

National spotlight on Goa's polluted lifeline, the Sal

The pot of water being ferried from River Sal to New Delhi for the Republic Day event carries not just pollutants, but also the weight of systemic failure; questions arise over government inaction on restoring the river's health despite numerous court directives and action plans

Team Herald

MARGAO: The decision to transport water from River Sal for Republic Day celebrations in Delhi has cast a spotlight on the river's alarming pollution levels. While the gesture aims to honour India's martyrs, it also raises questions about the river's deteriorating state and the failure to address its environmental degradation effectively.

The pollution of River Sal has been a matter of legal and public concern for years. A Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by Navelim resident Prof Antonio Alvares has prompted the High Court to monitor the issue closely. In response, agencies like the Margao Municipal Council (MMC), Sewerage Infrastructure Development Corporation of Goa Limited (SIDCGL), and the Public Works Department (PWD) were directed to tackle illegal sewage connections. However, enforcement has been

STATE OF THE SAL

POLLUTION
 ▶ High levels of faecal coliform (unit for bathing/recreation)
 ▶ Untreated sewage discharge from Margao
 ▶ Sediment imbalance affecting ecological health at Mobor

inconsistent, and the river's condition remains critical.



The PIL also highlighted the pollution of Salpem Lake, which receives untreated sewage from Margao through stormwater drains before the contaminated water flows into River Sal. Despite the court's directive to install phytotid bed treatment systems—a natural method of treating polluted water—progress has been negligible, leaving both the lake and the river in a worsening state.

KEY ISSUES
 ▶ Rampant illegal sewage connections.
 ▶ Outdated and inadequate sewerage infrastructure.
 ▶ Urbanisation leading to unchecked waste disposal.



FAILED ACTION PLANS
 ▶ High Court ordered Margao Municipal Council (MMC), SIDCGL, and PWD to curb illegal sewage connections
 ▶ National Green Tribunal (NGT) called for a rejuvenation plan - five years ago

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS
 ▶ Phytotid bed treatment systems (natural water purification).
 ▶ Plug illegal sewage discharge, upgrade sewerage network and solid waste management
 ▶ Monitoring ecological flow and water quality.
 ▶ Focus on ecological restoration and sustainable urban planning.

REALITY CHECK
 ▶ Minimal implementation, measures largely remain on paper

In addition, a National Green Tribunal (NGT) action plan to rejuvenate River Sal remains largely unimplemented. Though it called for measures such as controlling industrial and domestic pollution, restoring the river's ecological flow, and conducting periodic water quality assessments, untreated sewage still flows freely into the river, particularly along the Fatorda-Margao stretch.

Studies by the Goa State Pollution Control Board (GSPCB) and the National Centre for Sustainable

Environmental advocate

Abhijit Prabhudesai framed the issue within a broader context of neglect. "If these martyrs were alive today, they would undoubtedly advocate for cleaning the river first. How can we honour their sacrifice while allowing our environment to degrade?" he asked, highlighting the lack of political will to tackle Goa's environmental challenges.

Anthony D'Silva from Ambelim criticised the central government's decision to nationalise the river, arguing that it has weakened local oversight. "This river is losing its true essence. The central government's decision to nationalise it has stripped it of its power, depriving both the state government and the people

of their authority," he said. He stressed that restoring local control and enforcing strict pollution control measures are essential to reviving River Sal.

The irony of the situation is not lost on residents. While the Republic Day initiative aims to symbolically unite the nation, it inadvertently underscores the stark disconnect between symbolism and meaningful action. Once considered Salcete's lifeline, River Sal now reflects the consequences of unchecked urbanisation, untreated sewage, and inadequate waste management. Activists argue that the focus must shift from symbolic gestures to actionable solutions. Measures such as plugging illegal sewage connections, installing advanced treatment systems, and managing solid waste must move beyond planning to execution. Without these, River Sal's plight risks becoming a permanent reminder of systemic failure.

MMC's graft-accused clerk started finance Co, allege citizens

Say he was shielded from arrest due to political influence

Team Herald

MARGAO: A group of concerned citizens from Margao held a press conference on Tuesday, shedding new light on the Rs 18 lakh scam allegedly perpetrated by Yogesh Shetkar, a staff member of the Margao Municipality.

The citizens claimed that Shetkar had not only been involved in fraudulent activities within the Municipality but also started his own finance company. They alleged that Shetkar has political backing, which has shielded him from more serious consequences.

