

District Planning collapses as masterplan races ahead

Team Herald

MARGAO: While Margao's Vision 2041 Master Plan is gaining traction as consultants return to showcase a revamped blueprint for the commercial capital, South Goa's broader constitutional planning process lies in tatters. The District Planning Committee (DPC) — the statutory body responsible for consolidating development plans from panchayats, municipalities, and the Zilla Panchayat — has failed to meet in recent months. More worryingly, it has not prepared a district development plan for the current financial year (2025–26). No instructions have been issued to local bodies to submit fresh proposals, signalling a complete breakdown in the official planning mechanism. This inaction follows a backlog of over 3,400 development proposals submitted during the previous financial year (2023–24), none of which have been addressed. A senior official admitted bluntly, "We didn't even

MANDATED BY LAW

The DPC is a constitutional body under Article 243ZD and Goa Panchayat Raj Act Section 239.

● **DPC INACTIVITY:**

■ No meetings in recent months

■ No district development plan for FY 2025–26

● **PROPOSALS IN LIMBO:**

■ 3,400+ proposals from FY 2023–24 still pending

■ No call for new proposals this year

● **NO RESPONSE:**

■ Directorate of Panchayats and state govt have issued no explanation

● **CONTRADICTION:**

■ Aggressive push for Margao's Vision 2041 plan

■ Zero movement on district-wide integrated planning

initiate the process this year. What's the point in collecting new proposals when last year's are still sitting unattended?" Despite this administrative vacuum, no queries have been raised by the Directorate of Panchayats or the state government, and officials from the South Goa Zilla Panchayat confirmed that no consolidated plan had been drawn up or sent to the government for the upcoming year. The silence has prompted

sharp criticism from grassroots activists and governance experts, who say the collapse of the DPC undermines decentralisation and subverts the vision of bottom-up planning enshrined in the Constitution. "These committees aren't optional," said J Santan Rodrigues, convenor of the Goa Panchayati Raj Institutions Union. "They are constitutionally mandated to ensure local development needs are integrated into the district's plan. The silence around their

How many annual development plans has the MMC ever submitted to the DPC? They are rushing to endorse this master plan, but they haven't even followed the process they're legally bound to follow. The High Court had already provided guidelines on how local bodies should submit development proposals to the DPC for inclusion in the district plan. Has the MMC complied? If so, let them place those plans in the public domain. If not, then why this hurry with the master plan?" — Dr Ashish Kamat, convenor, United Goans Foundation (UGF)

These committees aren't optional. They are constitutionally mandated to ensure that local development needs are integrated into the district's official plan. The silence around their collapse is deeply worrying. If the goal is to get central funds for Margao projects, then why not pursue them for the whole of South Goa through the district development plan? — J Santan Rodrigues, convenor of the Goa Panchayati Raj Institutions Union

collapse is deeply worrying." Rodrigues also questioned the government's selective approach: "If the goal is to attract central funding for Margao, why not pursue funds for the entire district through the DPC process? The government's actions reflect selective governance and misplaced priorities." The contrast was stark earlier this month when consultants from Studio Pod, appointed by the Goa State Urban Development Agency (GSUDA), made a second public presentation of the Margao Master Plan at the Municipal Council hall. While

the plan's details drew attention, many were concerned about the pace with which it is advancing—especially in the absence of a functioning statutory process. The United Goans Foundation (UGF), which had previously moved the High Court over the state's failure to implement Article 243ZD of the Constitution, used the occasion to highlight the Margao Municipal Council's (MMC) non-compliance with court directives. "How many annual development plans has the MMC ever submitted to the DPC?" asked UGF convenor Dr Ashish Kamat at the meeting. "They're rushing to endorse this master plan, but haven't followed the process they are legally bound to." Kamat pointed out that the High Court had already laid down guidelines for how local bodies should submit their development plans for inclusion in the district plan. "Has the MMC complied? If so, let them publish those plans. If not, why the rush?"

At the centre of this governance gap lies Section 239 of the Goa Panchayat Raj Act, which mandates the creation of a DPC in every district. The committee is meant to prepare a unified development plan by integrating inputs from panchayats, municipalities and the Zilla Panchayat. The Act also requires the DPC to consult with relevant institutions and submit the final plan to the government. That process, critics point out, has not merely stalled — it appears to have been abandoned entirely. As Margao's Vision 2041 gathers momentum, promising major changes to land use, infrastructure, and investment, rural and semi-urban areas across South Goa are left without a voice in the conversation. What emerges, say observers, is a planning process tilted heavily in favour of urban centres, leaving the rest of the district in limbo — waiting for proposals to be acknowledged, funds to be allocated, and governance to catch up.

