

Six Days That Shook Goa

■ Viresh Borkar's hunger strike against Section 39A forced the government to respond and signalled a new phase in Goan politics.

SURAJ NANDREKAR

For six days at Azad Maidan, a hunger strike transformed Goa's political landscape. What began as a protest against Section 39A evolved into a statewide movement that drew ministers, opposition leaders, and civil society figures to a single protest site. At the centre of the agitation was St Andre MLA Viresh Borkar, whose fast compelled the government to negotiate and propelled him into the front ranks of Goan politics.

By the time the fast ended, the Chief Minister, Speaker Ganesh Gaonkar, Minister Subhash Shirodkar and several opposition MLAs had all visited Azad Maidan. The image of senior

leaders gathered around a fasting MLA created a powerful impression. For many observers, it signalled that the government had been forced onto the defensive.

The Issue Behind the Agitation

The protest centred on Section 39A, a provision linked to land-use conversions that many Goans fear could accelerate unchecked development. In villages such as Siridao and Palem, concerns about land conversion quickly turned into organised resistance.

Borkar made the issue his own. He confronted officials, raised the matter publicly and eventually declared an indefinite hunger strike. By shifting the protest to Azad Maidan, he ensured it



would receive statewide attention. The location mattered. Azad Maidan has long been associated

with political dissent in Goa. By choosing it as the site of his fast, Borkar

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Quotes...

● **Claude Alvares** backed the agitation and warned that the issue went far beyond a single constituency. He said, "Section 39A opens the door for large-scale land conversions and that is why people across Goa are worried about its impact. Planning decisions cannot be left to a few officials when they affect the future of the entire state." He stressed that the provision had triggered widespread concern because of its potential long-term environmental consequences.

● **Adv Norma Alvares** described Section 39A as a serious threat to Goa's planning framework and ecology. She said, "If 39A continues, it can destroy the whole of Goa. It is changing the face of Goa and making a mockery of the Town Planning Act." She added that the

government's decision to halt approvals showed that the agitation had already made an impact, saying, "The very suspension of the approvals is an acknowledgement that 39A is not correct. The fight will continue in the Assembly."

● **Dr Oscar Rebello** said the hunger strike reflected a deeper public unease about the direction of development in the state. He said, "This hunger strike reflects the deep anxiety Goans feel about the pace of development and what it means for the future of the state. People are no longer willing to remain silent when decisions affecting their land are taken without them." He described the protest as a sign that citizens were becoming more assertive about protecting Goa's future.

Goa to conduct tiger census under AITE 2026

Three-phase survey from March to June will use ground tracking, satellite mapping and AI camera traps to document tiger presence

Satyavatinandan Satrekar

The Goa Forest Department is preparing to undertake a comprehensive tiger census beginning March 2026 as part of the nationwide All India Tiger Estimation (AITE) 2026 exercise. The survey, expected to conclude by June, will attempt to document tiger presence using ground surveys, satellite mapping and AI-enabled camera traps. The census will begin after forest staff receive training from the Wildlife Institute of India and the National Tiger Conservation Authority, the agencies coordinating the nationwide estimation exercise along with state forest departments. The three-phase exercise will begin in March to record direct and indirect evidence such as pugmarks, scats, claw marks



and prey remains. The second phase will use satellite imagery and remote sensing to analyse forest cover, terrain and habitat corridors. In the final phase, AI-enabled camera traps will be deployed along animal trails and near water sources for about 25 days to identify individual tigers. The All India Tiger Estimation is conducted once every four years to assess tiger populations

across the country. The exercise in Goa comes amid ongoing proceedings in the Supreme Court of India over the proposed declaration of a tiger reserve in the state, an issue on which the government has maintained that tigers seen in Goa are transient animals moving in from neighbouring Maharashtra and Karnataka. Despite this position, past

Main Points

- **Goa to conduct tiger census from March to June 2026**
- Survey part of All India Tiger Estimation (AITE) 2026
- **Three phases: ground tracking, satellite mapping and camera trapping**
- **Training provided by Wildlife Institute of India and NTCA**
- Past estimates have recorded tiger presence in Goa
- **Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary not included at this stage.**
- Wildlife volunteers may be invited to participate

estimates have recorded tiger presence in the state. The 2002 census reported four tigers based on pugmarks and related signs, while the 2014 assessment detected two females, one male and two cubs through scat DNA analysis. The 2022 estimation also confirmed the presence of four tigers in Goa's forests. Wildlife activists and researchers have long argued that tigers have historically inhabited Goa's forested areas. Conservationists

have also pointed to the deaths of five tigers in Sattari between 2009 and 2010 as evidence of their presence and vulnerability in the state. While Maharashtra and Karnataka have already begun preparatory work for AITE 2026, Goa had earlier given no indication that it would participate.

