

# Row over UTТА leadership sparks fresh tribal unrest

Allegations of fraud, illegal elections and misuse of power levelled against tribal alliance executive; charge Prakash Velip, Govind Gaude used platform for personal gain

Team Herald

**PANJIM:** A coalition of prominent Scheduled Tribe (ST) organisations has jointly filed a petition before the District Registrar and Inspector General of Societies (South), challenging the legality of the current executive council of the United Tribals Associations Alliance (UTТА).

Addressing a press conference, Govind Shirodkar of the Gawda, Kunbi, Velip and Dhangar Federation stated that the organisations party to the petition include the All

Goa Scheduled Tribes Union, Tribal Welfare Organisation, Gaud Jatam Mahasangh Goa, Taleigao Tribal Welfare, Gomantak Gaud Maratha Samaj, Tribes of Goa, and Gomantak Velip Samaj Sangh.

Shirodkar said the petition contains serious allegations of fraud, financial mismanagement, and violation of the UTТА's bye-laws by the present leadership headed by Prakash Velip.

"It contests the validity of the election allegedly held on September 30, 2022, stating that no proper notice was served to member as-

sociations, and that many names listed as attendees or members are fraudulent or not affiliated with the alliance," he said.

The petitioners have sought a declaration that the 2022 election is null and void, the appointment of an independent administrator, and an immediate audit of financial records. They have also prayed for ad-interim relief restraining the current executive council from functioning.

Shirodkar further alleged that both Prakash Velip and Minister for Sports, Art and Culture and Rural

Development Govind Gaude have used the UTТА platform for personal gain. He claimed that the existing leadership does not consult other tribal organisations before making decisions.

He also pointed out that Velip has held office for the last seven years, contrary to UTТА's rules. "According to the bylaws, the term of the executive council of UTТА has to be for three years, and no member can continue for two consecutive terms. But Prakash Velip has been there for seven years," Shirodkar said.

## Vendor goes bananas after raid: Breaks FDA seal, flees with seized stock

FDA officials later tracked bananas to a shop near Panjim bus stand; destroy recovered stock

Team Herald

**MAPUSA:** In a blatant violation of FDA orders, a vendor allegedly broke the official seal of a godown and fled with 1.5 tonnes of bananas that had been seized on suspicion of chemical ripening. The pre-dawn incident occurred at 4:25 am on Tuesday, shortly after the Food and Drugs Administration (FDA) had sealed the premises and collected samples for testing.

FDA officials later tracked the bananas to a shop near the Panjim

bus stand, owned by the vendor's brother. The recovered stock was destroyed. The godown owner, identified as Noor Mohammed, has since been detained and will be handed over to the police for further action.

The FDA raid was carried out amid suspicion that the bananas were being ripened using unauthorised chemicals. "We conducted the raid, took samples, and told the vendor that the report would be available by tomorrow. We locked the shop and left. But when we re-

turned this morning, we learnt that the bananas had already been sold," a senior FDA official stated. CCTV footage confirmed that the vendor entered the premises around 4:25 am and transported the bananas using a tempo.

"Further investigation is in progress. If the vendor does not cooperate, he will be handed over to the police," the official added.

The FDA was awaiting laboratory test results at the time of the breach, which would confirm whether the bananas were chemically ripened.

## Tenant held for theft of gold, cash at Kundaim

Team Herald

**PONDA:** The Mardol Police have arrested a tenant for allegedly breaking into his landlord's house and stealing gold ornaments and cash worth Rs 4.62 lakh. The accused, identified as Pradip Navait, a resident of Kundaim, Ponda, and native of Madhya Pradesh, was apprehended a day after the crime.

The incident occurred on 9 June when the complainant, Suchita Naik, had left for work at Kundaim Industrial Estate, and her two children had gone to school. The house, located in Kundaim, was left unoccupied at the time. The accused, who rented a room on the premises, remained in his tenanted room to avoid suspicion.

According to the complaint filed by Suchita Naik, an unknown person had entered her home by forcing open the back door and stole gold ornaments worth approximately Rs 4.5 lakh and around Rs 12,000 in cash from a cupboard.

Following the report, Mardol Police launched an investigation and brought tenant Pradip Navait in for questioning. Upon thorough interrogation, he was found to be involved in the crime and was subsequently arrested.

Local residents, shocked by the betrayal, have demanded a thorough investigation to ensure full recovery of the stolen items.

Mardol Police are continuing efforts to trace and recover the stolen property.

