

“The recruitment process is often not well-documented, leaving individuals vulnerable to exploitation and legal complications abroad. It is crucial that we ensure that our people are safeguarded from such exploitation, and that proper channels are in place to monitor and regulate these agencies — Sankalp Amonkar, Mormugao MLA

“Government should take action against wholesale liquor shops found open beyond permissible limits. Recently a panchayat member was assaulted by a native from Varanasi at Cortalim. There is a strong demand by the residents of Cortalim constituency to close wholesale liquor shops within the time permitted to them — Anton Vas, Cortalim MLA

“The government has decided to lease the indoor stadium to an event management company at a monthly rent of Rs 25.25 lakh to organise non-sports activities thereby depriving benefits to sportspersons and creating nuisance and disturbance at the Goa University campus — Cruz Silva, Velim MLA

OPPOSITION TURNS THE HEAT ON TOURISM MIN OVER FOREIGN TRIPS

Questions whether they benefit Goa or are a waste of taxpayers' money

Team Herald

PORVORIM: The Opposition members on Wednesday cornered Tourism Minister Rohan Khaunte in the Goa Legislative Assembly for spending crores of rupees on foreign trips.

However, Khaunte defended the Department of Tourism's participation, stressing the importance of Goa's presence at global platforms to boost the State's international tourism profile.

Quepem MLA Altone D'Costa raised concerns over the Department of Tourism's foreign trips, questioning their value and whether they truly benefit Goa or are simply a waste of taxpayers' money. He expressed his skepticism about the effectiveness of these international events in promoting Goa's tourism. He said that the government had spent Rs 1 crore on foreign trips and asked whether these trips were really to promote tourism or junkets.

In response, Khaunte emphasised that such participation is crucial for showcasing Goa to a broader audience and attracting more tourists and for positioning.

BIG FIGHT

He also reassured the House that a proper tendering process was followed for all foreign trips undertaken by the department, ensuring transparency and accountability in these expenditures. This exchange highlights the ongoing debate about the value of international engagement and the responsible use of public funds in promoting Goa's tourism.

The Minister told the House that agencies involved in these initiatives are empanelled under A and B categories, selected through a structured ten-

TEMPERS FLARE OVER 'INCORRECT AND INADEQUATE DATA' ON TOURISM

PANJIM: The Goa Legislative Assembly on Wednesday witnessed a heated debate between Tourism Minister Rohan Khaunte and Sant Andre MLA Viresh Borkar with the latter alleging "incorrect and inadequate data" in answers to his starred question on the tourism plan to attract high-end tourists in the State.

Borkar walked into the well of the house in protest. Tempers flared when Borkar, who had tabled a starred question on the tourism plan to attract high-end tourists in the State, sought to know the details of the amount spent on upgradation of tourism infrastructure by the Tourism Department in the last three years. He demanded to

know whether new tourist landmarks have been identified and developed. But Khaunte said that information cannot be furnished in view of Rule 37 of The Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business of the Goa Legislative Assembly. The MLA was annoyed when the Minister stated that country-wise data from 2023 onwards was not available as the source agencies submitted only the consolidated data of international tourist arrivals. Borkar also sought to know how much amount was spent on road shows, events, study tours, social media promotion, television and radio and which markets were tapped to attract high-end tourists to the State.

billings were yet to be settled since 2023 and therefore the expenses had not been reflected in the reply. He also said that the bills of the travel by the Secretary (Tourism) were also not settled and pending due to political clearance issues.

Pointing to decline in tourists from Scandinavian countries, Benaulum MLA Venzy Viegas asked whether the government has taken feedback from tourists from Scandinavian countries on what Goa needs to do to bring back high-end tourists.

The Minister said that the government is actively promoting tourism beyond the beaches, with a strong focus on developing hinterland destinations. He also disclosed the government's plan to introduce the Airline Incentives Scheme only for emerging markets aiming to boost Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTA) and establish Goa as a premier travel hub, attracting high-spending visitors.

der process for overseas engagements undertaken by the department.

According to the Incredible India 2024 report, the United States (US) ranks second in tourist footfall across India and fourth highest in Goa, highlighting the State's growing appeal

among global travellers. Opposition MLAs highlighted that between 2019 and 2023, Rs 40 crore were spent from the State exchequer on foreign trips by the Department. They also sought to know whether these foreign trips were approved through a ten-

dering process or nomination basis or post-facto approval.

