



In the wake of incidents of collapse of old buildings in Margao and Panjim, the State government has asked the municipal councils to conduct structural audits of all old and dilapidated buildings in their respective jurisdiction. In the previous Assembly session, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant had said that the government is in the process of demolishing 110 unsafe buildings in Goa. He had informed that the government had made a provision of Rs 600 crore for taking up the urgent repairs, maintenance and construction of buildings. **VITHALDAS HEGDE** delves deep into the issue to find out the status of dilapidated buildings in Goa

WEAKENING STRUCTURES



BUILDING CONDITION IN PANJIM

- ▶ The Corporation of the City of Panaji (CCP) has asked the Goa Engineering College, Farmagudi, to conduct a structural stability study of 12 old and dilapidated buildings identified in the capital city
- ▶ 12 buildings are in a dilapidated and dangerous condition and need to be demolished
- ▶ The request was made by the CCP in the backdrop of the partial collapse of an unoccupied building due to heavy rains at St Inez, last month
- ▶ Out of the 12 buildings identified by the CCP, three buildings are in Ribandar, one each in Altinho and St Inez and seven in Panjim
- ▶ Of these, only one building is owned by the government while the rest are in private properties
- ▶ CCP Mayor Rohit Monserrate said that they had written to the GEC to conduct structural stability of 12 buildings which appear to be in a dilapidated and dangerous condition

STRUCTURAL CONDITION IN MAPUSA

- ▶ As many as 11 structures have been identified as being dilapidated in Mapusa town
- ▶ From these 11, six are private houses/buildings/apartments and five are government offices or quarters
- ▶ Among the five government structures, three are residential quarters such as Asilo quarters, police quarters and Junta quarters, while the office of Agriculture Department and the Administrator of Comunidades are also situated in the weak buildings
- ▶ The Zonal Agriculture Office located at Duler was vacated about six months ago after cement chunks started falling down and the building is closed
- ▶ The Comunidade office, though in a bad state, is still functioning and only some sections of this building are lying closed

Alarmed by the collapse of old and dilapidated buildings in the State, the Goa government is in the process of introducing a new Bill for auditing all old and weak government and private buildings across the State during the next Assembly session. Mostly buildings which are more than 30 years old will be audited and based on it a decision will be taken whether to demolish them and reconstruct.

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant had informed the House during the Monsoon Session that a new Bill for auditing all old and weak government and private buildings would be introduced in the next Assembly session.

Replying to a private member resolution moved by Vasco MLA Krishna 'Daji' Salkar, the CM had said that many government buildings were 30 years old and some were even 50 years old. In fact, only an audit won't help. After the audit, a report would be submitted and action would have to be taken either by the Disaster Management Authority or Public Works Department.

The Public Works Department (PWD) has carried out a time-bound structural audit of all government buildings, including residential quarters, which are 30 years old in order to ensure the safety of occupants. The major municipal councils have roped in Goa Engineering College (GEC) to conduct structural audit of buildings in their respective limits.

“The Ponda Municipal Council has initiated the process to identify old dangerous buildings, including private structures, so that action could be taken considering public safety. The owner of Fatima Building at Varkhandem has been issued a notice asking him to provide a structural stability report
— Vishant Naik, municipal engineer, Ponda

The issue was debated in the Legislative Assembly wherein some members opposed the audit on grounds of who would pay for the audit cost. In his resolution, the Vasco MLA had stated that the Public Works Department should carry out a time-bound structural audit of all residential and multiple dwelling buildings that are 30 years and older to ensure the safety of residents.

Margao MLA Digambar Kamat had suggested that an authority be created to address the issue, as there are many buildings under litigation. However, Aldona MLA Carlos Ferreira opposed the resolution, arguing against auditing private buildings since some tenants

pay as low as Rs 25 or Rs 50. He questioned who would cover the audit costs.

Benaulim MLA Venzy Viegas advocated for auditing Comunidade and government buildings first.

Leader of Opposition Yuri Alemao also stated that the government should not audit private buildings but should first ensure the structural stability of government buildings.

But the government is firm that all civic bodies and the officials concerned should keep a regular tab on the structural audit of all buildings in their respective areas.

CCP ASKS GEC TO CONDUCT AUDIT OF 12 BUILDINGS

The Corporation of the City of Panaji (CCP) has asked the Goa Engineering College, Farmagudi, to conduct a structural stability study of 12 old and dilapidated buildings identified in the capital city.

The 12 buildings are in a dilapidated and dangerous condition and need to be demolished. The request was made by the CCP in the backdrop of the partial collapse of an unoccupied building due to heavy rains at St Inez last month.

Out of the 12 buildings identified by the CCP, three buildings are in Ribandar, one each in Altinho and St Inez and seven in Panjim. Of these, only one building is owned by the government while the rest are in private properties.

CCP Mayor Rohit Monserrate said that the Corporation had written to the GEC to conduct structural stability of 12 buildings which appear to be in a dilapidated and dangerous condition. The report by the GEC is awaited, he said.