## No ban on mediapersons in hospitals

Team Herald

**BICHOLIM:** Chief Minister Pramod Sawant clarified on Tuesday that only photography and videography are prohibited inside hospital rooms, not the entry of mediapersons into hospitals. This followed the display of a 'No journalists allowed' board at the Primary Health Centre (PHC), Bicholim.

The PHC authorities removed the board after the Chief Minister's clarification that the restriction is limited to photography and videography inside hospitals to protect patient privacy.

"Photography and videography are not allowed in hospitals. We didn't say media personnel won't be allowed. I am telling again, not a media person but photography and videography will not be allowed in the interiors of the government hospitals," he said.

Sawant urged media personnel and visitors to cooperate with these guidelines to prioritize patient well-being and privacy.

## SWIFT ACTION



Following O Herald's report on haphazard parking in the no-parking zone along Chogm Road, Porvorim, the traffic cell has installed barricades to curb violations.

## Ponda scrap dealer kidnapped in broad daylight

Team Herald

**PONDA:** In a shocking incident that has sent shockwaves through the town, a 38-year-old scrap dealer Sandeep Choudhary, was abducted in broad daylight near his office in Joflinagar, Ponda, on Monday.

The abduction occurred around 3.15 pm when Choudhary was speaking with his assistant outside his office, located close to his residence. As the assistant momentarily turned to lock the premises, a white Swift car suddenly stopped nearby. The occupants of the vehicle forcefully pulled Choudhary into the car and fled within seconds.

Victim's jeep punctured to foil escape; police launch manhunt using CCTV footage

In a premeditated move, the kidnappers had also punctured the tyres of Choudhary's jeep parked outside his office to prevent any chance of escape.

Distressed family members rushed to the Ponda Police Station and lodged a complaint immediately after the incident. Ponda Police, led by PI Vijaykumar Kavlekar, have initiated a search operation and are currently analysing CCTV footage from various locations to trace the vehicle and abductors.

Choudhary, originally from Rajasthan, has been residing in Goa with his father for the past thirty years. He currently lives in Ponda with his wife and their one-and-a-half-year-old child.

## Goa Police unveil AI tools to tackle cybercrime

Team Herald

**PANJIM:** In a significant move to modernise law enforcement and strengthen digital safety, Goa Police on Tuesday unveiled two cutting-edge AI-based tools — Spot the Scam and Radical Content Analyser — developed in collaboration with BITS Pilani Goa Campus during the Goa Police Hackathon 2024.

Speaking at the launch, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said, "These tools are not only a contribution to Goa Police but are valuable assets for the entire country. The government will continue to coordinate with BITS Pilani for such innovative projects in the future."

He further noted, "With growing misuse of technology, advanced tools are essential for modern investigation. Goa Police has already launched other tech-based solutions like Quick Pass and Deep Trace."

Director General of Police (DGP) Alok Kumar, IPS, reiterated the department's tech-forward approach, stating, "We will

continue to make Goa Police a modern and tech-savvy police force."

Prof Suman Kundu, Director of BITS Pilani Goa Campus, added, "We are committed to partner with government for any kind of public projects."

The AI tool Spot the Scam is designed to detect fraudulent websites, phishing links, and scam apps, while Radical Content Analyser uses artificial intelligence to identify hate speech and extremist content in digital videos. Both tools are currently operational on a pilot basis and are being offered for use across India.

This launch is part of a broader digital transformation underway in the Goa Police. Recent smart policing initiatives include the Quick Pass App for seamless traffic enforcement, Deep Trace for digital identity verification using open-source intelligence, the TRACK Centre for real-time traffic monitoring, QR-based feedback systems across all police stations, and the Cyber Yodha Volunteer Network aimed at grassroots cyber awareness.

## Tari back as Colva PI

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Police Inspector Ritesh Tari has been reinstated as officer in charge of Colva Police Station following the suspension of three constables over corruption allegations. Tari had earlier been transferred to the South Goa Reserve Line in the wake of the incident.

It may be recalled that constables Amar Gaonkar, Siddesh Shirodkar, and Satyam Desai were suspended after being accused of demanding and accepting bribes from a scrap dealer. The action was taken by South Goa Superintendent of Police Tikam Singh, who also ordered a departmental inquiry into the matter.

PI Tari, who was previously heading the Colva Police Station, had been moved out during the fallout of the case. He has now been given charge of the station once again.

