

# 30 comunidades in South Goa risk losing control as govt prepares to step in

Stakeholders given deadline to respond; fears grow over appointment of custodians

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** With elections for new managing committees failing to take place across 30 comunidade bodies in South Goa, the government has initiated proceedings to declare these institutions as 'Comunidade in Default'—a move that could result in the loss of administrative control by stakeholders for the next three years.

The South Goa Administrator of Comunidades, Abhijeet Nikam, has issued individual notices to all 30 affected comunidades, asking them to explain why they should not be declared defaulters. The notices cite a lack of quorum during the scheduled election period from December 8, 2024, to January 19, 2025, as the reason for the failed electoral process. This failure was officially recorded by the Presiding Officers appointed by the district collector.

Once a comunidade is declared in default under Article 181-A(1) of the Code of comunidade, its name will be notified in the government gazette. The implications are far-reaching, as the law empowers the state to appoint government officials—typically mamlatdars or joint mamlatdars—as custodians to manage the affairs of the defunct comunidade for the

CAUSE OF CONCERN	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Default Declaration: Comunidades declared in default under Article 181-A(1) of the Code of Comunidade will be notified in the government gazette</li> <li>Government Control: Upon default, government officials (Mamlatdars or Joint Mamlatdars) will be appointed as custodians to manage the affairs of the comunidade for the 2025–2027 triennium</li> <li>Affected Comunidades: A total of 30</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>comunidades face this action—20 in Salcete, 6 in Mormugao, and 4 in Quepem, Sanguem, and Odar—comprising one-third of South Goa's 90 comunidades</li> <li>Objection Deadline: Stakeholders have until 24 June to file written objections or representations</li> <li>Hearing and Consequences: Personal hearings are scheduled for 1 July at 11:30 am; failure to respond or attend will result in ex parte decisions</li> </ul>

remainder of the 2025–2027 triennium.

Of the 30 bodies facing this situation, the majority—20—are located in Salcete taluka. Six others are in Mormugao, while the remaining four are spread across Quepem, Sanguem, and Odar. Collectively, these represent a third of all 90 comunidade bodies under the jurisdiction of the South Goa Administrator.

The issued notices give stakeholders until June 24 to submit their objections or representations in writing. Those seeking to present their case in person have been called for a hearing on July 1 at 11:30 am before the Administrator. If no response is received or stakeholders fail to appear, decisions will be taken ex parte, as per the warnings

contained in the notices. While the deadline looms, comunidade stakeholders remain deeply concerned about the prospect of custodians being appointed to replace the elected committees. As per amendments made to Article 181-A, the appointment of such custodians is automatic once the declaration of default is confirmed—subject only to the outcome of appeals under clause (4) of the same article.

The powers of the appointed custodian are sweeping. Under clause (5), the custodian assumes all the roles and responsibilities typically performed by a managing committee, ranging from day-to-day administration to financial decisions and legal representation.

This has raised alarm among comunidade mem-

bers, who see the move as a direct threat to the autonomy of these traditional institutions. "A comunidade is not just a legal entity—it is a cultural and historical institution rooted in community ownership. Having an outsider govern it, even temporarily, could undermine that spirit," said a stakeholder from a Salcete-based comunidade.

To make matters more uncertain, the only route to challenge the custodian's decisions is through an appeal to the same Administrator who initiated the default process. While this option exists under the law, stakeholders worry it offers little relief once the state machinery takes over.

Elections had been due for all comunidades in South Goa as part of the

regular three-year electoral cycle, mandated under Article 47 of the Code. However, many failed to achieve the quorum necessary for the proceedings to be valid. Under the code, a quorum is essential for the formation of the new managing committee. The reasons for the poor turnout remain a matter of speculation, with some citing apathy, internal disputes, or confusion over procedural requirements.

