

## Three days on, no FIR in Uday Bhembre case

Team Herald

**MARGAO:** Three days after former MLA and Opinion Poll activist Adv Uday Bhembre lodged a written complaint at the Fatorda police station following the threats, humiliation and warnings by Bajrang Dal men who landed up at his doorstep late on Friday, the police are yet to register an FIR.

The police inaction has been slammed by citizens, as the treatment of Bhembre has become a rallying call for supporters of free speech, who gathered at a massive rally in Margao on Sunday. Multiple activists that O Herald spoke to have reiterated that intimidation and threats are not part of Goan culture.

On Monday, police initiated a preliminary investigation and began recording statements. According to available information, the Fatorda police have

**“It is a clear case for registering an offence against the culprits. The police must determine whether it is a bailable or non-bailable offence, but they are obligated to register the case. A group gathering outside someone’s residence at night, engaging in trespassing, abuse and forming an unlawful assembly, constitutes a serious offence. Moreover, video evidence is available, leaving little room for further investigation – Cleofato Almeida Coutinho, Senior advocate**

taken statements from two individuals and collected a pen drive containing evidence related to the incident, which occurred on Friday night.

When contacted, Bhembre confirmed that the police had acknowledged his complaint and begun an initial inquiry. He noted that statements had been recorded and the pen drive taken as evidence, but no FIR had been filed.

Senior advocate Cleofato Almeida Coutinho emphasised that this case warrants an FIR. “It is a clear

case for registering an offence against the culprits. The police must determine whether it is a bailable or non-bailable offence, but they are obligated to register the case. A group gathering outside someone’s residence at night, engaging in trespassing, abuse and forming an unlawful assembly, constitutes a serious offence. Moreover, video evidence is available, leaving little room for further investigation,” he stated.

Bhembre who had initially decided to not go

to the police changed his mind a day after the incident. He had said, “I have realised it is not a question of my safety alone. Today if this happened to me, it can happen to anyone else, and that has to be stopped. The reason for filing this complaint is to ensure that the government takes action and also, the matter is on record. Tomorrow, the government can’t look the other way, saying that no one came to them with a complaint, which is why they didn’t act.” Bhembre filed a written complaint against Bajrang Dal activists led by Viraj Dessai of Cuncolim.

Meanwhile, the Akhil Gomantak Kshatriya Maratha Samaj Sanghatana has announced a dharna on Tuesday, March 4, at 5:30 pm at the Cuncolim Chief’s Memorial. The protest is in response to what they claim is a ‘derogatory’ video by Bhembre about Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.

### TWIST OF FATE



A float portraying Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Donald Trump forming a ‘Hitler - Stalin - Pact 2.0’ to squash Ukraine and its President Zelensky is pictured during the parade to celebrate Rose Monday (Rosenmontag) in Duesseldorf, western Germany, on Monday

## Apex Court says ‘forests being destroyed in Goa’

**Grants relief against forest conversion after Goa Foundation argues that conversion sanads a precursor to deforestation**

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Team Herald

**PANJIM:** The Supreme Court has acted again as the protector of Goa’s beleaguered forests under attack from the land mafia and mining lobby, as it passed an order granting interim relief against the conversion of large tracts identified as forest land by two expert committees.

“We know how forests are being destroyed in Goa,” observed the bench comprising Justice Abhay S Oka and Justice Ujjal Bhuyan on Monday, while passing its order on the land that is spread across 855 survey numbers.

This is the second time

### Don’t turn Goa into concrete jungle, SC tells State govt

in less than a month that the Apex Court has stood as a guard for Goa’s forests. On February 6, Supreme Court Justice Satish Chandra Sharma had remarked, “Please don’t turn Goa into a concrete jungle,” dismissing the State government’s Special Leave Petition (SLP) challenging the High Court’s order to impose a construction ban in several areas covered by the Outline Development Plan (ODP).

Monday’s Supreme Court intervention comes after a

petition filed by the environmental NGO Goa Foundation seeking a status quo order on lands identified as private forests by two expert committees – headed by VThomas and Francisco Araujo – in their 2018 reports. These reports, after extensive field visits, identified a total of 8.64 sq km of private forest land across North and South Goa, noting that 855 survey numbers were “final” private forest areas, with the rest categorized as “provisional”.

Senior Advocate Norma

Alvares, appearing for the Goa Foundation and assisted by Advocate Om D’Costa, argued that although no trees had been felled yet, the issuance of conversion sanads – official permits to change the land’s use – was a precursor to deforestation. She presented evidence of such a sanad being granted to the M/s Bhutani project in Sancoale, a plot that had been marked as a private forest by the expert committee.

The bench raised questions about how such conversion sanads could be issued while the matter was still under judicial review.

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## Pope suffers new crises, back on ventilation: Vatican

**AP, ROME:** Pope Francis suffered two new episodes of acute respiratory crises Monday and was put back on noninvasive mechanical ventilation, the Vatican said. Francis had inhaled “copious” amounts of mucus in another setback in what has become a more than two-week battle to overcome a complex respiratory infection and pneumonia.

In a late update, the Vat-



ican said the episode was caused by a “significant accumulation” of mucus in his lungs and bronchial spasms. “Two bronchoscopies were performed with the need for aspiration of copious secretions,” the Vatican said. Francis remained alert,

oriented and cooperated with medical personnel. The prognosis remained guarded.

Earlier Monday, Pope Francis issued a new message from the hospital as Vatican officials begged him to let his voice be heard after disappearing from public view for over two weeks as he recovers.

