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“I Would Rather Sit at Home Than Betray My Mandate”

Young, Unyielding, and in the Line of Fire -Yuri Alemao on Leadership, Defections, and the Road to 2027.

At a relatively young age and in his very first term as an *MLA*, **Yuri Alemao** has taken on the role of *Leader of the Opposition in the Goa Legislative Assembly*. It is a position that requires both political acumen and institutional knowledge. In this wide-ranging conversation with Editor Suraj Nandrekar, he discusses learning on the job, the scars of defections, criticism that he is a “soft” opposition leader, internal party challenges, and why he believes 2027 could mark a turning point for Congress in Goa.

Q: You became Leader of the Opposition in your first term and at a young age. How does that feel? What have you learned so far?

Yuri Alemao: It is not easy. It is a crown, but one full of thorns. There is public accountability that comes with this position. As Leader of the Opposition, your role is to expose the government, to question it, and to present alternatives. It has been a learning process. Politics is the art of the possible. Every day you learn. You learn from mistakes, from criticism, even from setbacks. When I started,

there were doubts about my experience. But over time, I believe there has been a visible change. My focus is clear. The government must be held accountable.

Q: You were a commercial pilot and did not initially plan a political career. How did you adapt so quickly to legislative work, especially finance and governance issues?

Yuri Alemao: I come from a political background. From a young age, I accompanied my father to political meetings and Assembly sessions. I closely observed

debates and watched leaders like Manohar Parrikar in his prime as Leader of the Opposition. That exposure helped. But I never imagined I would enter politics. In fact, after narrowly losing in 2012, I thought I would not return. Later, I worked extensively in my constituency and began studying the Assembly's rules and procedures around 2020. I read the rule book several times. Understanding finance and governance takes time. Even on my first day in the Assembly, during a debate on supplementary demands, I could barely

stand and speak. Today, there is a difference. Preparation and observation helped me bridge the gap.

Q: Congress in Goa is often described as divided. Three MLAs appear to speak in different directions. How do you plan to take the party into 2027?

Yuri Alemao: Congress is a democratic party. It allows voices to be heard. That sometimes creates the perception of division. But within the legislative wing, we are united. Questions are framed strategically. We



decide together how to approach issues. Yes, defections hurt us. In 2019 and 2022, we lost 18 MLAs. That damaged public confidence. But these defections were engineered. Despite that, we stayed true to our principles. The key for 2027 is unity. If opposition parties divide votes, the BJP benefits. The BJP is

a well-oiled machine with resources and organisational strength. We must keep egos aside and work collectively. If we do that, forming the government in 2027 is achievable.

Q: How do you respond to the argument that people have lost

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Tuber Festival of Bhuipal Displays More Than 80 Varieties

By Satyavatinandan Satrekar

Goa is known for its rich diversity of tuber crops, a legacy that has been preserved largely by tribal communities and traditional farmers. This diversity was showcased for the first time through a public exhibition that not only displayed tubers but also offered visitors a chance to savour authentic culinary preparations. The diversity and richness of tuber crops found in Goa and its surrounding regions were on full display at the festival held at Bhuipal. The exhibition was organised at Kalmachi Vhali in a specially erected eco-friendly mandap by the Vivekananda Environment Awareness Brigade, Keri, Sattari. More than 80 different varieties of tubers were meticulously collected and displayed by Suryakant



Shankar Gaonkar from Bhuipal and Datta Shambhu Naik from Priol. These tubers were sourced from various parts of Goa, reflecting the region's remarkable agro-biodiversity. Balkrishna Gawade, researcher and retired Professor of Botany from Kanakavali, who

attended the event as chief guest, said that Goa and the Konkan region are historically known for their diversity of tuber crops. These crops have served as important sources of food and nutrition since ancient times. He explained that tubers provide not only carbohydrates

On The Brink...

- Over 80 varieties of tubers from across Goa were displayed at the Bhuipal festival.
- Exhibition organised by Vivekananda Environment Awareness Brigade, Keri, Sattari.
- Focus on preserving and reviving

but are also rich in vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and play a role in building immunity.

Tejas Pandit from Vasco, who visited the exhibition, said that the event offered a rare opportunity to understand the diversity of tuber crops native to Goa.