Meanwhile, the notices issued by Administrator Nikam are seen as a formal step before invoking stronger enforcement mechanisms. "This is a crucial moment. Once the government steps in, it becomes very difficult for the comunidade to regain its autonomy during the same term," said a former committee member from Mormugao.

As the June 24 deadline approaches, all eyes are now on the responses from the affected comunidades. While some stakeholders are preparing written objections, others are scrambling to organise legal representation before the July hearing.

With nearly one-third of South Goa's comunidades at risk of state takeover, the coming weeks could prove decisive for the future of these once-autonomous village institutions.

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## Police probe on for murder after woman's body found in cashew plantation

Injury found on neck; police issue lookout notice to identify victim

Team Herald

**PONDA:** A woman's body, believed to be between 20 and 30 years of age, was discovered early Monday morning in a cashew plantation at Prapatnagar, Dharbandora, just a few metres off the main road, raising strong suspicions of murder.

The victim was found wearing a black T-shirt, black trousers, and black sandals. A noticeable slit mark was found on her neck, further fuelling suspicion of foul play. An old railway ticket was recovered from her purse, which may provide a clue to her identity or recent movement.

Ponda DySP Shivram Vaigankar confirmed that a case of murder has been registered by Ponda Police. A lookout notice has been issued to trace the woman's identity through police stations

and railway authorities across the region. According to sources, while an official conclusion is awaited, preliminary findings suggest that the woman may have been murdered. Forensic teams and a dog squad were called to the scene to collect evidence. The body has been sent for a post-mortem examination to determine the cause of death.

Local authorities have appealed to the public for any information that may help establish the woman's identity or the sequence of events leading to her death. The incident

has sparked concern in the area, with residents hoping for swift action and justice.

Dharbandora Sarpanch Balaji Gaus said, "Either the victim was murdered on the spot or her body was dumped here after being killed elsewhere. Blood stains were visible at the scene." He added that a local resident discovered the body while collecting sprouted cashew seeds.

In light of the incident, locals have renewed calls for CCTV installation along highways and main roads to deter and monitor criminal activity.

Either the victim was murdered on the spot or her body was dumped here after being killed elsewhere. Blood stains were visible at the scene. A local resident discovered the body while collecting sprouted cashew seeds

— Balaji Gaus, Dharbandora Sarpanch

## Man held for brutal assault on mother in Agarwada

Team Herald

**PANJIM:** Mandrem Police have arrested a 25-year-old man for allegedly abusing and violently assaulting his mother with a sharp weapon at their residence in Agarwada, Pernem, on Sunday.

The accused, Chandrashekhar Patil alias Sanju, a native of Bastora and resident of Agarwada, reportedly slapped, kicked, and attacked his mother using a *Koita* (sharp weapon), inflicting injuries on her head, neck, chest, and other vital areas.

Police sources said the incident occurred between 3 pm and 6 pm following a personal dispute. The victim sustained grievous injuries and was immediately rushed to Goa Medical College and Hospital (GMC), Bambolim, where she is currently undergoing treatment.

According to the complaint, Patil also abused his mother in filthy language and issued threats of dire consequences. Police have registered a case and further investigation is underway.

## Heavy rains, winds wreak havoc in Salcete

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Heavy rains accompanied by gusty winds battered various parts of Salcete on Monday afternoon, resulting in the uprooting of trees and causing significant property damage amounting to lakhs of rupees. The Margao Fire Station received at least 10 emergency calls related to tree falls and fire incidents across the taluka, with personnel working into the evening to bring situations under control.

Gil Souza, Station Fire Officer (SFO) at Margao, informed that a massive jungle tree collapsed onto a shade near the Maruti Temple at Davorlim. Two cars parked under the shade were damaged in the incident. The estimated loss was pegged at Rs 80,000, while fire personnel managed to save property worth Rs 1,00,000. The major call was attended by SFO Gil Souza and Leading Firefighter S K G Dessai, and it took nearly three hours to clear the tree.

