



Tri-Cornered Contest Heats Up Ponda By-Poll Battle

■ BJP, Congress and AAP gear up for keen fight as legacy politics, narrow margins and new entrants reshape contest.



Team Goemkarponn

PANAJI: The political temperature in Ponda has risen sharply with the constituency set to witness a keen three-cornered contest between the BJP, Congress and

AAP in the by-election scheduled for April 9, 2026. The BJP has fielded Ritesh Naik, son of former minister late Ravi Naik, signalling a strategy to retain the veteran leader's legacy vote bank. A

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MAIN POINTS:

- ▶ Ponda by-election scheduled for April 9, 2026.
- ▶ Tri-cornered contest between BJP, Congress and AAP.
- ▶ BJP fields Ritesh Naik, banking on Ravi Naik's legacy
- ▶ Congress nominates Ketan Bhatikar, aims to consolidate anti-BJP votes
- ▶ AAP fields Geetesh Naik, signalling expansion push in Goa
- ▶ Seat fell vacant after Ravi Naik's demise in October 2025
- ▶ 2022 election saw narrow margin of around 100 votes
- ▶ Absence of veteran leader makes contest more open.

Ritesh Naik Pays Tribute to Father After BJP Candidature Announcement



Team Goemkarponn

PONDA: Soon after being chosen as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate for the upcoming by-election, Ritesh Ravi Naik visited the cremation site of his late father, former minister Ravi Naik, to seek blessings. In an

emotional moment, Naik paid tribute to his father and reaffirmed his commitment to continue his legacy of dedicated public service. He expressed resolve to work tirelessly for the welfare and development of the people, carrying forward the values and principles upheld by his father.

12 Cases of Sexual Assault on School Girls Reported in Goa Since 2021

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PANAJI: A total of 12 cases of sexual assault on school-going girls have been reported in Goa between 2021 and January 31, 2026, the State government informed the Legislative Assembly. In a written reply to an unstarred question by MLA Yuri Alemao, Chief Minister and Home Minister Dr.



Pramod Sawant provided year-wise data, showing two cases in 2021, five in 2023, two in 2024, and three in 2025, while no cases were reported in 2022 and up to January 2026. Detailing measures

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Pramod Sawant Completes Seven Years as Goa Chief Minister

■ First CM in post-statehood era to achieve milestone; BJP hails leadership and stable governance

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PANAJI: Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant has completed seven continuous years in office, becoming the first CM in Goa's post-statehood history to achieve this milestone. He assumed charge on March 19, 2019, following the demise of former Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar.

An Ayurvedic doctor by profession, Sawant has led the state through several key phases, including governance reforms, a strong infrastructure push, and the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Under his leadership, the Bharatiya Janata Party returned to power in 2022, securing a third consecutive term in Goa.

The current government enjoys the support of 32 legislators, including independents and members of the Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party, reflecting a stable majority in the Assembly.

BJP Goa President Damu Naik praised Sawant's journey and leadership, stating that from a humble karyakarta



to Chief Minister, he has remained a true sevak of the people. Naik added that with dedication and decisive leadership, Sawant has steered Goa towards stability, progress, and development, and his completion of seven years in office is a testament to his commitment to building a stronger, Swayampurna and Viksit Goa.

8 Cases of Unruly Tourist Behaviour Reported in Goa in 2025

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PANAJI: Incidents involving unruly behaviour by domestic tourists in Goa saw a noticeable rise in 2025, with eight cases registered compared to just one in 2024, the State government informed the Legislative Assembly. In a written reply to an unstarred question tabled by MLA Aleixo Lourenco, Chief Minister and Home Minister Dr. Pramod Sawant said a total of nine cases were recorded over the two-year period. Details furnished by the government show that the offences in 2025 ranged from rash and negligent



driving to more serious crimes such as assault, molestation and even murder. These cases were reported across multiple police stations including Panaji, Saligao, Collem, Calangute, Mopa and Mandrem. Among the serious incidents, one case of murder was registered at Panaji Police

Station in May 2025, while molestation cases were reported in Mandrem and Panaji later in the year. Several other cases involved causing hurt and rash driving. All cases are currently sub judice, with multiple accused involved in several of the incidents, according to the annexure placed before the House.

Goa Board to Declare HSSC Results on March 21

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PORVORIM: The Goa Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education (GBSHSE) will declare the Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSSC) Class 12 results on March 21 at 5 PM. The examinations were conducted from February 10 to February 27 across 20 centres in the state. A total of 17,283 students appeared for the exams this year. Students will be able to access their results online once they are officially announced by the board.



"Ensuring Safe Navigation Through Strait of Hormuz Is Our Foremost Priority": PM Modi

Prime Minister discusses West Asia security concerns with Kuwait Crown Prince and stresses need for diplomatic engagement

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday held a conversation with Kuwait's Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, focusing on the evolving security situation in West Asia and reaffirming India's commitment to regional stability. During the interaction, the two leaders exchanged views on the growing tensions across the region and discussed recent



developments that have raised concerns about security and geopolitical stability. The discussion comes at a time when the Gulf region is witnessing

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Ponda By-Election: Legacy Meets Grit in a Tight Contest

The by-election in Ponda is shaping up as more than a routine electoral exercise. It is, in many ways, a contest between legacy and persistence, between inherited political capital and grassroots credibility. With the Bharatiya Janata Party fielding Ritesh Ravi Naik and the Congress backing Ketan Bhatikar, the constituency is witnessing a tightly poised battle that could hinge on perception as much as performance.

Ritesh Ravi Naik enters the fray carrying the weight and advantage of a well-known surname. The son of former chief minister Ravi Naik, his candidature is inevitably tied to the memory and influence of a leader who commanded significant respect in Ponda. Legacy, particularly in Goan politics, is not merely symbolic. It often translates into a ready network of loyalists, a degree of emotional connect with voters, and a presumption of continuity.

But legacy alone is rarely sufficient in a by-election, especially one that follows closely on the heels of a veteran's passing. Voters tend to scrutinise whether the successor can match not just the stature but also the accessibility and effectiveness of their predecessor. Ritesh's tenure as chairperson of the Ponda Municipal Council and his involvement in local development work will therefore come under the spotlight. The BJP will hope that a combination of organisational strength and the Naik family's influence consolidates its position.