A tuber is a fleshy underground root or stem that serves both as a food reserve and a reproductive structure. Speakers at the exhibition highlighted the resilience and biological efficiency of tuber crops, their year-round relevance to diverse farming

conditions, and their potential contribution to nutritional security, farmer prosperity, and sustainable agricultural growth.

Among the varieties displayed were *Dioscorea alata* (Chini), *Dioscorea bulbifera* (Karande), *Colocasia esculenta* (Alu), *Dioscorea pentaphyllo* (Dukkar kand), and several other lesser-known tubers.

Sya Bodke, Deputy Sarpanch of Honda, said that the collection and exhibition of such a wide range of tubers would help revive tuber crop diversity in Sattari, which is currently on the verge of extinction.

traditional tuber diversity. Experts highlighted nutritional, medicinal, and agricultural value of tubers. Traditional Goan tuber-based dishes were prepared and served. Strong participation from students and visitors from Goa and Maharashtra.

Students from various universities, schools, and colleges from Goa and Maharashtra visited the exhibition and relished traditional culinary recipes prepared using the displayed tubers. Ashwita Panikar made a presentation on rhizome varieties, highlighting the culinary and ethnobotanical value of different species of turmeric. Visitors also enjoyed traditional Goan dishes such as Khatkhate, Kel, dal curry with tubers, fried Madye Kaapa, and Nachani bhakri, all of which were prepared using locally sourced tubers.



Sunday Thought

Dabolim Airport Claims Raise a Bigger Question: Who Is Withholding the Truth?

Suraj Nandrekar

The controversy surrounding Dabolim Airport has once again pushed Goa into a familiar cycle of claim, denial and counter-allegation. At the centre of it stands South Goa MP Viriato Fernandes, who insists he has "confidential information" suggesting the airport's future is uncertain. On the other side is Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, who has categorically denied any plan to shut the airport. What the public is left with is noise without clarity.

The MP's refusal to disclose the source or substance of his information has rightly drawn criticism. If the information is credible, withholding it only fuels speculation. As an elected representative, Captain Fernandes has a responsibility to either back his claims with facts or reconsider the wisdom of raising alarm. Repeatedly hinting at danger without evidence risks turning a serious public issue into political theatre. At the same time, dismissing the MP's claims outright simply because he has not produced documents would also be an oversimplification. Governments do not earn credibility merely by denying allegations. They earn it by explaining policy, intent and long-term plans transparently. In this case, the Sawant government's response has largely been reactive and defensive, rather than explanatory. The Chief Minister has stated that Dabolim Airport will "never be shut down," an assurance repeated by several BJP MLAs. But beyond these verbal denials, the government has offered little by way of detailed clarification. There has been no comprehensive briefing on the long-term aviation policy for Goa, no public document outlining Dabolim's future alongside Mopa, and no attempt to decisively close the door on speculation through hard facts. If there is genuinely no truth to Captain Fernandes' claims, the government should have no difficulty placing its position on record in a clear, structured manner. A white paper, a policy statement, or even a detailed Assembly discussion would go a long way in putting the matter to rest. Silence or vague assurances only create space for suspicion to grow. This is particularly important because Dabolim Airport is not just another infrastructure asset. It



is a livelihood hub for thousands of Goans, especially in South Goa. Airlines, ground staff, taxi operators, tourism workers and small businesses all depend on stability and predictability. When political leaders on either side speak loosely about its future, the consequences are real.

The timing of the controversy also cannot be ignored. With municipal elections approaching and assembly elections on the horizon, emotionally charged issues are bound to resurface. Infrastructure anxieties have historically been used to mobilise voters, sometimes without genuine intent to resolve them. This makes transparency even more critical, not less. Captain Fernandes' choice to air his claims outside Parliament further complicates matters. If the issue is serious enough to warrant public alarm, why has it not been raised formally in the House? Parliamentary privilege exists precisely to allow MPs to speak freely on sensitive matters. Avoiding that platform raises questions, but so does the government's reluctance to proactively clarify. Opposition leaders like Vijai Sardesai, Yuri Alemao and others have also weighed in, intensifying the debate. Yet the discussion continues to revolve around statements and counter-statements, rather than documents, plans or timelines. This benefits no one except those seeking political mileage. Democracy does not require blind faith in either the opposition or the government. It requires accountability from both. Captain Fernandes must either substantiate his claims or acknowledge their speculative nature. But the Sawant government must also recognise that repeated denials are not a substitute for transparency. If Dabolim Airport is secure, the government should say so with facts, not just force. If there are long-term changes planned, the public deserves to know now, not during an election campaign. Uncertainty thrives where information is withheld.

