

Velsao livid as cops summon sarpanch over rly plaint

Four face criminal charges for preventing railway contractor from carrying out double tracking work on disputed land - a long traditional pathway to ancestral houses, without which the residents are landlocked

KARSTEN MIRANDA

MARGAO: As Goa celebrated Statehood Day, the situation was quite grim in Velsao, where locals not only felt abandoned by the State but were also prosecuted by the same authorities from whom they have been seeking relief regarding the railway project. It doesn't matter what the public occasion is - be it Christmas, Easter or Statehood Day - they have to deal with problems that are only growing worse over time, they rue.

In what is seen as the latest setback and potentially a move to silence them, four people, including the Velsao village sarpanch and an affected landowner, have received police summons after an FIR was filed based on a complaint by the Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL) contractor for blocking workers from carrying out work in disputed property near railway tracks, allegedly causing financial losses.

The disputed property is a long traditional pathway to ancestral houses situated opposite the tracks. No land acquisition was done for this area by the railways, and without this pathway, residents are landlocked.

Prior inspections by the Vasco talathi have confirmed that filling the traditional pathway with rubble and



No way for the villagers of Prameirovaddo to use their Right of Way; mud dumped outside ancestral homes of velsao residents (R); traditional drains that have served the village for decades have allegedly been damaged by the railway workers, sparking fears of flooding

raising its height compared to nearby houses has hindered locals and left them landlocked. For months, locals have complained about denial of access to their homes causing great hardship. A vehicle parked in front of one resident's house was towed away and a case filed. Locals cannot bring in vehicles for medical emergencies or transport essential commodities.

The four who received summons for blocking the

RVNL contractor executing double tracking work for South Western Railway are Maria Diana Gouveia, Velsao sarpanch; Sandra Rodrigues, whose house is near the tracks and whose land is claimed by Railways; Orville Dorado Rodrigues, Goencho Ekvott founder and Prameirovaddo Velsao resident; and Olencio Simoes, GE general secretary who supported the protest. Sandra has filed numerous complaints to authorities listing

how she is landlocked, denied access, and affected by mud dumping. Recent rains caused sludge to move into her property and blocked drainage.

Since January, a Land Survey Court case has been ongoing between locals and railways over land ownership. Locals have property documents proving ownership while railways do not. Despite complaints about land encroachment, intimidation and denial of basic

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rights, police have not entertained local complaints but instead sided with railways and accompanied railway officials during work.

The village panchayat issued stop work orders, dismissed by railways who continued work despite the orders remaining in force. While the Land Survey Court is yet to rule on ownership, police registered the FIR based on the contractor's complaint alleging locals encroached on their own property.

According to locals, this case stems from an incident that took place on March 7, 2025, when they allege that the RVNL contractor allegedly criminally tres-

passed into Velsao village panchayat's jurisdiction and attempted to dump mud on this traditional pathway for double tracking construction despite villagers submitting land records from the Revenue Department showing they own land up to the railway line according to Portuguese-era records - Matriz and Inscription & Description documents which, they pointed out, are valid land titles.

"This area was used as Right of Way since the 1890s and for over 60 years was a motorable road where the contractor dumped mud, industrial waste and construction debris," the locals lamented.



"The case is like filing a complaint against the owner for trespassing on his property. So no action



is taken on the complaints the residents have filed and of all the criminal activity taking place in this state? The police want to register cases against Niz Goemkars, who are standing up for their rights. Do they expect the residents to just sit and watch what is happening? There is talk now of the railways breaking down their compound walls to get more space for their work. Should the affected residents not fight back? Who is supposed to entertain their complaints? Railways complain and it's given top priority. Is this the government for the people or the railways?" said Olencio Simoes.

Locals pointed out that South Western Railways (SWR) have taken 46 respondents to the Inspector

of Survey & Land Records Court in Margao since January 2025. On ISLR advice, villagers filed a civil suit at Margao District Court in January 2025.

"Railways have no documents to prove title to the disputed land which doesn't have a survey number when the area was promulgated in 1973. Cadastral plans of the three revenue villages of Velsao, Pale & Issorcim have gone missing," alleged Orville Rodrigues.

When locals approached police for relief, officers said they were only doing their duty and advised getting a stay order from court or appropriate authority for relief.

Despite facing criminal charges, locals say they will not be silenced even as government machinery is being used against them rather than for them.