11 STRUCTURES IN DILAPIDATED CONDITION AT MAPUSA

As many as 11 structures have been identified as being dilapidated in Mapusa town. From these 11, six are private houses/buildings/apartments and five are government offices or quarters.

Among the five government structures, three are residential quarters such as Asilo quarters, police quarters and Junta quarters, while the office of Agriculture Department and the Administrator of Comunidades are also housed in the weak buildings.

The Zonal Agriculture Office located at Duler was vacated about six months ago after cement chunks started falling down and the building is closed. The Comunidade office, though in a bad state, is still functioning and only some sections of this building are lying closed.

Besides these major structures, the Mapusa municipal market and Mapusa sub-yard are also structures which need urgent attention and the municipality claims that with limited funds it is unable to carry out repairs to the municipal market, while the

sub-yard needs to be maintained by the Bhagayatdaar Saunstha.

When contacted about the major 11 structures that were in bad shape, Mapusa Municipal Council chairperson Dr Nutan Bicholkar said that the municipality had very little role to play and limited powers.

She informed that with regards to government premises, the PWD was empowered to act and overall for government and private structures the Deputy Collector had powers to execute demolition also.

“The municipality is not a demolition agency and we cannot just go and demolish as there is a process to follow. With regards to government buildings, the State government needs to act, and for private buildings, we can at the most issue notices to the building owners and isolate weak buildings or evacuate people from it; beyond that we have no role to play,” Dr Bicholkar said.

She said that in the backdrop of severe monsoon she initiated action on all dilapidated structures and ensured that they remain vacant.

“We visited these structures with our technical staff and made sure that some urgent steps are taken for the safety of human life. Rest is in the hands of the government,” the Mapusa civic chief said.

Former Mapusa councillor and prominent social worker Tushar Tople was of the view that the government needs to prioritise certain areas of work and needs to act, rather than following a lengthy process and talking of disaster management.

“Talking of disaster after it had happened was of no use, and preventive steps need to be taken. The government needs to be prompt in demolishing these buildings and ensuring new structures or repair of the existing buildings are taken up,” Tople said.

PRIORITIES MUST BE SET RIGHT

Officials in the PWD (buildings section) however admitted that the process has been initiated to demolish police quarters, Junta

quarters and Asilo quarters as these come directly under the PWD. But with regards to the Comunidade office and agriculture office, the proposal should come from their head.

On condition of anonymity, officials informed that the issue also figured in the last Assembly session wherein the Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, who also holds the PWD portfolio, informed the House that in all 110 government structures including offices, housing quarters, etc., across the State needed to be demolished as they were beyond repairs.

The officials informed that irrespective of municipal correspondence the PWD was seized about the condition of the three quarters and had even declared them unsafe.

But the government process is always slow and since first such work should be allocated funds it is always seen what would be the cost of demolition and plans of subsequent reconstruction. The officials further said that if the government wants then it can move fast on this issue but now since the last several months, files calling for demolition of dilapidated government structures in Mapusa were gathering dust and till now these structures continue to stand thereby posing a threat to people.

According to Ponda Municipal Council Chairman Anand Naik, they had already identified some of the old and dangerous buildings situated within the municipal area and also started the work of demolishing them.

Recently, the Old Shastri Hall building housing the municipal library and some shops was demolished and the shop owners were relocated. The decision to demolish this two-storeyed building which was more than 50 years old was taken in 2018 by the then Deputy Collector.

“The municipality is not a demolition agency and we cannot just go and demolish as there is a process to follow. With regards to government buildings, the State government needs to act, and for private buildings, we can at the most issue notices to the building owners and isolate weak buildings or evacuate people from it; beyond that we have no role to play
— Nutan Bicholkar, Chairperson, Mapusa Municipal Council

The Goa Engineering College team in its report had stated that the building was structurally unstable and needed to be demolished. It was also posing risk to motorists and pedestrians since the building was facing the main road. There were incidents of plaster of the wall, slab plaster and the ceiling falling off while rusted iron rods were also exposed.

This was one of the landmark buildings in the heart of Ponda town. Naik said similar action would be taken on all such weak buildings after a team of experts from Goa Engineering College, Farmagudi, conducts the structural audit and submits its report.

Municipal engineer Vishant Naik told **O Herald** that the Ponda Municipal Council initiated the process to identify old dangerous buildings including private structures so that action could be taken considering public safety.

He said the owner of Fatima Building at Varkhandem has been already issued a notice asking him to provide a structural stability report. Some shop owners had already vacated their shops in the building and some have asked for time considering the festival season.

Naik said that some buildings may be repaired and re-strengthened, while those in precarious condition will be razed for public safety.

The 16-flat PMC Ponda Municipal Council building at Shantinagar, Ponda, built in 1982, is in a dilapidated condition. The tenants had vacated the shops and the municipality is in the process of reconstructing a new building. The old building of the Ponda health centre is also in a precarious condition.

Social worker Rocky Dias expressed his concern over old dangerous buildings. He said till old structures are demolished there is need to seal them in order to prevent untoward incidents or from becoming a hub of anti-social activities.

(Inputs by Marcos Gonsalves, Erwin Fonseca and Santosh Naik)

