

# Night of Flames in Arpora Leaves 23 Dead

**At Birch by Romeo Lane, a midnight blast turned a crowded nightclub into a deadly inferno.**

## Goa Police Statement: Birch by Romeo Lane Fire

A major fire at Birch by Romeo Lane in Arpora, North Goa, has resulted in 25 deaths. Among the victims, four have been identified as tourists and fourteen as staff members. The identities of seven others are still being confirmed. Six people were injured and are currently receiving treatment. The cause of the fire has not yet been determined. Police and fire officials are carrying out a detailed investigation, and legal action is underway.

**Arpora:** A massive fire tore through the Birch by Romeo Lane nightclub in North Goa late Saturday night, killing at least 23 people and injuring several others, turning a busy weekend gathering into one of the state's most devastating nightlife disasters. The blaze erupted shortly after midnight, and within minutes the club was engulfed in flames and thick smoke, trapping workers and visitors inside.

According to early accounts from authorities,

the fire is believed to have been triggered by a powerful blast near the kitchen area, suspected to be from a gas cylinder. The explosion was followed by an almost immediate spread of flames across the lower sections of the club. Many inside reported hearing the initial blast and then seeing the lights cut off as the building filled with smoke. Staff attempted to guide people toward exits, but the speed at which the smoke expanded left little time for safe evacuation.

Fire services and police

personnel rushed to the site as soon as distress calls came in. Rescue teams battled the blaze throughout the night, forcing their way through thick smoke and collapsed sections of the structure. Several survivors escaped with burns and respiratory injuries, while many who remained trapped succumbed to suffocation. Most of the victims were staff members working on the ground and basement levels, although a few tourists were among the dead.

Goa Chief Minister Dr Pramod Sawant arrived at the scene in the early hours and described the fire as a deeply painful moment for the state.

"It is a tragic and painful incident for Goa. Strict action will be taken, and all permissions and safety compliances of the club will be thoroughly examined."

— Chief Minister Dr Pramod Sawant

He said that the government had opened a detailed inquiry into the incident and that strict action would follow if any

lapses in safety norms or building permissions were confirmed. He noted that the tragedy had occurred during the busy tourist season and said the state would not allow any establishment to operate without full compliance with safety requirements.

The Chief Minister also confirmed that post mortem examinations were underway and that the families of the deceased were being contacted. He said that many of the deaths appeared to be caused by inhalation of

toxic smoke rather than burns, an indication of how quickly the fire spread inside the building. He offered condolences to the families who had lost loved ones and assured support to those who were injured.

At the national level, Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed deep sorrow over the deaths and said his thoughts were with the bereaved families. He wished the injured a speedy recovery and said the Goa government was providing all necessary

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# ANJUNEM DAM WATER FINALLY REACHES FARMLANDS AFTER MONTHS OF DISRUPTION



## Water Reaches Farms...

- Irrigation water from the Anjunem dam was finally released on December 4 after weeks of delay caused by an unusually long monsoon.
- A 100 metre stretch of the right bank canal had collapsed in August when a contractor blocked the channel without permission,

slowing repairs and cutting off supply during the crucial early season.

- With the damaged portion restored, water is now flowing through both left and right bank canals to villages such as Keri, Morle, Poriem and Karapur.
- The release is helping

recharge wells, springs and local streams, giving farmers some relief after a difficult year.

- Farmers say the project will work better only if maintenance improves, contractors are closely monitored and the long pending distributory channels are completed.

by **Satyavatinandan Satrekar**

**I**rrigation water from the Anjunem dam has finally begun flowing into the right bank main canal, bringing much needed relief to farmers and horticulturists across Sattari. The Water Resources Department

opened the release on December 4, ending weeks of anxiety among villagers who depend on the annual supply for their winter crops. The move marks the first full scale release of the season, which had been pushed back because of heavy rain and a series of setbacks in canal

maintenance.

The release is normally a routine affair. Each year the department opens the canals shortly after the Dussehra festival to allow farmers to prepare their fields for rabi cultivation. This year however the monsoon refused to retreat. Rainfall extended well into October and

November.

Saturated embankments and waterlogged sections prevented engineers from carrying out essential maintenance, inspections and safety checks. By early December farmers were growing impatient, worried that any further delay would

leave them unable to cultivate vegetables and horticultural crops in time for the season. An officer of the WRD, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the continuous downpour made it impossible to undertake repair work in the canal network. The official said the priority was to wait

for stable conditions and ensure that water could be released without risking further damage. The officer also admitted that the department had failed to complete maintenance and repair work within the stipulated time period, adding that the prolonged monsoon only worsened the backlog.

