

ILLEGAL FILLING OF FIELDS DESTROYING GOA'S FARMLAND, WARN GREENS

Salcete Block Development Office confirms multiple cases of land-filling have taken place without permission; activists demand strict action against violators

Team Herald

MARGAO: A series of complaints regarding the illegal filling of agricultural land across several villages in Salcete taluka has sparked concern among environmentalists and social activists, who have called for strict action from the authorities, warning that these activities are contributing to the rapid destruction of Goa's farmland.

Information obtained from the Salcete Block Development Office (BDO) confirms that multiple cases of land-filling have taken place without permission. The

violations came to light during an inspection exercise ordered by the High Court, which is monitoring illegal land conversions and encroachments on agricultural zones.

The BDO is in the process of compiling a detailed report on the findings, which will be submitted to the High Court through the Directorate of Panchayats.

Villages affected include Navelim, Colva, Majorda, Betalbatim, Raia, and others in the taluka.

Environmental activists warn that these activities are contributing to the rapid destruction of Goa's farmland.

CALL FOR RESTORING FIELDS

- Violations came to light during an inspection exercise ordered by the High Court, which is monitoring illegal land conversions and encroachments on agricultural zones
- The BDO is in the process of compiling a detailed report on the findings
- Affected villages include Navelim, Colva, Majorda, Betalbatim, Raia, and others
- Locals claim these activities are being carried out by ignoring legal procedures & ECs
- Activists demanded swift and deterrent action from Panchayat & TCP Depts
- Called for restoring damaged fields & implement monitoring mechanisms at the panchayat level to prevent violations

"What we are witnessing is a slow but steady erasure of agricultural land. If the government does not act now, we may have nothing left to protect in a few years," said Xavier Fernandes, an ac-

tivist based in Loutolim.

In many instances, fields have been found filled with truckloads of mud and construction debris, allegedly done at night to avoid detection.

"The authorities are too slow in responding, and violators are exploiting this delay. In some places, fields are being filled overnight. This is not just a planning issue—it's an environmental crime," said Savio Rodrigues, a resident of Colva.

Locals have expressed concern that these illegal activities are being carried out in collusion with powerful interests, often under the guise of development, while ignoring legal procedures and environmental clearances.

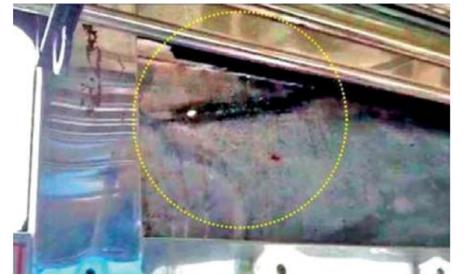
Activists have urged the Directorate of Panchayats and the TCP Department to take swift and deterrent action.

They also demanded the restoration of damaged agricultural fields and the implementation of monitoring mechanisms at the panchayat level to prevent further violations.

With pressure mounting from civil society, all eyes are now on the BDO report and the steps the state administration will take in response to these grave violations.

Rainwater leaks into Kadamba bus

Passengers complain window was covered with tin sheet; NGO threatens to file a formal complaint



The window of the KTCL bus covered with a sheet of tin

Team Herald

MARGAO: Passengers of a KTCL bus complained of rainwater entering the vehicle through a missing window pane, prompting an NGO to threaten formal action over the deteriorating condition of public transport vehicles.

The incident occurred on a KTCL bus bearing registration number GA 03 X 0552, operating on the Margao-Panjim shuttle route, where rainwater entered through a window that had been covered with a sheet of tin instead of proper glass.

The issue was reported during the Thursday morning shuttle service, with passengers expressing shock at being forced to travel in a bus that lacked basic safety and comfort standards.

The makeshift tin covering led to prevent rainwater from seeping into the bus, causing considerable inconvenience to commuters during their journey.

GOACAN, a local NGO, documented the incident and expressed outrage over the condition of the

public transport vehicle. The organisation questioned when Kadamba Transport Corporation Limited (KTCL) would take concrete steps to rectify such issues, highlighting the unacceptable state of buses that daily commuters are forced to rely on.

The NGO indicated that it would file a formal complaint, calling attention to the appalling reality that passengers must endure such conditions on what should be dependable public transport.

This is not the first time complaints have been raised about rainwater entering KTCL buses. The latest incident adds to mounting concerns over the poor maintenance of KTC buses, especially on high-traffic routes like the Margao-Panjim corridor, which serves hundreds of daily passengers.

This route has also seen repeated complaints of commuters waiting in excessively long queues to board buses, amidst what passengers allege is apathy and indifference from KTCL staff when verbal complaints are raised.