As elections draw closer, Goans must ask whether this debate is about safeguarding an airport or shaping a narrative. Fear without facts is irresponsible. Silence without clarity is equally damaging. The truth, if it exists, must come from one side or the other. Until then, the controversy remains less about Dabolim Airport and more about who is willing to be honest with the people of Goa.

Masterstroke

Is Dabolim Airport Here to Stay?

Irfan Iqbal Gheta

Goa is unique. Its people are different. Hospitable. Accommodative by nature. The argument that Goa needs two airports has long rested on these assumptions. Two airports would mean higher tourist footfall, better connectivity, and a stronger presence on the global map.

More flights, both domestic and international. More taxis. More hotels and restaurants. More traffic. More business. More employment. In short, more opportunities.

The promise was simple. Goa would thrive. Development would accelerate. Goemkars would benefit.

On December 11, 2022, that promise took physical form with the inauguration of Manohar International Airport. The high-profile ceremony was marked by political heavyweights from the ruling party sharing the stage and celebrating what was projected as a new era for the state.

But almost immediately, a question began to surface. Was this the beginning of the end for the already beleaguered Dabolim Airport? Did Goa truly need two airports, beyond the rhetoric of jobs and growth?

Three years on, those doubts refuse to fade. In fact, they appear to be growing louder.

Speculation intensified after a recent visit to New Delhi by Mauvin Godinho, accompanied by Rajya Sabha MP Sadanand Shet Tanavade, where they met Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. The stated objective was to seek an assurance that Dabolim Airport would continue to operate alongside Mopa.

Soon after, a controversial social media post set



tongues wagging. Opposition leaders claimed they had received "concrete information" from unnamed but "reliable sources" in New Delhi suggesting that Dabolim had effectively slipped out of Goa's grasp following "Operation Sindhoor".

According to them, it is only a matter of time before an official announcement is made. The writing, they argue, has been on the wall for a while.

Fatorda MLA Vijai Sardesai has already issued a call for a statewide agitation if any harm comes to Dabolim Airport, after giving the state government a seven-day deadline to offer clarity. Similar noises are coming from the Congress and AAP benches. Even AAP national convenor Arvind Kejriwal weighed in through a social media post.

As political temperatures rose, all eyes turned to Chief Minister Pramod Sawant for a clear and authoritative statement.

Instead, the first response came from Tourism Minister Rohan Khaunte.

After making a brief remark on the importance of investigative journalism and fact verification, Khaunte said, in his personal capacity, that both Dabolim Airport and Manohar International Airport are here to stay and that both are important for Goa.

That leaves Goa with more questions than answers.

Is the writing really on the wall? Is Dabolim Airport inching towards extinction? Or should Khaunte's reassurance be taken at face value, offering comfort that both airports will coexist?

For now, the uncertainty remains. And so does the unease.

scrutiny

Glass Injuries on Goa's Beaches Put Focus on Practical, Incentivised Remedy: DRS

Recurring injuries from broken glass on Goa's beaches have begun to draw attention to how waste is managed after consumption. As concerns grow over safety and tourism, the state's new Deposit Refund Scheme (DRS) is being seen as one possible way to curb glass litter before it reaches the sand.

