

CANSAULIM GANGRAPE: WHERE ARE THE CANDLES?

This past week, yet another shocking incident was reported in Goa that should have shaken the conscience of Goans and evoked widespread outrage, but that has not been the case. A mentally compromised woman was brutally gang-raped by five men in a supposed guesthouse in Cansaulim. She was repeatedly violated and then dumped on the highway. Fortunately, a passer-by noticed her in distress and immediately alerted the police, leading to her rescue.

This is not an isolated incident. If we examine crime statistics, cases of such violent acts are on the rise. However, the alarming issue is the growing perception that anything goes in Goa. Criminals seem to believe that either the law is too weak or investigations are too ineffective to bring them to justice.



“A few months ago, I had written to the government and made a public demand for the formation of a special investigation team to identify and neutralise organised crime in Goa. Organised crime is on the rise, whether it be extortion, attacks on activists, or other forms of violence. These individuals involved in the gang rape must surely have connections to organised crime, flourishing in the State under the full protection of this government, the MLAs, and the Ministers. Otherwise, they wouldn't have been so emboldened to commit such a heinous act in a State like Goa.”
—Sunil Kawthankar, Vice President, Goa Congress

There have been repeated instances of violence in North Goa's coastal areas, where murders have occurred in shacks, and brutal assaults have become disturbingly common. In some cases, outsiders running shacks have attacked guests, while in others, drunken tourists have assaulted shack workers. The lawlessness is escalating, and unless strict action is taken, Goa risks losing its reputation as a safe destination.

“Goa has seen murders and rapes, and while there have been shameful incidents in the past, a heinous crime like gang rape, which can happen to anyone, is a different matter altogether. We have miserably failed when it comes to taking action on the streets. It is also shocking that Civil Society has remained completely silent on this issue. At this moment, offering lip sympathy is simply not enough—this issue goes beyond political parties,” said Sunil Kawthankar.

“It is shocking and upsetting that such a gangrape has been allowed to happen in Goa. While the slogan ‘Beti bachao, beti padhao’ is being parroted by our government, how is it that nobody intervened and helped the girl? How is it that these 18-year-old boys, now forever branded rapists, did not even consider that she was mentally challenged? How low have we fallen?” said Tara Kerkar. “How is it that the staff at the guest house they took her to did not suspect anything and inform the police—considering it was a single girl with five boys? How were they allowed to get a room? This leads us to wonder how many more rapes and other crimes happen and go unreported and

The alarming issue is the growing perception that ‘anything goes’ in Goa. Criminals seem to believe that either the law is too weak or investigations are too ineffective to bring them to justice. There have been repeated instances of violence in North Goa's coastal areas, where murders have occurred in shacks, and brutal assaults have become disturbingly common. In some cases, outsiders running shacks have attacked guests, while in others, drunken tourists have assaulted shack workers. The lawlessness is escalating, and unless strict action is taken, Goa risks losing its reputation as a safe destination

unrecorded, with the perpetrators walking free,” she added. Kerkar said she was deeply concerned that such a dastardly crime has not elicited any response from Goan society – the Women's Commission, the Department for Women and Child Welfare, the Child Welfare Commission – none of these agencies has even uttered a statement. “The silence of the government is not surprising but how is it that the Opposition party has not yet spoken up about the gang rape,” she questioned. “The rot has gone deep into society- our youth have become slaves to the cheap thrills of alcohol, tobacco and drugs. We cannot blame the government alone for these crimes – each of us needs to look into our own houses and families and check if our sons are being brought up with the right values. Whether they are taught to respect women and treat both genders fairly and equally- not as prey,” added Kerkar.

YEAR-WISE RAPE CASES REGISTERED IN SOUTH GOA

- 2024** ■ Total rape cases registered in South Goa: **39**
■ Cases detected: **36 (92%)**. Several victims were minors, kidnapped and taken out of the State
- 2023** ■ Total rape cases registered in South Goa: **34**
■ All **34** cases detected, and culprits arrested
■ Highest number of 6 rapes registered in Verna
- Total rape cases registered in South Goa: **35**
- 2022** ■ All 35 cases detected
■ Highest number of 8 rapes registered in Verna



POINT-COUNTERPOINT

Goa is no longer the peaceful haven it once was. From its place on the hippie trail in the 1970s to the easy-going charm of the early 2000s, the State was known for its sunshine, freedom, and a laid-back, welcoming spirit. Shaped by centuries of European influence, Goans embraced diversity, remaining accepting and non-judgmental toward different cultures, clothing, and customs. Equality between genders was the norm, and an unspoken code of respect made Goa a place where people could live and let live. But in recent years, that image has begun to crack. The post-COVID surge of remote workers, migrant labourers, and a growing wave of tourists who treat Goa as India's sin city has transformed the social fabric. Crime rates are rising, and what was once unthinkable—daylight rapes, violent assaults, and even murders—is becoming disturbingly routine, not just in urban areas but deep into the countryside. With substance abuse on the rise and law enforcement struggling to keep up, the question is no longer whether Goa is changing, but whether it is becoming unrecognisable. In this week's edition of Herald TV's debate Point Counterpoint, **SUJAY GUPTA** and our panelists delve into the growing crime crisis and its impact on the State's identity