The group demanded that all the stolen money be recovered from the accused, expressing their doubts over the effectiveness of his arrest, which they alleged was "merely for show". The Rs 18 lakh from the feast fair revenue allegedly misappropriated by Shetkar, has sparked widespread controversy. "Citizens from across Goa have been cheated by Shetkar, and plans are underway to file formal complaints with the authorities," said Savio Coutinho, a spokesperson for the group.

Coutinho claimed that they had confirmed Shetkar's involvement in starting a finance company and provided evidence as well.

"We have the copy of a receipt where Shetkar has signed as a director of the

finance company. He had launched a finance scheme, and we have found agreement documents with investors, that bear his signature. Despite all these facts being public knowledge, he has been protected," Coutinho alleged.

He called for a deeper investigation into Shetkar's finance company, in addition to the ongoing inquiry into the fraud at the Margao Municipality.

Coutinho strongly criticised the police's account of Shetkar's arrest, calling it false. "The police version of the arrest is completely untrue," he stated. He pointed out that the Green Goa Foundation (GGF) had recently raised concerns about the involvement of two other officials in the scam, demanding their arrest as well.

The GGF has warned that if the authorities fail to recover the stolen amount and take further action against the accused, they will seek legal recourse with the High Court.

The case came to light in June, leading to Shetkar's suspension by the MMC. According to the police, Shetkar was entrusted with Rs 28,70,400 collected from 299 stall owners between May 19 and 25. The money was intended to be deposited into the Margao Municipal Council's HDFC Bank account, but Shetkar failed to do so, instead spending the amount for his personal use.

MMC FEAST FAIR SCAM

FIXING THE FLAW



HERALD IMPACT

After O Herald highlighted the subpar work carried out near the PWD Office, the contractor has shifted the chamber that was inconveniently located in front of a shop, built without any consideration or attention to detail

Ravindra Bhavan to honour Konkani poet Manohar Rai Sardessai's centennial

Team Herald

MARGAO: Ravindra Bhavan, Margao, will commemorate the birth centenary of Dr. Manohar Rai Sardessai, a celebrated Konkani poet, writer, French translator, and scholar, on January 18. Recognised as a towering figure in Konkani poetry, Dr. Sardessai's literary contributions will be honoured with a series of events celebrating his legacy.

Ravindra Bhavan Chairman, Rajendra Talak, revealed that the celebration will include a musical programme featuring songs written by Dr. Sardessai, performed by renowned artists Rajesh Madgaonkar, Sonia Shirsat, and Divya

Chafadkar. Adding to the tribute, Sanjana Publication will release a book highlighting lesser-known aspects of Dr. Sardessai's life and works, aiming to inspire and inform younger generations about his literary impact. In a bid to encourage young talent, the event will present the Dr. Manohar Rai Sardesai Yuva Puraskar to three youth poets aged 15-30.

Furthermore, a Kavya Lekhan Competition bearing Dr. Sardessai's name will provide a platform for young writers in the same age group to showcase their creativity and explore the art of poetry. A specially curated exhibi-

tion, featuring photographs and books chronicling Dr. Sardessai's life and contributions, will also be displayed under the guidance of his family member, Sunial Sardesai. Distinguished personalities, including Adv. Uday Bhembe, Jnanpith awardee Damodar Mauzoz, and Dr. Sardessai's daughter, Maya Sardesai, will grace the occasion, sharing memories and reflections on his influence on Konkani literature. This celebration promises to be a meaningful tribute to Dr. Sardesai, inspiring both literary enthusiasts and the youth to embrace and contribute to Konkani literature.

'Sonsoddo waste mountain grows by 90-100 tonnes every month'

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Margao Municipal Council (MMC) has come under sharp criticism from Savio Coutinho, former MMC chief and convenor of the Shadow Council for Margao (SCM), who claimed there are major loopholes in the town's waste disposal system.

According to Coutinho, the municipal body is entirely unprepared to address the 16 to 17 tonnes of dry waste generated in the town daily. "Of this total waste volume," Coutinho stated, "approximately 10 tonnes are sent to the Cacora plant and Nessai shed, with the remaining seven tonnes directed to the Sonsoddo Waste Management Plant."

"The most alarming revelation," Coutinho emphasised, "is that only three to four tonnes of this waste are being baled, resulting in 10 to 15 bales of approximately 300 kg each. This means that around three tonnes of dry waste continue to accumulate at Sonsoddo daily, leading to a mounting waste mountain that grows by an estimated 90 to 100 tonnes monthly."