On the other side stands Ketan Bhatikar, a candidate whose appeal lies in resilience and familiarity with the electorate. His narrow defeat in the 2022 assembly election, by less than 100 votes, remains a crucial factor in this contest. Such a close margin often creates a perception of unfinished business, both for the candidate and for sections of the electorate that may feel their support nearly translated into victory.

Bhatikar's continued engagement in social work since that loss adds to his credibility. In a constituency like Ponda, where personal

However, his political journey also presents a complication. Having contested the previous election on a Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party ticket before joining the Congress, Bhatikar must address questions of ideological consistency and political loyalty. Party-switching is not uncommon in Indian politics, but it does carry the risk of alienating voters who value clarity of affiliation. The Congress will need to ensure that this transition is framed as a strategic alignment rather than opportunism.

The presence of a third player in the form of the Aam Aadmi Party adds another layer to the contest. With Geetesh Naik in the fray and the recent visit of Arvind Kejriwal, the party is attempting to inject momentum into its campaign. While AAP has yet to establish deep roots in Goa, its ability to attract a segment of urban and younger voters cannot be dismissed outright.

outreach and visibility matter, sustained grassroots activity can be as valuable as party backing. His campaign is likely to emphasise consistency, accessibility, and a narrative of perseverance.

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The presence of a third player in the form of the Aam Aadmi Party adds another layer to the contest. With Geetesh Naik in the fray and the recent visit of Arvind Kejriwal, the party is attempting to inject momentum into its campaign. While AAP has yet to establish deep roots in Goa, its ability to attract a segment of urban and younger voters cannot be dismissed outright. Even a modest vote share could influence the final outcome in what is expected to be a closely fought election.

Yet, the broader question in Ponda is not merely who wins, but what factors will ultimately decide the result. Will voters lean towards continuity, trusting the BJP's organisational machinery and the Naik legacy? Or will they favour a candidate who has demonstrated persistence and maintained a visible presence on the ground?

Equally important is the mood of the electorate. By-elections often serve as referendums on local governance rather than sweeping ideological battles. Issues such as infrastructure, civic amenities, and accessibility of elected representatives tend to dominate voter concerns. Both leading candidates claim involvement in development work, but the electorate will weigh these claims against lived experience.

In the end, the Ponda by-poll may come down to a simple yet decisive calculation: familiarity versus inheritance. Ritesh Ravi Naik offers continuity rooted in legacy, while Ketan Bhatikar presents a case built on near-victory and sustained engagement. The outcome will reveal which of these narratives resonates more strongly with voters at this moment.

For now, Ponda stands at an interesting political crossroads, where history, ambition, and evolving voter expectations intersect in a contest that is anything but predictable.

EDITOR'S SPEAK

Gudi Padwa in Goa has rarely felt this uneasy.

Suraj Nandrekar

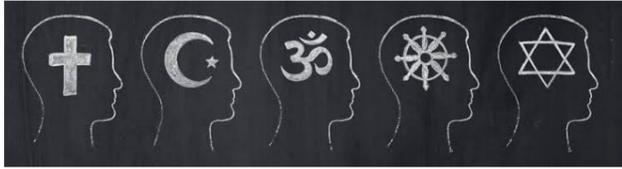
The festival, which traditionally marks renewal, prosperity and a fresh agricultural and cultural cycle, arrives this year under a cloud of uncertainty. Across the state, the familiar sight of gudis rising outside homes carries a quieter, more restrained optimism. The backdrop is not one of celebration alone, but of anxiety shaped by global conflict, local political churn and growing environmental strain. The most immediate concern for many households is the shortage of LPG. What was once a routine refill has turned into a waiting game, with families recalibrating daily life around supply delays. In kitchens across Goa, people are falling back on older methods, rationing usage, or simply cutting down. The crisis is not isolated. It is tied to the intensifying war in West Asia, a conflict whose ripples are now being felt far beyond its geography. Fuel, too, hangs in the balance. The possibility of shortages is no longer speculative chatter. Transport operators, small businesses and ordinary commuters are already bracing for disruption. In a state where tourism and mobility are central to the economy, even a minor shock to fuel supply can have cascading effects. This Gudi Padwa, the idea of abundance feels distant when the essentials themselves appear fragile. Yet, even as global tensions seep into daily life, Goa finds itself in the thick of political activity. The Ponda by-polls have injected fresh energy into the state's political landscape. Campaigns are visible, rhetoric is sharp, and the electorate is once again being courted with urgency. Beneath this lies a larger undercurrent. The possibility of Assembly elections in the coming months, perhaps as early as December or January, has turned this festive season into a prelude to a prolonged political contest. This overlap of festival and electioneering creates a peculiar atmosphere. Public gatherings blur the line between cultural celebration and political mobilisation. Promises are made, alliances are hinted at, and narratives are shaped even as families attempt to hold on to tradition. The question, however, is whether governance can keep pace with the challenges at hand, or whether electoral calculations will overshadow immediate needs. Parallel to these developments are the protests that have been simmering across Goa. From environmental concerns to local development disputes, citizens have been increasingly vocal. The anger is not abstract. It is rooted in tangible fears about land use, infrastructure projects and the long-term sustainability of the state's natural resources. These protests have not paused for the festival. If anything, they lend Gudi Padwa a sharper edge, a reminder that celebration and resistance often coexist. This brings the focus to the environment, an issue that cannot be relegated to symbolic gestures. Goa's ecological balance is delicate, and the pressures on it are mounting. This year, Gudi Padwa presents an opportunity to rethink how festivals are observed. Reducing waste, limiting noise and being mindful of local ecosystems are not merely lifestyle choices but necessary steps in preserving what remains. The state's identity is deeply tied to its natural beauty, and protecting it requires collective discipline. In many ways, this Gudi Padwa is a test of resilience. It asks whether Goa can navigate a moment where global conflict, local politics and environmental urgency intersect. The festival's essence lies in hope, but hope alone is not enough. It must be matched with awareness, responsibility and a willingness to act. As gudis rise across Goa this year, they do so not just as symbols of victory and renewal, but as quiet assertions that even in uncertain times, the state can find a way to endure.

