

Goa lags in tech: 1 in 5 govt schools has PCs for teaching

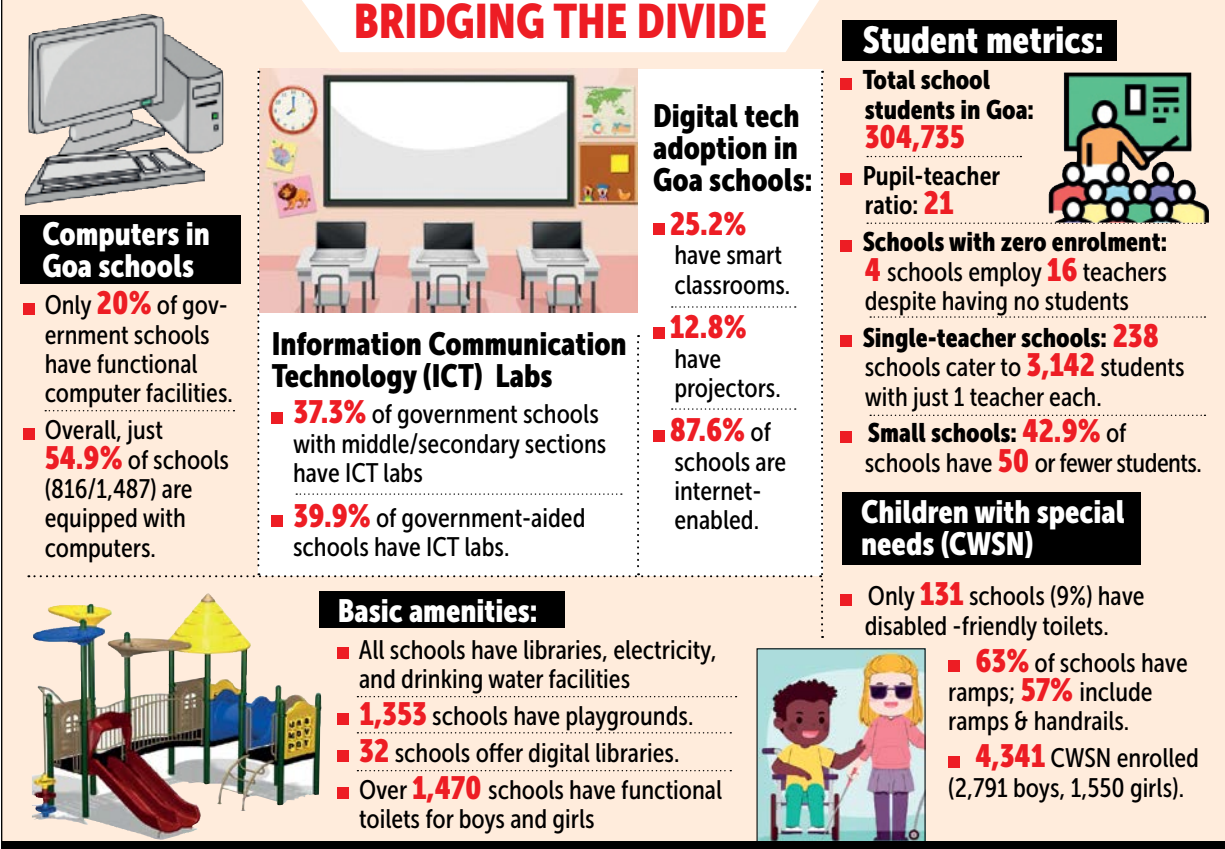
Union Education Ministry's UDISE+ report reveals stark digital disparity; pvt schools show over 90% computer coverage against govt's 20%

Team Herald

MARGAO: A recent report by the Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India, has spotlighted glaring disparities in educational infrastructure across Goa's schools. The Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2023-24 report paints a stark picture: only 20% of government schools in Goa have functional computer facilities for teaching—a sharp contrast to states and union territories like Chandigarh, Delhi, Puducherry, and Kerala, where nearly every school boasts such amenities.

Of Goa's 1,487 schools, just over half (54.9%) have operational computer facilities, though this figure masks deep inequalities. While 94.6% of government-aided schools and 92.9% of private aided schools are equipped, only 158 of 789 government schools meet this basic benchmark. Alarmingly, less than 40% of government and government-aided schools with middle and secondary sections have functional ICT labs, signaling a significant digital divide.

Goa's schools serve 304,735 students with a teaching force of 14,594, maintaining a pupil-teacher ratio of 21. However, tech-



nology adoption remains uneven. Only 25.2% of schools have smart classrooms, 12.8% use projectors, and 36.4% leverage mobile phones for teaching. Although 87.6% of schools have internet connectivity, systemic gaps persist—such as four schools with zero students that still employ 16 teachers, and 238 single-teacher schools managing a combined 3,142 students.