DRY WASTE DILEMMA

16-17 tonnes of dry waste generated in Margao daily

DISPOSAL BREAKDOWN:
 10 tonnes: Sent to Cacora plant and Nessai shed
 7 tonnes: Directed to Sonsoddo waste management plant

BALING CAPACITY AT SONSODDO:
 ▶ Only 3-4 tonnes baled daily;
 ▶ Produces 10-15 bales of around 300 kg each.

UNMANAGED WASTE:
 ▶ Around 3 tonnes left unprocessed daily, adding 90-100 tonnes monthly to the waste mountain at Sonsoddo

*All figures according to former Margao civic chief Savio Coutinho

Coutinho also suggested that "the actual waste generation might be even higher, with municipal workers reportedly disposing of a significant quantity of dry waste through crude burning in ward areas. These practices not only contribute to environmental pollution but also release toxic fumes into the already polluted environment."

"The situation at Sonsoddo is further complicated," he added, "by periodic fire incidents that temporarily reduce accumulated waste, but pose severe health risks to surrounding residents and a school nearby."

He noted that while wet waste is entirely processed at the Cacora plant, and 60% of dry waste goes to Cacora and Nessai shed, the minimal baling of just four tonnes daily can hardly be considered an achievement of the Council "Citizens and taxpayers need to question their elected representatives," Coutinho stressed. "Until then, nothing good will come through as the same representatives will consider that the people are content with how things are going on."

WRD restores nullah after Ponda civic body nixes encroachments



Team Herald

PONDA: Encroachments made by approximately 14 shop owners along the internal nullah at the Ponda Old bus stand have been cleared after directives from the Ponda Municipal Council (PMC).

The removal was prompted by difficulties faced by the Water Resources Department (WRD) in constructing a retaining wall for the nullah due to the encroachments.

With the obstruction now removed, the WRD has been able to widen the nullah, restoring its original 2.5-metre width. The clearance has also facilitated the construction

of a retaining wall alongside the nullah, enhancing the area's infrastructure and safety.

It was observed that several shop owners had extended their shops into the nullah basin flowing behind their establishments. This unauthorised expansion significantly narrowed the nullah, reducing its width by one to one-and-a-half metres in some areas.

The restricted flow had been a major contributor to monsoon flooding at the old bus stand, a crucial location in Ponda City.

A meeting with the affected shop owners, chaired by Agriculture Minister Ravi Naik, was

held to address the issue. The discussion was attended by PMC Chairperson Anand Naik and the Chief Officer.

During the meeting, the shop owners assured their cooperation with the PMC and WRD in completing the retaining wall. They recognised that the wall would not only enhance the safety of their shops but also mitigate the risk of flooding during the monsoon season.

The restoration work marks a significant step in addressing long-standing issues of flooding and infrastructural strain at the Ponda Old Bus Stand, ensuring smoother operations in the area.

MAX. TEMP 32°C

MIN. TEMP 23°C

idharudhar



Not a hurdle race, training for Smart City commute

Truck mishap on crumbling Manora-Raia road sparks outrage among locals

Team Herald

MARGAO: The deteriorating state of the Manora-Raia road came under renewed scrutiny on Tuesday after a truck toppled off the damaged stretch, leaving locals both shocked and angered by the authorities' inaction. Local MLA Aleixo Reginaldo Lourenco has assured that repairs will commence within 15 days, pledging to prioritise quality construction over the sub-standard work of the past.

"The road's poor condition has been a ticking time bomb for years, yet both the MLA and local officials remain indifferent," said Joao Paulo Fernandes, a local resident and AAP member. He criticised the prolonged neglect, adding, "Are they waiting for a major tragedy to occur? The broken promises of road repairs and safety measures are now clear, with incidents like these becoming more frequent."



Fernandes urged swift action to prevent further accidents, warning, "Let this accident be a wake-up call to those in power."

The residents of Manora-Raia will not tolerate this negligence any longer. Responding to the outrage, MLA Lourenco emphasised his proactive efforts to address the issue. "All necessary approvals have been secured, and a work order was issued in November. I am personally

ensuring the quality of the road and coordinating with departments to avoid future disruptions," he said.

Acknowledging past shortcomings, Lourenco assured residents that inferior materials like duplicate tar would no longer be used. "This time, we're committed to building quality roads. Some of my opponents are making baseless allegations to claim credit for the work, but my focus is on delivering results," he added.