

CEC Pushes Mhadei to Second Phase for Tiger Reserve Status, Triggering Strong Objections from Conservationists

The Central Empowered Committee set up by the Supreme Court has placed the consideration of Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary for Tiger Reserve status in the second phase. This move has drawn serious criticism from conservationists because the sanctuary has recorded five tiger deaths between 2009 and 2019 in forested areas surrounding it, and most of Goa's camera-trap images of tigers come from this very landscape. Despite this evidence, the CEC has recommended that Netravali and Cotigao wildlife sanctuaries



be considered first for notification as a Tiger Reserve. It suggested that Mhadei could be added in the second stage after detailed consultations and once the concerns of residents of Sattari are addressed. The Goa Foundation, which is the petitioner in the case, has welcomed the recommendation for

Netravali and Cotigao but maintains that Mhadei must be included without delay, as per the original proposal of the National Tiger Conservation Authority. The NTCA, a statutory expert body under the Wildlife Protection Act, had already concluded in its 2016 and 2020 assessments that Mhadei

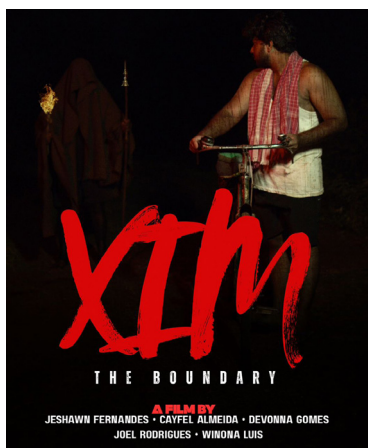
is an essential part of the tiger landscape. Under Section 38V, the State government is required to notify a Tiger Reserve on NTCA's recommendation. The Wildlife Protection Act has no provision for a phased notification based on political resistance or administrative hesitation. Conservationists point out that the CEC has overridden NTCA's scientific findings despite clear legal precedents. In the Corbett matter related to the Ajay Dubey versus NTCA case, the Supreme Court affirmed that NTCA guidelines and scientific assessments are binding on the State's forest administration. The petitioners argue that the CEC has ignored this

- ▶ Supreme Court's CEC defers Mhadei's Tiger Reserve status to a second phase.
- ▶ NTCA's scientific findings identifying Mhadei as critical tiger habitat were set aside.
- ▶ Goa Foundation welcomes Netravali and Cotigao but insists Mhadei must be included immediately.
- ▶ State's claims of displacement fears remain unverified despite sharply reduced habitation figures.
- ▶ Excluding Mhadei severs the crucial northern tiger corridor and risks creating an ecological island.

while placing Mhadei in the second phase.
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Goan short film “XIM – The Boundary”, directed by Jeshawn Fernandes, has been selected for inclusion in The Films That Move Collection, a curated platform that showcases powerful and thought-provoking films throughout the year.

Set in a quiet Goan village, the film brings to life the legend of the Rakondar, a mysterious protector said to guide the lost and punish those who disrespect him. The story follows Babush, played by Jeshawn Fernandes, a sceptical young man who challenges the village's long-held beliefs and soon discovers that some stories carry far more weight than he imagined. Clement Furtado appears as Joao Mam, along with an ensemble cast featuring Eden Pires, Ayden Costa, Prajval Arolkar, Rowan D'Costa, Aniket Dessai, Helen Gomes, Catlin Fernandes and Abner Barreto. The project showcases a young Goan creative team. Cinematography is by Joel



Rodrigues and Winona Luis, while the script is co-written by Devonna Gomes, Cayfel Almeida and Winona Luis. Editing is handled by Jeshawn and Cayfel Almeida, with costumes and props designed by Winona Luis and Cayfel Almeida. While the film was not selected

for the December 2025 Films That Move showcase, its narrative strength and emotional depth earned it a place in the collection, which screens films through schools, community events, mental-health programmes and the B.O.M.B network. Reacting to the recognition, director Jeshawn Fernandes said the film examines the space between folklore and reality. He described “XIM” as a story about how myths shape the way people perceive truth and influence their understanding of the world. “XIM – The Boundary” adds to the growing slate of Goan films making their mark, blending the region’s rich folklore with universal themes of belief, fear and curiosity.

