

Saltwater sabotage: Illegal fish farming is drowning khazan legacy

Centuries-old agricultural wetlands face collapse as rogue operators breach bunds to trap fish; govt rolls out rescue plan with sweeping powers to reclaim Goa's rice bowls

Team Herald

MARGAO: Once the backbone of Goa's agricultural economy, the khazan lands—ancient, community-managed coastal wetlands—are under assault. The threat isn't only natural or accidental. Illegal fish farming operators are now deliberately breaching protective bunds to flood fields with saltwater, destroying crops and rendering large tracts of farmland useless in the process. The ecological damage is compounded by the collapse of traditional maintenance systems, and the government has responded with its most ambitious intervention yet.

The newly released Khazan Land Management Plan (KLMP) lays bare the scale of the crisis: over 13,000 hectares of khazan lands are affected, with illegal activity accelerating degradation. The plan warns of "clandestine incidents whereby conditions are manipulated" to trap fish during high tide, and the destruction of bunds—some of which are centuries old—is often deliberate. In many areas, restoration attempts are sabotaged, with repairs reversed by repeat breaches days later.

To combat this, the State government plans to set up a Khazan Board with over-

KHAZAN LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN (KLMP)

Smart Zoning & Monitoring
NEW ZONING BASED ON SALINITY & DEGRADATION:
Low Salinity Zones: Restored for rice & vegetable farming
Moderate Salinity Zones: Allowed for controlled rice-fish farming
High Salinity/Degraded Zones: Regulated aquaculture or salt farming
Mangrove-Encroached Lands: Marked for containment only
TECH-DRIVEN MONITORING:



Enables real-time detection of breaches & damage
UAV-based LiDAR Mapping to track: Soil salinity levels
Bund integrity
Illegal land use

riding authority on land use in khazan areas, bypassing existing Regional Plan (RP) and Outline Development Plans (ODPs). While the Goa Land Use Act will still apply to agricultural tenancy lands, the board's decisions will supersede the TCP Act in other zones. The urgency stems not only from environmental degradation but also from the loss of food security and livelihoods. Many farmers have walked away from the land due to rising salinity, declining viability, and unchecked

encroachments.

Traditional khazan management—once a community-driven cooperative framework—has disintegrated since the Agricultural Tenancy Act of 1964, which, despite empowering tenants with land ownership, disrupted the collective system needed for bund upkeep and water regulation. Today, most Tenants' Associations are defunct, and illegal operators have filled the vacuum, exploiting the lack of oversight and commu-

nity engagement. The khazan lands, with their intricate system of sluice gates, embankments and drainage, once supported rice, coconut, salt, and integrated aquaculture. Now, those same features are being used against them. Operators breach bunds to allow saline water to enter during high tide, trap fish and prawns, and leave behind a devastated landscape that can take years to recover. The resulting saline intrusion also threatens freshwater aquifers, especially during low rainfall years,

with long-term consequences for inland agriculture and drinking water sources.

The board, which the Department of Environment will notify and for which it will serve as secretariat, will be established within six months. It will have the power to notify new land-use categories, order repairs, initiate legal action, and manage zoning based on scientific inputs. Its mandate will align with the CRZ 2011 Notification and Coastal Zone Management Plan and will be updated in response to climate and policy shifts.

The plan also highlights the role of urban encroachment. Near towns like Panaji, Margao, Calangute and Candolim, khazan areas have been degraded by construction waste, domestic garbage, and mining silt. In some places, bunds have been illegally levelled to make way for scrapyards or settlements. These pressures have compounded the damage from saltwater ingress and made restoration costlier.

Despite the bleak picture, some farmers have continued to grow rice and vegetables in less affected zones, showing that restoration is possible if illegal activity is checked and technical support is provided. The plan proposes targeted incentives, farmer training,

and the revival of viable Tenants' Associations. Traditional bund repair methods—developed over generations by the Gauda and other local communities—will be documented and integrated with modern materials and monitoring tools.

Yet, rebuilding the khazan system also means rebuilding trust. Decades of poor enforcement, weak coordination, and political interference have left many locals disengaged. The plan acknowledges this and introduces a phased monitoring system with biannual reviews and periodic assessments aligned with national coastal policies.

Climate change adds another layer of urgency. Sea level rise and stronger storms threaten to overwhelm already weakened bunds, while the loss of khazan wetlands would strip Goa of a vital buffer against floods and saline intrusion. These wetlands also sequester carbon and support biodiversity. The KLMP is not just a restoration blueprint; it is a last-ditch attempt to reclaim Goa's self-reliant agricultural model and prevent irreversible loss. Its success hinges on whether the Khazan Board can exercise its authority decisively, stop repeat violators, and involve local communities meaningfully.