## Sunday Thought

## Goa's Tourism Sector Braces for a Turbulent New Year

By Suraj Nandrekar

**A**s Goa braces for what should have been the most vibrant weeks of its tourism calendar, the travel chaos triggered by IndiGo threatens to dim the season's sparkle. With dozens of flights cancelled at the state's two airports in a single day, the disruption has put not only itineraries on hold but the entire tourism ecosystem on edge.

On paper this may appear to be a temporary operational hitch. In reality the timing could not be worse. This is peak season when hotels expect to brim with visitors, beaches hum with activity, shacks reopen after long monsoons and service providers from taxi operators to tour guides see their busiest days. When flights vanish and travellers are stranded, the ripple is immediate. Guests cancel. Bookings stall. Confidence drops.

Industry leaders are already voicing concern. Hotel associations report a surge in cancellations, especially among independent travellers who book at short notice and are quick to abandon plans when uncertainty looms. In a state that relies heavily on holiday spikes to sustain livelihoods throughout the year, such disruptions risk not only immediate losses but long lasting damage to Goa's carefully built tourism reputation.

The roots of the crisis lie in IndiGo's deeper operational fatigue. The country's largest carrier, which commands the bulk of domestic traffic, has been struggling with staffing shortages and scheduling stress. New fatigue and duty norms have added pressure. The collapse in on time performance across several airports reflects the scale

of the strain.

When an airline of this size stumbles, the consequences reach far beyond airport terminals. Travellers do not merely miss flights. They lose trust. Hoteliers scramble to salvage bookings or offer refunds. Local businesses lose walk in customers.

The state loses tourist spending at the very moment it is most needed. Even weddings and corporate events planned months ahead are reportedly being reconsidered because guests cannot be certain they will reach Goa on time.

The government's move to cap fares, mandate refunds and push for temporary relief offers some comfort. Yet administrative interventions can only patch the immediate chaos. They cannot restore the confidence that evaporates when travellers spend hours in uncertainty with little information. For a destination that sells ease, beauty and carefree leisure, this kind of disruption cuts deep.

The larger message is hard to ignore. When the backbone of connectivity falters, tourism does not simply slow down. It fractures. Goa has always marketed itself as a seamless getaway. To protect that image the state's tourism stakeholders now have to move quickly. This means clear communication, flexible booking policies, genuine outreach to affected travellers and a coordinated effort to reassure those reconsidering their plans.

Because once the flight schedules stabilise and the network returns to normal, the harder task begins. Restoring faith will take longer than fixing the timetable.



## Masterstroke

## Goa CM Dr Pramod Sawant Leads the Way

by Irfan Iqbal Gheta

**H**ectic electioneering for Goa the prestigious Zilla Panchayat Elections 2025 has begun in full force. The political landscape is buzzing with activity. Every party is out on the field staking its claim. Supporters are raising slogans. Leaders are promising sweeping victories. The familiar and often overused catch phrase "We will surely win" echoes across rallies, meetings and street corner interactions. It is the season of political grandstanding and every contender wants to be heard.

In the swirl of this charged atmosphere alliances are being stitched together with great enthusiasm. Some last barely a day. Others collapse even before they are formally announced. Negotiations are happening behind closed doors while loud battles for public attention rage outside. There is no dearth of drama. As far as the 2025 ZP polls are concerned Goa is witnessing a political theatre with all its unpredictable twists. There is barely a moment to breathe.

And yet, in the middle of this campaign heavy environment, an incident stood out for its quiet power.

Before I go further, let me clarify something important. What follows is not an attempt at polishing anyone's image. This is not a public relations exercise timed with the ZP elections. Nor is there any secret desire to appear as an official spokesperson of any political party or leader. I speak here only as a Baarik Munis, offering a simple, straight from the heart Sunday reflection meant to bring a moment of warmth into an otherwise chilly week.

The incident occurred on Wednesday. Chief Minister Dr Pramod Sawant was travelling to a programme. His convoy was moving along a busy highway, the usual cluster of police vehicles, escorts and staff cars making their way as per protocol. In the midst of this movement Dr Sawant noticed something that immediately caught his attention. An accident victim lay on the road, unattended and clearly in distress.

Without hesitation the chief



minister ordered the entire convoy to stop. What followed was almost cinematic. Vehicles that usually move with smooth coordination came to a sudden halt. It felt as though someone had

pressed pause on a live video game. For a leader managing a tight schedule this could easily have been one of those moments where protocol prevails and the convoy keeps moving. But that did not happen.