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Calling for the arrest of the owner and manager of the guesthouse where the rape took place, Kawthankar said, “The reports clearly show that such things have been happening quite frequently in these areas, and it's evident that the police are aware of it. The police cannot claim ignorance. If they are turning a blind eye to such incidents, it suggests they are being paid to do so. The corrupt officers do not work for free—there are certainly good officers in the state, as we see with the South Goa SP who cracked the case within 24 hours – but the incompetence of the larger chunk raises

PANELISTS

Trajano D'Mello, Political Analyst
Sunil Kawthankar, Vice President, Goa Congress
Tara Kerkar, Chairperson, Saveria Trust

questions,” he said.

A lot of questions need to be asked about the police's actions. For example, what was the night patrol squad doing? Wasn't there a Pink Force on the streets from Margao to Cansaulim? How did this youth manage to summon his drunken friends, bring them along, and then take the girl in a car? There are so many points where the police could have intervened – does this spell the collapse of law and order in Goa?

“In my opinion, there's no law and order in Goa – it's total disorder and disaster. O Herald reported that people are asking for patrolling at the Margao KTC bus stand, where thousands of people gather. If even such a place is causing fear, just imagine the state of mind of someone who has to travel by bike. Why is this happening? It's because law-makers are harbouring criminals, and this is the result,” said Trajano

D'Mello. “Let me give you an example. When we talk about how this lawlessness is affecting tourism, the entire coastal belt from Miramar to Arambol is infested with over 600 touts. Each month, only 10 touts are caught and released. You could call them pimps or touts; they're both. Many of these criminal activities are harboured by the tourism minister, who is fully aware of it. I'll tell you about an incident in Arambol – when our officials went to a shack to take action on a complaint, it was on public TV that the MLA told them they could never enter, whether it was legal or illegal. What does this say about a lawmaker preventing the law from functioning?” he asked. Referring to the case of South Goa SP Sunita Sawant who was unceremoniously shunted out of her post overnight without a reason, D'Mello said, “It is well-known that this government denies the fact that Bajrang

Dal functionaries are creating disorder and taking the law into their own hands. Sawant was trying to gather information, keep a watch, and maintain control over this situation, and she was immediately transferred.”

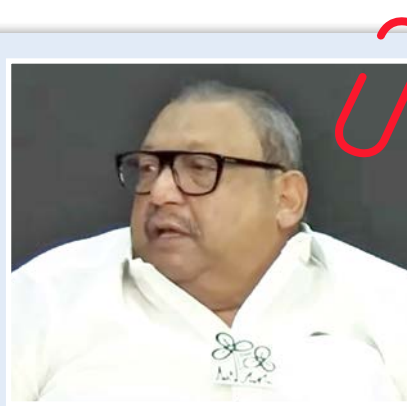
While on the subject of police lapses, one must recall that a month ago, an accused in police custody escaped during the exposition of St. Francis Xavier, when security in the State was at its highest. “Initially, it was reported that he had escaped, but what we later understood was that he was escorted out of his cell by a team of police officers. Where is the action? We have always said there was more than one person involved in this escape, but the government denied it. Now, yesterday, the police inquiry itself has revealed that four more cops were involved, so our stand has been vindicated,” Kawthankar said.

Now that all five rapists have been arrested, does the matter end here, for the police? There ideally should be a thorough investigation into the lapses that allowed something like this to happen. The culprits, all of whom are from one locality in Mormugao taluka, should be closely scrutinised. The question remains: how long will they stay behind bars? Will they be granted bail quickly? Are the investigations being conducted properly to ensure they face the harshest punishments? If the rapists in the Nirbhaya case could be sentenced to death, the punishment for this crime should be nothing less as they have taken advantage of the victim's mental challenged state.

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“A few months ago, I had written to the government and made a public demand for the formation of a special investigation team to identify and neutralise organized crime in Goa. Organised crime is on the rise, whether it be extortion, attacks on activists, or other forms of violence. These individuals involved in the gang rape must surely have connections to organised crime. Otherwise, they wouldn't have been so emboldened to commit such a heinous act in a State like Goa. I am certain that these people have links to such gangs that are flourishing in the state under the full protection of this government, the MLAs, and the ministers,” added Kawthankar.

