

# Severe soil erosion at Murdi-Khandepar sparks flooding fears in village

Locals blame illegal sand extraction for situation; fear for their homes, farmland

Team Herald

**PONDA:** Residents of Murdi-Khandepar have raised alarm over major soil erosion along the Khandepar riverbank, which they attribute to illegal sand extraction using suction pumps.

## LIVING ON THE EDGE

A portion of the riverbank, approximately 12 metres in length, collapsed on Wednesday, with an additional 20 metres showing visible cracks—raising fears of further erosion and potential flooding.

Locals, who have long opposed destructive activities in the river basin, warned that the widening of the river caused by erosion would increase the flood risk, particularly during monsoon. "One of the landowners



has already lost his bagayat land to the river due to the erosion," a resident said, adding that others may soon suffer similar losses.

In the past, the villagers had opposed a proposed Rs 100 crore bandhara (weir) at Murdi, fearing it would exacerbate flooding. Following public resistance, the government scrapped the project. However, with

the situation now deteriorating due to unchecked soil erosion, residents are once again concerned about the safety of their homes and farmland.

The Khandepar river, also known as the Dudhsagar river, flows into Goa from Karnataka with considerable force during the monsoon. The village of Murdi Khandepar, along

with nearby areas such as Baga, is highly flood-prone and has witnessed major floods in 1984 and 2021, which left homes inundated and mud houses destroyed.

Locals have repeatedly raised concerns with the authorities, citing illegal sand extraction as the root cause of the ongoing erosion. "We had filed

## LOCALS WANT SAND EXTRACTION ACTIVITIES STOPPED

- On Wednesday, a 12-metre section of the riverbank collapsed, and another 20 metres have developed cracks, heightening the risk of flooding, especially during monsoon
- The locals fear river widening will increase the potential for flooding
- A landowner has already lost agricultural land, and others fear similar losses if the issue is not addressed promptly
- The residents demand a complete halt to sand extraction activities in the flood-prone village
- Emphasise that inaction could lead to devastating consequences during monsoon

complaints last year, and inspections were carried out," a villager stated. However, they claim that illegal operations have continued unabated.

It may be recalled that on March 28, acting on a complaint by local residents, a joint team comprising officials from the Captain of Ports, Ponda Mamlatdar, and Ponda Po-

lice conducted a raid and seized 30 cubic metres of sand illegally stacked on the riverbank at Baga-Khandepar.

Residents have reiterated their demand for a total halt to sand extraction in the flood-prone village, warning that the consequences of inaction could be devastating in the upcoming monsoon.

# Fugitive Siddique withdraws bail plea for mom's death anniversary rituals

Team Herald

**PANJIM:** Fugitive Siddique 'Suleman' Khan on Wednesday withdrew his bail application filed to attend the first death anniversary rituals of his mother, after the High Court of Bombay at Goa expressed its disinclination to entertain the plea.

Khan, currently lodged in the Central Jail at Colvale, had filed a criminal bail application seeking temporary release to perform rituals for his late mother, which included the symbolic act of throwing a handful of soil over her grave. However, upon the High Court's unwillingness to entertain the request, his counsel sought and was granted permission to withdraw the application.

Suleman was arrested by the Special Investigating Team (SIT) of the Crime Branch in connection with multiple land grabbing

Siddique, currently lodged in the Central Jail at Colvale, had filed a criminal bail application seeking temporary release to perform rituals for his late mother, which included the symbolic act of throwing a handful of soil over her grave

cases across Goa. He had earlier escaped from police custody at the Crime Branch lock-up in Ribandar on December 13 last year. He was rearrested ten days later by Goa Police with assistance from Kerala Police in Ernakulam.

His wife, Afšana, has also been arrested in connection with a land grabbing case registered at the Mapusa police station.

Suleman's escape was facilitated by IRB constable Amit Naik, who was subsequently dismissed from service.

# Shack owners seek extension of operations

Team Herald

**PANJIM:** The Shack Owners Welfare Society, Goa, has formally requested the Department of Tourism to extend the current beach shack operational period until Sunday, June 8. The regular season ended on May 31, but the Society has cited exceptional weather conditions and increased tourist footfall as key reasons for the appeal.

In its representation, the Society highlighted the unusually delayed onset of the monsoon, which has resulted in continued favourable weather conditions.

The absence of early rains has created an extended spell of stable and pleasant beach weather—ideal for tourism activities.

The Shack Owners Welfare Society stressed the mutual advantages of an extension, noting that it would benefit not only shack operators, who have made significant investments, but also the broader tourism economy. "An extended period would allow shacks to cater to the ongoing influx of tourists, enhance the visitor experience, and contribute positively to local employment and revenue generation," the Society stated.

# FROM FIELD TO FRYING PAN

SAVIO MADEIRA



Boys gather alongside the Gaunsa vaddo Siolim link road to catch fish from the flooded fields below. The marshy water bodies are now teeming with invasive catfish and tilapia, which are a popular protein-rich fried snack during the monsoon

# MLA vows to revive Margao ESI hospital

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** With the goal of restoring the Margao ESI Hospital to its intended purpose of serving Goa's workforce, MLA Dr Chandrakant Shetye, who heads a government-appointed panel, paid a surprise visit to the facility on Wednesday.

His inspection revealed serious shortcomings in the hospital's operations and infrastructure.