Four Religious Conversion Cases Reported in Goa Over Five Years: Govt

Team Goemkarponn

PANAJI: The Goa government has reported a total of four cases related to alleged illegal religious conversions or attempts over the past five years, according to information tabled in the Legislative Assembly.

In a written reply to an unstarred question by MLA Carlos Ferreira,



Chief Minister and Home Minister Dr. Pramod Sawant stated that no such cases were registered in 2021, 2024, and 2025. However, two cases each were recorded in 2022 and 2023.

The government placed the data before the House, indicating that instances of alleged forced or unlawful religious conversions have remained minimal in the state during this period.

Further details,

including information on FIRs, accused persons, and the status of the cases, have been provided in an annexure submitted along with the reply. The disclosure comes amid periodic debates on religious conversion, with the government placing on record official figures reflecting the situation in Goa.

Jobs-for-Cash Scam: Accused Opposes Narco Test, Crime Branch Moves Court

Team Goemkarponn

PONDA: The high-profile jobs-for-cash scam in Goa has taken a fresh twist after the main accused, Pooja Naik, refused to undergo a narco-analysis test sought by investigators. According to sources, Naik declined to give her consent when approached by the Crime Branch as part of the ongoing probe. Following her refusal, the agency has now approached the Judicial Magistrate



First Class (JMFC) court in Ponda, seeking permission to proceed further in the matter. The scam, which surfaced last year, sparked major controversy across the state after allegations emerged that individuals

were being asked to pay money in exchange for securing government jobs. The case triggered political uproar, with claims linking a minister and a senior IAS officer, leading to multiple FIRs, suspension of several government staff, and widespread public outrage. Naik, against whom several cases have been registered at police stations including Madkai, Ponda, Divar, and Porvorim, had earlier claimed she

was being coerced into agreeing to the narco test. Chief Minister Pramod Sawant had ordered a comprehensive investigation into the scandal, following which the Crime Branch intensified its efforts, including pursuing the controversial narco-analysis procedure. However, as per legal provisions and Supreme Court rulings, such tests cannot be conducted without the consent of the individual concerned.

Goa Seizes Over 680 Kg of Drugs in Three Years; Police Step Up Crackdown

Team Goemkarponn

PANAJI: Goa Police have seized a total of over 680 kilograms of narcotic substances over the past three years, Chief Minister and Home Minister Dr. Pramod Sawant informed the Legislative Assembly.

As per the data tabled in response to an unstarred question by MLA Premendra Shet, 171.204 kg of drugs were seized in 2023, which rose sharply to 275.082 kg in 2024, before slightly declining to 234.286 kg in 2025.

Responding to concerns about drug peddlers targeting students near educational institutions, the government said that continuous intelligence gathering is underway and strict surveillance is being maintained by Goa Police in and around schools and colleges. Authorities stated that whenever such illegal activities are detected, immediate action is taken under relevant legal provisions. Awareness programmes are also being conducted



in coordination with educational institutions. On measures to combat drug trafficking, the government highlighted a zero-tolerance policy towards the drug trade, including supply and consumption.

Police have intensified enforcement by strengthening intelligence networks and carrying out targeted operations in vulnerable areas such as beaches, tourist hubs, transport points and zones near educational institutions. The state has also enhanced coordination with central and state agencies including the Enforcement Directorate (ED), Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), Customs, Coast Guard, Railway Police and airport authorities to tackle inter-state and international drug trafficking.

Goa HC Sets Aside FIR Against OCI Cardholder, Finds No Case of Forgery or Cheating

Team Goemkarponn

PANAJI: The Bombay High Court's Goa bench has quashed a criminal case against a 53-year-old Portuguese citizen holding an OCI card, observing that the allegations of forgery and cheating did not stand even at a preliminary level and that continuing the case would be a misuse of the legal process. Justice Ashish Chavan, while hearing a criminal writ petition filed by Elizabeth Flora Dias, also



known as Elisabeth Flora Luis, struck down the FIR registered at Vasco Police Station under Sections 465, 468, 471 and 420 of the Indian Penal Code.

The court held that the matter squarely fits within the guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court in the landmark Bhajan Lal case, which outlines circumstances where criminal proceedings can be quashed to prevent abuse of law. The complaint, filed by Ravi Luis in July 2025, came nearly two years after both parties had jointly submitted affidavits before the Mamlatdar of Mormugao for mutation of property. The complainant alleged that the petitioner misrepresented

her nationality by claiming to be Indian while holding a Portuguese passport. However, the High Court pointed out that the affidavits were properly attested and accepted by the competent authority, and notably, the Mamlatdar had not raised any grievance or initiated any complaint regarding wrongdoing. Addressing the forgery charges, the court found that a crucial requirement — the creation of a "false document" — was not demonstrated.



On the auspicious occasion of Gudi Padwa, **Pramod Sawant and his wife Sulakshana Sawant** perform Gudi worship at their residence, praying for happiness, prosperity, and well-being for all.

False Promise of Marriage Case: HC Grants Anticipatory Bail to Govt Officer

Team Goemkarponn

PANAJI: The Goa bench of the Bombay High Court has granted anticipatory bail to a government officer accused of engaging in a physical relationship with a woman on the alleged false assurance of marriage. In an order delivered on



Wednesday, Justice Neela Gokhale allowed the pre-arrest bail plea of Manthan Naik, who has been booked under Sections

69, 115(2), and 352 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023. Section 69 deals with sexual relations obtained through deceit, including false promises of marriage, employment, or promotion. The court noted that Naik had been granted interim protection in December 2025 and that there

was no indication he had misused that relief. Observing the absence of any such violations, the bench decided to confirm the interim protection. The prosecution had opposed the application, pointing to the gravity of the accusations. As per the complaint filed on October 28, 2025,

the woman alleged that she entered into a relationship with Naik based on his promise to marry her. The court order mentions that discussions regarding marriage had taken place between both families. However, the situation reportedly changed after the complainant discovered

that the accused was in contact with another woman, following which he allegedly backed out of the marriage, leading to the complaint. Taking into account that the chargesheet has already been filed, the court observed that custodial interrogation was not required at this stage.