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Sunday Thought

AAP's Solo ZP Gamble Could Be the Reset Goa's Opposition Needs

By Irfan Iqbal Gheta

AP Goa's decision to contest the upcoming Zilla Panchayat elections on its own has triggered predictable chatter. Critics call it risky and accuse the party of splitting anti-BJP votes. Supporters argue it is a bold attempt at political clarity. In truth, this move may be exactly what Goa's cluttered opposition front needed. For years, the opposition in Goa has relied on uneasy alliances, only to see them collapse under the weight of defections and internal contradictions. Parties that campaign as allies often turn into rivals within months, and leaders who promise stability switch sides without a second thought. Voters have watched this merry-go-round with increasing fatigue. Against this backdrop, AAP stepping away from alliances sends a simple message: it wants to know its real strength and is prepared to be judged on its own merit. Local body polls are not just about grassroots governance. They are political laboratories. They reveal which parties truly have a presence on the ground, which candidates can mobilise people, and which organisations have staying power beyond social media noise. For AAP, the ZP polls offer the first clear, uncontaminated measurement of its organisational spread. A good performance could give it the momentum it has long struggled to build. A poor performance will serve as a reality check, allowing the party to correct course before 2027. Either way, clarity is better than inflated expectations created by alliances. There is another factor at play. Goa's electorate is increasingly sceptical of alliance politics. Voters have watched parties campaign together and then fall apart the moment the votes are counted. They have seen elected representatives switch sides with little regard for



ideology or mandate. In that environment, a party choosing to walk alone may be viewed as a refreshing break from political convenience. AAP's decision may actually earn it credibility among voters who are tired of political arrangements that last only until the first cabinet reshuffle. The argument that anti-BJP votes will split assumes those votes automatically converge when alliances are announced. Goa's political history does not support this assumption. Voters in the state are independent-minded, and alliances have not always translated into consolidated voting behaviour. Sometimes alliances actually confuse voters and erode a party's identity. By contesting independently, AAP builds its own narrative rather than becoming a footnote in someone else's campaign. There is, of course, real risk. A poor performance could push AAP back into political margins. It may be labelled a spoiler, even if that label is politically convenient rather than truthful. But the larger risk for AAP lies in continuing to depend on alliances that have repeatedly failed the opposition. If it truly wants to emerge as an alternative, it must first prove it can stand on its own feet. By choosing to go solo, AAP has placed its credibility, discipline and organisational strength before the people. That is a gamble, but it is an honest one. Goa's politics needs more of that honesty. If the party manages to convert this decision into an organisational breakthrough, it will enter the 2027 elections with a clearer base, a stronger identity and a sharper message. And even if the experiment fails, at least the party would have learned the truth from the voters themselves. In a state tired of shifting loyalties and fragile alliances, that truth may be worth far more than a short-lived political arrangement.

Masterstroke

Dear Angry Young Men, Take a Chill Pill

By Irfan Iqbal Gheta

Goa is firmly in the grip of election fever. With campaigning for the 2025 Zilla Panchayat polls underway, the political temperature has risen sharply. Leaders across parties are restless, and the incumbent MLAs and ministers are feeling the heat more than anyone else. They know that the outcome of these polls will be an early indicator of which way the wind may blow in the years ahead. This is why, whenever they face the cameras, they are both eager to impress and anxious to prove they are working overtime. In that rush, their soundbites end up causing more damage than relief. The clearest example is the grand claim that all potholes across Goa will disappear within two weeks. After that, we are told, the word "potholes" will simply vanish from public conversation. It was a statement so extravagant that it practically smelled of desperation. Potholes have become folklore in Goa. They are everywhere. Delivering Goemkars from them requires a clear plan, realistic deadlines, and consistent follow-up with engineers. A poker-faced declaration does not inspire confidence; it only invites the next viral meme. Why this rage? Why these theatrical promises? Blame it on the looming elections. But that was not the only performance of the week. Another leader delivered a dramatic pledge. If the proposed tiger reserve project goes ahead and requires the displacement of even one village, he would stand in complete solidarity with the people. If authorities attempted to shift hundreds of natives for the sake of a