Officials now say the upcoming survey will provide updated scientific data on tiger presence, prey density, habitat conditions and human pressures.

Sunday Thought

After Azad Maidan, Mirabag Boils Over

Suraj Nandrekar

Goa's familiar cycle of protest is playing out once again. It begins with petitions and memorandums. It moves to demonstrations. It escalates to hunger strikes. And when even that fails, it spills onto the streets. The recent confrontation at Mirabag in Sanguem shows how quickly public anger can harden into direct action when people feel they are no longer being heard. This week, tension escalated after villagers gheraoed a Water Resources Department official at Pajemol, demanding answers over the Mirabag project and its perceived impact on their lives. The confrontation was not spontaneous. It was the product of weeks, perhaps months, of simmering frustration. Protesters sought clarity and accountability, but what they demonstrated most clearly was a loss of faith in official assurances. The Mirabag agitation comes close on the heels of protests that had already intensified at Azad Maidan, where demonstrators resorted to an indefinite hunger strike to press their demands on planning and development issues. Hunger strikes are rarely the first choice of protest. They are a last resort, adopted when people believe every other channel has failed. When such extreme steps produce little visible change, the consequences are predictable. Agitations deepen and spread. What happened at Mirabag is therefore not an isolated law and order issue. It is a symptom of a larger problem in governance. Across Goa, citizens increasingly feel that decisions affecting their land, water and livelihoods are taken without adequate consultation. Public hearings are often seen as formalities. Technical clearances appear distant and opaque. Officials arrive with files and maps, while villagers confront them with fears rooted in lived experience. This gap between policy and perception



is dangerous. Development projects, especially those involving water resources, inevitably alter landscapes and livelihoods. Even when the science supports them, they require trust to succeed. Without trust, even the most carefully designed project will meet resistance. The State cannot afford to dismiss these protests as mere obstructionism. Nor can it allow confrontations with officials to become normalised. When citizens begin surrounding government officers for answers, it signals a breakdown in communication. The responsibility for restoring that communication lies primarily with the administration. Transparency must come first. Project details should not emerge in fragments or through rumours. Timelines, environmental impacts and rehabilitation plans must be shared openly and early. Officials must be present not just in moments of crisis but throughout the decision making process. Equally important is responsiveness. Too often, grievances linger without resolution until frustration boils over. A timely response may not satisfy everyone, but silence satisfies no one. There is also a political lesson here. Goa has seen a steady rise in localised movements against projects perceived as imposed from above. Each agitation may revolve around a different issue, yet they share a common thread. People want to be heard before decisions are finalised, not after. The unrest at Mirabag should be taken as a warning. The hunger strikes at Azad Maidan were an early signal. The gherao at Pajemol is a louder one. If these signals continue to be ignored, the next stage may be even more confrontational. Good governance is not measured by how firmly the State responds to protests, but by how rarely such protests become necessary. Mirabag is a reminder that when dialogue fails, dissent finds other ways to speak.

Masterstroke

A Strategic Retreat or a Reset?

Irfan Iqbal Gheta

As the Goa Assembly elections of 2027 draw closer, three trends are beginning to take shape. First, protests by politicians and activists are set to intensify. The triggers are familiar. Mega projects, contentious policy decisions and development plans that sections of the public view with suspicion will once again become rallying points. Agitations will grow sharper as the political temperature rises. Second, rivalries across parties will gather momentum. Allegations and counter allegations will dominate the discourse. Leaders will switch sides. Old associates will turn into critics overnight. Charges of being a "B team" or having a tacit understanding with the ruling party will become routine. Issue based support will be dressed up in careful language. Political wordplay will flourish as each camp seeks to frame the narrative in its favour. The third trend is relatively new. Over the past year, there has been a noticeable rise in public declarations of intent to join political parties. Young activists and aspiring leaders have begun writing formal letters to party state presidents, expressing their desire to join and work at the grassroots level. The stated aim is service rather than electoral ambition, though the timing rarely goes unnoticed. So far, this emerging practice has not produced a clear success story. In contrast, an older tactic appears to be fading. Not long ago, it was common to float rumours of having received offers from multiple parties, followed by a declaration that a decision would be taken after consulting supporters. In today's political marketplace, where winnability is often the decisive factor, such manoeuvres appear to be losing their edge. Even as newer strategies emerge in an increasingly media driven and technology shaped environment, seasoned politicians continue to rely on methods that have served