Khola chilli ryots undergo training to enhance sustainable farming practices

Team Herald

MARGAO: The ICAR-Central Coastal Agricultural Research Institute (ICAR-CCARI), Old Goa, recently organised a training and input distribution programme on Integrated Nutrient Management (INM) in GI-certified Khola Chilli at Khola village. Conducted under the Scheduled Tribe (ST) Component of ICAR, the programme aimed to enhance sustainable farming practices and improve productivity of this traditional and valuable Geographical Indication crop of Goa.

The event witnessed active participation from 60 Scheduled Tribe women farmers, all engaged in Kho-

la chilli cultivation.

The training focused on the promotion of Phospho-rich Organic Manure (Phospho Urja) as a sustainable alternative to conventional fertilisers, with emphasis on improving soil health and enhancing crop performance.

The technical session was conducted by Manish Patel, Technician from the Natural Resource Management Section at ICAR-CCARI.

He provided in-depth guidance on the use of Phospho Urja.

The training aimed to equip farmers with knowledge of sustainable farming techniques that could improve their crop yields.

PADDY POWER



Farmers engaged in age-old traditional agricultural activity of planting paddy crop in a field at Fatorda

Old collectorate lift defunct for days, visitors inconvenienced

Team Herald

MARGAO: The elevator at the old collectorate building in Margao, housing several key government offices, has remained non-functional for several days, causing immense hardship to citizens and government employees alike.

Among the worst affected are senior citizens, pregnant staff member, and persons with mobility issues, who are being forced to climb up to four floors by staircase.

The building accommodates offices such as the South Goa Zilla Panchayat, Social Welfare Department, Tribal Welfare Department, Administrator of Comunidades, Women and Child Development and the District Agriculture Office. On any given day, a large number of people visit these offices to access public services, making the elevator a



crucial facility.

Milagres Fernandes, a local resident who visited the Social Welfare Office recently, said: "This is a government building that caters to hundreds of people daily. It's shocking that an essential facility like an elevator has been out of service for so long. How are elderly people and pregnant women expected to climb multiple floors?"

A visibly exhausted Sadanand Naik, a senior citizen who had to reach the third floor, echoed similar concerns. "I have knee problems. Climbing these stairs is not only painful but dangerous. I had to stop

multiple times to catch my breath. We talk about inclusive governance, but this is the reality we face."

A staff member of one of the government departments, who wished to remain anonymous, also shared her ordeal. "It's been a struggle to report to work every day. The government must prioritise basic infrastructure, especially in buildings with such a high footfall," she said.

Despite repeated complaints from both the public and staff, no immediate action appears to have been taken to repair the elevator. The building, which serves as a hub for various public services in South Goa, lacks any alternative provisions for those unable to use the stairs.

The ongoing situation has raised serious concerns about accessibility and safety in government buildings.

P'yat director issues directive on overuse of Margao burial ground

Team Herald

MARGAO: Amid mounting concerns over the overuse of Margao's sole burial facility at Pajifond, the Directorate of Panchayats has issued a strong directive to the Salcete Block Development Officer (BDO), asking for immediate action from all village panchayats in the taluka to address the lack of State-owned burial and cremation grounds within their own jurisdictions.

The instruction, issued by Director of Panchayats Siddhi Halarnkar, follows a complaint submitted by Margao resident Abdul Martin Carol and subsequent communication from the Additional Director of Panchayats (South). The complaint highlights how the Pajifond kabrastan, originally meant to serve the Muslim community

of Margao town, is now forced to accommodate burials from multiple villages across Salcete.

In her memorandum, Halarnkar directed the Salcete BDO to instruct all village panchayat secretaries to table the burial ground issue for discussion at their fortnightly meetings, take suitable action on the complaint, and submit a detailed report within 15 days of receiving the directive.

Carol, who has long raised this concern on behalf of the Muslim community, stated that establishing burial grounds within each village's jurisdiction would ease the persistent pressure on the Margao facility and reduce the burden on grieving families forced to transport the deceased over long distances.

Unattended garbage bin raises stink near Margao schools

Team Herald

MARGAO: The unhygienic conditions prevailing on account of a garbage bin with wet waste left unattended near Loyola High School and Fatima High School in Margao have sparked anger among parents, students, and residents, who have demanded immediate action.

The bin, reportedly left unattended for several days, emits a strong and unpleasant stench, creating a hazardous environment in the vicinity of two prominent educational institutions. The foul smell and presence of rotting garbage have made the area uncomfortable, particularly for schoolchildren.

Parents have voiced frustration over the neglect by municipal authorities and have urged the Margao Municipal Council to remove the bin at the earliest,



warning that the current situation could lead to serious health issues.

"Every morning, we have to walk through this mess with our children. The smell is unbearable, and it's only a matter of time before someone falls ill. The garbage must be removed without delay," said Riyana Shaikh, a parent of a student from Loyola High School.

Echoing this concern, Francis Fernandes, another parent said, "It's shocking that the authorities have allowed this to happen right outside schools. Our children deserve a clean

and safe environment. We demand immediate action to clear the bin and prevent such neglect in the future."

