



## Chimbel Villagers Stage Sit-In, Reject CM's Delegation Offer Over Unity Mall

### Protesters Demand CM's Presence or Clear Assurance in Assembly

#### Team Goemkarponn

**PANAJI:** A large number of villagers from Chimbel gathered near Mercedes junction and later at the Goa Assembly today to press for the scrapping of the proposed Unity Mall project.

The protesters rejected Chief Minister Pramod Sawant's suggestion to send a four-member delegation to the Assembly, insisting that either the CM himself appear in the House or provide a clear assurance to scrap the project. MLAs Viresh Borkar and



Venzy Viegas joined the demonstration in support of the villagers.

The protesters had given the government a half-hour window to

announce its decision in the Assembly. When police informed them that no such assurance had been given, and that the Chief Minister had instead

called a delegation for discussions, the villagers launched a sit-in protest outside the House.

They demanded a **CONTD TO PAGE 06...**



### Unity Mall Verdict: CM Says Legal View Being Sought

#### LoP Warns Against Challenging Court Order

#### Team Goemkarponn

**PANAJI:** Chief Minister Dr Pramod Sawant said the state government is currently studying the

lower court order related to the Unity Mall project and will seek a legal opinion on whether to challenge it.

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### Unity Mall Protesters Met CM, I Will Speak to Him Personally: MLA Rudolf Fernandes

#### Team Goemkarponn

**PANAJI:** MLA Rudolf Fernandes said that Unity Mall protesters had met Chief Minister Pramod Sawant a day earlier to discuss their concerns. Stating that he was not



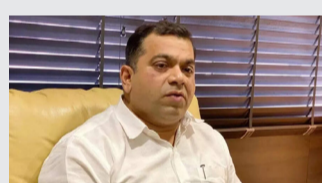
aware of the details of the discussion, Fernandes said he

**CONTD TO PAGE 06...**

### "One Truth, and I Spoke It in the Assembly," Says Khaunte on Unity Mall

#### Team Goemkarponn

**PANAJI:** Tourism Minister Rohan Khaunte strongly defended his statement made in the Goa Assembly on the Unity Mall issue, asserting that he had spoken only the



truth while replying to the calling attention motion.

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### MLA Borkar Slams Govt Over Unity Mall, Says People's Concerns Ignored

#### Team Goemkarponn

**PANAJI:** MLA Viresh Borkar has criticised the state government over the proposed Unity Mall project, alleging that it was ignoring the concerns of local



residents.

Speaking on the **CONTD TO PAGE 06...**

### Govt Expanding Icu, Nicu Beds, Working To Fill Doctor Shortages: Rane

#### Opposition flags staff vacancies and medicine shortages at South Goa District Hospital

#### Team Goemkarponn

**PANAJI:** Health Minister Vishwajit Rane said the Goa government is actively expanding ICU and NICU capacity and recruiting specialised doctors to strengthen healthcare in South Goa.



The discussion was sparked by concerns raised by the Opposition. Leader of Opposition Yuri Alemao and MLA Viresh Borkar flagged serious gaps at South Goa District Hospital, citing 193 vacant posts, absence of cardiologists and neurologists, acute medicine shortages, unpaid local purchase bills for 8-9 months, and staff salaries pending for three months.

Alemao asked, "There is so much load on GMC. What will the Minister do to reduce this burden? Patients are dying."

Speaking in the Legislative Assembly, Rane highlighted that 30 new NICU beds are being commissioned today, more ICU beds will follow, and 150 beds have been added in the last two months.

"We never claimed healthcare is 100% perfect. We are running short of doctors, and the Chief Minister is helping us bring in specialised doctors. Efforts are underway to address OPD and other facility requirements," Rane said.

### LoP Alemao raises issues of Fish meal, Hazardous waste

#### Team Goemkarponn

**PANAJI:** Leader of Opposition Yuri Alemao on Thursday raised issue of Fish meal Pollution, Hazardous waste and encroachment by industrial units in Sociedade land in Cuncolim.

"The attention of



the House is drawn to the issue of grave and escalating civic and

environmental crisis due to the pollution in Cuncolim Industrial Estate and its surrounding areas because of untreated water released by fish meal plants in open areas. The Effluent Treatment Plants (ETP) of the fish meal units are not in working conditions resulting in untreated

discharge posing threats to health and contamination of sources of water. There is fear and anxiety due to approvals to additional fish meal plants outside the industrial area," Cuncolim MLA said.

"Further, heaps of hazardous waste dumped **CONTD TO PAGE 06...**

### Oppn Must Suggest Development Plan, Says Min Vishwajit Amid TCP Row

#### Heated Assembly clash over Congress-era land conversions;

#### Digambar Kamat intervenes as Rane defends State policies and lawyer appointments

#### Team Goemkarponn

**PANAJI:** "If they don't want development in the State of Goa, they should come up with a charter of demands on how we can develop the State," said TCP Minister Vishwajit Rane during a fiery debate in the Goa Assembly.

The uproar began



when the Opposition protested the Speaker's

refusal to allow discussion on a postponed question raised by MLA Venzy Veigas.

Minister Rane stated that the reply, originally postponed during last monsoon session, had already been tabled, prompting the Opposition to demand a formal ruling.

Rane also accused the Congress party of

"destroying the State of Goa" by converting over 9.80 crore sq. meters of land during its tenure, harming salt pans and other protected areas.

The statement sparked a heated verbal exchange with Leader of Opposition Yuri Alemao, who blamed the current government for its handling of land matters.

# When Institutional Reputation Matters More Than a Student's Life

The death of a 19-year-old Class 12 student from Baina is a heartbreaking reminder of how brutally indifferent our education system can become when numbers matter more than human lives. The student allegedly died by suicide after her college refused to allow her to appear for board examinations, fearing her low marks would bring down the institution's average results and harm its reputation. Her parents claim the management went a step further, forcing them to sign documents that left the young girl distressed and humiliated. Police are at the site, and investigations are ongoing. But beyond the legal process lies a deeper, more uncomfortable truth about what our schools and colleges have become.