Foreign National Held in Assagao Drug Bust, Narcotics Worth Rs 23.81 Lakh Seized

Team Goemkarponn

ANJUNA: In a major breakthrough, the Anjuna Police Station conducted a narcotics raid at Sonarkhed in Assagao, Bardez, leading to the arrest of a foreign national involved in illegal drug possession. The accused has been identified as Sokratis Michailidis (59), a Greek



national currently residing in Badem, Assagao. During the operation, police recovered 2.271 kg of charas valued at approximately ₹22.71 lakh and 10.77 grams of ecstasy worth around

₹1.10 lakh, taking the total seizure to ₹23.81 lakh. The contraband was seized under the provisions of the NDPS Act. The raid was carried out by a police team led by PI Suraj H. Gawas, along with PSI Viraj V. Naik and other staff members. Acting on credible intelligence, the team executed a well-coordinated operation,

successfully apprehending the accused and seizing narcotic substances along with other incriminating materials. Police officials stated that the arrest marks a significant step in curbing international drug trafficking in the region. Further investigation is underway to ascertain the wider network and possible links associated with the accused.

Drug Bust in Anjuna: Two Held with Ganja Worth ₹ 1.4 Lakh

Team Goemkarponn

ANJUNA: In a major crackdown on narcotics, the Crime Branch Police Station in Anjuna, Bardez, arrested two individuals following a raid conducted in the early hours of March 14, 2026. Acting on specific intelligence, officials raided a room at Mazalwada in Anjuna and recovered 1.5 kilograms of ganja valued at ₹1,40,000. The drugs were seized from the possession of Loknath Haldar (21), a native of Rampurhat in West Bengal, who is currently residing in Anjuna. A case was registered against him under Section 20(b)(ii)(B) of the NDPS Act, 1985. He was subsequently produced before the JMFC court in Mapusa and remanded to seven days of police custody.



During interrogation, Haldar disclosed that he had procured the contraband from Rajkumar Das, a native of Bihar. Based on this information, the Crime Branch launched a search operation and, with the help of technical surveillance, arrested Das from Verla, Mapusa, around midnight on March 17, 2026. He was produced before the JMFC court and remanded to five days of police custody. Police have also invoked Section 29 of the NDPS Act in the case, indicating a larger conspiracy.

Civil supplies team finds illegal LPG use near Vasco railway station; eatery owner booked

Team Goemkarponn

VASCO: An illegal use of domestic LPG cylinders for commercial purposes came to light during a late evening inspection near the Vasco railway station on 16.03.2026 at 19:15 hrs, when officials from the Civil Supplies



Department detected violations at a local food outlet. According to the complaint filed by Assistant Director of Civil Supplies,

Mormugao Taluka, Tulshidas Dabholkar, the inspection team found that the proprietor of Star Fast Food, Saif Shaikh, was using two domestic LPG cylinders of BPCL for commercial cooking, in violation of norms. The accused, a resident of Vasco,

was found operating the establishment using subsidised domestic cylinders meant strictly for household use. Following the complaint, Vasco police registered an offence against the accused under Sections 3 and 7 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.

Man Booked for Molesting Woman in Bus in Cuncolim

Team Goemkarponn

CUNCOLIM: Cuncolim Police have registered a case against a man for allegedly outraging the modesty of a woman aboard a passenger bus on March 16, 2026. According to police, the incident occurred between 6:30 pm and 8:00 pm at Padi, when the accused, identified as Ankush Gaonkar, a resident of Gaondongrim

in Canacona, allegedly touched the complainant inappropriately without her consent while seated next to her in the bus. Based on the complaint filed by the victim (name withheld), Cuncolim Police registered an FIR under Section 74 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023. Further investigation in the case is being carried out by PSI Sahil Pagui of Cuncolim Police Station.

Minor girl goes missing from Zuarinagar residence; Verna police register kidnapping case

Team Goemkarponn

SANCOALE: A minor girl went missing from her residence at Zuarinagar, Sancoale, on Tuesday afternoon, prompting police to register a kidnapping case after her mother expressed suspicion of foul play. According to the complaint lodged by a lady complainant, a



resident of Zuarinagar and native of Karnataka, her minor daughter left the house without informing anyone and did not return thereafter.

The complainant stated that despite efforts to trace her, the girl remained untraceable, leading her to suspect that unknown person(s) may have kidnapped her from lawful guardianship. Based on the complaint, Verna police registered an offence under Section 137(2) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and Section 8 of the Goa

Children's Act. Police have initiated a search to trace the missing minor and are examining all possible angles, including suspected abduction. Further investigation is being carried out by PSI Rajdatt Arsekar of Verna Police Station under the supervision of PI Anand Shirodkar and guidance of Mormugao DySP Gurudas Kadam.

Four Booked for Assault, Abduction and Criminal Intimidation in Panaji

Team Goemkarponn

PANAJI: An offence has been registered by police following a complaint filed by Edwin Dias, a resident of Boutavaddo, Assagao, Bardez, in connection with an alleged assault and abduction incident. According to the complaint, the incident occurred on March 15, 2026, at Altinho, Panaji, where four accused—identified as Aarti Golatkar, Nitin Golatkar, Jai Golatkar, and another member of the Golatkar family, all



residents of Altinho—allegedly acted with common intention to wrongfully confine the complainant in their house. Police stated that the accused assaulted Dias with fist blows and kicks. They further allegedly forced him into a silver-coloured wagon vehicle and took him to his

residence in Assagao, where he was threatened with dire consequences, including death. Based on the complaint, an offence was registered on March 17, 2026, at around 7:44 pm. Further investigation in the case is being carried out by Head Constable Babu B. Madanwar.