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### Indian woman on death row in Abu Dhabi executed

**PTI, NEW DELHI:** An Indian woman on death row in Abu Dhabi for the alleged murder of a four-month-old child has already been executed on February 15, the Delhi HC hearing her father’s plea about her well-being was informed on Monday. Shahzadi Khan was handed over to the Abu Dhabi police on February 10, 2023.

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## Parents protest April school start, flag flaws in NEP implementation

Team Herald

**PANJIM/ MARGAO:** Parents across Goa have voiced strong opposition to the decision to start the new academic year in April 2025, citing concerns over student well-being, teacher workload and inconsistencies in the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

On Monday, a delegation of parents met Director of the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) Meghana Shetgaonkar, urging the government to shift the academic year’s start date back to June.

They pointed out that final exams are set to conclude on March 28, leaving students with just three days before the new session begins. Parents emphasised that this schedule denies students much-needed time to relax, pursue extracurricular activities and spend time with family.

They also raised concerns over the rising summer temperatures and the lack of adequate cooling and water facilities in most schools. “With extreme heat conditions predicted by the



A delegation of parents which met Director of the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) Meghana Shetgaonkar, at Porvorim

### PARENTS SPEAK

■ Demand that the academic year begin in June instead of April, citing student well-being and extreme summer heat

■ Say students will have only three days between final exams (March 28) and the new school year, leaving little time for

rest and extracurricular activities

■ April is crucial for paper corrections, result preparation and planning, making an immediate restart impractical for teachers.

■ Argue that the April start contradicts the principles of NEP policies, which emphasise flexibility

IMD and a shortage of water in several areas, children will face unnecessary hardships,” a parent stated.

Teachers, too, are affected. “We raised points regarding difficulties which would be faced by teachers who have their regular April duties. They have to

manage paper corrections, finalising results and planning for the new academic year, all while accommodating the abrupt transition,” said Cecille Rodrigues, an activist and a parent who attended the meeting.

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### ALLAHBADIA ROW

#### Nothing like fundamental right on platter: SC

**PTI, NEW DELHI:** The Supreme Court on Monday said there was a duty on persons exercising fundamental rights and nothing like a “fundamental right on a platter”.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh made the profound remark while hearing the matter of podcaster Ranveer Allahbadia, who was allowed to resume “The Ranveer Show”.

“We know that some briefless people are writing some articles in the name of freedom of speech and expression. We know how to handle them also. In this country there is nothing like a fundamental right on a platter. The fundamental rights all flow by a duty and unless those people want to understand their duty, then we know how to deal with those kinds of elements,” Justice Surya Kant said.

Justice Surya Kant pointed out that one of the accused in the case went to Canada and spoke on the case.

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## Decibel fight setback: Govt U-turn on noise panel member

**Janie Crasto’s appointment as Noise Monitoring Committee member rejected**

AUGUSTO RODRIGUES

**VAGATOR/ PORVORIM:** The fight against persistent noise pollution in Vagator and Anjuna took an unexpected turn when the Goa government, on Monday, joined petitioner Desmond Alvares in abruptly rejecting Janie Crasto as a member of the Noise Monitoring Committee (NMC), leaving local residents shocked and disappointed.

The government had initially approved Crasto’s appointment but later reversed its decision. Advocate General Devidas Pangam defended the move, stating, “There will be a conflict of interest if she is made a member, as she has previously filed complaints against establishments playing loud music. Hence, it would not be fair to have her on the committee.”



The sudden reversal has fueled concerns among residents who had welcomed her selection. “When her name was accepted, we saw a ray of hope. Now, with her removal, I fear the High Court may have to take a stronger stance,” said Sheryl D’Souza.

Crasto, however, remained resolute. “The people of my village

know what I stand for. When you are good, the bad will always get upset. When I learned my name was accepted, I saw it as an act of God. I will continue to ensure that the less fortunate, the sick, and the elderly can sleep peacefully,” she asserted.

Amicus Curiae Nigel Costa Frias had initially proposed Janie Crasto, Jeremy Ferreira, and Inacio Fernandes for the NMC. The government immediately rejected Ferreira and Fernandes but accepted Crasto. However, the situation took a surprising turn when petitioner Alvares objected to her appointment, leading to her removal. Alvares attempted to persuade the Amicus Curiae to reconsider, but Costa Frias remained firm in his support for Crasto.

When contacted, Alvares told

O Herald, “She was incapable of dedicating her full time to the role, and she is also associated with tourism.”

The High Court intervened, with Justice M S Karnik urging the Amicus Curiae and the government to consider candidates from outside Anjuna and Vagator. “If no one from the village is accepted, then find someone who is honest and independent,” he advised. The court was also informed that two proposed candidates, Govind Dhargalkar and John Logan D’Souza, were deemed unsuitable.

Meanwhile, former NMC member Domingos Pereira had declined reappointment and suggested a non-practicing advocate from Calangute.

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**“The people of my village know what I stand for. When you are good, the bad will always get upset. When I learned my name was accepted, I saw it as an act of God. I will continue to ensure that the less fortunate, the sick, and the elderly can sleep peacefully – Janie Crasto, Anjuna resident**

**“She is incapable of dedicating her full time to the role and she is also associated with tourism – Desmond Alvares, petitioner**

MAX. TEMP 34.7 °C  
MIN. TEMP 23.5 °C

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Sign here only if idli-sambar is strictly off the menu!