Dr Sawant stepped out in his cream bandhgala, calm but purposeful. He walked straight toward the injured person. Passers by, initially surprised, quickly realised what was happening. The chief minister leaned down, checked the condition of the victim and spoke to him with reassuring gentleness. Those watching could see genuine concern, not the hurried gestures often associated with high profile visits.

Recognising the urgency of the situation Dr Sawant took a quick decision. One of the vehicles accompanying him was converted into a makeshift ambulance. The victim was lifted with care and rushed to the nearest hospital, with medical supervision arranged immediately. Only after ensuring that the man was in safe hands did the chief minister resume his own official commitments. He did not alert the media. He did not wait for cameras. He simply moved on. Later, as the story spread, some political observers suggested it was a well timed PR stunt. But those who know the ground reality dismissed this easily. The chief minister does not need such staged moments. The administration under him is functioning with confidence. The much discussed double engine sarkar has proved its election winning capability time and again. Creating a spectacle is the last thing he requires.

What has always marked Dr Sawant's public persona is his calm steadiness. Even when there is turmoil within the political space or when responsibilities pile up he rarely shows signs of strain.

He carries himself with a sense of assurance that makes people feel that the state is in capable hands.

# WILL OPPOSITION BE UNITED IN GOA?

- RGP–Congress–Goa Forward Alliance Talks Reach Crucial Stage
- Decision Expected Tomorrow Morning “Fresh Proposal” Under Review
- MLA Borkar Accuses BJP of Sabotage

## Team Goemkarponn

**PANAJI:** Opposition alliance negotiations for the upcoming Zilla Panchayat (ZP) elections intensified today as the Revolutionary Goans Party (RGP), the Congress, and the Goa Forward Party (GFP) held separate but significant rounds of discussions in Panaji.

While the Congress presented a fresh proposal to the RGP, GFP President Vijai Sardesai reiterated his party's commitment to the alliance process, describing Congress as the “senior partner” in the arrangement.

The political developments have sparked heightened interest as all three parties attempt to stitch together a united

front to take on the ruling BJP.

RGP President Manoj Parab confirmed that the Congress had come forward with a revised offer, which would now be placed before RGP candidates, core committee members, and senior leaders before the party takes a final call.

“Congress has given a new proposal to us. We will discuss it with our party members tonight and tomorrow morning we will decide on the alliance,” Parab said after a meeting with GPCC President Amit Patkar and AICC Goa in-charge Manikrao Thakare at a hotel in Panaji.

Parab reiterated that during the first round of discussions earlier in the week, certain broad understandings had already

been established.

“The St Cruz seat had been assured to us in the first meeting and there was an agreement that the first list of candidates would be announced jointly, with five seats allotted to each alliance partner. We are reviewing whether the fresh proposal aligns with those discussions,” he said.

RGP MLA Viresh Borkar, who attended the meeting alongside Parab and RGP Treasurer Ajay Kholkar, went a step further by directly accusing the ruling BJP of attempting to derail negotiations.

“The BJP is behind breaking our alliance. The BJP knows that if our alliance is formed, they will face defeat,” Borkar said, adding that the ruling party “fears a consolidated



opposition front” in several ZP constituencies where anti-BJP sentiment is high.

While the RGP held its separate negotiations, the Goa Forward Party also met the Congress leadership as part of ongoing alliance discussions. GFP President Vijai Sardesai said the talks revolved primarily around seat sharing and structural coordination between parties. “Congress is the senior partner and talks on seat sharing are ongoing. These will be finalised in a day or two,” Sardesai said

following his meeting with Thakare, Patkar and other senior Congress leaders.

When asked about the absence of the RGP “I was the one who first took RG leaders to meet Cuncolim MLA Yuri Alemao and Quepem MLA Altone D’Costa. That initiated the dialogue between the two parties,” he disclosed.

Sardesai also stressed that GFP would continue to oppose defectors and accused the BJP of encouraging family rule in the ZP polls. In his words, “We will not give any opportunity to defectors.

The BJP is promoting parivaarvaad, and this must be countered collectively.”

Sardesai said the discussions also covered broader administrative concerns beyond just seat sharing. “We spoke about dissolving the RDA and strengthening the ZP system. Strengthening grassroots democracy is one of our priorities,” he added. With RGP expected to announce its final decision by Saturday morning, the political landscape in Goa is poised for a major shift.