Panaji, Feb 2026 -
Last year, numerous beachgoers went back home carrying memories of injuries from broken glass bits littered on Goa's sunny beaches. In January alone this year, two cases were reported wherein people had to be administered first aid by lifeguards after suffering cuts from broken glass strewn along the popular North Goa shoreline. The injuries, recorded across multiple beaches, underline a recurring safety concern linked to discarded glass bottles according to Drishti Marine, the state-appointed lifesaving agency. "The issue of glass litter is a challenge for tourists and citizens alike. For a tourist destination and any healthy functioning society, it is imperative to address this issue," says Carlos Souza, convenor of the Confederation of Indian Industries' Goa panel on Tourism. Data sourced

from Drishti Marine, the Goa government-appointed beach safety agency, shows that injuries linked to broken glass were reported in 2025 from Anjuna, Arambol, Baga, Benaulim, Calangute, Colva and Palolem. In 2024, similar cases were recorded across Betalbatim, Morjim, Velsao, Bainha and Palolem.

For those whose livelihoods depend on the beach, the pattern is familiar. "Tourists take bottles on the beach, they drink, they bury them, sometimes they litter, sometimes they break them," says Cruz Cardoz, president of the Shack Owners Association. "Later, people step on it. A lot of people cut their feet."

Cardoz suggests that a deposit scheme for bottles sold near beaches may well be the answer. "Right now, nobody keeps a deposit," he says. "If you sell a bottle and tell the person to keep a deposit



and take it back once the bottle is returned, people will bring it back."

That logic mirrors the thinking behind the state government's Deposit Refund Scheme (DRS), currently being rolled out by the Department of Environment and Climate Change, Government of Goa. Under the scheme, consumers pay a refundable deposit at the point of purchase, which is returned when the empty container, including glass bottles, is brought back to an authorised collection

point. Dr Anthony de Sa, who heads the DRS Scheme Administrator Committee, stated that the DRS scheme was shaped to include waste that does not get collected when discarded, because of its low re-sale value - such as multi-layered plastic (MLP). "While a significant amount of waste is being managed, especially materials with clear monetary value, such as PET bottles and beer bottles, low-value waste, such as chips and chocolate wrappers and

juice cartons, is largely left behind. These materials were difficult to collect, costly to transport and generated little revenue, yet they are disastrous for the environment," he said. Explaining the approach, de Sa said that it was important to have a comprehensive approach, in which high value as well as low value waste were both collected, and internal cross-subsidies leveraged. "The objective is to incentivise return at source, not to deal with the material after it

enters drains, beaches or public areas," he said, adding that the DRS, while incentivising waste collectors, was also aiming to drive at a social behavioural change towards waste disposal by consumers, and packaging by manufacturers.

Carlos Souza believes measures like the DRS are necessary if Goa wants to protect both residents and visitors from the menace of glass litter. "Glass litter is a threat to safety. It affects how tourists experience Goa and how residents use public spaces," he says.

According to Anthony Fernandes, who runs the Roma Cafe beach shack shared how glass litter finds its way into the sand especially at night, when groups of domestic tourists drink on the beach and leave the garbage behind. "Even in the water there are glass bottles and people get cuts," Fernandes says.

From Kitchen to Community: Manija Tilve's Journey of Enterprise and Empowerment

By Kajal



What begins in a home kitchen often carries the warmth of memory and tradition. For a Candolim-based entrepreneur, that warmth has grown into a small but determined enterprise rooted in Goan flavours and shaped by a larger social purpose.

"I always enjoyed experimenting with new recipes," she says, recalling how her interest in cooking began in childhood. After marriage and motherhood, the demands of home took priority. With a young daughter to care for, stepping out for a conventional job was not practical. Instead of setting aside her ambition, she

turned inward, to the one space she knew best — her kitchen.

"I started small, making homemade products from home," she says. The initial response was modest, but steady. Customers who tried her products returned with repeat orders. Word of mouth travelled. Encouragement came from members of her self-help group and support from the local panchayat. Soon, she found space to sell her products and began participating in exhibitions such as Lokotsav and Saras, where her reach widened.

Her range has since expanded from four or five items to nearly twenty. Among her most sought-after offerings are multigrain laddoos prepared with organic jaggery and pure

ghee. The laddoos blend ten grains and ingredients, including bajra, ragi, rice, wheat, moong, chana, fenugreek, peanuts, sesame and cardamom. "These are rich in protein, vitamins and iron. They are healthy even for children," she explains.

Freshness and hygiene are central to her work. She adheres to food safety norms, maintains clean preparation areas and ensures that products are made in fresh batches, especially during exhibitions. "We prepare food the way we would cook for our own children," she says, underlining the personal standard she applies to every order.