Later in the evening, around 7



pm, a fire broke out on an electricity pole near a high school, adjacent to the Margao Police Station. Upon receiving the alert, a fire team was dispatched to the location. One fire tender was used, and the blaze was brought under control swiftly.

In another major incident, a jackfruit tree collapsed onto the compound wall of Vanishta Classic building behind Costa Ground at Aquem, Margao. Firefighter

SKG Dessai and his team were deployed at the scene, where they managed to clear the area within an hour by cutting the branches.

SFO Souza further reported that a branch of a banyan tree fell on a *ghumti* (small temple) near Classic Hospital in Malbhat, Margao. Sub-Officer C V Carvalho and the duty crew cleared the area within an hour.

Additionally, a jungle tree fell on a temple near Holy Trinity Church at Majilwado, Benaulum.

## CM's claim on rental vehicles reignites safety debate

Stakeholders call for action plan

Team Herald

**PANJIM:** Chief Minister Pramod Sawant's assertion that 70 per cent of road accidents in Goa involve rent-a-car and rent-a-bike vehicles used by tourists has reignited public debate over the safety, regulation, and accountability of the tourism-driven rental transport sector.

Reacting to the CM's statement, stakeholders and road safety activists have urged the government to swiftly formulate an actionable plan to address the issue.

Nitesh Chodankar, President of the North Goa Rent-a-Cab Association, admitted that while operators take precautions when handing over vehicles, controlling tourists' conduct remains a major challenge.

"I agree to both things. When we give the vehicle, the tourist is not drunk. We advise them to refrain from rash driving, but they still do the opposite. We are meeting the Chief Minister this week with some suggestions and we are also thinking over how to prevent this problem," Chodankar told *O Herald*.

Ronald Martins, Convener of consumer rights group GOACAN, said the

time for action is now.

"Now that the Government has identified the quantum of accidents caused by the vehicles rented by tourists, the need of the hour is to put in place an Action Plan to reduce these accidents. The matter can be taken up for discussion at the forthcoming meetings of the District Road Safety Committees," he said.

Taxi driver Rohan Kandolkar highlighted the operational vulnerability of owners when tourists violate the law and disappear.

"When people come to hire taxis, they are absolutely sober. We cannot keep a tab on their behaviour. I know of a recent incident where a driver was found driving under the influence of alcohol. The car was taken to the police station and the man was told to be present in court the next day but he however ran away to his hometown. The owner of the car had to go to court and spend from his own pocket to hire a lawyer to get the vehicle released. This happens quite regularly," Kandolkar revealed.

Dilip Naik, President of the Goa Road Safety Forum, said it was significant that the Chief Minister had

publicly acknowledged the problem.

"We were saying it before the CM's statement, but when authorities or politicians say the same thing, it gets value," he said.

This is not the first time that the rent-a-vehicle sector has come under scrutiny. In February last year, a tragic accident occurred when a motorcyclist was flung off the Old Mandovi Bridge into the river after being hit by a speeding rent-a-car attempting to overtake another vehicle.

In the aftermath, former Minister Churchill Alemao demanded stronger regulation of the rent-a-cab sector, stating, "Why are the prevailing rules so weak for rent-a-car operators and the tourists driving these vehicles?"

In response to the mounting concerns, the Department of Transport has intensified enforcement measures. Transport Director P Pravimal Abhishhek has issued instructions to all Assistant Directors of Transport (ADTs) to carry out comprehensive inspections of transport vehicles - particularly rent-a-cabs - to ensure the installation and proper functioning of speed governors as mandated by law.

## Colva's sewage station malfunctions, consumer body demands action

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Colva's sewage woes have resurfaced as a pumping station near the Fisheries Department was found malfunctioning, discharging untreated water into nearby fields. The issue was identified during an inspection by the Colva Village Panchayat, Sewerage Department, and Biodiversity officials, who attributed the failure to power fluctuations. Additionally, two other pumping stations in the area remain uncommissioned. This marks a repeat of previous complaints regarding sewage contamination near the iconic beach.