Karnataka Rider Dies After Self-Accident in Canacona

Team Goemkarponn

CANACONA: A 24-year-old man from Karnataka succumbed to injuries following a self-accident in Canacona on March 17, 2026. Police said they received information from South Goa District Hospital, Margao, at around 2:19 pm that the injured rider, identified as Preetham Ranganath HA, a resident of Chitradurga, had died while undergoing treatment. Enquiry revealed that the accident occurred earlier the



same day at Rajbag, Canacona, when the deceased was riding a Hero Xpulse motorcycle with a pillion rider, travelling from Canacona towards Karwar. The

rider reportedly lost control of the vehicle, leading to the accident. An inquest panchanama was conducted, and the body was sent for post-mortem examination. The autopsy confirmed the cause of death as hemorrhage and shock due to severe injuries to the head, face, and spine caused by blunt force impact. The body was later handed over to the family for final rites. Further enquiry is being conducted by PSI Babu Dessai of Canacona Police Station.

'Campus to Career' Initiative Launched to Boost Youth Employment in Goa

Team Goemkarponn

PANAJI: Chief Minister Dr Pramod Sawant on Thursday inaugurated the 'Campus to Career' initiative, aimed at strengthening the link between academia and industry and creating meaningful employment and apprenticeship opportunities for the youth of Goa. Speaking at the event, the Chief Minister said the initiative seeks to bridge the



gap between education and employment by equipping students with practical skills and industry exposure. He highlighted that the

programme is being organised in collaboration with the Directorate of Higher Education, Government of Goa, Goa State Higher Education Council (GSHEC), Goa Industrial Development Corporation (GIDC), and the Directorate of Industries, Trade & Commerce (DITC). Dr Sawant also felicitated beneficiaries under the RAMP Programme and participated in discussions on key initiatives such

as the PM Internship Programme, Converge 2.0, and industry cluster development. He emphasised that the initiative focuses on building a strong work culture among students, making youth industry-ready through practical exposure, encouraging early career counselling in educational institutions, and expanding apprenticeship opportunities through government platforms.



Valpoi Shigmotsav Committee Acts Tough After Incident

Team Goemkarponn

VALPOI: The Valpoi Shigmotsav Committee has taken strict action following a recent incident during the Shigmotsav celebrations, announcing key decisions to maintain discipline and ensure smooth conduct of future events.

Addressing a press conference, the committee stated that both groups involved in the incident will be denied entry for the upcoming Sattari Shigmotsav. In a move to enhance

safety and accountability, the committee also announced that it will submit a formal representation to the concerned authorities, seeking mandatory alcohol testing of participants before the traditional Romtamel performances. Additionally, the committee has decided to make it compulsory for every Pathak Pramukh to submit a declaration ensuring discipline and responsible participation by their respective groups during the festivities.

Governor, CM Extend Gudi Padwa Greetings to People of Goa

Team Goemkarponn

PANAJI: Goa Governor Pusapati Ashok Gajapathi Raju and Chief Minister Pramod Sawant have extended warm greetings and best wishes to the people of the state on the auspicious occasion of Gudi Padwa. In his message, the Governor

said that Gudi Padwa marks the beginning of the traditional New Year and symbolises new beginnings, hope and prosperity. He highlighted that the festival reflects India's rich cultural heritage and reinforces the values of harmony, unity and collective progress. The

Governor also noted that the festival is celebrated under different names across the country, such as Ugadi in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and Cheti Chand by the Sindhi community, commemorating the birth anniversary of Lord Jhulelal. Despite regional variations, he



said, the spirit of the festival remains rooted in renewal, hope and cultural unity.

Bar Council Election Row: RO Appointment Set Aside After Legal Challenge

Team Goemkarponn

PANAJI: In a significant development ahead of the State Bar Council elections scheduled for March 24, 2026, Advocate Sanjit Dessai, President of the Quepem and Sanguem Advocates Association, has successfully challenged the appointment of the Returning Officer. Dessai raised objections to the appointment of the Secretary of the Bar Council of Maharashtra and Goa as the Returning Officer (RO), contending that it violated the rules framed by the Bar Council of India. As per the BCI Rules, 2023, the RO must be either a former High Court judge or a senior advocate, with additional safeguards to ensure fairness and impartiality in the election process. He argued that appointing



the Council's own Secretary, Sharad Tanaji Bagul, as RO created a conflict of interest, as the position demands independence and neutrality. Dessai further maintained that such an appointment undermines the integrity of the electoral process and prejudices candidates entitled to a fair election. The objections were upheld by the High-Powered Election Supervisory Committee (HPCSC), which ruled that the appointment was in violation of Rule 10 of the BCI Rules, 2023, and set it aside. However, the Committee invoked the legal principle of De facto doctrine, allowing all actions and decisions taken by the Secretary while functioning as RO to remain valid, including the use of ballot papers already printed or signed.

Authorities Tighten Vigil Ahead of Ponda Bypoll

Team Goemkarponn

MARGAO: South Goa Collector and District Election Officer Egna Cleetus convened a meeting of the Election Expenditure Monitoring Team along with representatives of key enforcement agencies to ensure strict vigilance ahead of the upcoming by-election. Officials from the Income Tax Department, police, Customs, Excise, Lead Bank, and Fire Services attended the meeting, where detailed



instructions were issued to monitor financial activities closely. The Collector directed all agencies to keep a strict watch on suspicious or illegal transactions

and ensure timely reporting, with the aim of maintaining transparency and smooth conduct of the bye-election to the 21 Ponda Assembly Constituency scheduled

for April 9, 2026. Authorities emphasised coordinated efforts among departments to curb malpractices and uphold the integrity of the electoral process.

Illegal Meat Seized at Keri Checkpost; One Detained

Team Goemkarponn

VALPOI: Valpoi Police seized approximately 300 kg of illegal meat worth ₹1.10 lakh during a checkpost operation at Keri in Sattari on March 18, 2026. According to police, the कार्रवाई was carried out at around 4:30 pm, during which a vehicle transporting the meat was



intercepted. The accused, identified as Ahamed Jamalsab Pathan (47), a resident of Ramapur in Khanapur taluka of

Belagavi, Karnataka, was detained in connection with the case. Police have also taken the vehicle into custody as part of

the operation. Further investigation is underway to ascertain the source and intended destination of the seized meat.