At the centre of this tragedy is a question that should trouble every educator, policymaker, and parent: when did institutional prestige become more valuable than the life of a student?

Across India, academic institutions have turned board results into a branding exercise. Pass percentages are flaunted, toppers are paraded, and success is measured almost entirely through statistics. In this race for perfection, students who struggle academically are often treated as inconvenient liabilities. Instead of support, they face subtle exclusion, pressure to drop out, or, in extreme cases, outright denial of opportunities. This case, if the allegations hold true, represents the most cruel outcome of this mindset.

The young student was not a failure. She was a teenager still learning, still growing, and still deserving of guidance and empathy. An educational institution's role is not merely to produce impressive results but to nurture students through their difficulties. Denying a student the right to sit for an examination because her performance might affect the average score is not education; it is abandonment.

Even more disturbing are the allegations that her parents were compelled to sign documents, presumably to shield the institution from

*“Across India, academic institutions have turned board results into a branding exercise. Pass percentages are flaunted, toppers are paraded, and success is measured almost entirely through statistics. In this race for perfection, students who struggle academically are often treated as inconvenient liabilities. Instead of support, they face subtle exclusion, pressure to drop out, or, in extreme cases, outright denial of opportunities. This case, if the allegations hold true, represents the most cruel outcome of this mindset. The young student was not a failure. She was a teenager still learning, still growing, and still deserving of guidance and empathy. An educational institution's role is not merely to produce impressive results but to nurture students through their difficulties.”*

accountability. This highlights the power imbalance that often exists between schools and families. Many parents, particularly from less privileged backgrounds, feel intimidated by authorities and comply out of fear or confusion. When institutions exploit this vulnerability, the damage extends far beyond academics. It strips families of agency and students of dignity.

Student suicides linked to academic pressure are not isolated incidents in India. From school children to competitive exam aspirants, stories of young lives lost recur with alarming regularity. Each time, society

expresses shock and sorrow. Committees are announced, guidelines are drafted, and then quietly forgotten. Counselling remains inadequate, mental health support is treated as optional, and accountability is rare.

What this death exposes is not just individual wrongdoing but a systemic failure. Boards and education departments have created an environment where institutions are rewarded for results, not responsibility. There is little scrutiny of how schools achieve their percentages or who they leave behind in the process. Weak grievance redressal mechanisms mean students often have nowhere to turn when they face injustice.

If investigations establish that the student was denied her examination unfairly or that her family was coerced, those responsible must face serious consequences. Cosmetic actions will not suffice. There must be a clear message that pushing students to the edge in the name of reputation will not be tolerated.

Beyond punishment, reform is urgently needed. Examination boards must ensure transparent and humane eligibility rules. Independent oversight should be strengthened to prevent arbitrary decisions by institutions. Mental health counseling should be mandatory, accessible, and stigma-free. Most importantly, schools must be evaluated not only on results but on how they support students who struggle.

Education should be a process that builds confidence, not crushes it. Failure in an exam is temporary; the loss of a life is irreversible.

This tragedy should force a moment of reckoning. An institution that safeguards its image at the cost of a student's life has already lost its moral standing. No average percentage, no ranking, no reputation can ever justify such a loss. The real test now is whether this incident leads to change, or whether it will fade into statistics, much like the marks that mattered more than a young girl's life.

## LETTERS

### High Detection Rates Cannot Mask Rising Crime Concerns in Goa

The Goa Chief Minister's assertion in the Legislative Assembly that the state has achieved the highest crime detection rate in the country at 86 per cent deserves closer scrutiny, especially in light of troubling crime figures placed on record by the Opposition. While improved detection and faster police response times are welcome, they cannot be used to deflect attention from the steady rise in serious crimes, particularly against women. Government data cited in the House shows a sharp increase in rape cases, from 26 in 2021 to over 100 in 2025. These are not abstract numbers but real incidents involving real victims. When such crimes rise consistently over several years, the focus should not only be on detection after the fact, but on prevention, safety, and trust in policing. A high detection rate offers little comfort if crimes themselves are becoming more frequent. Similarly, the fluctuating but persistent number of murders raises legitimate concerns about law and order. Labeling Goa as safe based largely on response time and detection statistics risks oversimplifying a complex reality. Five or eight minutes of response time matters, but so does what happens before violence occurs. The Chief Minister's remarks that many rape accused are known to the victims underline a deeper social problem that cannot be solved by CCTV cameras or tenant verification drives alone. It calls for stronger community policing, better victim support systems, and sustained awareness efforts. Goa's reputation as a peaceful state cannot rest on percentages alone. The true measure of safety lies in whether citizens, especially women, feel secure in their daily lives. That is a question statistics alone cannot answer.

- Desmond D'Souza, Margao

### Arpora Nightclub Fire Raises Serious Questions on Regulatory Failure

The revelation that the Goa State Pollution Control Board granted a 15-year consent to operate to the Birch nightclub at Arpora in April 2024, despite multiple complaints alleging serious violations, is deeply disturbing. Coming in the aftermath of the deadly fire that claimed 25 lives, this disclosure raises grave questions about regulatory accountability and governance. According to the government's own reply in the Legislative Assembly, complaints against the establishment ranged from illegal construction and sewage discharge to noise pollution and safety concerns. These are not minor or technical issues. They point to systemic risks that should have triggered stricter scrutiny, not a long-term "green category" clearance valid until 2039. Regulatory bodies exist to protect public interest, not to rubber-stamp permissions while ignoring warning signs. Granting a 15-year consent despite repeated complaints suggests either a shocking lapse in due diligence or a troubling disregard for safety norms. In either case, the consequences have been tragic.