them well. Grand birthday celebrations double up as demonstrations of strength. Oversized cakes, elaborate stages and carefully managed crowds send out a message of relevance. Major development projects are announced with fanfare. These exercises are as much about optics as they are about governance, especially in the run up to a crucial election year. The incumbent government, for its part, appears to be taking no chances. While the opposition remains fragmented, there is little sense of complacency. Systems and responses seem calibrated for every situation. When a new entrant joins the ruling party, the message is uniform. Leaders speak of aligning with the vision of Narendra Modi and contributing to the goal of a developed India by 2047. The language is consistent, and the welcome is carefully staged. The same calibration is visible in the handling of protests, which have a way of surfacing at politically sensitive moments. The government typically begins with negotiation and persuasion, attempting to defuse tensions through dialogue and administrative measures. When dissent persists, the Chief Minister, Pramod Sawant, often steps in personally. Relying on accessibility and reassurance, he seeks to calm tempers and offer assurances, often linking decisions to a broader vision of Goa's development in the coming decade. When resistance proves difficult to overcome, the government has at times chosen to step back, shelving or modifying projects in response to public pressure. Whether such moves amount to tactical retreats or strategic resets remains to be seen. What is clear, however, is that the political landscape in 2026 is already alive with anticipation, calculation and quiet manoeuvring. The road to 2027 promises to be anything but dull. Viva Goa.

TWO FRIENDS TURN A SMALL FOOD CART INTO A DREAM VENTURE

BY KAJAL



For many young people, life after college usually leads to the search for a stable job. But for two friends in Goa, stepping out of college meant choosing a different path. Instead of waiting for opportunities, they decided to create one of their own. What began as a simple idea has today taken shape as a small roadside food cart serving authentic Goan flavours and steadily building a loyal customer base. The food cart, named Saanchi, is run by two friends, Twinkle and Ischita, who share a common goal of building something independently. Situated along a roadside, the modest setup offers a variety of Goan delicacies including chicken cafreal poi, chicken kheema poi, prawn poi and mushroom poi, along with sandwiches and other snacks. Despite its simple appearance, the cart has become popular for its consistent taste and homely feel. From the beginning, both friends were determined to maintain authentic Goan flavours. Before launching



the cart, they spent nearly two to three months experimenting with recipes at home. They tested different combinations of spices and ingredients, often asking family members to taste the food and suggest improvements. Eventually, they finalised the recipes and standardised the measurements to ensure consistency. "We experimented a lot before starting," said Twinkle. "Once we finalised the taste, we fixed the measurements. Now we follow the same quantities every day so the taste remains the same." The responsibilities are clearly divided between the two. Twinkle manages purchasing, accounting and administrative work. She handles everything from buying ingredients to maintaining records and planning expenses. Meanwhile, Ischita works on the front line with the help of her brother, managing the cooking, serving and day to day operations of the cart. "I handle the cooking and service along with my brother, while Twinkle looks after the accounts and purchasing,"

said Ischita. "Dividing the work makes it easier for us to manage everything." The idea to start the food cart came from their desire to do something on their own rather than follow the routine of a regular job. Without any formal background in hotel management or catering, they relied on trial and error to learn the basics of running a food business. Starting out was not easy. The cart was launched in September, just after the festive season, when heavy rains created several challenges. Their initial setup was temporary and not suited to monsoon conditions. Rainwater leaks and electrical issues made work difficult during the first few months. "We started during the rainy season, which was very challenging," Twinkle said. "We used plastic sheets to cover the cart and somehow managed until we could put up a proper shed." Financial constraints were another major hurdle. With limited funds, they had to carefully plan their spending and gradually build the business. Support from family members

helped them through the initial phase. In the beginning, most customers were local residents who stopped by out of curiosity. Many of them returned after trying the food and soon became regular visitors. The business received an additional boost when a social media influencer visited the cart and posted a video online. The video attracted attention and helped bring in new customers for several months. "The best feeling is when customers come back and tell us they like the food," said Ischita. "Some even say it tastes like home cooked food, and that makes us very happy." The name Saanchi was chosen after much thought, as the friends wanted something unique and easy for people to remember. They continue to experiment with new recipes while preparing their own masalas to maintain a distinct taste. For now, their main goal is to recover their initial investment and stabilise the business. While they hope to expand in the future, their current focus remains on maintaining quality and

building strong relationships with customers. Twinkle believes that young people should consider trying independent ventures if they have an idea and the determination to pursue it. "A job is important, but doing something of your own is a different experience," she said. "If you have an idea, you should at least try. Otherwise, you may regret not taking the chance." Built on teamwork and determination, the small roadside cart stands as a reminder that even modest beginnings can lead to meaningful achievements. For Twinkle and Ischita, what started as a simple idea has become the foundation of a shared dream.

Goa Writers Explore Desire, Land and Identity in Latest Anthology

The anthology hopes to resonate with readers that there's so much more to Goa beyond food, restaurants, tourism and beaches.

Moving beyond the familiar imagery that often defines Goa in the public imagination, writers from the Goa Writers Group examined how desire shapes contemporary life in the state, from marriage and migration to land, tourism and faith, during a recent MOG Sunday session at the Museum of Goa.