The opposition members also stated that the Minister had not furnished details of his OSD (officer on special duty) who travelled foreign countries. The Minister told them that the

Law-abiding public need not panic over HC order, says CM

Says if need be will bring in law to protect the rights of affected people

Team Herald

PANJIM: Pointing out that there is distinction between illegal and irregular constructions, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on Wednesday asserted that there is no need for law abiding general public to panic over the order delivered by the High Court of Bombay at Goa in public interest litigation (PIL) suo motu dated March 6.

ILLEGAL CONSTRUCTIONS

Reacting to the matter raised by Leader of the Opposition Yuri Alemao in the Legislative Assembly on Tuesday, the Chief Minister said that various authorities have been directed to take certain action in compliance some of the authorities have initiated certain steps.

"At this juncture I would like to point out that there is no need for the law abiding general public to panic and that we need to make a distinction between illegal and irregular constructions," said CM.

"We are examining the

“Various authorities have been directed to take certain action in compliance some of the authorities have initiated certain steps. At this juncture I would like to point out that there is no need for the law abiding general public to panic and that we need to make a distinction between illegal and irregular constructions — Pramod Sawant, Chief Minister

order further and wherever required we will explore the possibility of bringing in law/legislation to protect the rights of the affected people, if felt necessary," Sawant said.

In compliance with the High Court order on March 6, the Directorate of Panchayats and Department of Municipal Administration have issued instructions village panchayats, and CCP and municipal councils respectively, across the State to identify and initiate actions against such illegal constructions.

ZERO HOUR

Legislator urges govt not to lease Bambolim indoor stadium

PORVORIM: Velim MLA Cruz Silva on Wednesday urged the government to withdraw its decision to hand over the operation of Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Indoor Stadium at Goa University campus, Bambolim, to an event management company. Silva who raised this issue during Zero Hour in the Legislative Assembly, said that the government has decided to lease the indoor stadium to an event management company at a monthly rent of Rs 25.25 lakh to organise non-sports activities thereby depriving benefits to sportspersons and creating nuisance and disturbance at the Goa University campus.

'Licence fee hike additional burden on bar owners'

PORVORIM: Mormugao MLA Sankalp Amonkar on Wednesday said that 100 per cent increase in license fees charged on the licence issued and also on its renewals was adding pressure and additional financial burden on the bar owners in the State. Amonkar said that as per the notification issued by the government in June 2024, there is 100 per cent additional licence fees charged on the licence issued and also on its renewals. The bar owners across the State are facing competitions from the wholesale outlets, apart from paying for other licences from the authorities such as local bodies, food and drugs, legal metrology, electricity, etc. The Bar Owners who are covered under this notification also face stiff competition from the ones who are not covered in view of no uniformity. He urged the government to immediately withdraw the notification and to safeguard their livelihood.

Govt must regulate overseas recruiting agencies: MLA

PORVORIM: Expressing his concern over duping of youths seeking jobs abroad, Mormugao MLA Sankalp Amonkar on Wednesday urged the government to monitor and regulate the overseas recruiting agencies.

Raising the matter during Zero Hour in the Legislative Assembly, Amonkar drew the attention of the House to the growing concerns of the people regarding the activities of recruitment agencies in the State of Goa, particularly those involved in facilitating overseas employment for our citizens.

He said that there has been an alarming increase in reports of some agencies taking advantage of the desperation of our youth and job-seekers. These agencies are allegedly engaging in unethical practices, including charging exorbitant fees, providing misleading information about job offers, and failing to fulfil contractual agreements with the workers. As a result, many Goans have found themselves stranded in foreign countries with no support or means of return.

Amonkar said, "The recruitment process is not well-documented, leaving individuals vulnerable to exploitation and legal complications abroad. It is crucial that we ensure that our people are safeguarded."

Tourist Info Mgmt System must for hotels: Min

Team Herald

PORVORIM: Tourism Minister Rohan Khaunte on Wednesday announced that the TIME (Tourist Information Management System) software will be mandatory for all hotels and accommodations starting April 1 this year, ensuring comprehensive data collection on tourist arrivals in the State.

In the last quarter of 2024 (from October to December), Goa recorded 100 per cent occupancy, with flights operating at full capacity, contributing to an average tourism growth of 22 per cent in 2024, Khaunte said.

He added that this surge was a result of proactive engagement with stakeholders, strategic discussions with Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, and a commitment to prioritising quality over quantity in tourism.

