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## OPPN RED-FLAGS GREEN CESS 'SCAM'

Rs 8k cr fraud and Vedanta, Adani, JSW not taxed, claims LoP in Assembly; CM maintains 50% cess collected

Team Herald

PANJIM: The Opposition on Friday launched a scathing attack in the Assembly on the government, with Leader of the Opposition Yuri Alemao claiming that "thousand of crores" had been lost in the alleged scam in the collection of green cess from companies importing coke and coal into the Mormugao port.

Over the last decade, 102.46 metric tonnes of coal and coke have been imported into Goa, yet the government has been slow in collecting taxes from these companies,

– Yuri Alemao, LoP

However, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant maintained that over 50% of the green cess had been collected in line with Supreme Court directives.

Alemao further accused the government of failing to issue demand notices and collect taxes from large companies such as Vedanta, Adani, and JSW. He also raised concerns about the reduction in green cess from 2% to 0.5%, which he claimed resulted in a significant loss to the state's ex-



Opposition MLAs corner the government on the Assembly floor during a discussion on the coal-handling issue

chequer. "This is a mega fraud amounting to Rs 8,000 crore," Alemao charged, calling on the government to withdraw the consent to operate granted to these companies and demanding an inquiry into the alleged scam. He also asked for the formation of a House Committee to investi-

gate the matter. The LoP, who raised the issue in a starred question, claimed that the total cess demanded under the Goa Green Cess Act amounted to over Rs 352.2 crore, but only Rs 237.7 crore had been collected.

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## Five bills rushed through at end of day

Team Herald

PANJIM: The Assembly on Friday passed the Comunidade Amendment Bill, 2025, defeating opposition amendments. Revenue Minister Atanasio Monserrate explained that Article 31 A prohibits the conversion of Comunidade land for purposes other than the one originally proposed. As part of the debate, Goa Forward Party MLA Vijai Sardesai demanded that land allotted to Zuari Agro for industrial purposes should be reverted. He alleged that the land was converted into settlement and sold to a builder, who has developed the land and selling plots.

The other Bills passed were the Goa Provision of Water Supply (Amendment) Bill, Goa VAT (Amendment) Bill, Goa Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Bill, the Goa Goods and Services Tax (GST) (Amendment) Bill. The government withdrew the Goa Media Persons and Media Institutions (Prevention of Violence and Damage or Loss to Property) Bill, 2022, which sought to protect journalists from violence or loss to property. All of these bills were passed even as the Rules 141, 143 and 156 relating to introduction, consideration and passing of bills were suspended in the Assembly.

## Eco-warriors hail SC's 'concrete jungle' warning to State govt

After face loss in Apex Court, govt should focus on halting green cover loss: Activists

Team Herald

PANJIM: A day after the Supreme Court warned the State government against turning Goa into a concrete jungle, environmentalists applauded the apex court's strong message on protecting the State's green cover.

The Supreme Court had dismissed the government's Special Leave Petition against a High Court order, which directed a restraint on construction in the Outline development Plan (ODP) areas of Calangute, Candolim, Arpora, Nagoa and Parra.

Speaking to Herald TV, environmentalist Rajendra Kerker expressed concern over rapid development in the region. "Hills are being cut, rivers polluted and agricultural fields are rapidly being converted into construction zones. Tiswadi taluka is already overburdened, and now popular beach areas like Calangute and Arpora are becoming victims of over-concretisation," Kerker said. "We're not against building houses, but the unregulated way land is sold and buildings

Hills are being cut, rivers polluted and agricultural fields are rapidly being converted into construction zones. Tiswadi taluka is already overburdened, and now popular beach areas like Calangute and Arpora are becoming victims of over-concretisation

– Rajendra Kerker, environmentalist

The way concretisation is increasing in Goa, we'll face serious issues in the future. There was no need for the State to approach the Supreme Court. The government, which receives international funds for climate change, should ensure there is no further environmental degradation

– Ramesh Gawas, environmentalist

constructed will lead to traffic congestion, pollution, and environmental destruction."

AAP Goa Convenor Amit Palekar also supported the ruling, stating, "The government is destroying Goa, and the Supreme Court has recognised this. We stand firm that Goa should be preserved for Goans, and AAP will do whatever it takes to ensure this."

Environmentalist Ramesh Gawas emphasised the importance of the Supreme Court's decision. "The way concretisation is increasing in Goa, we'll face serious

issues in the future. There was no need for the State to approach the Supreme Court. The government, which receives international funds for climate change, should ensure there is no further environmental degradation," Gawas said.

The High Court ruling, issued on January 23 followed a hearing led by Justices M S Karnik and Nivedita P Mehta, who directed the State to impose a construction freeze in the five ODP villages in the Bardez taluka. This was in response to a PIL filed by the NGO Goa Foundation.

## US readies another 487 Indians for deportation

PTI, NEW DELHI: Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri revealed there are as many as 487 presumed Indian citizens with final removal orders from the US authorities and details of 298 people have been shared with India already.

He said the information shared by the US authorities was being verified. Meanwhile, the govt on Friday said it has registered concerns with the US over the deportation of illegal immigrants in shackles and conveyed that this kind of treatment could have been avoided. The remarks of Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri came amid uproar over the deportation of illegal Indian immigrants by the US in handcuffs during their 40-hour flight on-board a military aircraft.

"We do make our concerns known to the United States that this kind of treatment can perhaps be avoided," the foreign secretary said in response to questions on the deportation.

He said the US policy of deporting illegal immigrants in restraints has been in place since 2012. "I don't think there was any protest. We don't have any record of any protest having been made about it," the foreign secretary said to a question on whether India had registered its protest on deportation of illegal immigrants in shackles in 2012.