Meanwhile, with the PI of Maina Curtorim Police Station currently on leave, the police inspector of Margao Police Station has been assigned additional charge.

## Forest dwellers get land rights sanads

CM vows to mainstream Vanarmare tribe within one year

Team Herald

**PONDA:** Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on Monday distributed sanads (land ownership documents) to 136 forest dwellers — including 90 from North Goa and 46 from South Goa — under the Forest Rights Act, and pledged to bring the nomadic Vanarmare tribe into the mainstream within the next year.

Speaking during the 'Sankalp Se Siddhi' programme celebrating 11

years of the Modi government at the Kala Academy in Ponda, Sawant said the State government has already cleared around 2,000 claims under the Forest Rights Act and issued sanads. "The remaining 8,000-odd claims will be cleared by December 19 this year, thus giving the tribal and forest dwellers their rightful land," he declared. "All 10,000 applications under the Forest Rights Act in the

state will be cleared by December 19."

The programme, held in association with several government departments, also saw the felicitation of over 100 individuals selected through 31 departments for their contribution under various welfare schemes.

Present on the dais were Speaker Ramesh Tawadkar, Agriculture Minister Ravi Naik, Tourism Minister Rohan Khaunte, Social

Welfare Minister Subhash Phaldessai, Cooperation Minister Subhash Shirodkar, and Sports Minister Govind Gaude, among others.

Highlighting the BJP-led government's outreach efforts, Sawant said, "This special programme is to highlight achievements that the BJP-led government at the Centre and State have delivered under the leadership of PM Modi."

## Coastal MLAs united against taxi aggregator apps

Team Herald

**CALANGUTE:** Calangute MLA Michael Lobo on Tuesday stated that all MLAs from Goa's coastal belt are firmly opposed to the introduction of new taxi aggregator apps in the State, reiterating their collective support for local taxi operators.

Addressing the media in Calangute, Lobo said a meeting of coastal MLAs and ministers was held on Monday to discuss the ongoing taxi issue. "Yesterday there was a meeting of coastal belt MLAs and ministers to discuss the taxi issue. CM was supposed to be there but because of the GMC issue

he could not make it. All the coastal MLAs are against bringing in new taxi apps and fully support taxi owners' demand to scrap the proposed cab aggregator guidelines. We will not allow outsiders to bring in cab aggregators," he said.

Lobo emphasised the need for transparency and standardisation of fares. "The issue is how to bring transparency in point-to-point fares; how the customer will get his bill on his mobile or through WhatsApp or email. There should be no bargaining. Digital, online payment with clear point-to-point fares is the only solution," he stated.

Citing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Digital India initiative, Lobo added, "We give our full support for transparency in fares. I have always supported taxi owners. I'm strongly with local taxi owners to see that cab aggregators do not come from outside to our State."

He further argued that it is neither viable nor profitable for local taxi operators to work under aggregator models. "What is the status of the taxi meters? Nobody has used them. Taxi owners spent Rs 12,000 to fix them, and every year they have to pay Rs 5,000 for renewal," Lobo pointed out.

## Waterlogged roads leave Bethora children wading to school

Team Herald

**PONDA:** Primary school children and local residents in Bondbaag, Bethora, are facing hardships due to waterlogging caused by incomplete gutter work along the newly widened four-lane highway in the area.

Even light rainfall results in internal roads being submerged, as the water from the highway gutters has no outlet to drain into a nearby nullah. This has led to frequent flooding, making it difficult for students and pedestrians to navigate the waterlogged stretch.

Concerned locals, including parents of primary school students, have urged the National Highway (NH) authorities and the Beth-

Locals urge authorities to fix drainage before monsoon worsens conditions; Parents raise safety concerns as rainwater floods school approach roads



ora Panchayat to take immediate action. They are demanding that the gutter work be extended and connected properly to nearby drainage systems to prevent further flooding.

Speaking to the media,

residents Sadanand Gaude and Nyaneshwar Khandeparkar highlighted the issue. Gaude stated, "The highway has been widened into four lanes and gutters have been constructed, but they remain incomplete at Bond-

baag. As a result, rainwater accumulates on the internal road leading to the primary school and residential area."

"When it rains, water from the highway flows into the internal roads, making it very difficult for students

to walk. Even bikers have slipped in the muddy water," he added.

Khandeparkar demanded that authorities act swiftly to clear the waterlogging and prevent inconvenience and accidents. Residents have reiterated their plea for immediate intervention before the situation worsens with the onset of heavy monsoon rains.

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