After touring the 100-bedded hospital and engaging with medical staff, Dr Shetye acknowledged that the facility is underperforming and outlined the need for immediate reforms.

He said he would submit a comprehensive report to Labour Minister Atanasio Monserrate, recommending key improvements to upgrade services and revive public trust.

"The hospital is meant to serve over two lakh employees and their families. To bring them back, we must make significant improvements," Dr Shetye stated.

He emphasized ending the current system where employees seek treatment at government hospitals

and later claim reimbursement.

"They should be allowed to do so only if a consultant from ESI certifies in writing that the required service is not available," he added.

Dr Shetye called for the urgent appointment of a full-time Medical Superintendent and more consultants to ensure referred patients receive timely and proper care. "Without specialists to attend to them, patients will not return to ESI," he warned.

The panel also plans to ensure 24x7 availability of basic diagnostic services like lab tests, X-rays, and ECG. Air-conditioning in the operation theatres, improved coordination among departments, and better procurement practices for medicines are also on the agenda.

He stressed the need for tighter coordination among departments and a more accountable system that ensures efficient delivery of services to beneficiaries. "With the right changes, this hospital can once again become a dependable healthcare facility for the working class," he concluded.

# Congress alleges neglect of Saligao-Pilerne road

Team Herald

**CALANGUTE:** Raising serious concerns regarding the condition of the Saligao-Pilerne road, the Saligao Congress Block Committee, in a memorandum submitted to the PWD office, Mapusa, alleged that the road is being deliberately kept in a damaged state.

In the memorandum, the committee stated, "This intentional neglect is to create an opportunity for soliciting bribes from industries in the industrial estate in exchange for making the road serviceable."

While attempting to submit the memorandum, Congress workers, along with North Goa district Congress president Virendra Shirodkar, were allegedly manhandled by police who prevented them from entering the PWD office. Shirodkar's shirt was reportedly torn in the scuffle. The Congress workers also stated that no senior PWD officials were present to address their concerns.

The Saligao-Pilerne road, a usually busy route connecting to the Pilerne Industrial Estate, has been closed to traffic after being dug up and subsequently damaged by recent pre-monsoon rains, causing significant traffic disruptions.

# Court dismisses KA's defamation suit against newspaper

Team Herald

**PANJIM:** The North Goa District Court-3 at Merces has dismissed a Rs 50 lakh defamation suit filed by the Kala Academy against a vernacular newspaper, ruling that the case was barred by limitation and lacked the necessary pleadings and proof to establish defamation. The Court also imposed a fine of Rs 1 lakh on the Kala Academy.

The suit stemmed from a news report published

on June 15, 2020, which alleged that promotions were granted to "inefficient staff" at the Kala Academy without following proper procedures or conducting any inquiry and without the knowledge of the Academy's chairman. The institution claimed that the report was false and malicious, and sought damages of Rs 50 lakh.

However, the following day, the newspaper carried a clarification from the then Member Secretary of Kala Academy, Gurudas Pilarn-

kar, stating that no injustice had been done to the staff.

In its defence, the newspaper argued that the suit was not maintainable as there was no cause of action and the plaintiffs had not served any legal notice prior to filing the suit. It also contended that the suit was an abuse of the legal process and an attempt to infringe on its fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression.

District Judge Apurva R Nagvenkar, in her order, noted that the plaintiffs

proceeded with the suit despite knowing it was time-barred and lacking in essential elements to prove defamation. The court observed that the plaintiffs had failed to examine any of its office-bearers, faculty, students, or members of the public residing or conducting business in the area.

Additionally, the Kala Academy did not submit any office records to demonstrate a decline in student admissions or faculty resignations follow-

ing the publication. Nor was there evidence of any departmental inquiry into the allegations made in the article.

Importantly, the plaintiffs also failed to produce evidence that the Board of Directors had approved Pilarnkar to file the suit on behalf of the institution, which, being an autonomous body registered under the Goa Societies Registration Act, 1860, could not proceed through an individual without proper authorisation.

# Mapusa traffic cell cracks down on rent-a-bike parking

Team Herald

**MAPUSA:** In a bid to tackle mounting traffic congestion and reclaim public parking space, the Mapusa Traffic Cell has issued strict directives against the unregulated parking of rent-a-bike vehicles in the town's market area.

Effective immediately, all rental two-wheelers must be parked only in officially designated zones. The directive follows a spate of complaints from residents and visitors, who have long expressed frustration over the unavailability of parking due to rental vehicles occupying prime public spots—most notably in the Aram Soda zone.

According to Traffic PI Marlon D'Souza, the commercial misuse of public parking has been a major contributor to traffic bottlenecks, particularly during peak hours.

"In fact these rent-a-bike operators occupy prime spaces by showcasing their vehicles in public places leaving very little space for the others," said D'Souza.

**In fact these rent-a-bike operators occupy prime spaces by showcasing their vehicles in public places leaving very little space for the others**  
—Marlon D'Souza, PI, Mapusa Traffic Cell

When they apply for permits, the operators claim that they will park their vehicles in private areas and once they get the go ahead and clearances from the RTO, then they flout the rules and end up on the public road causing inconvenience to other road users, said the PI and added that the drive was conducted along with the RTO officials.

"We want to implement law in letter and spirit a the entire area is designated as pay parking zones by the Mapusa Municipality," stated the PI and added that there is an acute shortage of parking place in the town and the need of the hour is to see that we avoid traffic chaos and confusion basically during peak hours.

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