The Arpora fire was not merely an accident. It was the outcome of accumulated negligence, where enforcement failed at multiple levels. When authorities overlook violations and allow establishments to operate unchecked, they become complicit in creating conditions that make disasters inevitable. This case also exposes a wider problem in Goa's nightlife regulation, where commercial interests often appear to trump public safety. Post-tragedy assurances and inquiries, while necessary, are not enough. What is urgently needed is transparency in how consents are granted, independent audits of high-risk establishments, and personal accountability for officials who ignore red flags.

The lives lost in Arpora demand more than condolences. They demand answers, responsibility, and meaningful reform. Otherwise, such tragedies will continue to repeat themselves, with the same pattern of warnings ignored and lessons learned too late.

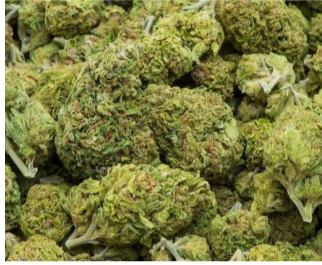
- Sanath Naik, Arpora

# Drug cases in Goa crossed 590 in three years

Team Goemkarponn

**PANAJI:** A total of 591 drug-related cases have been registered in Goa over the last three financial years and the current year so far, Chief Minister and Home Minister Dr Pramod Sawant informed the Legislative Assembly, while also revealing that no assistance was sought or received from central agencies in these cases.

In a written reply to an unstarred question tabled by Curtorim MLA Yuri Alemao, the Chief Minister stated that 180 drug cases



were registered in 2022–23, 128 in 2023–24, 167 in 2024–25 and 116 cases in the current financial year up to December 31, 2025.

The reply said that while no formal assistance was taken from agencies such as the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) or Directorate of Revenue

Intelligence (DRI), Narco Coordination (NCORD) meetings are regularly held at the district level under the chairmanship of district collectors, with district superintendents of police acting as member convenors, to ensure coordination between various government bodies to curb drug trafficking.

Dr Sawant informed the House that law enforcement agencies, including the Anti-Narcotic Cell, use technical surveillance, digital analysis, call detail records, location data and

intelligence databases in drug investigations. The government is also exploring the use of advanced analytics and artificial intelligence-based tools to strengthen detection and intelligence gathering, subject to legal and technical feasibility.

The Chief Minister further stated that there has been a noticeable change in the trend, source and type of narcotic substances in the state, with an increasing presence of synthetic and semi-synthetic drugs, along with evolving trafficking routes.



## Goa to oppose any water diversion projects on Mhadei; PRAWAH is a neutral authority, Assembly told

Team Goemkarponn

**PANAJI:** Goa government has assured the Legislative Assembly that it will actively oppose any water diversion or river projects proposed by Karnataka on the Mhadei (Mahadayi) river, and ensure that no such project receives approval from the Mahadayi PRAWAH Authority.

This assurance was given by Water Resources Minister Subhash Shirodkar in a written reply to an Unstarred Question by Fatorda MLA Vijai Sardesai on the Mhadei river.

The Minister clarified that Mahadayi PRAWAH is a neutral statutory authority constituted by the Government of India to implement the award of the Mahadayi Water Disputes Tribunal, subject to the outcome of cases pending before the Supreme Court. He said the Authority is not mandated to protect the interest of any individual State, but to act in a

neutral and objective manner within its notified powers.

However, Shirodkar said the State of Goa is taking all necessary precautions and remains vigilant over every move by Karnataka. Goa, he said, will actively oppose any projects proposed by Karnataka so that they do not receive PRAWAH's approval.

The reply also stated that no project proposed by Karnataka in the Mahadayi basin has been approved by PRAWAH so far.

On monitoring river flows, the Minister said Mahadayi PRAWAH is responsible for regulating, controlling and monitoring the storage, use and release of waters of the Mahadayi river system, as per the Tribunal's award. The Authority also collects and scrutinises hydrological and water-use data from all concerned States, including maintaining flow records and diversion data.

# Decline in Major Crimes in Goa Reported for 2025; CM Cites Proactive Policing

Team Goemkarponn

**PANAJI:** Chief Minister and Home Minister Dr. Pramod Sawant detailed a consistent decline in major crime categories across the state over the last three years. Addressing Unstarred Question No. 119 raised by MLA Vijai Sardesai, the Chief Minister provided data showing that assault cases dropped from 321 in 2023 to 252 in 2025, while incidents of mob violence decreased from



eight to six in the same period. While dacoity saw a marginal increase with five cases reported in 2025, the government emphasized a 100% detection rate for these

incidents, noting that one case has already reached the chargesheet stage. Notably, the report highlighted that no "gang war" incidents were recorded during this three-year window, reinforcing the government's position on the absence of organized gang activity in the state.

Despite the positive statistics, the state government declined to share the minutes of high-level review meetings between the Chief Minister

and top police officials regarding high-profile robberies in Baina and St. Cruz, citing Rule 37(15) of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure which protects internal administrative discussions. To combat evolving crime patterns, the Goa Police have intensified proactive measures, including the "Robot" and "Robin" night patrolling initiatives and the integration of private CCTV feeds with the Smart City surveillance network.

## Goans lost over ₹74 crore to cybercrime in three years; senior citizens increasingly targeted

Team Goemkarponn

**PANAJI:** Cybercrime has inflicted a massive financial toll on Goa, with residents losing more than ₹74 crore between 2023 and 2025, Chief Minister and Home Minister Dr Pramod Sawant told the Goa Legislative Assembly.

Replying to a Starred Question (LAQ No. 017C) tabled by MLA Alexio Lourenco, Sawant said cyber fraud losses have risen sharply, reflecting the growing scale and sophistication of online crimes.

According to data placed on the floor of the House, Goans lost ₹3.60 crore in 2023, which jumped dramatically to



₹29.73 crore in 2024. In 2025 (till December 31), the losses surged further to ₹40.79 crore, taking the three-year total to ₹74.12 crore.

