

## Vedanta takes a step back in face-off with Bicholim truckers

Company agrees to stop its own 12-wheeler trucks; HC to hear company's plea on ore movement from Matwada-Pilgao Junction to Sarmanas Jetty on Feb 4

Team Herald

**BICHOIM:** The impasse over iron ore transportation in Bicholim taluka finally ended on Saturday with Vedanta Sesa Goa agreeing to stop operating 12-wheeler trucks hired by it.

With this development, iron ore transportation in the taluka, which was halted for three days, will now resume from February 3.

The decision was taken during a meeting in the office of Bicholim MLA Dr Chandrakant Shetye.

“We will now transport ore from the mining block as well as the rejected ore from Monday. Though it was stated that it would be on trial basis for next 10 to 12 days, we are of the firm opinion that the Bicholim Truck Owners' Association will transport the ore from both the sites and will not allow any outsiders

– Rajaram 'Satish' Gaonkar,

Bicholim Truck Owners Association president

“Vedanta Sesa Goa prioritises the interests of the local community and in order to compensate for the restriction in number of trips for transportation of ore, it is being initiated on a trial basis to facilitate the TOA (Truck Owners' Association) to transport overburden

– Vedanta Sesa Goa

company assured them that it will stop trucks hired by them through a contractor.

Gaonkar said, “We will now transport ore from the mining block as well as the rejected ore from Monday. Though it was stated that it would be on trial basis for next 10 to 12 days, we are of the firm opinion that the Bicholim Truck Owners' Association will transport the ore from both the sites and will not allow any outsiders.”

Cont on Pg 11 >>

## FAITH & REVERENCE

SAGUN GAWADE



A girl watches devotees pay obeisance to the idol on the occasion of Ganesh Jayanti, also known as Bhadra Shukla Chaturthi, at Pimpleshwar Siddhivinayak Temple, Altinho-Panjim

## Goa Congress: Puppet on a BJP string?

Criticism grows louder from both within and outside the party as leaders, activists slam Congress for 'soft Opposition' politics

Team Herald

**PANJIM:** Job scam, land-grabbing, curtailed Assembly session, Siddiqui's escape... Goa might be on the boil for many months now, but the muted approach of the State's principal Opposition party – the Indian National Congress – has raised fears about the party having gone soft, something that will strengthen the hands of the ruling BJP leading up to the 2027 Assembly elections.

Why is Congress not raising decibel levels and putting the government on the mat – it's a question that is getting louder and even long-time party members won't ignore it anymore. Former Congress MLA Agnelo Fernandes confessed that he had noted a distinct lack of energy within its ranks. “There is no 'josh' in the Opposition anymore. We don't see the fire that was once there, whether it was Congress or BJP challenging the government. Perhaps it's due to the reduced number of opposition members in the Assembly. Barring Vijai Sardesai, no one seems vocal enough to take on the government,” Fernandes said.

“Democracy is safeguarded by a fighting opposition, one that engages in struggles on the streets. That's where Congress is falling short

– Cleofato Almeida Coutinho, senior advocate

“A lot of opposition leaders today have their own businesses. If they speak out against the BJP government, they risk being harassed

– Sudip Tamankar, former Congress member and activist

“The Congress party has not shown its role as an effective opposition. We also need to sever the ties some former Congress leaders have with the BJP, as this has led to defections

– Elvis Gomes, former bureaucrat and Cong leader

“The people of Goa still have high hopes for Congress, and we haven't met those expectations. This is why questions about the party's role are being raised. We need a new leadership strategy

– Yogesh Nagvenkar, Cong member from Fatorda

Senior Advocate Cleofato Almeida Coutinho offered a critical perspective on Congress. While acknowledging the party's national presence, he pointed out that Congress has failed to strengthen its grassroots base. “Congress is not a cadre-based party, and while it does take up important issues, it's not fighting on the streets,” Coutinho said. “Democracy is safeguarded by a fight-

ing opposition, one that engages in struggles on the streets. That's where Congress is falling short. To defeat the BJP, we need a counter-narrative to Hindutva and leadership that can capture the people's imagination. How that will unfold remains to be seen.”

