

# Varca locals call for ban on mega housing projects, cite strain on infrastructure

Demand for carrying-capacity assessment grows as villagers flag overburdened utilities and ecological harm

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Alarmed by the pace of high-density construction in their village, residents of Varca have urged the local panchayat to immediately convene an extraordinary gram sabha to adopt a resolution blocking permissions for multi-unit housing projects until a detailed carrying-capacity study is conducted.

More than 600 villagers have signed a joint appeal submitted by Shohail Furtado, emphasising that the existing infrastructure in the coastal village is already stretched thin. They said further large-scale residential developments would only exacerbate problems in electricity, water supply, waste disposal, and sewerage.

"Our infrastructure is not equipped to handle additional pressure. The village is already facing frequent power cuts and water shortages.

## A VILLAGE PUSHES BACK

Over 600 villagers signed a joint appeal, highlighting that the village's basic infrastructure—electricity, water, sewerage, and waste disposal—is already under severe strain

Residents raised strong objections to construction in

ecologically sensitive zones like khazans, sand dunes, and open fields

Concerns were also raised over inadequate road access and poor planning, with fears that new buildings are contributing to traffic congestion and safety hazards

Sewage from several developments is not being properly treated, raising the risk of contamination and public health concerns," the memorandum stated.

Residents also raised objections to construction activity in ecologically sensitive areas such as khazans, sand dunes, fields, and open land. They argued that these projects not only threaten the natural ecosystem but also compromise the village's cultural and environmental fabric.

They further highlighted concerns over buildings being approved without ensuring adequate road access, which has led to traffic congestion and safety risks for pedestrians and school children.

The villagers want a scientific carrying-capacity analysis to determine whether the area can sustain additional housing, and to identify what upgrades would be required in terms of infrastructure and public services. They have also asked that the study's

findings be made public and that all future planning decisions be aligned with its recommendations.

"No planning permissions for mega housing projects should be considered until this study is completed and reviewed by the public," Furtado said. Meanwhile, former Varca Sarpanch Selu Fernandes, who is a panch member, defended the panchayat amid criticism from a group of locals demanding a special gram sabha.

Fernandes recalled how, during a previous gram sabha, she had urged Varca locals not to sell their land to outsiders. However, no one seemed to listen at the time. Given this, she felt that the current criticism directed at the authorities was misplaced. Fernandes questioned whether the blame should instead fall on those locals selling their properties.

## CHICALIM PANCHAYAT LAUNCHES FIRST VILLAGE-LEVEL 'CARRYING CAPACITY COMMITTEE'

Initiative to assess development limits across Chicalim, Dabolim, and Sao Jacinto

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** In a first-of-its-kind move in the state, the Chicalim Village Panchayat has set up a committee dedicated to studying the carrying capacity of its jurisdiction, which includes the areas of Chicalim, Dabolim, and Sao Jacinto.

Led by sarpanch Kamala Prasad Yadav, the panchayat has brought together all elected representatives along with one nominated member from each ward to form the committee. The team is tasked with charting a framework to evaluate how much development the village can sustain without overburdening its infrastructure and natural resources.

The decision to form the committee

follows a resolution unanimously passed during the gram sabha held on April 13 this year. The resolution underscored the growing need to assess the environmental, infrastructural, and social limits of the village before clearing future projects.

The committee held its first meeting earlier this week to initiate discussions on how the carrying capacity assessment will be conducted and what parameters will be considered.

This proactive step by the Chicalim panchayat comes at a time when several other villages in Goa have raised alarms over unchecked construction and the resulting pressure on essential services like water supply, power infrastructure, waste management, and road connectivity.

## Notify 23 coastal creeks under Irrigation Act: AAP

Calls for eco-restoration strategy to revive polluted water bodies, protect biodiversity

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) legislators renewed their call for the Goa government to notify 23 coastal creeks under the Irrigation Act, warning that continued neglect was leading to severe environmental degradation, stagnation, and pollution.