Investment Board 'fast tracked' resort nod, alleges NGO

Team Herald

MARGAO: The United Goans Foundation (UGF) has filed a formal complaint against the Goa Investment Promotion Board (IPB), accusing it of gross negligence, procedural violations, and wilful misconduct in approving an integrated resort project by M/s Delta Corp Limited in Dhargalim village, Pernem.

The complaint, submitted by UGF president Ashish Kamat, has been addressed to Chief Minister Pramod Sawant—who also chairs the IPB—along with Chief Secretary Dr V. Candevellu, Secretary (Revenue) Sandeep Jacques, and other board members.

Kamat has demanded immediate action and a thorough probe into what he alleges is a deliberate bypass-

Files complaint with CM - who chairs the Goa Investment Promotion Board - for gross negligence in overlooking critical facts while granting approval to the project planned in Dhargalim - Pernem

ing of ground realities to fast-track the project in favour of Delta Corp.

He claims that the IPB overlooked several critical irregularities and inconsistencies while clearing the resort proposal.

"From all the available evidence, it is clear that the IPB board, under the leadership of the Chief Minister, intentionally disregarded key facts to hasten the approval process," Kamat stated in the

complaint.

According to the UGF, the approval violates the basic tenets of responsible governance and reflects a compromised decision-making process, possibly driven by vested interests. Documentary evidence has been submitted to support the claims of negligence and procedural lapses.

The foundation has also warned that if no action is taken, it will approach the High Court to challenge the IPB's decision and seek legal action against board members for alleged dereliction of duty.

As the controversy unfolds, the complaint has raised fresh concerns about transparency and accountability in Goa's investment approval process. The state government has yet to respond.

Govt ropes in online travel agencies to help small hoteliers go digital

The collab aims to help businesses expand their market reach, improve visibility, and adapt to today's digital-first travel habits

Team Herald

MARGAO: In a push to bring Goa's small and medium tourism units into the digital age, the Department of Tourism has reached out to the Small and Medium Hoteliers Association of Goa for help identifying businesses that still rely solely on walk-in customers due to lack of online visibility.

The move follows feedback from recent stakeholder consultations, where officials learned that many small hotels, guest houses, and service providers struggle to get listed on Online Travel Agency (OTA) platforms.

Tourism Director Kedar A Naik, in a letter to the association, urged it to compile a list of interested members for a capacity-building workshop the department is organising in collaboration with leading OTAs. The aim: to help businesses expand their market reach, improve visibility, and adapt to today's digital-first travel habits.

TRAVEL AGGREGATOR WEBSITES MUST REGISTER UNDER TOURIST TRADE ACT WITHIN 15 DAYS

MARGAO: The Department of Tourism, Government of Goa, has issued a directive mandating that all Online Travel Aggregators (OTAs) operating in the State register under the Goa Registration of Tourist Trade Act, 1982, and the Rules of 1985. OTAs have been given a deadline of 15 working days from the issuance of the official circular to complete the process.

The move is part of the State government's broader initiative to bring all tourism-related services under a unified regulatory framework. The aim is to enhance oversight, ensure compliance with tourism norms, and

improve the monitoring of accommodation listings across the state.

Tourism Minister Rohan Khaunte stated that OTAs must list only those accommodations—hotels, guesthouses, homestays, and similar properties—that are officially registered with the Goa Tourism Department. The registration process has been streamlined and can be completed online through the department's portal, which provides specific forms for online tourist service providers.

OTAs that fail to comply within the stipulated timeframe may face strict action from the authorities.

Association president Santosh Sangam Divkar welcomed the move, noting that many hoteliers still aren't on OTAs and continue to depend on walk-ins. "Tourism Minister Rohan Khaunte has taken a proactive step by involving top OTAs to help bridge this digital gap," Divkar said.

The upcoming workshops will be split into

two sessions — one for hoteliers already on OTA platforms but seeking help with promotion, and another for those yet to make the digital leap. Divkar also appealed to non-members to step forward, saying, "We're putting this out on social media to reach every hotelier in Goa so no one misses out."

The association had

earlier held meetings in Calangute and Benaulim to gather suggestions, where the extent of digital disconnect among small units became clear.

The tourism department has set a June 6 deadline for nominations. Once the list is submitted, it will finalise the venue and dates in consultation with participating OTAs.

Speaker launches free coaching centre for rural students

MARGAO: Goa Assembly Speaker Ramesh Tawadkar has announced a new residential academic centre to prepare students for national-level entrance exams like NEET and JEE. The initiative builds on a 2008 residential school project for students from Quepem, Sanguem, and Canacona.