The report lays bare the challenges of scale and resources. Nearly 43% of Goa's schools cater to 50 or fewer students, while 11% accommodate over 500. Yet, there is a silver lining: all schools boast essentials like libraries, electricity, and drinking water. Playgrounds are available in 1,353 schools, while 32 have digital libraries, and 1,470 schools have functional toilets for

boys and girls. Environmental measures remain underdeveloped, with only 51 schools equipped with solar panels and 60 adopting rain-water harvesting systems. The secondary dropout rate is another concern, standing at 7.8%—with boys dropping out at a higher rate (10%) than girls (5.4%). The situation is even more

children with special needs (CWSN). Only 9% of schools (131 of 1,487) have toilets suitable for CWSN, though 63% have ramps, and 57% combine ramps with handrails. Currently, 4,341 children with special needs—2,791 boys and 1,550 girls—are enrolled, highlighting the pressing need for Goa to invest in inclusive and equitable infrastructure for its future generations.

Over 400 religious leaders urge President, PM to address violence against Christians

The appeal follows 14 reported incidents of violence, threats, and disruptions against Christian gatherings during Christmas season

Team Herald

MARGAO: Over 400 senior Christian leaders and 30 church groups issued an urgent appeal to the President of India Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, calling for decisive action to address the mounting wave of violence against Christians throughout the nation.

This appeal specifically addresses at least 14 documented incidents of violence, threats, and disruptions that targeted Christian gatherings across the country during the Christmas season, the leaders and church groups detailed in their press release.

Expressing profound concern over the alarming trend of intolerance and hostility, the appeal was signed by prominent Christian leaders including Thomas Abraham, David Onesimu, Joab Lohara, Richard Howell, Mary Scaria, Cedric Prakash S J, John Dayal, Prakash Louis S J, Zelhau Keyho, E H Kharkongor, Allen Brooks, K Losii Mao, Akhilesh Ed-

gar, Michael Willams, A C Michael, and Vijayesh Lal. The leaders presented comprehensive documentation from two major organisations: the Evangelical Fellowship of India has reported over 720 incidents of violence targeting Christians, while the United Christian Forum has independently recorded 760 cases between January and November 2024, underscoring the widespread nature of these incidents.

The appeal draws attention to multiple systemic concerns plaguing the community, including the widespread misuse of anti-conversion laws, escalating threats to religious freedom, the proliferation of hate speech, and discriminatory policies that continue to deny Dalit Christians their Scheduled Caste status. The Christian leaders specifically emphasised the urgent need for the PM's intervention in Manipur, where ongoing violence has resulted in over 250 deaths, the destruction of 360 churches, and the displacement of thousands of residents since May 2023.

Carmona Comunidade elects new panel

MARGAO: The Comunidade of Carmona has been revived after a 30-year hiatus, marking a significant milestone in its history. The newly elected committee, which will serve a three-year term, includes President Blair Rodrigues, Substitute Francisco E. Furtado, Attorney Teofil Antao, Substitute Serafino Cota, Treasurer Osmand Egipsy, and Substitute Neizel Antao.

EXPOSITION MASS OF ST FRANCIS XAVIER

Watch the Exposition Mass Day 44, in Konkani at 5 pm on Herald TV and YouTube. Just scan this QR code and watch the Holy Mass on your cell phone. **NOTE: THE QR CODE WILL BE ACTIVE ONLY AT 5PM**

CIVIC NUISANCE



Workers employed by the Santa Cruz village panchayat collect garbage from the road side in the village. Despite a warning signboard, miscreants continue to dump garbage at the secluded spot

Committee formed to probe workplace sexual harassment complaints in South Goa

Tem Herald

MARGAO: The District Magistrate has established a Local Complaints Committee for South Goa under Section 6 of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act. The committee, chaired by Neha A. Naik Panvelkar, includes members Auda Viegas, Nimisha Faleiro, Adv Paty Da Silva, Anand Gaude, and

Sister Deepti Kuruvilla, alongside representatives from the Directorate of Social Welfare and the Directorate of Women and Child Development.

The committee is tasked with receiving and investigating complaints of sexual harassment as defined under Section 2(n) of the Act, adhering to the guidelines outlined in Chapters 4 and 5. Its proceedings will follow principles of natural justice and the prescribed procedures under the Act.

Block Development Officers (BDOs) and Chief Officers of Municipal Councils within the South Goa District have been appointed as Nodal Officers at the block and taluka levels. Their role is to receive complaints and forward them to the Local Complaints Committee for further action.



CRIME SURGE: ARE PREVENTION AND CONVICTIONS MORE IMPORTANT THAN HIGH DETECTION RATE?