The session at the Pilerne-based museum centred on Appetite: New Writing from Goa, an anthology of essays, short stories and poems edited by Shivranjana Rathore and Tino de Sa, and published by Penguin Random House recently. The collection brings together voices connected to Goa, each responding to the theme 'appetite' in distinct ways.

Opening the discussion, the editors reflected on how the idea of appetite extends beyond food. "Appetites are not just about hunger," one of the editors noted during the conversation. "They are about longing — for love, for land, for power, for



belonging."

Rathore described the theme as emerging organically within the group, but said it resonates strongly with the present moment in Goa. "There's a hunger for Goa that exists everywhere — from the inside, from the outside, from everywhere," she said, suggesting that the anthology attempts to examine how that desire is lived, negotiated and sometimes resisted.

She clarified that the editors did not approach the project

with the intention of defining Goan identity. "We did not set out to represent anything," Rathore said. "In the intention of not wanting to represent... I think that in itself is resistance and subversion." By foregrounding intimate, personal narratives rather than spectacle, she argued, the book shifts focus away from commodified images of the state.

With rapid social and economic shifts, Rathore noted that the collection captures Goa

across time. "We have a beautiful sense of temporality in the pieces," she said, explaining that contributors move between past inheritances, present realities and imagined futures.

That layering, she added, allows the anthology to reflect changing lifestyles, migration patterns and evolving aspirations without prescribing a single viewpoint.

Furthermore, Rathore drew a distinction between revenue-driven

growth and more holistic approaches that consider land and ecology. While the anthology does not advocate policy positions, she said it "holds a container for all those layers and tensions," acknowledging the structural forces that shape individual lives.

Co-editor Tino de Sa echoed the idea of appetite as cyclical and layered. Speaking about his poem 'Bread Upon the Waters', he said, "A poem belongs to the reader," emphasising that its meaning shifts

with interpretation. Using a deck of cards as a metaphor, he described appetites as impulses that enter and exit one's life, only to return in altered forms.

The discussion also touched on literature's role in a fast-moving media environment. Rathore described the present as a "hyper-propaganda era," arguing that writing can slow down perception. "What any work of writing does is capture a moment," she said, adding that documenting lived experience opens space for reflection rather than reaction. For Goan readers, she expressed hope that the anthology offers recognition. "I hope people feel seen," she said, referring to stories that explore community pressures, work in the tourism economy and shifting definitions of belonging. For readers beyond the state, she suggested the book may complicate familiar narratives. "I love restaurants. I love food. But there's so much more to a place," she remarked.

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linked his protest to a wider tradition of public resistance. A Movement Takes Shape What began as a constituency issue quickly grew into a broader movement. Villagers travelled to Panaji to show support. Activists joined the agitation. Civil society groups began raising concerns about the long-term impact of land conversions. Environmentalists such as Claude Alvares supported the agitation and argued that land-use changes needed far greater scrutiny because of their ecological impact. He emphasised that

planning decisions could permanently alter Goa's fragile environment and should not be taken lightly. Advocate Norma Alvares also backed the protest, highlighting the legal and environmental implications of large-scale land conversions. She stressed that planning laws must protect public interest and not merely facilitate development. Public health expert Oscar Rebello described the hunger strike as an important moment in citizen action, noting that it reflected widespread concern about the pace and direction of change in Goa.

Their support helped broaden the agitation beyond a single constituency issue and turned it into a larger debate about governance and development. The Government Feels the Pressure In the early days of the fast, the government appeared cautious. Assurances were offered, but no firm commitments were made. As the days passed, however, the pressure increased. Crowds gathered daily at Azad Maidan. Political leaders arrived to express support. The presence of both ruling party figures and opposition MLAs showed

how seriously the agitation was being taken. The visits by senior leaders were particularly significant. Rarely does a hunger strike by a single MLA draw such a wide cross-section of political leadership. Each visit reinforced the perception that the protest could not be ignored. By the sixth day, the government signalled its willingness to address the issue. Only after receiving assurances did Borkar agree to end his fast.

The Rise of a Political Figure The hunger strike transformed Borkar's political image. Until

then, he was seen largely as a local MLA. The fast elevated him to statewide prominence. The symbolism of the protest played a major role. A fasting MLA, supported by villagers and visited by senior leaders, created a compelling narrative. For many supporters, Borkar emerged as a leader willing to confront authority directly. The agitation also gave him credibility on land and environmental issues, which resonate strongly across Goa. A New Phase in Goan Politics The hunger strike has had consequences beyond Section 39A. It has revived a form of

politics rooted in public mobilisation rather than purely electoral competition. In recent years, protests in Goa have often remained localised. This agitation showed that a single issue could unite people across regions. It also demonstrated that traditional forms of protest still have power. Hunger strikes may seem old-fashioned, but this one proved they can still influence political outcomes. Opposition and Civil Society Converge Another notable aspect of the agitation was the convergence of political and civil society support.