Yet the story extends beyond food. Employment for other women forms a core part of her vision. Several women, especially

from financially strained households, work alongside her. "If a woman's household is struggling financially, she can come work with me. It helps her family run better," she says. For her, enterprise is not merely about profit. "Money is not everything. Preserving Goan taste and empowering women is my real motivation."

Her journey has also unfolded on public platforms. Participation in cultural events and beauty pageants brought recognition, including titles such as Mrs Calangute and Mrs Candolim, along with a runner-up position in a Super Mom competition. These experiences built confidence and expanded her network. "These platforms gave me confidence and visibility," she reflects.

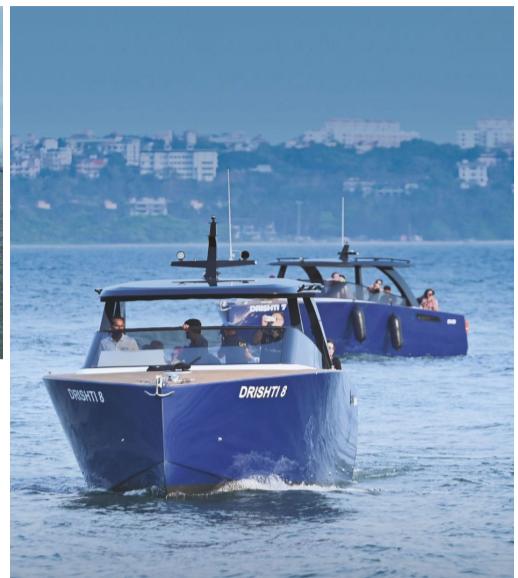
Through it all, family



support has been constant. "Whenever I needed help, they were there," she says, acknowledging the encouragement she received from her husband and friends.

Her message to other homemakers is simple and direct. "Every woman has some talent. Do not suppress it. Step out with confidence and stand on your own

feet." In an era when conversations around entrepreneurship often revolve around scale and funding, her journey offers a quieter lesson. It shows how an enterprise can grow from passion, how tradition can coexist with ambition, and how one woman's resolve can create opportunity for many others.



Aguad: Where Goa's Past Finds a Living Present

The Aguad Port and Jail Complex has long stood watch over Goa's coastline, carrying within its stone walls the weight of conquest, resistance and memory. Once a strategic port and later a prison that held freedom fighters, the complex has gradually moved beyond being a site of remembrance alone. Today, Aguad has re-emerged as a shared public space — part heritage precinct, part cultural venue where history coexists with contemporary life, and where the past is encountered not as a relic, but as something lived, engaged with and carried forward.

This 17th-century heritage structure has had a history of gore and glory. From providing a safe berth for Portuguese ships at its port, to later holding the freedom fighters imprisoned in its cells — The Aguad Port and Jail Complex has seen many versions. This restored complex continues to evolve, with several activities engaging visitors through the day... and night too. From the interactive museum, where you can learn key details of Goa's history — especially the Liberation movement — to the heritage cruise and curated events, this space truly has something for everyone.

Aguad By Boat

Travelling to Aguad by road is fun, but heading there aboard a boat is even more so. With a capacity of 15, the D7 & D8 ferries passengers from one iconic space, Panaji's Kala Academy, to another — the Aguad Port and Jail Complex. In addition to skipping the traffic, the boat gives visitors another experience, gliding across

user-friendly web app and QR-coded audio guides, the museum is a perfect blend of history and new-age tech, making the experience a highly engaging one, especially for the younger audience. AIM entry is included in the ticketed Aguad experience.

Aguad Heritage Walks

Stroll into history with the heritage walks at the formidable Aguad



the Mandovi, building up anticipation for what is to come at the Complex. The boats operate on prior bookings.

