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# Power of people & empathy of the Court stop Siolim tree rampage

**High Court stays "merciless" felling of trees in Siolim by the Govt, till March 26; sensing urgency of the PIL, the HC bench heard the matter almost immediately after the PIL was moved and mentioned on Wednesday morning**

Team Herald

**PORVORIM:** In a major relief and a victory for the people's movement in Siolim, the High Court on Wednesday stayed in the interim, the ongoing and "merciless" felling of trees till March 26.

The directions were given in a PIL moved by three public-spirited people of Siolim led by a 39-year-old conservationist and wildlife rescuer Aaron Fernandes and two re-

30 trees were "mercilessly" felled as a part of the "allegedly sanctioned activity of road widening" of Major District Road No.10 in the village of Siolim from March 3, 2024 onwards.

"We (the petitioners) were anguished the scale and size of the felling. Apart from the 30 trees that have been felled, our concern is to save 120 more that will be felled on the road from Siolim to Badem (Assagao). On March 11 a first offence report was

## UNDERLYING VESTED INTERESTS OF MEGA PROJECTS BEHIND TREE FELLING

The ongoing tree felling seems to have been hastily done under the guise of development and road safety, whereas it is apparent that there are underlying vested interests of potential mega-project housing and commercial developments proposed in Siolim village, including construction of a casino on the Siolim River

—Extract from the PIL

filed by the Regional Forrester Officer against the contractor, one Rafique Munna but the question is who is behind this contractor," said Advocate Norma Alvares who argues the matter in Court. The advocate on record for the petitioners is Adv Om D'Costa.

The petitioners had feared that the ongoing rampant and reckless cutting of trees would lead to the devastation of the environment. They stated that on March 3, contractors went on a tree felling spree wherein age-old trees including huge flowering mango trees, were ruthlessly chopped from the HDFC Bank junction, Siolim up to the bus stop on the Siolim Main Road i.e., opposite the road going towards Porta Vaddo, Siolim. In three days, across this stretch, more than 30 trees had already been mercilessly felled.

The petitioners also produced photographs of some of the ancient trees felled by the contractors.

The contractors present at the site could not show relevant papers, documentation and work orders for the ongoing project, and they could only state that they had been instructed to cut the trees and proceed with their work, the petitioners stated.

The detailed hearing and arguments will commence on March 26.

## WHAT IS THE PRAYER?

▶ To stay further felling of trees in Siolim village as a part of the works of road widening of major district road (MDR) starting from Siolim Market T-Junction

▶ To direct the PWD to produce all approvals required prior to commencement of the project including permissions under the Trees Act

## WHAT WILL HIGH COURT ASSESS?

1 Is the felling of many roadside trees in Siolim, including several heritage or intergenerational trees, necessary and can be permitted and without study of alternatives?

2 Are all approvals as required under the Goa Preservation of Trees Act, and directions issued by this Hon'ble Court, being complied with?



Siolkars take out candlelight march to celebrate their victory against tree felling, on Wednesday

## From candlelight protests to candlelight celebrations, in Siolim

AUGUSTO RODRIGUES

**SIOLIM:** The candlelight protest in Siolim turned into a celebration for over a 120 people, with the Goa Bench of the Bombay High Court on Wednesday staying further felling of trees till the next hearing on March 26, 2024.

In a first step to victory, the High Court whilst list-

ing the writ petition filed by Aaron Fernandes and two others through Advocate Om D'Costa and argued by Adv Norma Alvares, a First Offence report has been filed against the tree-cutting contractor thus indicating that no permissions were obtained for the same.