Mundra Emerges as Major Drug Seizure Hub, Parliament Data Reveals

■ Gujarat Ports Account for Highest Number of Narcotics Busts Between 2021 and 2025.

New Delhi: Official data presented in Parliament has revealed that India's private ports, particularly in Gujarat, have been key targets for international narcotics trafficking networks over the past five years. Among them, Mundra Port recorded the highest number of drug seizure incidents between 2021 and 2025.

Information shared in the Rajya Sabha showed that 18 major drug seizures were recorded at ports across the country during this period. Out of these, eight incidents occurred in Gujarat alone. Facilities linked to Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone and container freight stations at Mundra together accounted for five of the seizures, more than any other port location in India. The largest single seizure



during the period took place in September 2021 at Mundra Port, where the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence confiscated 2,988 kilograms of heroin concealed in cargo. Another frequently targeted location was Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority, which was linked to six separate seizures, including a case in September 2022 when Delhi Police intercepted 345 kilograms of heroin connected to port cargo. Across 2021 and 2022 alone, heroin seizures at Indian ports amounted

to approximately 4,159 kilograms, highlighting the scale of trafficking attempts through maritime routes. Authorities also reported a shift in the type of drugs being smuggled by 2024. Two separate operations at container freight stations in Mundra led to the seizure of a combined 94.19 lakh tramadol tablets. In addition, 1,000 tramadol injections were recovered at a facility in Kolkata Port. Tramadol, a prescription opioid, has increasingly been trafficked to markets in West Africa and the

Middle East. Responding to the data, Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai stated that the rising number of seizures reflects stronger enforcement and better coordination among agencies. Authorities credited joint efforts by central and state law enforcement bodies, along with maritime security forces including the Indian Coast Guard and the Indian Navy. The government also highlighted the establishment of the Multi Agency Maritime Security Group in November 2021 to strengthen coastal surveillance. However, official records indicate that 2025 has so far reported no port related drug seizures in the national database after four consecutive years of major busts.



“Certain Practices Not In Line With My Ethics”: HDFC Bank Chairman Resigns

■ Sudden exit of Atanu Chakraborty triggers market reaction as RBI approves interim leadership.

New Delhi: Atanu Chakraborty, part time chairman and independent director of HDFC Bank, resigned from his position with immediate effect on Wednesday, citing ethical concerns linked to developments within the bank over the past two years. In his resignation letter addressed to the chairman of the governance, nomination and remuneration committee, Chakraborty stated that certain developments and practices within the organisation were not aligned with his personal values and ethical principles.

He clarified that these differences formed the sole reason for stepping down and confirmed there were no additional factors behind his decision. Chakraborty joined the bank's board in May 2021 and served during a period that included the landmark merger between HDFC Ltd and HDFC Bank. The consolidation created one of the largest financial institutions in the country and elevated the bank to the position of the second largest in India. Despite the strategic significance of the merger, the full benefits of the integration are still expected to unfold over time. Following his resignation, the bank confirmed through a regulatory filing that there were no other reasons for his departure apart from those mentioned in the letter.

The board acknowledged his contributions during his tenure and expressed appreciation for his role in guiding the institution through a transformative phase. Amid the leadership change, the Reserve Bank of India approved the appointment of Keki Mistry as interim part time chairman for a period of three months beginning March 19. Mistry previously served as vice chairman of HDFC Ltd before its merger with HDFC Bank. The central bank noted that it had taken note of the developments and approved the temporary arrangement requested by the bank. It also reiterated that HDFC Bank remains a Domestic Systemically Important Bank with strong financial fundamentals, a professionally run board and a capable management team. The leadership change had an immediate impact on investor sentiment. Shares of HDFC Bank, a major component of the Nifty 50 index, came under pressure after the announcement. The bank's American Depositary Receipts in the United States fell sharply overnight, while the stock in Indian markets also declined during early trading. Market analysts expect the stock to remain under pressure in the near term amid the leadership transition and broader economic uncertainties.

...CONTD FROM PAGE 01

Tri-Cornered Contest Heats Up Ponda By-Poll Battle

former chairperson of the Ponda Municipal Council, Ritesh Naik has been active in local politics since joining the party in 2020 and has played a key organisational role in recent elections. The seat fell vacant following the demise of Ravi Naik on October 15, 2025, marking the end of a long-standing political era in the constituency. The Congress has nominated Ketan Bhatikar, a former MGP leader who had narrowly lost to Ravi Naik

in the 2022 Assembly elections by around 100 votes. His candidature is aimed at consolidating anti-BJP votes and capitalising on his previous strong showing.

Meanwhile, the Aam Aadmi Party has fielded social worker and Bhandari Samaj leader Geetesh Naik, who recently joined the party in the presence of national convenor Arvind Kejriwal. His entry reflects AAP's renewed push to expand its footprint in

Goa. Ponda, traditionally dominated by Ravi Naik, now faces a more open and unpredictable contest in his absence. The narrow margin in the last Assembly election has boosted Congress's confidence, while the BJP is banking on continuity through legacy and youth appeal. AAP's presence adds a new dimension, with the potential to influence vote shares among sections seeking an alternative to traditional parties. Ritesh

Naik expressed gratitude to the BJP leadership for reposing faith in him and appealed to voters to extend the same support given to his father over the past decades.

He said he would carry forward his father's work and expressed confidence of victory. Roy Naik also struck a conciliatory note, stating that political opponents are friends and expressing confidence that the BJP will secure victory in the by-election.

12 Cases of Sexual Assault on School Girls Reported in Goa Since 2021

taken to curb such incidents, the government said awareness programmes are being conducted in schools and colleges in collaboration with NGOs, focusing on child safety, cyber awareness, and laws such as POCSO and POSH. Police presence has also been strengthened, with personnel deployed round-the-clock at railway platforms and regular

patrolling carried out near school premises, especially during opening and closing hours.

Authorities have coordinated with educational institutions to install CCTV cameras in schools and, where possible, in school buses. Schools have also been instructed to enforce strict monitoring of staff and visitors, including mandatory background verification and police checks.