Aguad Interactive Museum (AIM):

The Aguad Interactive Museum, set within Aguad's erstwhile prison cells, houses some interesting information that goes beyond what you find in your history textbooks. Through its three immersive sections, Goa: The Land, The Struggle and The People, and the interactive exhibits and state-of-the-art kiosks help transport visitors to the era of guns and revolutions. With the

Port and Jail Complex. The fort, which has borne witness to several historical events, is an ideal site for the explorer and the inquisitive history buff. On the walks you can learn how the structure was used as a defence against the Dutch and the Marathas, as a prison to house the freedom fighters and their acts of defiance while there, and about the various aspects of the Portuguese-built architecture. This walk also gives the visitors exclusive access to the beautiful chapel, a freshwater spring, former kitchens and dingy prison cells in the Aguad jail.

views of Goa's shoreline, offering a magnificent view of the complex on its 45-minute cruise trip amidst the quiet waves and solitude of the sea, something you cannot experience otherwise. Cruise begins at 5:30 pm from Aguad. Prior booking is mandatory.

Restaurants

Indulge in the perfect dining experience at Aguad, with a curated range that suits every palate. If you're looking for a relaxed and casual atmosphere, head to the Black Sheep Bistro at the Barracks, where the comfort foods and cosy ambience let you

unwind, or you could hit the neighbouring, vibrant beverage outlet — Motley Brew — which serves unique coffee-infused beverages and mocktails. Cellar 1612, on the other hand, sets the stage for a dining experience like no other. With a menu that blends traditional Indian flavours with global influences, the a restaurant is an embodiment of what the Complex stands for — the past meeting the present. Finally, the waterfront restaurant, D Sailor, lets visitors dive into a diverse menu, from seafood to comforting classics and finger food, while being surrounded by the ocean on three sides.

Weekend Getaway

The Aguad Weekend Getaway, held every weekend, breathes new life into the historical site, combining family time and local heritage. With rows of curated stalls, the lively seaside weekend market ensures visitors can indulge in unique finds and local crafts, where artisans showcase their handcrafted knick-knacks, providing a delightful shopping experience beyond what the space offers on a regular day. **Curated Events** The complex has carved a niche for itself in Goa's event scene as a space to host special curated events. From candlelight

concerts, which bring a sense of mystique to the majestic fort walls, to the musical nights like Tunes on the Tides, which bring alive culture, music and tradition — Goan, Indian or Western.

Ticket availability and pricing are subject to each event.

Art Exhibitions

The complex also hosts art exhibitions at its gallery for the art aficionados to take in what they love cocooned within the heritage walls. The recently held exhibition honouring the unknown Indian masters was one such event. The DAG (formerly Delhi Art Gallery), India's premier art company, brought to Goa an exhibition of works commissioned by the East India Company in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The two hundred works of art — this was the largest exhibition of its kind — show how the Aguad Port & Jail Complex can house an extensive collection of artworks.

With all that's constantly happening at the Aguad Port and Jail Complex, everyone — young or old, local or tourists — has something to look forward to. So if you're looking for something to do, to learn about Goa's rich history, or just to have a meal at a picturesque space, head to this majestic complex.

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trust in Congress because of repeated defections?

Yuri Alemao: People were disappointed. That is natural. But they also understand who defected and why. Many of those who left had already received everything from the Congress: positions,

power, recognition. We made it clear that if someone wants to defect, they should resign and seek a fresh mandate. We even pushed for strengthening the anti-defection law. When I went to the people during the Lok Sabha and Zilla Parishad elections, I faced them openly. I did not hide. I told them my

stand was clear. I did not defect. I remained loyal to the party's ideology of secular and liberal values. The response was positive. People respect consistency.

Q: Did you ever get an offer to defect?

Yuri Alemao: No. And even if such an offer had come, I would not have

accepted it. My upbringing is such that I will not be lured by money or power. I would rather sit at home than betray my mandate.

Q: There is criticism that you are a "soft" opposition leader. How do you react to that?

Yuri Alemao: I take it with a pinch of salt. If you look at past Leaders of

the Opposition, many did not speak as forcefully or consistently. My approach is not to make personal remarks or hit below the belt. I study the subject, raise specific allegations, and expose issues with facts. That is constructive opposition. The government has a brute majority. With 33 MLAs, they can push

through decisions. But that does not mean we remain silent. We have repeatedly demanded longer Assembly sessions. For example, during the Budget session, we sought 25 working days. They kept only 14. If you restrict debate, how can serious discussion happen?