Benaolim MLA Venzy Viegas said the creeks suffer from a lack of tidal flushing and are increasingly contaminated due to untreated sewage discharge. "Only if these creeks are notified under the Irrigation Act will they be eligible for maintenance and

Only if these creeks are notified under the Irrigation Act will they be eligible for maintenance and restoration funds — Venzy Viegas, Benaolim MLA

restoration funds," he said.

Viegas also slammed the Goa State Biodiversity Board for failing to implement a sand dune restoration plan and urged the government to draft a comprehensive eco-restoration policy. "We need an integrated approach that covers creek manage-

ment, sand dune protection, and biodiversity conservation," he said.

Velim MLA Cruz Silva echoed concerns over the deteriorating state of water bodies, pointing specifically to the River Sal. "Untreated sewage discharge has turned it into one of the most polluted rivers in Goa," Silva said, referring to findings from the Goa State Pollution Control Board.

Both MLAs urged immediate government action to address what they described as a growing ecological crisis in Goa's coastal and riverine areas.

## LITURGICAL MILESTONE



A new edition of the 'Order of Religious Profession' was officially released this week in a solemn function at the Apostolic Nunciature in New Delhi. His Excellency Leopoldo Girelli, Apostolic Nuncio to India and Nepal, handed over the first copy to His Eminence Filipe Neri Cardinal Ferrão, President of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) and the Archbishop of Goa and Daman. The new ritual reflects the renewed theological and spiritual depth of consecrated life in the light of Vatican II Council. It offers a liturgically rich and solemn presentation of the Rite of Religious Profession, honouring the Church's esteem for religious life and consecrated communities

## Tourism's toll on Morjim: Water woes, concretisation and cultural erosion



For many visitors, Morjim is a beachside escape—where the surf kisses the shore, yoga mats dot the sand, and menus come printed in Russian. But for Amisha Shetgaonkar, a 23-year-old environmental researcher born and raised in this village, Morjim is far more than a tourist postcard.

Armed with a Master's degree in Environmental Science and a deep sense of belonging, Shetgaonkar embarked on a journey with Goa Water Stories to uncover what lies beneath Morjim's rapidly changing façade. "Growing up here, I knew the village had a unique charm," she says. "But it was only through this project that I truly began to understand how layered and vulnerable our ecosystem is."

Her research explores the intersection of water, culture, and tourism—how unchecked development is altering not just the landscape, but the community's relationship with its natural resources. What began as a classroom introduction to environmental feminism through a paper on "Gender, Environment, and Ecology" transformed into an immersive project, in collaboration with Asavari Gurav, Elisha D'Souza, Jodan Inacio D'Souza, Natasha James, Siddesh Gaunekar guided by Dr. Sulochana Pednekar of Goa University.

Shetgaonkar's findings are sobering. "Tourism draws enormous volumes of water for hotels and luxury resorts," she says. "In summer, locals are the ones left facing



scarcity. Meanwhile, sewage tanks from these same businesses often leak into groundwater and nearby water bodies."

The damage doesn't stop at contamination. Solid waste is frequently dumped near wells, fields, and rivulets. "Garbage disposal around water sources is shockingly common. It's not just an environmental hazard—it's a threat to public health," she adds.



Scan the QR code to experience Amisha Shetgaonkar's project, 'The impact of tourism on Morjim'

nied environmental degradation. The village's name itself—'Morje' in Konkani—has been reshaped by tourism into its anglicised avatar, 'Morjim'. The name is believed to come from morj, the local word for peacock—an animal once abundant here. "That may just be a folktale, but what isn't fiction is how our identity has been diluted," Shetgaonkar reflects.

Morjim's transformation into 'Little Russia' is emblematic. With over 70% of chartered flights to Goa originating from Russia, Russian-run businesses have multiplied—restaurants, shacks, and guesthouses now sport Cyrillic menus and signboards. "Some locals feel alienated in their own home. There's a sense that the culture being performed for tourists isn't ours anymore," she says.