The Assembly was also informed that senior citizens are increasingly becoming victims of cyber fraud. While 6.17% of cybercrime victims were senior citizens in 2023, the figure more than doubled to 14.11% in 2024. In 2025, it stood at 12.21%, underlining the continued vulnerability of the elderly

to online scams.

Explaining the reasons behind the rise in cybercrime, the government said rapid digitalisation combined with low public awareness, evolving criminal techniques, and misuse of personal information have led to a spike in identity theft, financial fraud and other cyber offences. The lure of "easy and fast money" and lack of cyber security awareness, especially on social media, were also cited as major contributors.

The government outlined several measures to tackle the growing menace. The Ministry of Home Affairs' cybercrime portal ([www.cybercrime.gov.in](http://www.cybercrime.gov.in))

## GSPCB gave 15-year clearance to Arpora nightclub despite complaints

Team Goemkarponn

**PANAJI:** The Goa State Pollution Control Board (GSPCB) granted a 15-year consent to operate to the Birch nightclub at Arpora in April 2024 despite multiple complaints alleging serious violations.

In a written reply to a question raised by Fatorda MLA Vijai Sardesai, the Chief Minister stated that the nightclub, operating under the name Birch by Romeo Lane, was granted a 'green category' consent, valid until 2039.

The reply revealed that at least four complaints had been received against the establishment. These



included allegations of illegal construction, sewage discharge, noise pollution and safety-related concerns. Despite these issues being on record, the pollution control board proceeded to grant long-term operational clearance to

the nightclub.

The disclosure comes in the wake of the devastating fire at the Arpora nightclub last month, which claimed 25 lives and sparked widespread outrage over regulatory lapses and enforcement failures.

# Baina student ends life after being denied exam appearance

## Team Goemkarponn

**BAINA:** A 19-year-old student from Baina allegedly ended her life on Wednesday evening after she was reportedly denied permission by her college to appear for board examinations.

According to her parents, the student was preparing for the exams but was not allowed to sit for them, which came as a severe shock to her. Neighbours and family members claimed the institution was concerned that her low marks could affect its overall performance and exam results.

The family further alleged that they were pressured into signing certain documents related to the issue, a development that reportedly left the student mentally distressed and withdrawn.



The incident has sparked anger among local residents, who questioned whether an institution's reputation and academic statistics were

being placed above the wellbeing and future of students. Police rushed to the spot after receiving information and conducted a preliminary inquiry. The

body was sent for medico-legal formalities, and statements of the parents and others concerned are being recorded. Further action will be

taken after examining all relevant documents and circumstances surrounding the incident.

The tragedy has once again drawn attention to

academic pressure and mental health challenges faced by students, with residents demanding a thorough investigation and accountability.

## Man caught accepting bets at Mayem, booked for gambling

### Team Goemkarponn

**BICHOLIM:** Bicholim Police have booked a 49-year-old man for gambling after he was caught accepting money bets in a public place at Mayem on Wednesday.

According to police, Head Constable Umesh S. Naik (HC 4580) lodged a state complaint stating that between 12.15 pm and 1.00 pm on January 14, 2026, the accused, Balu, son of Dattaram Chande, resident of H.

No. 139/17, Shardha Colony, Mayem, Bicholim, was caught red-handed at Kelbaiwada, Mayem, while accepting cash bets from members of the public in an open public place.

During the raid, police seized cash amounting to Rs. 1,050 along with other gambling-related accessories from his possession.

Further investigation in the case is being carried out by HC Umesh S. Naik of Bicholim Police Station.



## Man held with suspected ganja worth Rs 96,500 in Margao

### Team Goemkarponn

**MARGAO:** Margao Town Police arrested a man after he was caught red-handed in possession of suspected ganja during a late-night operation at Comba, Margao.

According to police, PSI Sameer Gaonkar lodged a state complaint stating that between 12.10 am and 2.48 am on January 14, 2026, the



accused, Mohammed Ashraf Bikkannbai, a

resident of Sukhubhat, Seraulim, was found

in possession of dry greenish-coloured plant material, including stems with flowering and fruiting parts, suspected to be ganja. The seized contraband is valued at Rs 96,500.

The accused was arrested in connection with the case. Further investigation is being carried out by PSI Sanjay Velip of Margao Town Police Station.

## Hit-and-run driver arrested in Mayem accident case

### Team Goemkarponn

**BICHOLIM:** Bicholim Police have arrested a 48-year-old man in connection with a hit-and-run accident that left a scooter rider seriously injured at Mayem in Bicholim.

According to police, the incident occurred on January 11, 2025, at around 12.30 pm near Adinath Math close to Fun Club, Mayem. A red



WagonR car bearing registration number GA-04-C-1870, travelling from Poirra towards Bicholim, was allegedly driven in a rash and negligent manner and collided head-on with an Activa scooter bearing registration number GA-04-N-0797 coming from the

opposite direction towards Chimulwada, Mayem.

The impact caused grievous injuries to the scooter rider, Kishor Sakhalkar, a resident of Chimulwada, Mayem. The driver of the car allegedly fled the scene without providing medical assistance to the injured man or informing the police.

Based on the investigation into Bicholim Police Station Motor

Vehicle Accident No. 06/2026 dated January 13, 2026, a state complaint was lodged by Ganesh Parwar (HC-5723). During the course of the investigation, police identified the accused as Vishnu, son of Vithal Shetkar, aged 48, presently residing at S-G-2, Amay Niwas near Chandrakant Garage, Khorlim, Mapusa, and a native of Ravana New Colony, Parye, Sattari.