The school currently offers education up to Class 12 (Science stream) and will now provide free specialised coaching through a partnership with Acharya Academy, Pune. "Expert faculty from Acharya Academy will train the students, and the entire program will be completely free of cost," Tawadkar said.

The centre will reserve 100 seats for Scheduled Tribes (ST) students and 50 for others. Alongside academics, students will receive mentoring, career guidance, and personality development.

"Our goal is to help students from remote villages compete in medicine and engineering," Tawadkar said. Applications for the first batch will open soon, with selection based on academic merit.

Neglect of Goan cultural icons ruffles feathers on Statehood Day

Team Herald

MARGAO: Ravindra Bhavan, Margao, is facing sharp criticism for sidelining Goan cultural legends during this year's Goa Statehood Day celebrations. Former member of the Entertainment Society of Goa (ESG) and Goa State Cultural Development Committee, Vishal Pai Cacode, has accused the institution of failing in its duty to honour Goa's own stalwarts, and instead choosing to spotlight veteran filmmaker Shyam Benegal.

Pai Cacode expressed deep disappointment that Goan icons such as cinematographer K. Vaikunth, Padma Bhushan awardee Laxman Pai, and Padma Shri cartoonist Mario Miranda were ignored during the celebrations. "This is not just an oversight, it is a grave injustice to the legacy of Goan art and creativity," he said.

All three personalities, born in Salcete taluka, are being commemorated this year as part of their birth centenary. However, no events such as exhibitions, retrospectives, or lectures were held in their honour

While Goan stalwarts like cinematographer K. Vaikunth, Padma Bhushan awardee Laxman Pai, and Padma Shri cartoonist Mario Miranda are being commemorated this year, no events such as exhibitions, retrospectives, or lectures were held in their honour. Instead, Ravindra Bhavan chose to organise a film festival featuring the works of Shyam Benegal, a filmmaker from Karnataka

“Goa Statehood Day is a moment of pride and reflection. It should be about celebrating those who have shaped our identity through art, cinema, literature, and culture”
- Vishal Pai Cacode, artist and former ESG member

Instead, Ravindra Bhavan chose to organise a film festival featuring the works of Shyam Benegal, a filmmaker from Karnataka, on the very day that marks Goa's Statehood.

"Goa Statehood Day is a moment of pride and reflection. It should be about celebrating those who have shaped our identity through art, cinema, literature, and culture," said Pai Cacode, calling the move a continued marginalisation of Goan talent by

the institution's chairman, Rajendra Talak.

He also appealed to Dnyanpeeth awardee Damodar Mauzo, who is scheduled to attend the Shyam Benegal Film Festival, to raise his voice against what he described as a cultural injustice.

In addition to the lack of tributes, Pai Cacode criticised Ravindra Bhavan for failing to start long-promised music, dance, and theatre training classes for children and youth in South Goa. "Our cultural institutions must remember their core responsibility: to celebrate, preserve, and promote the artistic and cultural achievements of Goans," he said.

Calling on Salcete MLAs and the public to demand accountability, Pai Cacode urged collective action to ensure Goa's artists are no longer sidelined.

Agri officials inspect crops damaged by unseasonal rain in Velim

Over 60k sq mtrs of farmland cultivated by 30 farmers affected; MLA Cruz Silva pushes for urgent compensation

Team Herald

MARGAO: Salcete Zonal Agriculture Officer (AAP) Rajesh Da Costa and his team from the Agriculture Department conducted a site visit to assess the extensive crop damage suffered by farmers in the Velim constituency due to the unprecedented and torrential rainfall in May.

The sudden weather change has wreaked havoc on local agriculture, with preliminary estimates indicating that nearly 60,000 square metres of farmland—belonging to over 30 farmers—have been adversely affected. Paddy fields and vegetable plots were among the worst hit, leaving cultivators grappling with significant



losses. Accompanying the inspection was Velim MLA Cruz Silva, who interacted with affected farmers and expressed concern over the extent of the damage. He urged the state government to take swift action by disbursing compensation to the affected cultiva-

tors without delay.

"This is not just a setback to individual farmers but a blow to our local food security," Silva said. "Immediate relief is essential, and we must also work towards long-term solutions to safeguard livelihoods from erratic climate patterns."

Silva assured farmers that he would continue to raise their concerns with the authorities and push for both immediate and sustainable support mechanisms. The Agriculture Department is expected to compile a detailed report following the field visit to facilitate further action.