MMC turning blind eye to hundreds of unlicensed market traders: Activists

Citizens slam council over double standards, say only 16 shops are compliant

Team Herald

MARGAO: A group of concerned Margao residents, led by former municipal chairperson and Congress functionary Savio Coutinho, has alleged that an overwhelming majority of business units operating from Margao Municipal Council (MMC) properties are functioning without valid trade licences. In a press briefing, Coutinho claimed that out of around 800 commercial establishments housed in municipal markets and other council-owned spaces, only 16 are officially licensed. According to him, the rest evade not just trade licence fees but also payments for signboards and sanitation services. The citizens criticised what they described as a

ILLEGAL CHIMNEY REMOVED AFTER OUTCRY AT AQUEM

MARGAO: An illegally installed chimney on an apartment building in Aquem, Margao, was dismantled on Saturday after strong objections from flat owners and intervention from a municipal councillor. The move came after residents, led by flat owner Vishal Pai Cacode, issued an ultimatum demanding the immediate removal of the chimney, which had been set up without any official permissions. Following the pressure, the shop owner took down the structure. "People's power wins," said Cacode, who credited collective community action for resolving the

issue. Tensions had flared earlier in the day when residents discovered that the chimney had been installed without approval from the Margao Municipal Council (MMC). Alarmed by the health and safety risks posed by the external exhaust so close to their homes, residents protested and raised concerns over the lack of oversight. The councillor confirmed on site that no permissions had been granted and questioned the shop owner as to how such an installation was allowed in the first place.

glaring case of administrative negligence and unfair enforcement. Coutinho accused MMC chairperson Damodar Shirodkar and the council of discriminating between businesses operating from private properties and those functioning

within municipal premises. "Private business owners are made to pay hefty fees for trade licences, signage, and sanitation. Yet the MMC turns a blind eye to its own establishments that fail to meet even the most basic regulatory re-

quirements," he said. The group argued that this selective enforcement not only undermines transparency and good governance but also places an undue burden on compliant private establishments. They further alleged that the fees currently being collected by the council have not been properly ratified. "Several councillors have filed formal objections, pointing out that the rates being imposed are not in accordance with the council's officially approved resolutions," said a member of the group, adding that no charges should be collected without the due ratification of meeting minutes. Coutinho also revealed that the Shadow Council of Margao had filed a Right to Information (RTI) application seeking details of trade licence holders occupying municipal spaces. However, the MMC has reportedly failed to respond, even after two months. Appeals to the first appellate authority have also gone unanswered.

Fresh push to block ore handling at Kalem rly station near Mollem sanctuary

Petition urges Goa Wildlife Board to reject industrial activity in protected forests

Team Herald

MARGAO: Environmental groups, led by Save Mollem and backed by the Goa Foundation, have launched a public campaign demanding that the Goa State Board for Wildlife reject a proposal to permit ore handling at Kalem Railway Station. The board will revisit the controversial proposal—first discussed on March 20—at its meeting on Monday, June 30. The campaign features an open petition and mass email drive urging board members to uphold their duty to protect Goa's forests. The ore transport project, backed by Vedanta Ltd and South Western Railways (SWR), targets Kalem Station—located within the Bhagwan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary and Mollem National Park. Activists argue that allowing ore handling in such an ecologically sensitive zone sets a damaging precedent. The citizen letter accompanying the petition thanks board members who previously opposed the plan

and asks them to stand firm. "Your stand for our forests and wildlife is crucial," it reads. "We urge you to reject this environmentally destructive proposal." Kalem lies within Goa's oldest and largest protected forest. Opponents warn that ore handling will raise air, noise and water pollution levels, damaging watersheds, forest health and wildlife corridors. Though an alternative yard 2 km outside the sanctuary was proposed earlier, campaigners note that the ore route still cuts through fragile ecosystems. "Shifting the yard doesn't shift the damage," said one organiser. "If trucks and loaders use the same roads, the pollution remains." Campaigners are also concerned about the board's independence. With railway officials participating in internal discussions, activists fear the board may act as a passive recipient of decisions. "It's worrying that the Wildlife Board appears to be taking cues from the Railways, rather than

asserting what's acceptable in a sanctuary," said one conservationist. The campaign has gained momentum online, with citizens from Goa and beyond being urged to send appeals before Monday's meeting. The petition letter states: "It is disconcerting to know that Railway representatives were part of the deliberations, and their decisions will be conveyed to the Board—rather than the Board defending wildlife interests. We urge that the natural world remain your core mandate." Activists are calling for not only the rejection of the Kalem proposal but also a broader commitment to keeping protected areas off-limits to extractive industries. With time running out, campaigners hope citizen pressure will count. "The board must remember its name—it's the Wildlife Board, not a clearances committee for mining companies," said a signatory. "We hope they do what's right."