## Govind Gaude Breaks His Silence: “I Was Targeted, But My Work Speaks for Itself”



**Former Minister Govind Gaude opens up on his removal from the Cabinet, allegations of internal pressure within the ruling party, the political road to 2027 and the controversies that followed him. In a candid conversation with Suraj Nandrekar on Just Casual with Goemkarponn, Gaude offers a blunt assessment of Goa's political currents, the criminal landscape and the Kala Academy debate that stirred months of public scrutiny.**

**Suraj Nandrekar :** After your removal from Cabinet, what changed in the way people connect with you?

**Govind Gaude:** Nothing has changed. Whether minister or MLA, I have always remained accessible. In fact I now get more time to be with people. The day I was dropped, thousands stood with me. My work continues the same way.

**Suraj Nandrekar :** Your exit came soon after your statement on corruption. Do you regret saying it?

**Govind Gaude:** I regret nothing. My statement was twisted by those who dislike me. I never claimed corruption exists everywhere. If anyone thinks I spoke against the government, let there be an inquiry. I have nothing to fear.

**Suraj Nandrekar :** Was there internal pressure within the BJP that led to your removal?

**Govind Gaude :** No. There

was no pressure from the top. Attempts were being made against me for years by some who are allergic to my growth. But my work is visible to all.

**Suraj Nandrekar:** Do you still consider yourself a loyal BJP worker?

**Govind Gaude :** I have worked for the party even when I was not a member. Some who call themselves loyalists have harmed the party more than me. My contribution is known to people.

**Suraj Nandrekar:** Did the party treat you fairly during the episode?

**Govind Gaude :** The Chief Minister stood by me. I continue to work for party programmes and for my people.

**Suraj Nandrekar :** Your emotional statement about cutting your tongue created confusion. What did you mean?

**Govind Gaude :** It had nothing to do with Daman

or any place. People interpreted it as they wished. I said it out of hurt. I am still waiting for answers to some questions I raised.

**Suraj Nandrekar :** After years of loyalty, do you personally feel hurt?

**Govind Gaude :** Politics is full of tides. What happened may have happened for the better. My focus is on people's service.

**Suraj Nandrekar :** For 2027, will you accept only a BJP ticket or are you open to alliances?

**Govind Gaude :** Alliance or no alliance, it does not affect me. I have always taken risks. My workers stand strongly behind me. I have survived tough phases because of people's blessings.

**Suraj Nandrekar :** Ravi Naik was your political mentor. Will his son get a BJP ticket?

**Govind Gaude :** He has a strong legacy. I believe the party will give the ticket

to one of his sons. The leadership will decide.

**Suraj Nandrekar :** Crime in Goa is rising. Do we need a strong home minister like the Goa of old?

**Govind Gaude :** You cannot compare today with that era. Things have changed. But crime must not rise. The Home Department must take strict action. Migrant verification is weak and often only on paper. Enforcement needs to be stronger.

**Suraj Nandrekar :** Are you saying poor policing leaves room for corruption?

**Govind Gaude :** Some officers are sincere, some are not. Files lie untouched for months. Unless pushed, nothing moves. Political representatives often have to intervene.

**Suraj Nandrekar :** You earlier said the Chief Minister has too much workload. Was that criticism?

**Govind Gaude :** It was not criticism. Parrikar and

Pramod Sawant have different styles. Parrikar was deeply involved. The CM today handles many portfolios, so decisions naturally take time. There is no comparison between the two eras.

**Suraj Nandrekar:** Departments say funding has slowed. Is that true?

**Govind Gaude :** Earlier mining revenue helped. Now funds from Centre take longer due to procedures. Even private permissions take years. Systems need better reforms.

**Suraj Nandrekar:** Coming to the Kala Academy controversy. Did you mishandle the project?

**Govind Gaude :** I was the only one constantly following up on it. Others pushed the burden on me. The controversy was political. After I left, no one made noise about it. That itself speaks volumes. Engineers and architects have not spoken because their work

stands strong. Suraj Nandrekar. You once said those who are wrong will get what they deserve. What did you mean?

**Govind Gaude :** People have their opinions. Those who tried to target me were later exposed. My work for Kala Academy was honest. I continue to be involved in theatre and art.

**Suraj Nandrekar :** You were heavily trolled online. How did you deal with it?

**Govind Gaude :** It was manufactured trolling. Some activists and politicians drove it. Truth takes time but it comes out. I will speak everything openly at the right time.

**Suraj Nandrekar :** You are back on stage, acting. Does it help you mentally?

**Govind Gaude:** Very much. Theatre is my passion. It gives clarity. Politics is uncertain. Power comes and goes, but service continues. I have answered everything honestly today.

# Goan Spirit Shines in London as United Friends UK Marks 9th Annual Dance



**T**he United Friends UK celebrated the Feast of St Francis Xavier with their ninth annual dance on November 29 at Cranford Community College in London. The gathering drew Goans from across the country for an evening filled with devotion, music, and community pride.