single tiger that nobody has even seen, he would organise a massive protest. And if pushed further, he was ready to go to jail. What are we meant to call this? A rebel with a cause or plain recklessness dressed up as courage? Now contrast this with what the chief minister, the forest minister, and a first-time MLA said. The Goa government, they pointed out, has not yet received the official recommendations on the tiger reserve. The chief minister stated calmly that he would wait for the Advocate General to thoroughly study the matter before making any comment. The forest minister, known for losing his temper easily, was remarkably measured and simply noted that the issue is sub judice. And then came the subtle reprimand from the first-time MLA. He reminded everyone that there is a protocol and a hierarchy. He was not authorised to comment on a sensitive matter and would leave the official statement to the chief minister. What does this careful choreography indicate? Nobody feels completely safe. Nobody can take their position or their party's goodwill for granted. Pressure is mounting on all sides. Leaders are scrambling to prove they deserve to hold their seats. In moments like these, words become landmines. This is a timely reminder to weigh every word with care. The internet forgets nothing. In the long run up to elections, a careless quip today may return as ammunition tomorrow. So to the angry young men bursting with adrenaline and camera-ready fury, here's some friendly advice. Take a chill pill. Smile a little. And brace yourselves for a long, noisy, and unforgiving election season ahead.



56th IFFI comes to a close, but the magic of cinema will last forever!



As the lights dimmed inside the Dr. Syama Prasad Mukherjee Indoor Stadium, a soft hush fell over the audience a silence that comes only at the end of something extraordinary. The 56th International Film Festival of India had reached its final evening in Goa, but even as the closing ceremony began, one could sense that this iconic festival never truly ends. Its stories linger, its art continues to breathe, and its influence ripples long after the red carpets are rolled away. This year, IFFI didn't just conclude it left an imprint across global cinema, celebrating human imagination in all its colours, cultures, and contradictions. For nine vibrant days, Goa transformed into a confluence of filmmakers, storytellers, dreamers, and cinephiles from around the world. The city's venues pulsed with screenings, discussions, masterclasses, performances and creative exchanges that



crossed languages and borders. Thousands witnessed how cinema can illuminate truths, preserve traditions, challenge norms, and open windows into lives far removed from our own. From the red-carpet moments to the bustling film bazaar, from spotlight conversations to late-night screenings, IFFI 2025 showcased a world united by stories even when divided by geography. On closing night, emotions ran high as awards were announced, honouring the artists whose work rose above the rest. The Vietnamese masterpiece *Skin of Youth*, directed by Ashleigh Mayfair, claimed the Golden Peacock for

Best Feature Film—a bold, stylish narrative that the jury described as unforgettable for its emotional depth and



for his film *Gondhal*, a story the jury compared to a Shakespearean fable woven into real life. The awards continued



impressed the jury with equal brilliance. Indian creativity too took centre stage. Director Karan Singh Tyagi's *Kesari Chapter 2* was honoured as Best Debut Indian Feature, while *Bandish Bandits Season 2* won Best Web Series for making music and art accessible to modern audiences. The festival also spotlighted diverse global cinema, including Norway's *Safe House*, which received the ICFT-UNESCO Gandhi Medal for promoting peace and non-violence. However, one of the evening's most emotional moments came when the audience rose to their feet to honour an icon—Rajinikanth, celebrating 50 glorious years in Indian cinema.



powerful message. The film's gentle blend of love, sacrifice, and human vulnerability ensured it will remain etched in the minds of those who witnessed it. In another proud moment, Marathi cinema shone brightly as Santosh Davakhar earned the Silver Peacock for Best Director

to celebrate talent from across the world—Spain's Ubeimar Rios for his emotionally staggering performance in *A Poet*, Slovenia's Jara Sofija Ostan for her subtle, expressive portrayal in *Little Trouble Girls*, and the joint winners Hesam Farahmand and Tönis Pill, whose debut films

Thalaivar Turns 50 in Cinema: Rajinikanth Felicitated at 56th IFFI

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The final evening of the 56th International Film Festival

of India unfolded with a rare blend of nostalgia, celebration, and cinematic emotion, but one moment rose above the rest—the grand felicitation of a man whose name alone evokes applause across continents. Rajinikanth, beloved as Thalaivar, was honoured for completing 50 remarkable years in cinema, and the stadium felt less like a closing ceremony and more like a historic tribute to an artist who has shaped popular culture for half a century. As the lights softened inside the Dr. Syama Prasad Mukherjee Indoor Stadium, an energy unlike any other swept across the venue. It wasn't just another award being handed over; it was a collective acknowledgment of a life lived in service of the silver screen.