Students attending both schools have also been forced to endure the foul odour while entering and exiting the premises, raising questions about the effectiveness of waste management and sanitation efforts in the town. Many parents worry that prolonged exposure to decomposing waste could affect their children's health.

Residents have urged the municipality to ensure regular garbage collection.

Siridao fishermen briefed on climate-resilient mariculture practices

Team Herald

MARGAO: A fishermen-scientist interaction was organised at the ICAR-Central Coastal Agricultural Research Institute (ICAR-CCARI) in Goa to promote climate-resilient mariculture practices among coastal fishing communities.

The event brought together 10 fishermen from Siridao, as part of ongoing efforts to build adaptive capacity of vulnerable coastal villages against climate change through sustainable and resilient aquaculture practices.

The interaction aimed to create awareness about climate-resilient aquaculture technologies, promote fish biodiversity conservation, and understand the ground-level needs of the fishing community.

Scientists briefed the

fishermen on various climate-resilient aquaculture practices including open sea cage farming, seaweed cultivation, and mussel farming as viable livelihood options in the face of changing marine environments.

The initiative also emphasized the promotion of artificial reefs to enhance marine biodiversity and restore degraded coastal habitats. During the event, the fishermen of Siridao were felicitated for their commendable act of rescuing and releasing stranded dolphins under the guidance of ICAR-CCARI scientists. This gesture reflects the deep-rooted conservation ethos of the fishing community.

The fishermen expressed a positive response to the climate-resilient fish farming initiative and showed keen interest in adopting these technologies in their village.

Team Herald

MARGAO: An initiative that bridged generations and promoted sustainable practices, a group of students and parents recently took part in a traditional paddy transplantation exercise in Curtorim's Angli-Tollem fields.

The experiential learning session was spearheaded by environmentalist Tallulah D'Silva and Vishal Raule from Panjim, in collaboration with local farmer and agro-biodiversity campaigner J Santano Rodrigues.

The visit was part of an awareness drive to encourage appreciation for organic farming and traditional agricultural techniques. Despite the State government's continued push for mechanised farming solutions, this initiative focused on the cultural and

environmental importance of manual transplantation methods.

Rodrigues, who also heads the NGO Goa Panchayati Raj Institutions Union (PRI), shared that the request came from the student group and their guardians, who were eager to learn about the age-old practice. "Though I had already finished transplanting my own fields, I didn't want to turn them away. I reached out to a fellow farmer who generously agreed to let us use his plot for the demonstration," he said, expressing delight at the enthusiasm shown by the young participants.

Around 50 students, who were accompanied by their parents, rolled up their sleeves and waded into the fields to engage directly in the transplanting process. The activity not

Cultivating values: Students, parents reconnect with nature, transplant paddy in Curtorim fields

ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS

- 50 students, accompanied by their parents, rolled up their sleeves, waded into the fields and engaged in the transplanting process
- The activity served as an opportunity to reconnect with nature and understand the labour and precision that traditional farming entails
- The group belongs to the Traveling Dome initiative, which organises immersive, nature-focused experiences for children and families
- The Curtorim visit included transplanting exercise and a tree plantation drive
- The event highlighted the interconnectedness of biodiversity, farming traditions, and ecological awareness

only served as a lesson in sustainable agriculture but also as an opportunity to reconnect with nature and understand the labour and precision that traditional farming entails.

The group belongs to the Traveling Dome initiative, which organises immersive, nature-focused experiences for children and families. Their Curtorim visit included both the transplanting exercise and a tree plantation drive, with saplings provided by the Goa State Biodiversity Board. The dual-event highlighted the interconnectedness of biodiversity, farming traditions, and

ecological awareness.

D'Silva and Raule praised the turnout and energy, noting that such participation among youth and parents shows promising signs for the future of environmental stewardship. "Events like these help foster a deeper understanding of our land and food systems. It's not just about planting rice—it's about cultivating values," said D'Silva.

Rodrigues reiterated the importance of individual and community-level engagement in preserving Goa's traditional agrarian identity. "Even as the government supports mechanisation, we've remained committed to promoting organic and traditional practices. They might not always be the most economical, but they are vital for long-term sustainabil-

ity," he said.

The Agro-biodiversity team of Goa PRI, along with support from the Goa State Biodiversity Board (GSP-CB), ensured that the event ran smoothly, offering guidance and equipment to all participants.

As the monsoon rains nourished the freshly planted saplings and paddy shoots, the day ended not just with muddy feet, but with a renewed sense of purpose among those who attended—particularly the young learners, who left with a new appreciation for Goa's rural heritage.

The parents also praised the initiative, speaking about how it has sparked so much of interest about agriculture for their children who got to participate in such a different and yet traditional activity.