“Ensuring Safe Navigation Through Strait of Hormuz Is Our Foremost Priority”: PM Modi

increased uncertainty due to the wider regional conflict. The Prime Minister reiterated India's firm stance condemning attacks that undermine Kuwait's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The remarks come amid escalating tensions as Iran has reportedly carried out missile and drone strikes targeting military facilities and

key infrastructure in several Gulf countries. These incidents have heightened security alerts across the region. In response to the repeated threats, Kuwait has activated its air defence systems, with authorities responding to alerts linked to areas connected with military operations and logistics networks.

Iran Strike Halts Qatar's Major LNG Facility, Sparks Global Energy Concerns

■ Disruption at Ras Laffan gas hub raises fears of supply shortages and economic impact for major importers like India

New Delhi: A missile strike by Iran on the massive liquefied natural gas facility at Ras Laffan Industrial City has intensified turmoil in global energy markets, forcing a halt to production at one of the world's most important gas export hubs in Qatar. The attack comes amid escalating tensions across Middle East following the conflict triggered by military strikes involving the United States and Israel. In response, Iran has carried out missile and drone attacks targeting strategic assets in the Gulf region, including energy infrastructure and



locations linked to foreign military presence. Ras Laffan hosts the largest LNG export facilities in the world and is a central pillar of Qatar's energy industry. The shutdown has disrupted production and raised fears of supply shortages in global natural gas markets. Qatar remains among the world's leading LNG

exporters, alongside the United States, Australia and Russia. This is not the first disruption in recent weeks. Earlier in March, Iranian missile attacks targeted gas fields linked to Qatar's energy sector, forcing QatarEnergy to suspend production temporarily. The strikes were reportedly retaliation for an earlier attack

on Iran's South Pars Gas Field, part of the world's largest natural gas reserve. Meanwhile, tensions have severely affected maritime traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, a critical global energy route that normally carries around one fifth of the world's oil supply. With the waterway turning into a high risk zone, hundreds of cargo vessels have remained stranded near major Gulf ports, deepening concerns over global supply chains and rising energy prices. For India, the disruption could have significant consequences.



"Fake News Alert": Government Denies Claims of Indian Ships Being Blocked by Iran

■ MEA Says Viral Social Media Posts About Strait of Hormuz Restrictions Are Completely Baseless

New Delhi: The Ministry of External Affairs has dismissed viral social media claims suggesting that Iran has blocked Indian ships from passing through the Strait of Hormuz, calling the reports false and misleading. Amid heightened tensions in West Asia, the ministry issued a public warning urging people to remain cautious about unverified information circulating online. Through its fact check unit on social media, the ministry flagged the widely shared posts and labelled them as fake, advising users not to spread such misinformation. The viral messages had alleged that Iran denied passage to Indian vessels in the Strait of Hormuz and that multiple ships were stranded in the region. The posts also claimed that the situation could

severely disrupt India's energy supplies and cause shortages of domestic gas. One of the posts suggested that the alleged restriction was linked to an earlier incident in which India had supposedly seized three Iranian oil tankers in February while negotiating a major trade agreement with the United States. It further claimed that Iran had declared the strait a restricted zone for Indian ships until the tankers were returned. Another circulating message stated that 22 Indian naval ships carrying 611 Indian citizens were stranded in the waters of the Strait of Hormuz.

The claim also said that six of these vessels were transporting liquefied petroleum gas and that India could face a major shortage of cooking gas because of the supposed blockade.

"Extremely Fruitful Meeting": US Envoy Holds Strategic Talks With NSA Ajit Doval

■ Discussions Focus on Security Cooperation, Indo Pacific Stability and Key Geopolitical Issues.

New Delhi: The United States Ambassador to India, Sergio Gor, held talks with India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, describing the interaction as an extremely fruitful meeting focused on key security and geopolitical matters. Following the meeting, Gor shared that the discussions covered a wide range of strategic issues of mutual interest between the two countries. The conversation included areas such as defense coordination, intelligence cooperation and broader regional



security concerns. In a message posted on the social media platform X, the US envoy stated that the meeting addressed several important topics and reflected the continued progress in strategic

cooperation between the United States and India. He emphasised that the partnership between the two nations is steadily advancing through regular dialogue and collaboration on critical matters. The meeting comes at a time when Washington and New Delhi are actively working to strengthen cooperation in the Indo Pacific region. Both countries have been expanding engagement on issues such as supply chain resilience, counterterrorism initiatives and emerging technology policies.

"Tareekh Pe Tareekh" To End As Supreme Court Tightens Rules On Adjournments

■ New Measures Allow Delays Only in Exceptional Situations Amid Rising Case Backlog

New Delhi: The Supreme Court has introduced stricter guidelines to curb frequent adjournments, making it clear that requests for postponing hearings will now be accepted only in rare and exceptional circumstances. The move aims to streamline court proceedings and reduce unnecessary delays in the judicial process. According to the new directions, letters seeking adjournment



can be circulated only by Advocates on Record or by parties appearing in person. Such requests must be shared in advance with the opposing party or caveator. Proof of service must also be submitted

before 11:00 am on the previous working day to ensure transparency and fairness in the process. The opposing side has been given the right to challenge these requests. Any objections must be sent through email before 12:00 noon on the previous working day and will be placed before the court for consideration. The court has specified that adjournments will be granted only under exceptional conditions.

Congress Divided Over Iran Crisis: Shashi Tharoor, Manish Tewari Back Government Amid Party Criticism

■ Differences emerge within Congress as some leaders support India's cautious diplomatic approach while party leadership intensifies criticism

New Delhi: Differences have surfaced within the Indian National Congress over India's response to the escalating tensions in West Asia, with senior leaders Shashi Tharoor and Manish Tewari publicly supporting the government's diplomatic stance even as the party leadership criticised it. Tharoor defended the Centre's handling of



the crisis involving Iran, Israel and the United States, describing India's approach as an example of responsible statecraft rather than a failure of moral leadership. He argued that while the conflict raises important

questions under international law, India's restrained response reflects careful strategic judgment and a focus on national interest. He emphasised that diplomatic silence should not be interpreted as support for military actions, noting that foreign policy often requires balancing principles with practical consequences.