Rajinikanth, dressed in his familiar simplicity, walked onto the stage with the same grace that has earned him legions of fans. The applause was thunderous—an ovation not choreographed by any script, but born from pure admiration. Goa Chief Minister Dr. Pramod Sawant stepped forward to honour the superstar, presenting a shawl and memento that symbolized not just recognition, but deep respect. Standing alongside were Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting Dr. L. Murugan, Ministry Secretary Shri Sanjay Jaju, and actor Ranveer Singh each representing

a different era of Indian cinema, all united in celebrating one man whose influence spans generations, languages, and boundaries. When Rajinikanth spoke, his words carried the quiet humility that has always defined him. He thanked the central government with emotion glinting in his voice. He reflected on his journey, saying that fifty years felt like only a decade or so because every moment spent acting still fills him with joy. And then came a line that had the audience cheering with affection—“Even if there are 100 births, I would like to be born as Rajinikanth.”



It was not arrogance. It was gratitude—an acknowledgment of a life he feels blessed to have lived, of a career he cherishes deeply, and of the love that fans have showered upon him for decades. The felicitation marked not just a milestone, but a golden chapter in Indian cinema. With over 170 films across

Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Hindi, Rajinikanth has built a legacy of characters that remain etched in collective memory. From the swagger of his cigarette flips to the emotion of his dialogues, from the rawness of his early roles to the larger-than-life persona he shaped later, Thalaivar has influenced generations of filmmakers and actors. His honours—the Padma Bhushan, Padma Vibhushan, and the prestigious Dadasaheb Phalke Award—tell only a fraction of the story. The rest lives in the hearts of millions who grew up watching him, imitating him, loving him. As the

celebration unfolded, it became clear that IFFI wasn't just felicitating an actor; it was honouring a phenomenon. Rajinikanth's journey symbolises how cinema can inspire, uplift, and transcend the barriers of language. He is not merely a superstar—he is a cultural force who has shaped style, storytelling, and screen presence across Indian cinema. Beyond the tribute, the festival evening also subtly reminded audiences of IFFI's own legacy. Born in 1952, the International Film Festival of India stands tall as South Asia's most prestigious cinematic event.



Rudra Avtar: The Creator Who Turned a Pandemic Into a Purpose

In the sprawling digital universe where viral content often eclipses substance, only a few creators manage to carve a space through authenticity, empathy, and a genuine connection with their audience. Among them is Rudra Avtar, known widely as Rudra Ghotge, whose rise from a curious, restless youth during the COVID-19 lockdown to a beloved Goan content creator is both heartwarming and inspiring. His journey is a testament to how passion, persistence, and a strong support system can transform a period of uncertainty into a story of triumph, creativity, and impact. Rudra's entry into content creation was born out of circumstance, but it was driven by curiosity and a desire to explore the unknown. The global lockdown of 2020 brought life to a standstill: streets emptied, schools closed, social gatherings disappeared, and the rhythm of everyday life was disrupted. For many, these months became a period of monotony or anxiety. For Rudra, however, the pause presented an opportunity. Armed with a simple smartphone and a head full of ideas, he began experimenting with creating videos. At

first, these were modest, playful attempts — short sketches, random observations, and lighthearted humor that reflected his immediate surroundings. Each clip, though simple, was a step into uncharted territory, a way to express himself and engage with a world suddenly confined to screens. From the very beginning, Rudra's approach was defined by curiosity and attentiveness. He observed which elements of his content elicited laughter, which moments resonated emotionally, and which ideas sparked conversation. Over time, this practice sharpened his storytelling instincts, helping him understand the subtleties of timing, delivery, and audience engagement. Unlike creators chasing trends for fleeting views, Rudra approached his craft as a process of exploration, gradually refining his voice and style while staying true to who he was. What amplified Rudra's growth was the unwavering support of his family and friends. In an era where online success is often portrayed as a solitary achievement, Rudra's journey underscores the power of community. His family encouraged every experiment, every



late-night shoot, and every uncertain step he took. Friends became collaborators, lending their time, creativity, and technical skills to bring Rudra's visions to life. He recalls long nights spent filming in small apartments, improvising with makeshift props, and laughing through retakes until the scene felt right. "My family stood by me throughout," he says. "My friends helped me shoot, edit, and even brainstorm... without them, I wouldn't be where I am today." This collective effort became the backbone of his creative journey, allowing him to take risks and grow without fear of failure. As Rudra's confidence grew, so did the scope and sophistication of his content. What began as small, experimental videos evolved into