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People take away metal items and electric wirings from the vandalised residence of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Bangladesh's former leader and the father of the country's ousted PM Sheikh Hasina, in Dhaka, on Friday

## Vandalism, arson engulf Bangladesh

Protesters attack houses of Awami League leaders

PTI, DHAKA: Protesters in Bangladesh have attacked and torched houses of leaders of deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League across the country, and murals of the country's founder Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were demolished and defaced in nearly two dozen districts, according to media reports.

The unrest sparked over a live online address by Hasina on Wednesday night, when protestors targeted the house of Sheikh Mujib.

A house of Awami League President Member Sheikh Selim in Dhaka's Banani was set on fire around 1:30 am on Friday.

Security concerns prevented the Fire Service vehicles from accessing the site until 2:45 am.

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## B'desh govt appeals for peace

PTI, DHAKA: Bangladesh's interim government led by Muhammad Yunus on Friday called for peace and urged citizens to immediately restore law and order.

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## More voters than adult populace in Maha: Rahul

PTI, NEW DELHI: Alleging "numerous irregularities" in the Maharashtra polls, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday claimed there were more registered voters than the entire state's adult population, and that more voters were added in five months between the Lok Sabha and state polls than in the five years before that.

## MAHARASHTRA POLLS

He also asserted that if the demand to the Election Commission by the state's opposition parties – Congress, Shiv Sena-UBT and NCP-SP – to be given centralised data of voters' list for the Lok Sabha elections 2024 and the assembly polls 2024, is not met, the next step would be to approach the judiciary.

The Election Commission said it will respond with full facts in writing and the procedural matrix uniformly adopted across the country.

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## Viral video helps nab tourists for attacking local at Sangolda

Team Herald

PANJIM: A viral video of Thursday's brutal attack on a Goan by some tourists on CHO-GM Road in Sangolda helped the Saligao Police nab the culprits late at night. The two assailants have been identified as Faiz Shaikh (23) and Arkan Shaikh (22), both from Nashik, Maharashtra.

On Thursday, Salvaram

Salgaonkar, a local from Anjuna, was involved in a road incident when his car, traveling from Porvorim to Saligao, collided with a two-wheeler ridden by tourists near Union Bank on CHO-GM Road. The skirmish quickly escalated into a brutal assault, leaving 52-year-old Salgaonkar helpless in the middle of the street.

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## HOOGLIGANS IN THE GARB OF TOURISTS

■ Salvaram Salgaonkar, a 52-year-old local from Anjuna, brutally assaulted by two tourists at Sangolda

■ Faiz Shaikh (23) and Arkan Shaikh (22) from Nashik, Maharashtra identified as culprits behind the attack

■ The assailants used helmets as weapons, repeatedly attacking Salgaonkar and vandalising his car before fleeing the scene

■ A motorist recorded the attack and shared it online. The video went viral, sparking outrage and leading to the arrest of the assailants

MAX. TEMP 33.4 °C  
MIN. TEMP 21.4 °C  
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No time for key issues in this jam-packed schedule!

## PARAGLIDING BAN IS NO SOLUTION

### Tourism dept has no safety checks for adventure sport yet

AUGUSTO RODRIGUES

KERI: The tragic death of a tourist and her paragliding instructor at Keri on January 18 has ignited a heated debate surrounding safety standards and the response from the Department of Tourism, which hastily suspended all paragliding activities across the state after the accident.

But was this just a knee-jerk reaction, and should the government be doing more to ensure safety protocols in adventure sports instead of reacting only after a mishap has happened?

The sudden suspension caught many sports enthusiasts off guard. Anil Madgavkar, founder and first president of the Paragliding Association of



We are working on new guidelines, and they should be ready soon. The suspension was not meant to end the sport but to ensure it operates on a safer path for both enthusiasts and operators

– Kedar Naik, Director of Tourism

Apart from Keri and Tiracol, there are other operators at Arambol's sweet water lake, who are working hand-in-glove with the authorities. Only when a tragedy occurs does everyone take notice

– Andrew Fernandes, Keri resident

India (PAI), responded with a letter to the Department, stating, "Paragliding is far safer than driving on our roads. Every day, hundreds of acci-

dents happen on the roads, with many fatalities. Yet, vehicles are not banned."

In response, senior officials within the Department of

Tourism, speaking on condition of anonymity, acknowledged the need for better safety protocols, saying, "We agree with Madgavkar's point.

However, we have suspended the sport until proper safety systems are implemented. As of now, there are no systems to test the equipment."

Madgavkar, in his letter to the Department of Tourism, criticized the knee-jerk reaction of suspending the sport. He pointed out that this was the first fatal paragliding accident in the past decade and that accidents, whether on roads, in the air, or on water, are typically caused by equipment failure or human error. "All accidents, including those in the air, are a result of either equipment failure or pilot error," Madgavkar said.

Locals, including Andrew Fernandes, also weighed in on the issue. "Apart from here and Tiracol, there are other operators at Arambol's sweet water

lake, who are working hand-in-glove with the authorities. Only when a tragedy occurs does everyone take notice," Fernandes said.

Madgavkar suggested that the solution lies in proper equipment inspection and certification, along with ensuring that pilots are adequately trained. In his letter to the Department, dated January 27, 2025, Madgavkar recommended that the government approach PAI to certify the equipment and pilots to avoid further accidents.

Officials in the Department of Tourism, speaking privately, agreed that comprehensive safety protocols are needed to minimize accidents.

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