Former Congress member and activist Sudip Tamankar highlighted the challenges faced by many opposition members. “A lot

of opposition leaders today have their own businesses. If they speak out against the BJP government, they risk being harassed. We've seen how the government targeted Congress MLAs who later joined the BJP. The BJP is also skilled at dividing votes. A regional party, once silent, is now suddenly active, and the BJP is using them to divide votes,” Tamankar noted. “It's unfortunate that we don't have a formidable opposition, though I do appreciate the efforts of people like Vijai Sardesai in the Legislative Assembly.”

Former minister Sadaand Malik contended that the Opposition was not actually weak but was being made to appear so. “For the first time in Goa's Legislative Assembly, the Leader of the Opposition is a first-timer. While the opposition members are competent, the government is exploiting the situation. Congress should have leveraged the experience of leaders outside the Assembly to guide the new members. This could have helped the party address key issues and mobilise support on the streets,” Malik suggested.

Cont on Pg 11 >>

## 8 Naxalites killed in Chhattisgarh encounter

**PTI, BIJAPUR:** Eight Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Saturday, the police said.

The gunfight broke out around 8.30 am in the forest in Gangaloor Police Station area when a joint team of security personnel was out on an anti-Naxalite operation, said a senior police official.

Cont on Pg 11 >>

## Setback for AAP in Delhi, 8 outgoing MLAs join BJP

Send resignation letters to Speaker, relinquishing their House membership

**PTI, NEW DELHI:** Eight outgoing AAP MLAs joined the BJP here on Saturday, with only four days to go for the February 5 Delhi Assembly polls.

All the eight MLAs resigned from the primary membership of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)

on Friday, citing reasons like alleged corruption and the Arvind Kejriwal-led party's deviation from its ideology.

All the eight legislators were denied poll tickets by the AAP this time.

Cont on Pg 11 >>

### MLAS WHO JOINED BJP

Vandana Gaur (Palam), Rohit Mehraulia (Trilokpuri), Girish Soni (Madipur), Madan Lal (Kasturba Nagar), Rajesh Rishi (Uttam Nagar), B S Joon (Bijwasan), Naresh Yadav (Mehrauli) and Pawan Sharma (Adarsh Nagar)

## As Bhutani moves in, villagers prepare protest pitch again

Volunteers start collecting signatures against project that villagers call 'illegal work and unauthorised occupation'

AUGUSTO RODRIGUES

**GONCOI, SANCOALE:** Candlelight meeting that saw thousands attend, a nine-day fast by village elder Premanand Naik – the protests against the Bhutani Infra project that rocked Sancoale last year are gathering pace again, as villagers are now moving door to door, collecting signatures against the controversial housing project that they say threatens the environment and the local community.

The latest protests are gathering steam after Bhutani moved in with machinery to the site recently. While the company claims it is for “soil testing”, volunteers are collecting signatures of villagers who



Women from Sancoale stand out in the fight against Bhutani Infra

describe the project as “illegal work and unauthorised occupation”.

“If Bhutani Infra thinks that buying people in power will crush us, they are mistaken,” said Premanand Naik, the 65-year-old village elder who led

the hunger strike. “They tried to discredit our movement, but the villagers have shown that our unity cannot be broken. I'm ready to strike again if necessary.”

Cont on Pg 11 >>

“They are operating with a live construction licence but haven't secured the necessary permissions from relevant authorities. Since our Sarpanch, MLA, and Chief Minister have chosen to remain silent, we have no choice but to stay vigilant. We'll continue the fight, no matter what

– Socorin Joseph, protestor

“If Bhutani Infra thinks that buying people in power will crush us, they are mistaken. They tried to discredit our movement, but the villagers have shown that our unity cannot be broken. I'm ready to strike again if necessary

– Premanand Naik, protestor

The banker to every **india**

## PLAN YOUR BUDGET WITH SOLID BANK KI SOLID BACKING

Savings Account | Current Account | Loans | YONO SBI | SBI Wealth | NRI Services and more

Be a part of the SBI family now

Scan to know more

For details, call 1800 1234 | 2100 or visit bank.sbi

Follow us on