sketches that were humorous, relatable, and deeply resonant. He began crafting characters, weaving narratives, and exploring themes that reflected the everyday lives of his viewers. From the quirks of neighborhood life in Goa to humorous takes on social interactions and family dynamics, Rudra's content struck a chord because it was grounded in reality, yet presented with creativity and warmth. Even as his videos became increasingly polished, he maintained a light, respectful tone, ensuring that humor never came at the expense of sentiment or sensitivity. This careful balance between entertainment and integrity has helped Rudra cultivate a unique digital persona. He is not merely a creator chasing

clicks or trends; he is a storyteller who values authenticity, community, and positive engagement. Through his videos, he celebrates local culture, narrates heartfelt stories, and offers reflections on everyday life, creating a sense of connection and belonging among his viewers. In an online landscape often dominated by sensationalism, Rudra's content stands out as a refreshing blend of humor, cultural pride, and human warmth. Beyond the laughter and entertainment, Rudra's journey carries invaluable lessons for aspiring creators. He emphasizes persistence above all else, urging newcomers to remain consistent even when initial efforts seem insignificant. "Be consistent. No matter how small your start is, keep

creating. Your journey will take shape if you don't stop," he advises. These words reflect his lived experience: success is rarely instantaneous, but it grows steadily when fueled by passion, effort, and patience. Rudra's story is a reminder that meaningful achievement is rarely glamorous from the outset; it is built quietly, moment by moment, through dedication and resilience. Rudra's rise also illustrates the transformative power of digital platforms. With a simple smartphone and determination, he turned an uncertain period of isolation into a thriving creative journey that inspires thousands. He has become a source of joy, laughter, and reflection for his audience, proving that content can be both entertaining and meaningful. His work bridges generational gaps, cultural divides, and geographical distances, demonstrating that authenticity and heart resonate universally. Looking ahead, Rudra's vision remains rooted in growth, creativity, and community engagement. He aims to continue producing content that entertains, inspires, and reflects the culture and values he holds dear.

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CEC Sidelines Mhadei, Puts Goa's Tiger Future at Risk

The State government's submission about strong apprehension among locals and fears of displacement has been accepted by the CEC without examining the factual accuracy of these concerns. Section 38V(5) of the Wildlife Protection Act protects the rights of forest dwellers and ensures that relocation only happens voluntarily. Earlier Tiger Reservenotifications have not required immediate eviction, yet the CEC has treated habitation concerns as decisive. The State also changed its own figures for affected population.

What began as a claim of about one lakh people was later corrected to 1,274 households. Despite this drastic revision, the CEC still listed high habitation as a reason for excluding Mhadei in the first phase. Environmentalists say this reveals a lack of scrutiny and an acceptance of the State's fear-led narrative. The report has also disregarded crucial ecological principles. Mhadei forms the northern link between Goa's forests and the Bhimgad landscape in Karnataka and the Sawantwadi Dodamarg

corridor in Maharashtra. Leaving Mhadei out of the Tiger Reserve breaks this connectivity and undermines the source sink relationship that ensures healthy tiger movement across the Western Ghats. Conservationists warn this will convert the proposed reserve into an isolated island vulnerable to genetic inbreeding. The poisoning of a tigress and her three cubs in 2020, which occurred in the Mhadei region, highlights how exposed the area is to threats. By excluding Mhadei from the initial Tiger

Reserve notification, the CEC leaves the zone where tigers are most vulnerable outside the strongest legal protection framework. Environmentalists describe this as creating a death trap in the very habitat that requires maximum attention. Tiger expert Dr Ullas Karanth has repeatedly pointed out that tigers do not follow administrative boundaries. This ecological reality, they say, has been ignored in the final recommendation. Critics also argue that the decision contradicts the Supreme Court's

Precautionary Principle, which requires authorities to place conservation first when there is credible evidence of threat, and the Public Trust Doctrine, which obligates the State to act as a trustee for wildlife rather than give precedence to speculative human fears. The High Court had earlier observed that areas with dense habitation had already been excluded from the proposed Tiger Reserve. The CEC's report does not engage with this finding. According to conservationists, the committee has produced a

recommendation shaped by concerns about human settlement rather than the survival of the species. While environmentalists welcome the move to declare Netravali and Cotigao as the Tiger Reserve, they stress that Mhadei must be included immediately to protect the integrity of the landscape. Severing the Mhadei sanctuary, which forms the critical northern corridor linking to the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve, turns the reserve into an ecological island headed towards genetic isolation.