# MMC launches pay parking in Vasco, urges discipline amid rampant misuse of parking slots

**Team Goemkarponn**

**MORMUGAO:** The Mormugao Municipal Council (MMC) on Wednesday launched a pay parking system along all sides of the MMC building in Vasco, marking the first such initiative in the city. The pilot project was inaugurated on the occasion of Makar Sankranti in the presence of MMC Chairperson Girish Borker and City ward councillor Shami Salkar.

While the initiative aims to regulate parking in one of Vasco's most congested areas, the need for such a system has become evident due to growing complaints from motorists. On many occasions, car owners are unable to find parking space as two-wheelers



are routinely parked in slots earmarked for cars, leaving designated bike parking either underused or ignored. Residents and office-goers have often flagged that indiscriminate parking has added to

traffic congestion and inconvenience around the municipal complex.

Speaking on the occasion, MMC Chairperson Girish Borker said the pay parking system was being

introduced for the first time in Vasco on a trial basis to bring order to the chaotic parking situation. "The objective is not revenue generation alone but ensuring parking discipline in a busy commercial

zone like Vasco," Borker said. Borker appealed to citizens to cooperate with the civic body and strictly follow parking norms. He issued a clear warning that two-wheelers parked in wrong or unauthorised

areas would be lifted. "Vehicles found violating parking rules will be towed away and a fine of ₹700 will be imposed, of which ₹500 will go to the traffic department and ₹200 will be charged by the MMC towards lifting and towing," he said.

Ward councillor Shami Salkar said the initiative was planned keeping in mind the persistent parking chaos in Vasco city.

"People often complain that there is no parking space, but at the same time, many do not respect the markings. This system is meant to bring discipline and ensure fair use of available space," she said.

The MMC has indicated that the effectiveness of the pilot project will be reviewed before extending the pay parking system to other parts of Vasco.

## GMC strengthens cancer care with new Hematology and Bone Marrow Transplant unit

**Team Goemkarponn**

**PANAJI:** Goa Medical College (GMC) has taken a significant step towards strengthening specialised healthcare services with the appointment of senior and consultant doctors to establish a Hematology and Bone Marrow Transplant Unit under the Medical Oncology department.

Health Minister Vishwajit Rane announced that Dr. Mahadev Swamy has been appointed as Senior Consultant, while Dr. Nakul Dilip Tikare and Dr. Anura Kantak have joined as Consultants to support the new unit.

"This focused capacity building will help us create a dedicated Hematology and Bone Marrow Transplant Unit at GMC. It is a major step towards making advanced, quality



healthcare accessible and affordable for all Goans, while ensuring that the best medical facilities are available closer to home," Rane said.

He also expressed gratitude to Chief Minister Dr. Pramod Sawant for his continued support. "I am grateful to Hon'ble Chief Minister Dr. Pramod Sawant for his guidance and

encouragement in strengthening Goa's healthcare ecosystem," he added.

The new appointments are expected to significantly enhance GMC's ability to provide advanced cancer care and specialised blood disorder treatments, reducing the need for patients to travel outside the state for critical procedures.



## IMA Goa outlines neurodiversity outreach plan to Health Minister

**Team Goemkarponn**

**PANAJI:** The Indian Medical Association (IMA) Goa State has presented its year-long programme focusing on neurodiversity in children to the State Health Department, with an emphasis on early detection, awareness and timely intervention.

State President of IMA Goa, Dr Shradha Mulgaoker Patil, along with State Secretary Dr Abhijit Shanbhag, met Health Minister Vishwajit Rane and briefed him on the Association's initiatives aimed at

supporting neurodiverse children across Goa through structured outreach for schools, parents and caregivers.

Health Minister Vishwajit Rane said, "Ensuring strong, inclusive, and future-ready healthcare for every child—anchored in early awareness and timely intervention—remains a key priority for the State. The IMA's focus on neurodiversity will help identify children early and connect them with the right care, which can make a real difference in their lives."

He added that

collaborative efforts between the government and professional medical bodies were essential to building an inclusive healthcare system for children.

The meeting was held in the presence of Dr Rajesh Patil, Medical Superintendent of Goa Medical College, and Dr Rajnanda Dessai, Officer on Special Duty to the Health Department. The proposed programmes will include awareness drives, screening and referral mechanisms to ensure better outcomes for neurodiverse children across the state.

# Beach Vigil App Ensures Garbage Is Cleared Within Two Hours, Says Tourism Minister

■ Goa Government Reviews Manpower Needs to Strengthen Beach Cleanliness During Peak Season

Team Goemkarponn

**PANAJI:** Goa Tourism Minister Rohan A. Khaunte on Tuesday informed the Legislative Assembly that complaints related to garbage on beaches received through the Beach Vigil App are being acted upon swiftly, with waste cleared within a two hour timeframe. He said the system has improved response efficiency and helped authorities address cleanliness issues in real time.

The Minister was responding during Zero Hour in the ongoing winter session of the Goa Legislative Assembly to concerns raised by Siolim MLA Delilah Lobo. He said agencies responsible for beach maintenance have been instructed to prioritise cleanliness and ensure that efforts are sustained consistently rather than addressed in isolation.

Khaunte stressed that maintaining clean beaches requires a collective and continuous approach. He said the



government's focus is not limited to creating digital systems alone, but also ensuring that follow up action is taken promptly with full departmental support. According to him, all issues highlighted by legislators and the public are being taken seriously and resolved on priority.

The Tourism Minister said beach cleaning and maintenance is an ongoing responsibility, particularly during peak tourism seasons

when footfall increases significantly. He acknowledged that challenges arise during such periods and assured the House that the department is actively working to manage the pressure on coastal infrastructure and sanitation services.

Addressing concerns over manpower, Khaunte clarified that existing tenders for beach cleaning do not specify a fixed number of workers. He

assured legislators that he would instruct the Director of the Department of Tourism to review manpower deployment and assess actual requirements on the ground to ensure effective waste management.