Kabrastan land dispute to be settled at last

Team Herald

MARGAO: The long-pending issue of land for the Kabrastan at Sonsoddo is likely to be resolved soon, following a special meeting of the Margao Municipal Council (MMC) on Wednesday. The council passed a resolution to approve a deed of exchange proposal, aimed at settling the matter amicably in court.

The dispute has been pending before the High Court, with the Goa State Urban Development Agency (GSUDA) informing the court of its inability to construct the cemetery due to objections from the Confraria of the Chapel of Borda. According to records presented at the meeting, a survey conducted by the Directorate of Settlement and Land Records found that the Confraria has encroached upon 1001 sq mtrs of land that was acquired for the Kabrastan.

However, the Confraria claims that its cemetery pre-dates the land acquisition, and the possession of the disputed land was based on a mistaken belief. In response, the council's legal team has prepared a draft deed of exchange and grant of easement. The council unanimously approved the proposal, which will now be presented before the court to resolve the issue.

During the discussion, Councillor Nimisha Falei-

OTHER MMC UPDATES

ILLEGAL STRUCTURES: The council will conduct a survey to identify unauthorised structures within its jurisdiction and submit a detailed report

SURVEY TIME EXTENDED: A two-month extension has been granted to contractors handling door-to-door waste collection and the survey of illegal constructions due to on-ground challenges

WATER TANK PROJECT: Construction of the water tank to support the fire hydrant system at the municipal market is nearing completion

HYDRAULIC PARKING: The long-pending hydraulic parking project is in its final planning phase, with work expected to begin soon

ro and others objected to the use of the word "encroached" in the official documents. Faleiro argued that the chapel's cemetery had existed before the acquisition and urged for a more appropriate term. Municipal officials expressed willingness to consider substituting the word in official communications.

URBAN BREATHERS



Pigeons enjoy the recently renovated open space on Panjim's Cunha Riveira Road, also called 'Bhonsle Square' by locals who frequent the spot. The square now has a sculpture and benches, which are used by traders, taxi drivers and elderly people who catch up with friends

Margao fair collects over 30 lakh in revenue

Team Herald

MARGAO: The ongoing feast fair in Margao has already generated over Rs 30 lakh in revenue, Margao Municipal Council (MMC) Chairperson Damodar Shirodkar told reporters on Wednesday.

He also stated that the council has ensured full compliance with the High Court's directions concerning the organisation of the fair.

Shirodkar said that the council had taken all necessary precautions to maintain order and safety at the fair. "We have not allowed any stalls on the roadside. All the basic facilities have been provided, including regular monitoring of activities," he assured.

The High Court had earlier issued strict instructions regarding the management of public fairs, including guidelines related to stall placements, pedestrian access, and public safety. Shirodkar emphasised that the council has acted responsibly to uphold these directives and prevent any inconvenience to the public.

The Margao feast fair, held annually, draws large crowds and a wide range of vendors. Shirodkar added that dedicated teams have been assigned to oversee the fair's daily functioning, sanitation, and traffic management to ensure smooth operations throughout the event.

Biodiversity committee urges Banalkars to grow more fruit trees, distributes saplings

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Benaulim Biodiversity Management Committee (BMC) has embarked on a green initiative, distributing fruit-bearing trees to local villagers with the dual aim of enhancing the region's green cover and promoting biodiversity. The move is also a strategic effort to support the crucial role of bees and other pollinators.

During the distribution event, emphasis was placed not only on increasing the number of trees but also on encouraging community participation, particularly among the younger generation. With growing concerns about youngsters being increasingly engrossed in technology, calls were made to inspire them to "get their hands in the soil" and actively participate in planting and nurturing trees.

The initiative highlights the importance of fostering a symbiotic relationship between



By distributing fruit-bearing species, the BMC hopes to provide natural food sources for bees, which are essential for pollination

humans and nature. By distributing fruit-bearing species, the BMC hopes to provide natural food sources for bees, which are essential for pollination and thus, the health of local ecosystems and agricultural productivity. The committee expressed optimism that this effort will not only lead to a greener Benaulim but also instill a sense of environmental responsibility among its residents from a young age.

Hospitality association alleges malpractice by liquor wholesalers

Team Herald

MARGAO: Rampant violations by certain wine store wholesalers in Fatorda and other parts of Goa have drawn sharp criticism from the hospitality sector, with business owners warning that unchecked malpractices are threatening the survival of legitimate establishments.

The Indian Tigers Organisation, representing affected stakeholders, has submitted a formal complaint to the Excise Department seeking immediate intervention.

Rahul Shanbhag, a representative of the organisation, highlighted three major violations: illegal sale of country and local liquor, unauthorised public consumption of alcohol outside wine shops, and unfair competition to licensed bars and restaurants.