Judith Almeida, president of the Colva Civic and Consumer Forum (CCCF), criticized the government, including the Goa State Pollution Control Board (GSPCB) for its handling of the situation. "The Sewerage Treatment Plant (STP) for Colva was cleared without considering the lack of expertise to execute it effectively," she said. Almeida compared the situation to the problematic Margao STP and questioned the government's priorities, pointing out that an administration failing to manage basic sewage systems cannot boast of tourism development plans.

She called for a thorough inquiry into the project and demanded that officials be held accountable. "The entire system needs scrutiny, and those responsible should be liable for the financial losses," Almeida added. Locals have called for immediate action to resolve the sewage issue before it further damages Colva's environment and reputation.

## FDA cracks down on food safety violations with 80 raids across Goa

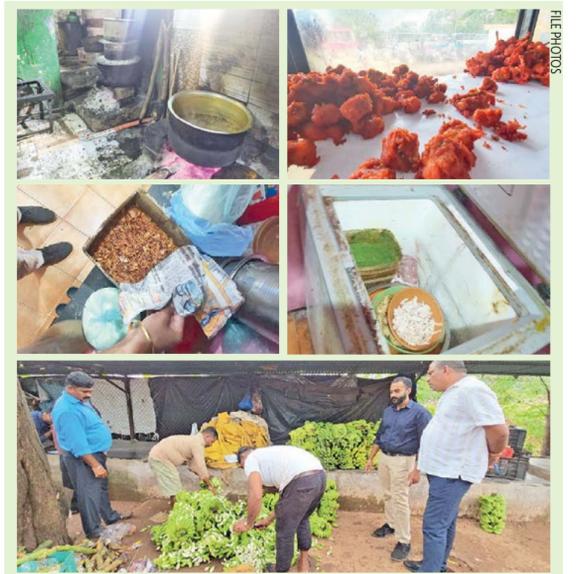
Team Herald

**PANJIM:** The Food and Drugs Administration (FDA) has conducted nearly 80 raids across North and South Goa since the launch of its special drives in August 2024, inspecting more than 350 establishments, according to FDA Director Shweta Dessai.

Speaking to *O Herald*, Dessai said the initiative began with a focus on cashew shops along the coastal belt, particularly in Calangute, following complaints about substandard products. "Our initial focus was on cashew shops in the coastal areas, particularly in Calangute, following numerous complaints. Subsequently, we addressed concerns about unhygienic conditions in restaurants and then extended our inspections to roadside eateries selling items such as chicken shawarma, vada pao, bhel puri and fruit juices throughout Bardez, Pernem, Tiswadi, and Salcete," she said.

During these inspections, the FDA destroyed large quantities of artificially ripened bananas. "Special drives were also conducted during mango season in Bardez to target artificially ripened mangoes," she added.

Dessai noted that routine inspections and sample analyses are being carried out alongside the special drives. "Our efforts began in North Goa, specifically targeting cashew shops in the coastal belt of Calangute and Candolim, in response to complaints from tourists regarding the sale of substandard



cashews unfit for consumption," she explained.

Hygiene at food outlets remains a key concern. "We found several vendors transporting meat and paneer into the state without proper labelling or adequate storage facilities. In one instance in Margao, over 450 kilograms of unlabelled meat were destroyed. Similarly, large quantities of bananas were destroyed due to excessive use of ethylene gas for artificial ripening," said Dessai.

While South Goa currently has

three artificial ripening chambers, North Goa has none, she informed.

The FDA director urged food establishments to proactively maintain hygiene and cleanliness in anticipation of inspections. "Raids are being conducted, but vendors are also being provided training, and follow-ups are done depending on the findings. We ensure compliance with guidelines. However, some vendors remain errant—for instance, one restaurant in Margao was shut down for failing to comply with FDA orders," she said.