During the discussion, MLA Delilah Lobo drew attention to the condition of beaches at Anjuna, Vagator and Chapora. She highlighted the need for adequate staffing and regular waste clearance to maintain cleanliness and uphold environmental standards in popular tourist areas.

Responding to these concerns, the Minister reiterated the government's commitment to protecting Goa's beaches, which are central to the state's tourism economy. He said sustained monitoring, timely grievance redressal and appropriate manpower deployment would remain key priorities to ensure that Goa's coastline remains clean, safe and welcoming for both tourists and local residents.

## Transcend Goa 2026 to Open with Grand Ceremony in Presence of Chief Minister

■ Transmedia Conclave to Spotlight Innovation, Creativity and Industry Collaboration in Panaji

Team Goemkarponn

**PANAJI:** The much anticipated transmedia conclave Transcend Goa 2026 is set to be inaugurated on January 15, marking the beginning of a dynamic platform focused on innovation, creativity and future ready conversations in media and entertainment.

The opening ceremony and first day of the conclave will be held at Maquinez Palace at the Entertainment Society of Goa in Panaji. The event will be graced by the presence of Chief Minister Dr. Pramod Sawant along with several senior dignitaries from the government and creative industries. Among those attending are the Chief Secretary of Goa Dr. V. Candavelou, Siolim MLA and Vice Chairman of the Entertainment Society of Goa Delilah Lobo, ESG Chief Executive Officer Asvin Chandru, Creativeland Group Chairman C. Sajan Raj Kurup and Harish Rao, Founder of Bulletproof Entertainment and Co founder of Goa Future Proof.

Day one of Transcend Goa 2026 is designed to set the tone for the



conclave, featuring keynote addresses and panel discussions on emerging trends across transmedia storytelling, cinema, digital content and evolving entertainment ecosystems. The programme will also include interactive networking sessions aimed at fostering dialogue among industry leaders, filmmakers, content creators, entrepreneurs and policymakers.

Organised by the Entertainment Society of Goa in partnership with Goa Future Proof and supported by the Government of Goa, the conclave seeks to create meaningful collaboration across creative sectors. The initiative aims to attract investment, encourage innovation and highlight Goa's growing capabilities in media infrastructure and cultural production.

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## Chimbel Villagers Stage Sit-In, Reject CM's Delegation Offer Over Unity Mall

firm commitment from the government to remove the Unity Mall project from its current site. Additionally, the protesters urged the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) to prepare a scientific report to define the proper buffer zone and zone of influence of the Toygar Lake wetland. Villagers alleged that the government was ignoring the full 85,000-square-

metre zone of influence and had recognized only 1.75 lakh square metres as wetland. They demanded that the entire 2.6 lakh square metre area be re-notified officially as wetland. The protest escalated after reports emerged of signal jammers allegedly deployed to block live media coverage. Journalists confronted DIG Varsha Sharma over the interference, and the

## Unity Mall Verdict: CM Says Legal View Being Sought

Emphasising dialogue over confrontation, the Chief Minister said the government is open to discussions with the villagers and appealed to them not to intensify the agitation and to withdraw the protest.

Responding to the Chief Minister's remarks, Leader of Opposition Yuri Alemão cautioned the government against challenging the court verdict on the Unity Mall project. He said

the verdict reflects the people's demand and urged the government to hold talks with the affected villagers. Alemão warned that ignoring public sentiment and opting for legal confrontation instead of dialogue could lead to a law and order situation.

Chief Minister Dr Pramod Sawant has appealed to protesters opposing the proposed Unity Mall to avoid agitation and instead

engage in dialogue with the government.

He said the issue could be resolved through discussions and assured that the government was open to hearing the concerns of the Chimbel residents.

The Chief Minister further stated that the government is ready to hold talks with the protesters and will also seek a legal opinion in view of the court order related to the project

## LoP Alemão raises issues of Fish meal, Hazardous waste

at different locations in the industrial estate and vicinity poses risks to life, safety and security, more particularly during monsoon as the hazardous materials contaminate nearby streams and water bodies. It was assured in the House that the hazardous waste would be removed by September 2025, but there is no action." He said. "Also, there is fear and anxiety due to one M/s Shirdi Steel Private Limited Company encroaching land of Sociadade in Cuncolim for its extension and despite Civil Suit is pending before court in regards to 'lease and default of payment', the said company is carrying out work illegally." he said.

## "One Truth, and I Spoke It in the Assembly," Says Khaunte on Unity Mall

Dismissing allegations of misleading the House, Khaunte said that while there may be "a thousand lies," there is only one truth, and that truth was placed on record by him in the Assembly. He maintained that his reply was clear and factual, and categorically denied making any misleading or misleading statements on the Unity Mall matter.

## Unity Mall Protesters Met CM, I Will Speak to Him Personally: MLA Rudolf Fernandes

would personally speak to the Chief Minister to understand the outcome of the meeting. He added that he would take up the matter directly with the Chief Minister in order to seek clarity on the way forward regarding the Unity Mall issue.

## MLA Borkar Slams Govt Over Unity Mall, Says People's Concerns Ignored

issue, Borkar said that people of Chimbel had met Chief Minister Pramod Sawant and requested that the project should not be taken up at the proposed site, as the area is ecologically sensitive and rich in biodiversity.

# “India Is the Mother of Democracy,” Says PM Modi at Commonwealth Speakers’ Conference

■ Prime Minister Highlights Scale of Indian Elections, Women’s Leadership and Democratic Growth

**New Delhi:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday described India as the “mother of democracy” while addressing the Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of the Commonwealth. He said India has demonstrated that democratic institutions and processes can deliver stability, speed and scale while serving the aspirations of a diverse population.

Referring to the 2024 general elections, the Prime Minister said the



exercise stood as the largest democratic event in human history. He noted that the elections witnessed participation from more than 8,000 candidates and over 700 political parties, reflecting the depth and vibrancy

of India’s democratic framework. According to him, the scale of the elections reaffirmed the strength and credibility of democratic processes in the country.