"Many wine store wholesalers are illegally selling country

The Indian Tigers Organisation warned that if such practices are allowed to continue, many law-abiding businesses may be forced to shut down, leading to job losses and economic distress in the hospitality sector

or local liquor, which they are not licensed to sell," Shanbhag said. "This directly violates excise norms and gives these outlets an unfair advantage over compliant businesses."

Equally concerning, according to the complaint, is the growing trend of public alcohol consumption outside these wine shops. Customers are often seen loitering around the premises and drinking in open spaces, turning these areas

Bars and restaurants follow strict regulations, pay higher fees, and invest in staff, infrastructure, and customer experience — Rahul Shanbhag, Association Representative

into informal and unregulated drinking spots. Residents have raised concerns about rising public nuisance, especially in residential areas and near markets.

"Bars and restaurants follow strict regulations, pay higher fees, and invest in staff, infrastructure, and customer experience," Shanbhag noted. "Yet, we are losing customers because people are opting to drink at these wine shops

where rules are openly flouted and costs are lower. This is not competition—it is exploitation of regulatory loopholes."

The Indian Tigers Organisation warned that if such practices are allowed to continue, many law-abiding businesses may be forced to shut down, leading to job losses and economic distress in the hospitality sector.

In their letter to the Excise Inspector, the group has urged authorities to carry out surprise inspections, enforce licensing conditions strictly, and penalize violators to restore a level playing field.

"We are not asking for favors," Shanbhag said. "We are demanding enforcement of the law to protect legal businesses and public order."

Authorities have yet to issue an official response, but affected businesses say they will continue to raise the issue until action is taken.

Goa@2037: GCCI conclave outlines Rs 15k cr vision for sustainable growth, CM vows review

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Goa Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI) hosted a landmark conclave on "Inclusive & Sustainable Growth for Goa @ 2037" in Panjim, where government officials, industry leaders, sustainability experts and civil society participants came together to discuss a long-term development roadmap for the state. The day-long event culminated with Chief Minister Pramod Sawant formally releasing the "Vision Report Goa@2037", which has been submitted to the government as a forward-looking proposal centred on the theme 'Heritage to Horizon - Green and Inclusive'.

The conclave was inaugurated earlier in the day by Industries Minister Mauvin Godinho in the presence of Chief Secretary V Candavelou. In his remarks, GCCCI president Shrinivas Dempo said Goa stands at a critical inflection point and must now transition from its traditional dependence on tourism and mining to a future-oriented economy driven by innovation, ecological responsibility and inclusion. He noted that the vision

Developed in partnership with GIM, the report proposes a Rs 15,000 crore investment roadmap anchored in sustainability, skilling, innovation and inclusive growth. With six strategic pillars and inputs from 12 sectoral taskforces, the vision aims to generate 1 lakh skilled jobs and halve carbon intensity by 2030. The CM welcomed the plan and hinted at integrating it into the state's upcoming Vision Document

document aims to ensure Goa becomes a globally competitive, socially harmonious and economically vibrant state over the next decade. Godinho endorsed the report and said its recommendations would serve as a useful blueprint for good governance in the state.

The vision report, prepared in partnership with the Goa Institute of Management (GIM), was developed through consultations with 12 sectoral taskforces and identifies six cross-cutting strategic pillars—Infrastructure, Tourism, Innovation, Skilling, Sustainability, and Governance. According to the GCCCI, this integrated roadmap can unlock Rs 15,000 crore in private investment and create over 1 lakh skilled jobs by 2030, while also halving Goa's economy-wide carbon intensity without compromising social harmony or

fiscal stability. The CM praised GCCCI's initiative and said the government will closely study the report. He revealed that the state's own Vision Document is scheduled for release by December 2025 and acknowledged that GCCCI's inputs would be valuable to the drafting process. Sawant also welcomed the proposal to set up a Goa Vision 2037 Steering Council chaired by the Chief Minister, with representation from across sectors to ensure implementation. Concluding the session, Dempo reiterated the need to translate ideas into action through sustained collaboration between the government, industry and academia.

The event featured five expert panel discussions covering key thematic areas. A session on Infrastructure and Ease of Doing Business was moderated by CA

Sandip Bhandare and featured officials from GIDC, NABARD and local industry. The Tourism and High-Value Economy panel explored strategies to transform Goa into a global hub for luxury, wellness, medical and eco-tourism, while the session on Innovation and Entrepreneurship discussed how Goa could position itself as a hub for clean tech, AI and media startups. Skilling and Human Capital Development was the focus of another session featuring representatives from the National Skill Development Corporation, Siemens, and global academic institutions. The final panel, focused on Sustainable Goa, addressed clean energy transitions, waste management systems and green mobility, with insights from experts in environmental planning, mobility and infrastructure.