raised and assured that necessary measures would be taken. Suggestions included improving traffic regulation, installing proper signage, and clearly designating parking and stopping zones for buses to minimise confusion and enhance passenger safety.

The awareness drive also encouraged public participation and urged commuters to report unsafe practices to the authorities. GOACAN continues to play an active role in advocating for safer roads and more accountable public transport services in Goa.