The Prime Minister also highlighted the

strong participation of women voters, stating that women in India are not only active participants but are increasingly taking leadership roles. He pointed out that India has a woman President, a woman Chief Minister in the national capital, and nearly 1.5 million elected women representatives across various levels of governance. This, he said, reflects the inclusive nature of Indian democracy and its ability to empower citizens across social and regional lines.



## More Than 21 Lakh Devotees Take Holy Dip at Sangam on Makar Sankranti

■ Pilgrim Numbers Expected to Cross One Crore as Magh Mela Sees Massive Turnout

**New Delhi:** Prayagraj witnessed a massive surge of pilgrims on Thursday as more than 21 lakh devotees took a holy dip in the Ganga and at the Sangam on the occasion of Makar Sankranti during the ongoing Magh Mela. The ritual bathing began shortly after midnight, with large crowds gathering at the ghats in the early hours of the day.

By 8 am, lakhs of devotees had already completed the sacred ritual, and authorities anticipated the turnout to rise significantly as the auspicious period of Makar Sankranti lasts until sunset. With continuous arrivals of pilgrims from different parts of the country, officials estimated that the total number of bathers could cross one crore by the end of the day.

Makar Sankranti holds deep religious importance as it marks the beginning of the sun’s northward movement, known as Uttarayan. The

day is considered highly sacred, with sunrise to sunset believed to be the most auspicious time for bathing, prayers, and spiritual practices. Devotees traditionally offer prayers to the Sun God and recite sacred mantras, believing these rituals bring spiritual merit and prosperity.

The Magh Mela is spread across nearly 800 hectares and has been divided into seven sectors for better management. To handle the huge influx of visitors, more than 25,000 toilets have been installed across the fairgrounds, supported by a sanitation workforce exceeding 3,500 personnel to maintain cleanliness throughout the area.

A well-equipped tent city has been set up for pilgrims observing Kalpvash, a short-term spiritual retreat involving meditation, prayer, and disciplined living. Facilities such as yoga spaces, meditation areas, and essential amenities have been provided.



## “Salute to Soldiers Guarding Our Borders,” Says PM Modi on Army Day

**Nation Pays Tribute to Courage, Sacrifice and Service of Indian Armed Forces**

**New Delhi:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday paid tribute to the courage and sacrifice of India’s armed forces on the occasion of Army Day, saying the dedication of soldiers serving in the most challenging conditions fills every citizen with pride. He lauded the unwavering commitment of Army personnel who protect the nation across difficult and dangerous terrains.

In a message shared on social media, the Prime Minister praised the bravery of troops deployed in remote regions, dense forests and snow covered mountain peaks. He offered heartfelt salutations to soldiers guarding India’s borders and acknowledged their discipline, valour and selfless service to the nation. The Prime Minister said the resolve and professionalism of the armed forces remain a source of strength for the country.

## “Veterans Are Central to India’s Security and Nation Building,” Says Army Chief

■ Army Expands Role of Ex Servicemen Through Welfare, Strategic Engagement and Resettlement Initiatives

**New Delhi:** Chief of Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi on Wednesday said the Indian Army is actively integrating veterans into the national security framework while strengthening welfare, healthcare and resettlement programmes for ex servicemen and their families. Speaking at an event marking Armed Forces Veterans Day,

he emphasised that the contribution of veterans continues long after they leave active service. The Army chief said former service personnel have played an important role in safeguarding the nation and contributing to governance, industry and social development. He noted that veterans have consistently stepped forward whenever the country has faced



challenges, reflecting a deeply rooted sense of duty and national responsibility. Armed Forces Veterans Day is observed every year on January 14 to honour the legacy of Field Marshal K M Cariappa, India’s first Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, who retired on this day in 1953.

## “There Is No Democracy in Bengal,” ED Tells Supreme Court Over Raid Obstruction

■ Top Court Examines Allegations Against Chief Minister and State Police During I-PAC Searches

**New Delhi:** The Supreme Court on Thursday heard arguments on a petition filed by the Enforcement Directorate accusing the West Bengal government and police machinery of obstructing lawful search operations during raids conducted at the I PAC headquarters and the residence of its director in Kolkata on January 8. The court described the allegations as serious and warranting close scrutiny. The agency alleged



that the situation in the state reflected a complete breakdown of democratic norms, claiming that senior police officials accompanied Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to the raid locations and interfered with the searches.

## 78th Army Day Celebrations Showcase Military Strength, New Units and Indigenous Weapon Systems

**New Delhi:** The Indian Army marked its 78th Army Day on Thursday with a grand parade in Jaipur, Rajasthan, showcasing its growing combat strength, indigenous weapon systems and organisational reforms. Chief of Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi attended the celebrations held at Mahal Road in Jagatpura, marking the first time the prestigious Army Day parade was conducted outside a traditional cantonment area. The event was attended by several

**Jaipur Hosts Historic Parade as Indian Army Highlights Modern Warfare Capabilities and Reforms**



senior dignitaries, including Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma, Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, Rajasthan Governor Haribhau Bagde

and other senior civil and military officials. The historic shift in venue reflected the Army’s increasing engagement with the public and its evolving operational outlook.

# “If You Don’t Take Wickets, It Becomes Very Difficult,” Gill After Rajkot Loss

■ India Captain Admits Middle Overs Let Team Down in Seven Wicket Defeat to New Zealand

**New Delhi:** India captain Shubman Gill admitted that his side failed to control the game during the middle overs, a lapse that proved costly in their seven wicket defeat against New Zealand in the second ODI at the Niranjan Shah Stadium in Rajkot on Wednesday. Gill said the inability to take wickets in that phase allowed the visitors to build momentum and chase the target comfortably.