As Goa looks back at 2024, cases of heinous crimes have steadily been rising, with 106 rapes and 29 murder cases being reported by the police in 2024. White-collar crimes have also risen exponentially, with the cash-for-jobs scam that broke in October 2024, ratcheting up figures of many crores of rupees that have been siphoned off

“Prevention and detection primarily depend on the police department. And the police primarily depend on the head of the department. This means people of IGP and higher ranks, as well as the one in charge of the Home Department. The Home Minister has to take regular reviews and provide directions. However, this is not happening in Goa. FIRs are not registered even after 24 hours in cases of assault. There is no doubt that the Goa Police have cracked some good cases. However, they cannot rest on their laurels; they have to be available and responsive 24x7” — Prashant Naik

“Crime levels have reached alarming heights, with instances of drinking in Panjim, even on the routes frequented by top officials like the DGP, SP North, and SP Home. This trend must be curbed, and law enforcement agencies should focus on preventing crimes, not just detecting them. Effective surveillance by Crime Investigation Departments (CIDs) is crucial in uncovering and preventing crimes, particularly in tourist-dominated areas. The prevalence of thefts and rapes everywhere is unacceptable, and the government should take responsibility for its failure to ensure public safety” — Rui Ferreira, advocate

“There should be two divisions within the police: one for investigation and detection, and the other for law and order. Those who are physically well-built, for whom most physical tests are tailored, should be assigned to law and order. In contrast, those in crime detection should possess intellectual and analytical strengths to analyze complex cases. For the second category, it can recruit individuals with law degrees” — Radharao Gracias, advocate

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Citizens slam MMC's push for café within Margao municipal garden



Team Herald

MARGAO: The Margao Municipal Council (MMC) is once again advocating for a cafeteria within the famous Margao Municipal Garden, known as Aga Khan Children's Park, despite earlier resistance when the idea was tabled. The matter is set to resurface at the Council's January 3 meeting, raising fresh debate about its feasibility and necessity.

Former MMC chairperson and convenor of the Shadow Council for Margao (SCM) Savio Coutinho criticised the renewed push for the cafeteria, saying, "It looks like the proposer of the restaurant in the multi-level parking facility is still lobbying with the powers-that-be for the allotment of municipal premises (garden) for a restaurant."

It may be recalled that earlier, there was a plan to establish a restaurant on the rooftop of the multi-

The idea was proposed and shot down at the civic body's previous council meeting; critics decry lack of public consultation; matter to be discussed today council meeting

level parking facility, which attracted public criticism and had to be withdrawn due to a lack of bidders.

In this case, the cafeteria proposal first sparked controversy when it was introduced at a previous council meeting, with critics questioning the sudden urgency of the BJP-led civic body to establish such a facility in the garden. Many had raised concerns about the lack of public consultation and whether the project aligns with the garden's intended purpose.

The meeting this week will also address the fate of

the long-delayed multilevel parking project, initially planned to ease congestion in the city. The MMC is now considering a hydraulic parking system after failing to attract bidders for the original concrete structure. However, the focus on a cafeteria has overshadowed discussions about Margao's pressing parking issues, particularly around the garden.

Adding to public frustration, the Council appears to have shelved the proposed 'Dada-Dadi and Nana-Nani Park' for senior citizens, an initiative long touted as a priority.

Coutinho also highlighted another glaring oversight in MMC's agenda. "There is absolutely no mention of the future course of action against the staff who misappropriated Rs 18 lakh or the recovery of the money," he noted, accusing the Council of shielding the accused employee instead of pursuing justice.

Loutolim farmers pin hopes on NGT, HC to stay Borim bridge project

NGT hearing on January 7; Goa govt and PWD response awaited

Team Herald

MARGAO: As the next hearing before the National Green Tribunal (NGT) on January 7 approaches, farmers from Loutolim and Borim are hopeful for a positive outcome regarding their petition against the proposed high-level Borim bridge. The farmers are also preparing to escalate the matter further by filing a petition before the High Court in a bid to secure a stay on the controversial project.

Albert Pinheiro, President of the Carbot, Mascasana & Bebedo Tenants Association in Loutolim, expressed optimism, stating, "We have high hopes that there will be a stay either from the NGT or the High Court. As of now, besides the one attempt by the PWD and consultant to enter our fields to carry out the demarcation, there has been no further movement on the ground." Meanwhile, the farmers remain focused on maintaining their khazan fields, a centuries-old agricultural system that is now under threat.

The upcoming NGT hearing follows the tribunal's December 2 session, during which it reserved its order on the farmers'

plea for a stay on land acquisition proceedings related to the bridge project and adjourned the next hearing to January 7, 2025. At the last hearing, the Goa government had sought additional time to file its reply, leading to the adjournment. The tribunal did not grant the farmers' immediate prayer for a stay, leaving the Public Works Department (PWD) to file its reply by the next hearing.

In their petition, the farmers argued that the current design and alignment of the proposed bridge on NH-17B (NH-566) disregards the presence of Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) areas, forest regions, and the environmental sensitivities of the site. They contended that the project threatens eco-sensitive areas and khazan lands, which are vital for the local community's livelihood and environmental balance.

The petitioners highlighted that the Zuari River, the largest in Goa, traverses multiple talukas, including Tiswadi, Ponda, and Salcete. They emphasised the significance of the river's saline wetlands, reclaimed approximately 4,000 years ago by indigenous communities.