The programme opened with a hymn in honour of St Francis Xavier, followed by a welcome from Brito Carvalho. Music from the band Legacy, lively sets by DJ Jonathan, and the humour of MC Bunty kept the hall buzzing. The crowning of the United Friends Queen remained the most anticipated moment of the night.

Clayton Fernandes Barreto, Social Secretary to the High Commissioner of India in London, attended as Chief Guest. The committee spoke warmly about his humility



and ability to connect with people despite his senior diplomatic role. Barreto spent the evening mingling with guests, sharing conversations, and enjoying the celebration with no airs, which left a strong impression on the community.

Barreto and his wife Dione crowned Ms Ashwini S Rodrigues as United Friends UK Queen, a highlight that added sparkle to the festivities. The committee

also presented Barreto with a memento as a mark of gratitude for his steady support to the Goan diaspora and his role in strengthening ties with the High Commission.

In his address, Barreto congratulated United Friends UK on nine years of unity and cultural service. He praised the organisation for growing from a small group of friends into a strong community that contributes both in the



UK and in Goa. He reminded Goans of the importance of passing on their heritage, saying that language, music, festivals, and food must be treasured and shared with future generations. He stressed that Goan values of humility, kindness, and gratitude continue to define the community, no matter where they live.

Pamila Rodrigues, the Labour Party's selected candidate for Hounslow Central Ward in the

2026 council elections, attended as the special invitee. She applauded the group for maintaining the same dedicated team for nine years and said their consistency is rare in today's fast-changing world. She also expressed excitement for their milestone tenth year.

Authentic Goan cuisine prepared by Mum's Delight under Freddy Carvalho added a homely touch to the celebrations. United Friends UK

President Sonia Antao delivered the vote of thanks, acknowledging the hard work of committee members Sanjay Andrade, Valle Fernandes, Gaudencio Fernandes, and Savio Fernandes.

The event concluded on a high note, reaffirming that even far from home, Goans in the UK continue to keep their culture alive through faith, food, music, and a shared sense of belonging.

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assistance on the ground. President Droupadi Murmu also conveyed her condolences, calling the loss of life in the fire heartbreaking. By early morning, the charred remains of Birch by Romeo Lane stood cordoned off as fire officials and investigators continued their assessment. Burnt debris, collapsed sections of roofing and a strong smell of smoke lingered over the area, now transformed from a popular nightlife stretch to the site of a major disaster. Authorities are expected to examine the club's safety equipment, emergency exits, fire-fighting measures and licensing records. The blast and rapid spread of flames have raised pressing questions about compliance and enforcement in Goa's nightlife sector, especially at venues that operate at high capacity during weekends and tourist peaks. Hospitals in the region continued to treat survivors through the morning.

## My Last Dream is the Assembly: The Journey of Pratima Coutinho



By Mahima Shetkar

**G**oa has always been home to leaders who speak their minds, but few have combined

fearlessness with a deeply personal connection to their roots quite like Pratima Coutinho. Lawyer, activist, and political leader, Coutinho has carved a unique path in

## Former South Goa MP speaks on NRI issues, brain drain, and the road to 2027

Goan public life, blending advocacy with action, and vision with empathy.

From an early age, Coutinho was drawn to public service. Her journey into law equipped her with the tools to fight for justice, while her foray into politics allowed her to address issues at the grassroots level. Over the years, she has championed causes ranging from women's empowerment to the protection of Goan heritage, earning respect across communities.

Yet behind the public persona is a woman driven by one enduring dream: to enter the Assembly. "My last dream is to enter the Assembly," she admits candidly. This ambition, she says, is

not merely about political office but about creating meaningful change for the people of Goa. Her vision extends beyond legislation; it is about giving voice to those who feel unheard, protecting the rights of Goans, and preserving the cultural and social fabric of the state.

In conversation, Coutinho reveals a side rarely seen by the public. She speaks about the challenges of balancing personal and professional life, the lessons learned from setbacks, and the people who inspired her along the way. Her stories are not just accounts of political battles but reflections of resilience, integrity, and determination. Coutinho's influence goes beyond policy

debates. She is known for engaging with citizens directly, listening to their concerns, and fostering dialogue. In doing so, she embodies a form of leadership that is approachable yet unwavering, compassionate yet firm.

As she looks ahead, Coutinho's message is clear: leadership is about service, courage, and persistence. Whether or not she reaches the Assembly, her journey serves as a testament to the power of conviction and the impact one individual can have on their community. For Goa, Pratima Coutinho remains a symbol of hope, ambition, and fearless advocacy—a woman whose last dream may yet become her greatest legacy.