

# Three Salcete village panchayats risk fund freeze from April 1 for violating Goa Panchayat Raj Act

## Failure to hold gram sabhas and present budgets puts Cana-Benaulim, Loutolim and Betalbatim in financial limbo

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Three of the 30 village panchayats from Salcete have not only failed to adhere to the Goa Panchayat Raj Act but will also not be able to spend any money from April 1, as their budget for the financial year 2024-25 are not presented to the villagers.

Section 5 of the Goa Panchayat Raj Act clearly states that every village panchayat shall hold a gram sabha on any Sunday in the month of January. The Aquem Baixo Panchayat was the only panchayat to hold a gram sabha on January 28, 2024.

Following directions from

the BDO on February 26, other panchayats held their gram sabhas in the February or March and all of them presented the budgets at the gram sabha meetings.

However, Cana-Benaulim, Loutolim and Betalbatim are the only three panchayats that did not hold the gram sabha nor have they presented their budgets to the villagers.

"We could not have our gram sabha as our panchayat hall was given to the church for use, since the church is undergoing repairs," said Loutolim Sarpanch Joanna Fernandes, who incidentally has resigned since.

Incidentally, the 9-member Loutolim Panchayat has

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two couples as members including Joanna and her husband. While candidly agreeing that there was an agreement between them to share the office of the sarpanch, Joanna assured that the budget will be presented at the next gram sabha to be held in April.

Benaulim Sarpanch Xavier Pereira explained, "We had a problem, as our secretary was suddenly suspended and that is why

we could not hold our gram sabha." He assured that the budget will be presented at the next gram sabha.

Betalbatim Sarpanch Minu Antonio Fernandes, while admitting that they did not hold the gram sabha, said he will discuss with the secretary what should be done next, while pointing out that their secretary is presently on sick leave.

Salcete BDO Pranit Naik was categorical in stating

that the three panchayats will not be able to spend any money till the budget is presented before the gram sabha and implied that from April 1, the three panchayats will not be able to utilise any funds.

"The Director of Panchayats will have to decide what action should be taken for not holding the mandatory gram sabha in January," he said, while pointing out that the Act empowers the BDO to convene the gram sabha, which he said they had done.

"Any aggrieved villager can complain to the Director of Panchayats for failure to convene the mandated gram sabha in January," he said.

# Party will decide on Shripad Naik's retirement: BJP President

## MoS had stated that 2024 Lok Sabha election will be his last election; requested party to choose a new face for 2029

Team Herald

**PANJIM:** Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) State president and Rajya Sabha MP Sadanand Shet Tanavade on Tuesday said that the party will decide on the retirement of Union Minister of State for Tourism Shripad Naik, from politics.

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Naik has further stated that the opposition were making false propaganda that there is anti-incumbency in the North Goa constituency. "There is nothing like anti-incumbency and opposition are trying to misguide the voters," he had said.

Naik who is seeking re-election for the sixth consecutive term said

that it was unfortunate those who had never won any election were making baseless charges against him that he did not raise issues concerning the State in Parliament. "Opposition should know that most of the time I was Union Minister," he said advising the opposition to exercise caution while making absurd statement against him.

# Speaker begins final arguments on disqualification of Digambar, Michael

Team Herald

**PANJIM:** Goa Assembly Speaker Ramesh Tawadkar on Tuesday began final arguments on disqualification petitions filed against the then Leader of the Opposition and MLA Michael Lobo and Margao MLA Digambar Kamat.

Concluding his arguments, Goa Pradesh Congress Committee (GPCC) president Amit Patkar's counsel Adv Abhijit Gosavi submitted that by their conduct in July 2022, the two MLAs demonstrated that they had voluntarily given up their membership.

"They (both MLAs) have failed to attend the Congress Legislature Party (CLP) meetings held on July 9 and 10. One of them attended only one meet-

ing while the other MLA did not attend any meeting. Even on July 10, one of them was found at the official residence of the chief minister. This is nothing but voluntarily giving up the party's membership," Adv Gosavi submitted.

"By the conduct of the MLAs, it was clear that they had voluntarily given up the membership and this fact was fortified as in the month of September when they joined Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It is to be seen in the context that whatever we were alleging eventually proved correct," Adv Gosavi said citing some judgments of Supreme Court, wherein it has stated that voluntarily giving up party's membership can also be inferred from the conduct of the MLAs.

# Irreversible damage threatens iconic Baga River

## Calangute Biodiversity Committee sounds alarm over unchecked development; urges swift action to safeguard mangroves and riverine life before it's too late

Team Herald

**CALANGUTE:** The iconic Baga river, in Calangute, is facing irreversible destruction and urgent action is needed to stop the destruction of mangroves and riverine biodiversity, according to the bio-diversity management committee (BMC) of the Calangute panchayat.

The Calangute Village Panchayat biodiversity panel, in a complaint to the Goa State Coastal Zone Management Authority (GCZMA) and other authorities, said unauthorised construction activities on the banks of the Baga river with indiscriminate dumping of waste, release of sewage water and land filling are leading to



irreversible damage to the river, which is a global tourist attraction.

In the complaint, the bio-diversity panel stated,



"Baga holds significant importance as a national small river, not only for its ecological value but also for its cultural and environmental significance. However, unauthorised construction activities on its banks have led to irreversible damage to its delicate ecosystem."

"The mangrove forests along the riverbanks serve as crucial habitat for a diverse range of flora and fauna, playing a vital role in maintaining the ecological balance of the region. Moreover, the river itself supports a rich biodiversity of aquatic life, including endangered species that depend on its waters for survival."

"The Goa State Pollution

Control Board (GSPCB) had conducted an inspection of Baga river in 2019. The report prepared by GSPCB was placed before the gram sabha which was held recently. The gram sabha which resolved to call for a joint site inspection of Baga river as we find that the Baga river is getting more polluted due to unauthorised activities along the river bank," the complaint stated.

"We strongly urge you (GSPCB) to take immediate action to halt all further land filling and illegal construction activities along the banks of Baga river and to enforce strict regulations and penalties for those responsible for the destruction of the river," it said.

# Holi with Qawwali extravaganza in Xeldem

Team Herald

**SANGUEM:** Holi took on a distinctive hue in Xeldem, within the Curcholem constituency, as businessmen hailing from Rajasthan and Gujarat orchestrated a celebration that blended traditional fervor with musical charm on Monday.

While the customary splashes of colors adorned the festivities, the hallmark of the occasion was the inclusion of a captivating qawwali program, organized to amplify the spirit of the festival in Xeldem. Amidst the soul-stirring melodies resonating from Abhay Desai's residence, jubilant participants engaged in lively dance routines, enveloping one another in vibrant hues within the courtyard.

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