This influx has triggered deeper shifts. Agricultural lands have

been converted into resorts. Traditional livelihoods, once rooted in fishing, farming, and craftsmanship, are vanishing. Migrant workers have poured into the village, changing the social fabric and creating tension over access to jobs and housing.

"In the name of eco-tourism and sustainable tourism, a lot of irreversible damage has been done," Shetgaonkar points out. "It's not enough to just plant trees or talk about 'green' resorts. We need to critically evaluate the cost of this development."

And yet, for all the loss, her research has also stirred a sense of hope. The stories and mythology she unearthed—about the origins of the village, the forgotten wells, the community rituals—have strengthened her bond with Morjim. "This is my home," she says, "and I want to protect it."

She hopes her work prompts serious conversations about sustainable water use, better tourism policies, and a return to community-led decision-making. "It's about time we listen to the people who have lived here longest—and whose futures are most at stake."

Goa Water Stories is a collaboration with the Living Waters Museum, the Centre for Public Policy and Governance at the Goa Institute of Management, the Goa University and the Sunaparanta Goa Centre for the Arts.

## Margao markets choked with plastic waste despite govt ban

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** In a disturbing contradiction to the government's ongoing campaign to eliminate single-use plastic, Margao's markets are currently drowning in plastic waste.

The sight of overflowing garbage bins and littered plastic bags in the commercial heart of South Goa has raised serious concerns among environmentalists and citizens.

Despite repeated announcements and awareness drives regarding the ban on plastic, ground realities in Margao paint a starkly different picture. The markets, frequented daily by thousands of locals and tourists, are now becoming hotspots of plastic

pollution. Heaps of plastic wrappers carry bags, and packaging materials can be seen clogging corners, drains, and open spaces.

Environmentalists have condemned the state and local authorities for their lack of enforcement.

Savio Fernandes, a prominent environmental advocate, described the situation as "an outright failure of governance." He added, "When a central marketplace like Margao is so heavily polluted, it raises questions about the sincerity and effectiveness of the government's plastic ban initiative."

Echoing similar sentiments, Parag Naik criticized the lack of regular inspections and punitive measures.

"There's been no visible effort to penalise offenders. Traders and vendors continue to use plastic without fear," he said.

Ravindra Shirodkar also expressed concern over the long-term environmental impact. "This is not just a cleanliness issue; this is about the health of our ecosystems," he remarked.

Activists are calling for immediate intervention, including strict enforcement of the plastic ban, imposition of fines on violators, and a coordinated cleanup drive across all market zones.

They also stressed the need for regular public awareness campaigns to educate both vendors and shoppers about the consequences of plastic use.

## Leaders from different faiths form alliance for climate action

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), through its Office for Interreligious Dialogue and its social action wing, Caritas India, participated in the launch of the National Multi-Faith Action Coordination Committee (MFACC), joining as a core member during its inaugural meeting. The meeting was organised by the Global Interfaith WASH Alliance (GIWA) and UNICEF at Parth Niketan, Rishikesh, Uttarakhand.

Fr Dr Anthoniraj Thumma, National Secretary of the CBCI Office for Interreligious Dialogue, and Mr Navneet Yadav, Lead - Humanitarian Action and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) at Caritas India, represented the CBCI Centre and ex-



pressed support for MFACC and its partners, UNICEF and GIWA.

The meeting was attended by leaders from seven major faith traditions, as well as representatives of various faith-based organisations operating across India. The event took place in the presence of former President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, and was held under the guidance of Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswati.

MFACC aims to serve

as a national platform for knowledge sharing, priority setting, and coordinated action in response to social and environmental challenges, including public health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), child protection, education, DRR, and climate action. The committee plans to hold its next meeting in Delhi to develop a detailed action plan and will convene quarterly to review progress.