Young artists chronicle the fading story of Goa's oyster shell windows

In old Goan homes, oyster shell window panes once let in filtered sunlight while keeping the interiors airy—an elegant solution to Goa's heat and humidity, drawn straight from the sea. Now, two young women—Elisha D'Souza, 19, and Bhawana Jain, 26—are retracing the stories hidden in these fragile panes, before they disappear for good. As part of the Goa Water Stories initiative, the two artists combined photography, writing, oral history, and installations to explore the intersection of water, culture, and memory embedded in the declining tradition of oyster shell windows. For Elisha, a student of Arts at Carmel College, the project was personal. "The story of the oyster shell windowpane isn't just about architecture—it represents an entire ecosystem and a connection to the past," she says. "I was drawn to how water shaped something as tangible as a window, and how that window, in turn, tells us something about how people once lived with the sea."

Her work took her to heritage homes in Chandor, where she met Ranjeev Fernandes, who showed her the last few shells his family had preserved. "He spoke about how it's no longer easy to find Goan carpenters skilled in this work. That hit me—preserving heritage isn't just about saving things. It's about saving knowledge," she says. Elisha also recalled the stories of her grand-uncle, the late Ambrose Cardozo, a retired seafarer. "He would talk about voyages, lost

treasures, and the wisdom of the fishing community. It helped me understand that cultural heritage and environmental conservation aren't separate—they flow into each other." The oyster window is one such confluence. Known locally as mussor or capiz shells, these were translucent panels made from windowpane oysters, once abundant off Chicalim Bay,

Nauxim Bay and many other parts of Goa's coast. Today, the species (Placuna placenta) is in decline due to pollution, overharvesting and coastal construction. Bhawana, an MA Fine Arts student at Central Saint Martins, London, says her two years in Goa helped her see how memory is held in materials. One day, while interviewing an elderly Portuguese man, he handed her a small box of old oyster shells. "It was such a simple act, but so symbolic," she recalls. "This wasn't just

waste. It was a piece of someone's story." Her installations and cyanotypes reflect this entanglement of ecology and personal memory. "We are water—we cannot live in it, but we need it to live," she says. "Water is a sculptor of landscapes, traditions and beliefs. When we lose these oyster windows, we lose a way of thinking about water as a presence, not just a resource." Both Elisha and Bhawana believe that documentation and creative engagement are key to preserving Goa's cultural and ecological heritage. Through photography, installations, and interviews, they hope to raise awareness about the interconnectedness of water, tradition, and sustainability. "My dream for Goa," says Elisha, "is one where development doesn't come at the cost of our roots—where local knowledge and sustainable practices are respected and carried forward."

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.

Scan the QR code to experience Elisha and Bhawana's project, 'The Oyster shell window panes'

After days of pleading, seawater drained from Betalbatim fields

MARGAO: After over a week of waiting, farmers from Betalbatim finally saw relief on Saturday as floodwater that had swamped their paddy fields was released into the sea. The operation, carried out with the assistance of Benaulim MLA Venzy Viegas, came as a major respite to cultivators who had feared crop damage due to prolonged waterlogging. For eight days, the farmers had been seeking permission to deploy a JCB to open the blocked handi (traditional water outlet), which would have allowed the stagnant water—a mix of seawater and rain—to drain

out. Their repeated appeals to various authorities went unanswered, as they were directed from one office to another, with the process held up over the need for Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) clearance. During this time, the water levels continued to rise, submerging not just their fields but also the narrow access paths they rely on for daily work. Many said they stood to lose weeks of labour and thousands spent on inputs, as there was no way to pump or manually drain the water. Some feared the paddy would start rotting if the situation persisted, wiping out the season's yield.

Navelim dog shooting: Gun mismatch under police lens

MARGAO: In a fresh development in the Navelim dog shooting case, police are probing a suspected mismatch between the gun surrendered by the accused and the type of bullets found in the injured animal. While the shooter has reportedly handed over a 0.1 calibre airgun, the family of the dog's owner claims the bullets retrieved are of .22 calibre. Police have sought a ballistic report, and further investigation is under way. The incident occurred on June 19 in an open field in Bellem, Navelim. Valentina Vieira filed a complaint alleging that her neighbour, 20-year-old Jovito Fernandes, shot her pet dog four times—three pellets struck its stomach and one its head. The act was captured on CCTV. The dog is currently hospitalised. PSI Sanjay Velip is investigating.

MAX. TEMP	29.6 °C
MIN. TEMP	25.7 °C

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Please arrest me — I don't want to miss the party!