Ajit Agarkar Seeks Extension As Chief Selector Until 2027 ODI World Cup

Request to continue in role comes after India's recent ICC success and ongoing discussions with the cricket board

New Delhi: Chief selector Ajit Agarkar has reportedly approached the Board of Control for Cricket in India seeking an extension of his tenure until the 2027 ICC Cricket World Cup. The request comes soon after India's triumph at the 2026 ICC Men's T20 World Cup and follows a period of significant success for the national side in global tournaments. Agarkar's contract had earlier been extended by one year ahead of the Indian Premier League 2025 season as recognition for India's strong performances in international competitions. During that period, the team secured the 2025 ICC Champions



Trophy and the 2024 ICC Men's T20 World Cup. Discussions regarding his latest request are understood to be ongoing, although no formal decision has been announced. Reports indicate that a former cricketer from India's West Zone had previously emerged as a potential candidate to replace Agarkar, but no concrete developments have followed on that front.

His request is believed to have been strategically timed, arriving shortly after India's latest T20 World Cup victory. Agarkar's journey to the top selection role had earlier seen setbacks. When the position of chief selector became vacant during the 2020 to 2021 period, Chetan Sharma was chosen ahead of him despite Agarkar being an applicant. The opportunity eventually

came in mid 2023 when he was appointed to lead the selection panel. Since taking charge, Agarkar has overseen a period in which India reached four major ICC finals, including the 2023 ICC Cricket World Cup, the 2024 T20 World Cup, the 2025 Champions Trophy and the 2026 T20 World Cup. The team secured multiple titles during this run, reinforcing the importance of selection strategies behind the scenes. His tenure has been marked by bold decisions, including backing Suryakumar Yadav as a long term T20I captain ahead of Hardik Pandya and replacing the experienced Rohit Sharma as India's ODI captain.



Sunny Sports Club Crowned A Division North Zone Champions

Parab's Five Wicket Haul and Pawar's Unbeaten Half Century Seal Four Wicket Win in Final

PANAJI: Sunny Sports Club clinched the Goa Cricket Association A Division North Zone 2025 to 2026 title after defeating Karimabad Cricket Club by four wickets in the final played at the GCA ground in Porvorim. Batting first, Karimabad Cricket Club were bowled out for 154 runs in 40.2 overs. Aaditya Kota anchored

the innings with a patient 51 off 95 deliveries, while Vasu Tiwari added a quick 25 from 20 balls and Siddharth Karpe contributed 25 off 43. Karimabad showed signs of recovery after losing two early wickets at 42 runs, but frequent middle order setbacks prevented them from building a larger total.

Don Bosco College Panjim Secure Convincing Eight Wicket Victory

Yogesh Kauthankar Shines With Bat and Ball as Pernem Are Bowled Out for 63

Team Goemkarponn

PANAJI: The twelfth day of the 2025 to 2026 inter college cricket championship featured two matches at the Goa University Ground in Bambolim, with Don Bosco College Panjim registering a comfortable victory in the first match of the day. After winning the toss, Don Bosco College Panjim chose to bowl first against the Government College of Arts and Commerce Pernem. The decision proved effective as the Pernem side struggled to build momentum and were eventually bowled out for



63 runs in 14.1 overs. Manish Rao was the top scorer for Pernem with a quick 23 runs off 16 deliveries, while Sarthak Naik added 19 runs from 21 balls. However, the batting lineup failed to withstand the disciplined bowling attack from Don Bosco College. Sankalp Prabhu delivered a standout spell, taking four wickets for just 11 runs in



his three overs. Yogesh Kauthankar also made a major impact with the ball, claiming three wickets for 11 runs and keeping the run flow under control. Chasing a modest target, Don Bosco College Panjim approached the innings steadily and reached 67 for the loss of two wickets in just 9.1 overs to secure an eight wicket win.

"Tennis Is Growing in Goa": Bandodkar Panjim Gymkhana Tennis Open Attracts 247 Entries

Strong Participation Across Junior, Open and Masters Categories for Third Edition Tournament

Team Goemkarponn

PANAJI: The third edition of the Bandodkar Panjim Gymkhana Tennis Open 2026 has received an impressive response, drawing a total of 247 entries from players across Goa and reaffirming the tournament's growing prominence in the state's tennis calendar. The competition, held in memory of Goa's first Chief Minister Dayanand Bandodkar, will take place from March 21 to March 29 at the Panjim Gymkhana courts in the



capital city. Backed by the Goa State Tennis Association and the DB Bandodkar and Sons Group, the event continues to expand its reach while offering a competitive platform for players across different age groups. A significant

portion of the entries has come from junior categories, which have attracted enthusiastic participation from young players. The boys under 12 division has 10 participants, while eight players have entered the girls under 12 category. In the under 14 section, 14 boys and nine girls will compete. The under 18 category has also seen strong interest, with 17 boys and 11 girls registering for the event. The masters categories are expected to feature experienced competitors as well.

Goan Players Make Strong Start at 48th Indian Masters Badminton Championships

Team Goemkarponn

PANAJI: Goan shuttlers delivered an encouraging performance on the opening day of the qualifying rounds at the Yonex Sunrise 48th Indian Masters National Badminton Championships 2025

to 2026 held at the Manohar Parrikar Indoor Stadium in Navelim, Goa. Several local players advanced with impressive victories across different categories. Chinmay Fallary led the Goan charge with a confident win in the Men's Singles 55



category, defeating Manoj Narayanan Karinattu of Maharashtra in a controlled performance.



Fallary maintained steady pressure throughout the match to secure a convincing

result and move ahead in the tournament. In the Men's Doubles 65 event, the Goan pair of

Deepak Salaskar and A R Surendra Kamath produced a determined display to defeat Cherian Marattukalam Jacob and Rajeev R N of Kerala. The contest extended to three games, with the Goan duo holding their composure in the decisive stages to seal the victory.