By leveraging real-time data analytics, the government will gain deep insights into visitor demographics, travel patterns, and emerging trends, allowing for strategic interventions and a seamless hospitality eco-system.

GOA BUDGET 2025-26: WHAT'S ON THE ANVIL?

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

■ **Rs 640 crore** for projects under Goa State Infrastructure Development Corporation

■ **Rs 40 crore** for state museum complex

■ **Rs 20 crore** for new bus stand in Curchorem

■ Green Corridors on highways to enhance safety and aesthetics

HERITAGE AND CULTURE

■ **Rs 71 crore** to restore Colvale Fort, Chapora Fort, and Mormugao Fort and other structures

■ **Rs 14 crore** to upgrade Adil Shah Palace and construct Mario Miranda gallery in Old Goa

■ Goa State Mission for Manuscripts to be set up

SOCIAL WELFARE AND PUBLIC SERVICES

■ Goa Happiness Index to measure public happiness and well-being

■ Digitisation of panchayat-related payments to ease the process for villagers

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

■ Regularisation of unauthorised constructions up to 1,000 sqms in urban areas and 600 sq mt in rural areas

■ A new job portal for local job opportunities, with exclusive access for Goans for the first seven days

■ Unified pension



AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES, AND ANIMAL CARE

■ **Rs 300 crore** for agriculture: Focus on agro-tourism, including the establishment of Goa Cashew Board, Bamboo Board & Poultry Board

■ A new veterinary college and mobile animal welfare clinics

DIGITAL INNOVATIONS

■ One app for all public services

■ Cyber Security Centre of Excellence to be set up

■ Global capability centre at Verna and preferential policy for Goan IT companies

HEALTHCARE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

■ **Rs 993 crore** allocated for Goa Medical College

■ More ambulances and day care cancer centres

■ **Rs 5 crore** for district hospital upgrades

scheme for govt staff, assuring them 50% of average last pay

■ New Drinking Water Department to be set up

New Mopa city to be developed

■ Laptops for government middle school classes

■ Uniform colour code for government buildings

“The figures are not real. It is a deficit budget and he will be exposed. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation projects the growth rate of State's GSDP at 9 per cent while the budget says that it is 14.7 per cent. All the figures are fudged. This is the reason why govt did not allow Opposition MLAs to speak; CM spoke for almost 2.30 hrs but did not allow even 2 mins for opposition to speak. This is a fraud budget — Vijai Sardesai, GFP president and Fatorda MLA

“This budget has potential, but potential alone doesn't fill empty stomachs or fix broken roads. Goans don't ask for miracles—they ask for what's promised. I urge the government to move beyond numbers and deliver a Goa where growth isn't just a statistic, but a lived reality. Let 2025-26 be the year when we bridge the gap between intent and impact. I challenge the govt to prove that every rupee reaches the ground—not just the balance sheets — Capt Venzy Viegas, Benaulum MLA

Economic survey pegs growth at 14%

Team Herald

PANJIM: The Economic Survey 2024-25, tabled in the Goa Legislative Assembly by Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, has projected Goa's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) at Rs 1,21,309.02 crore for 2024-25, with an anticipated growth of 13.87 per cent.

According to the report, the growth is mainly due to anticipated resumption of mining and quarrying activities after auctioning of mining leases in the State and various infrastructure projects undertaken by the govt.

Incidentally, in 2023-24, the GSDP grew by 13.73%, reaching Rs 1,06,532.57 crore. Per capita income has also risen from Rs 4.85 lakh in 2019-20 to Rs 6.74 lakh in

2023-24, states the Survey. It said that the Credit Deposit Ratio (CDR) of the State as on September 30, 2024, was 32.66 per cent, an increase from 31.86 per cent during the same period in the previous year.

The Survey said as per budget estimates 2024-25, the revenue surplus was Rs 1,720.19 crore, the Fiscal Deficit estimated to be Rs 3,149.47 crore and the capital receipts estimated at Rs 4,326.66 crore.

The internal debt of the state for the year 2024-25 was estimated at Rs 3,750.20 crore, the Survey said.

It said the State witnessed a declining trend in decadal growth of population which stood at 8.23 per cent in 2011 Census as compared to 15.21% in 2001 Census.



Panchayat Minister Mauvin Godinho speaks on the Goa Panchayati Raj Amendment Bill



Fatorda MLA Vijai Sardesai alleged that private universities coming to Goa are real estate scams



Quepem MLA Altone D'Costa raises concerns over the Tourism Department's foreign trips