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Siolim residents celebrate their victory with the beating of drums, utensils, boxes and various music instruments, on Wednesday

"I cannot even express my feelings. Though, it is sad that trees have already been killed this full drama illustrates the corruption within various departments of the government

—Aaron Fernandes, petitioner

"This is a good example of how people of multiple facets coming together can make a change. The symbolic protests and legal action have set a good example for all villages of Goa

—Mohan Kumar, conservationist whose petition got the Tree Authority of Goa revived

"This win today is an indicator for all of us, from all parts of Goa, to stand together to fight injustices, irrespective of the village we hail from

—Sandra Fernandes

"The good news for everyone in Goa is that people have shown that they are not ready to keep quiet anymore due to acts of vandalism being carried on in the name of development

—Oswald Pinto

## Biden, Trump set up election rematch after clinching nominations

**AP, WASHINGTON:** President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump clinched their parties' presidential nominations Tuesday with decisive victories in a slate of low-profile primaries, setting up a general election rematch that many voters do not want.

The outcome of contests across Georgia, Mississippi and Washington State was never in doubt. Neither Biden, a Democrat, nor Trump, a Republican, faced major opposition. But the magnitude of their wins gave each man the delegate majority he needed to claim his party's nomination at the summertime national conventions.

Not even halfway through the presidential primary calendar, Tuesday marked a crystallising moment for a nation uneasy with its choices in 2024.

There is no longer any doubt that the fall elec-



tion will feature a rematch between two flawed and unpopular presidents. At 81, Biden is already the oldest president in U.S. history, while the 77-year-old Trump is facing decades in prison as a defendant in four criminal cases. Their rematch — the first featuring two U.S. presidents since 1912 — will almost certainly deepen the nation's searing political and cultural divides over the eight-month grind that lies ahead.

In a statement, Biden celebrated the nomination while

casting Trump as a serious threat to democracy.

Trump, Biden said, "is running a campaign of resentment, revenge, and retribution that threatens the very idea of America."

He continued, "I am honoured that the broad coalition of voters representing the rich diversity of the Democratic Party across the country have put their faith in me once again to lead our party — and our country — in a moment when the threat Trump poses is greater than ever."

## Brave bus driver saves 35 pilgrims from robbers

**Was shot at during robbery attempt; drove for 30 km to save the passengers**

**AGENCIES, NEW DELHI:** Showing immense courage and presence of mind, a Maharashtra minibus driver, who was shot at during a robbery attempt, kept driving for 30 kilometres to save the passengers in the vehicle.

The incident took place on National Highway 6 when the driver, along with 17 members of the family, was travelling from Amravati to Nagpur after visiting a temple.

The police have registered a case against four unknown persons and have formed teams to find the accused.

The driver, Khomdev Kawade, said, "The robbers were in a car and tried to



The minibus (left), which was driven by Khomdev Kawade

stop us by firing at the minibus. I received injuries in my hand, but did not stop the minibus and drove it to a police station, after about 30 kilometres."

Three other passengers were also injured and they

were admitted to a hospital in Tivsa.

He said that the robbers were in a SUV that had an Uttar Pradesh registration number.

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## 22,217 electoral bonds purchased from Apr 1, 2019 to Feb 15, 2024: SBI to SC

**Out of these electoral bonds, 22,030 were redeemed by political parties**

**PTI, NEW DELHI:** The State Bank of India (SBI) on Wednesday told the Supreme Court that a total of 22,217 electoral bonds were purchased by donors between April 1, 2019 and February 15 this year, out of which 22,030 were redeemed by political parties.

In a compliance affidavit filed in the apex court, the SBI said as per the court's direction, it has made available the details of electoral bonds to the Election Commission of India before the close of business hours on March 12.

It said details, including date of purchase of each electoral bonds, names of the purchaser and the denomination of the bonds purchased

have been furnished. The affidavit, filed by SBI's chairman Dinesh Kumar Khara, said the bank has also furnished to the EC details like date of encashment of the electoral bonds, the names of political parties which received the contributions and the denominations of the bonds.

"A total number of 22,217 bonds were purchased during the period April 1, 2019 till February 15, 2024. At the time of collating the information for the EC, the details were segregated as below," it said.

The affidavit said between April 1, 2019 to April 11, 2019 a total of 3,346 electoral bonds were purchased and 1,609 redeemed.

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