“The investigation into this particular rape case is a total sham,” D'mello said. “The cancellation of the guest house's licence will likely be struck down in court because natural justice has not been followed. They are simply trying to give the appearance that



“The investigation into this particular rape case is a total sham, and I'll tell you why. The cancellation of the guest house's licence will likely be struck down in court because natural justice has not been followed. They are simply trying to give the appearance that they've taken action, but this doesn't stand up to the test of law. This has become a pattern—whenever something happens, the licence of the establishment is cancelled, but the person who should actually be arrested is roaming free.”
—Trajano D'Mello, Political Analyst

HOW THE HEINOUS CRIME UNFOLDED



- Main accused Adil Algur, (18), from Chicalim, enticed and befriended the victim, abducted her from the Margao KTC bus stand and travelled by bus to Vasco bus stand
- Algur made the victim pillion rider the scooter and took her to Dabolim. Accomplices Mohammed Ali Mulla, Shahzad Shaikh, Viresh Aguanda and

Mohammed Yasir Shaikh, who arrived in a four-wheeler

- They took the victim to a flat in Cansaulim, where Adil allegedly raped her, followed by the other four who committed the heinous act
- Through digital mapping and scientific probe, the police arrested all the five accused within two hours



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they've taken action, but this doesn't stand up to the test of law. Why hasn't the manager been arrested? This has become a pattern—whenever something happens, the license of the establishment is cancelled, but the person who should actually be arrested is roaming free,” he added.

The recent brawl reported at a beach shack in Arambol, during which Amar Bhandekar was either murdered or according to the post mortem report, suffered a heart attack due to the circumstances is yet another shameful example of lawlessness in Goa's beaches. Amar Bhandekar was trying to ensure that the beach, which had been overcrowded with chairs and other furniture, was cleared. Ultimately, that setup is completely illegal; beaches are not meant to be covered with furniture from shacks. Beaches are for the public to enjoy, not for endless rows of chairs and tables. Amar Bhandekar had to pay with his life just for trying to remove these chairs.

Recently, six people were arrested for assaulting tourists at the Kenwood Shack. This incident occurred in January, when a group of tourists was attacked by workers at the shack. The workers involved were outsiders, and not only the workers but even the shack's operator was not a Goan. Then there was an assault on a Goan veterinarian and his friends at a shack in Candolim. While some claim the vets were drunk, regardless

of that, there's no excuse for beating people up. There was also an incident where a Gujarat police officer from the crime branch was brutally assaulted on Calangute beach. When he went to file a report, the local police station refused to register an FIR. It's laughable that even a cop is finding it difficult to get a report filed. And then, two people were arrested for assaulting tourists from Maharashtra – the latest in a string of incidents that have happened one after another this past tourist season. Are these conflicts on our beaches happening because the demographics of these shacks are changing, and violence has unfortunately become the norm? “Most likely, the people running these shacks are aware that they can get away with murder or any other crime because they have political backing protecting them,” said D'Mello.

“If you look closely, the majority of shacks are run by non-Goans. We often talk about the tourism industry helping to employ our youth, but when you visit these shacks, the entire operation is run by outsiders. The service staff, the waiters, and the cooks are all non-Goans. So, where is the benefit for Goans? How is this tourism industry helping our people? The hotels may be owned by Goans, but the room boys are all non-Goans,” said Kawthankar. “The Congress leader recalled an incident when he visited a reputed shack on Calangute beach for dinner and was shocked at the number of touts offering tourists drugs and prostitutes, the unsavoury characters hanging around the dark lanes leading from the parking lot to the beach, whistling and commenting on passersby.”

“If locals like us feel unsafe and do not want to visit these beaches anymore, what image of our State are we projecting to tourists?” he asked. “The burden on our basic facilities—water, electricity, roads—is being borne by the Goan population. These are our rights, but we are paying the price,” said Kawthankar.

“Take the situation in Bardez, for example. There are illegalities in the projects, and the water is being diverted to private swimming pools. This is causing a huge strain, and it's not just affecting the poor—it's affecting everyone. Even the rich are suffering from water scarcity. Some of my friends, who are affluent, are coming to me for water. The water crisis is impacting everyone, not just the poor,” added Kawthankar.

“If we don't have a comprehensive tourism policy and a shack policy, then who will run these shacks? How will we manage all these issues? Along with that, there should also

A lot of questions need to be asked about the police's actions. For example, what was the night patrol squad doing? Wasn't there a Pink Force on the streets from Margao to Cansaulim? How did this youth manage to summon his drunken friends, bring them along, and then take the girl in a car? There are so many points where the police could have intervened – does this spell the collapse of law and order in Goa?

be a comprehensive state security policy. Otherwise, under this BJP government, with the total collapse of law and order, in the next 2 to 3 years, Goa will be known as the Paatal Lok of India,” he remarked.

Policies are essential, but they need people who are committed to implementing them. Take, for example, the recent policy change with regards to land conversions—it happened at record speed. “There's a reason for that. Usually, politicians and officials don't encourage Goans because if a Goan pays, they tend to tell people that they have paid (a bribe). However, non-Goans, when they pay, they keep it quiet,” said Kawthankar.

One crucial question remains: should we not expect political parties to do more? In the coming two-day Assembly session, the Opposition must raise their voices and demand that all other work be suspended for at least half a day to discuss nothing but this rape case. This is the least we should expect.

“But will the Opposition be willing to do this? When you said that people's emotions have been aroused, it's clear that the people of Goa are fed up with the ruling party as well as the Opposition. They feel convinced that we are only playing to the gallery and not seriously addressing the issues at hand. Unless we can truly engage with the people and rebuild their confidence, we will continue to lose their trust,” concludes D'Mello.