India posted 284 for 7, a total anchored by KL Rahul’s unbeaten 112 off 92 balls, his eighth ODI century. Despite the competitive score, New Zealand paced their chase well, led by



Daryl Mitchell’s unbeaten 131. Mitchell stitched together a decisive 162 run partnership for the third wicket with Will Young, who contributed 87, steering the visitors to victory and leveling the series.

Reflecting on the defeat, Gill said India bowled well in the opening

spell but failed to maintain pressure once the fielding restrictions eased. He noted that with five fielders inside the circle, wickets are crucial to slow down scoring. Without breakthroughs, even an additional 15 to 20 runs on the board would not have been enough to defend the total.

Gill highlighted the importance of partnerships on such batting friendly surfaces, stating that once batsmen get set, they need to make their starts count. He pointed out that new batters often find it difficult to score freely on these wickets, making sustained partnerships a key factor in determining the outcome.

The India skipper also felt that his team could have been more aggressive with the ball in the middle overs. He observed that while the pitch offered some movement early on, it settled after the first 20 to 25 overs, which made bowling more challenging.

# Nitish Reddy Fails to Make an Impact as India Lose Second ODI to New Zealand

■ Assistant Coach Ryan ten Doeschate Says Allrounder Must Seize Opportunities

**New Delhi:** Brought back into India’s playing XI following Washington Sundar’s injury, allrounder Nitish Reddy struggled to make an impact during the seven-wicket defeat against New Zealand in the second ODI at Rajkot’s Niranjan Shah Stadium on Wednesday. Reddy scored 20 runs off 21 balls and bowled two wicketless overs, failing to influence the outcome of the match.

Indian assistant coach Ryan ten Doeschate admitted that despite multiple opportunities, Reddy has yet to fully justify the team’s backing. “For someone making their way, particularly with the bat tonight, it was a perfect chance to spend 15



overs at the crease. You really have to take these chances to push your case for selection,” he said.

Doeschate also reflected on India’s team combination, suggesting that playing an extra pacer instead of a spinner was a misjudgment given the Rajkot conditions.



# PV Sindhu Exits India Open; Srikanth Kidambi and HS Prannoy Progress

■ Indian Shuttlers Experience Mixed Fortunes on Day 1 of India Open

**New Delhi:** Indian shuttler PV Sindhu was ousted from the India Open on Wednesday, while compatriots Srikanth Kidambi and HS Prannoy advanced to the Round of 16 with victories over Tharun Manneppalli and Lee Cheuk Yiu, respectively.

Sindhu, fresh from a semifinal finish at the Malaysia Super 1000 last week, started strongly but could not sustain her momentum. She narrowly took the first game 22-20 before dropping the next two 12-21, 15-21 to Vietnam’s Thuy Linh Nguyen in a 68-minute contest. Reflecting on her performance, Sindhu acknowledged the need for greater consistency, saying, “Small mistakes in critical moments become decisive. After losing a

point, I need to reset quickly and be ready for the next rally.”

Srikanth Kidambi, on the other hand, overcame a tense encounter with fellow Indian Tharun Manneppalli, winning 15-21, 21-6, 21-19. Trailing 17-19 in the decider, the former world No. 1 steadied himself to close out the match, displaying composure he admitted had been missing in recent seasons. Srikanth pointed out the challenges players face outside the top 32 rankings, noting that access to high-level tournaments has become increasingly competitive.

HS Prannoy also booked his place in the Round of 16 with a 22-20, 21-18 win over last year’s runner-up Lee Cheuk Yiu.

# “Half a Billion Requests Show Football’s Global Power,” Says FIFA Chief

■ Unprecedented Demand for FIFA World Cup 2026 Tickets Despite Pricing Concerns

**New Delhi:** The craze for the FIFA World Cup 2026 has reached unprecedented levels, with ticket requests crossing the 500 million mark worldwide. The massive demand highlights the tournament’s global appeal even as concerns continue over the high cost of attending matches.

Ticket applications were received from fans

across all 211 footballing nations and territories, reflecting widespread enthusiasm for the event, which will be jointly hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico. The application window for the lottery based ticket allocation closed earlier this week, and applicants are expected to be informed about the status of their requests in early

February.

Demand has been particularly strong beyond the host countries, with fans from Germany, England, Brazil, Spain, Portugal, Argentina and Colombia submitting the highest number of requests. This surge underlines football’s enduring popularity in both traditional powerhouses and emerging markets.



Among individual matches, the most sought after ticket has been Colombia’s group stage clash against Portugal in Miami on June 27. This was followed closely by Mexico’s match against South Korea in Guadalajara on June 18.

# Goa’s Beach Sports Teams Felicitated for National Achievements

■ Sports Minister Honours Medal Winners at Goa Legislative Assembly in Porvorim

## Team Goemkarponn

**PANAJI:** The Goa Soccer Beach, Beach Volleyball and Sepak Takraw teams were felicitated on Thursday for their outstanding performances at national level competitions. The ceremony was held at the Goa Legislative Assembly premises in Porvorim, where the athletes were recognised for bringing laurels to the state.

The felicitation was led by Sports Minister Dr. Ramesh Tawadkar, who congratulated the players



for their dedication, discipline and competitive spirit. The event was attended by Vice Chairman of the Goa Film Development Corporation Dhaku Madkaikar, Director of Sports Dr. Ajay Gaude, High Performance Director of Khelo India Goa Sumith

M R, along with senior officials of the Sports Authority of Goa. During the ceremony, the Beach Volleyball team was honoured for securing the gold medal, showcasing dominance and consistency throughout the tournament. The

Goa Beach Soccer team received accolades for winning the silver medal after a strong campaign against top opponents. The Sepak Takraw team was also felicitated for clinching the bronze medal, highlighting the state’s growing presence in diverse sporting disciplines. Speaking on the occasion, the Sports Minister praised the athletes for their hard work and commitment, stating that their success reflects the steady progress of sports development in Goa.