

# Varca cabbies object to 'outsiders', threaten 'action' against hotels

Scaling up their turf war, taxi drivers accuse hotels of encouraging app-based taxi services; allege that taxi operators from outside the village carry weapons in their vehicles

Team Herald

MARGAO: Local taxi operators from Varca have issued stern warnings to hotel managements and authorities over the increasing presence of outside taxi operators and app-based services in the coastal village, claiming these external operators are depriving them of their livelihood.

At the centre of the dispute are taxi operators serving hotels, who allege that hotel managements are colluding with taxi app aggregators, allowing outside drivers to pick up guests while local operators remain idle. The operators expressed particular concern about a newer, unnamed taxi app that has recently gained traction in the area.

While speaking to reporters, Jose Afonso, a former

“Taxi drivers from outside Varca collect hotel guests right under the nose of local taxi operators, making it difficult for them to eke a living. Even when the hotel customers book taxis of local operators, they are later cancelled as outside taxis come and pick them up. This only goes to show the hand of the hotel managements in support of outside taxis

– Jose Afonso, former Varca sarpanch,

Varca sarpanch, said taxi drivers from outside Varca collect hotel guests right under the nose of local taxi operators, making it difficult for them to eke out a living. "Even when the hotel customers book taxis of local operators, they are later cancelled as outside taxis come and pick them up. This only goes to show the hand of the hotel managements in support of outside taxis," he said.

Afonso added that these hotels had established themselves through the blessings and support of local Varca vil-

lagers after promising to provide employment opportunities, including taxi services. "I know that these hotels had come after promises made by the managements to support local unemployed youth," he stated.

While speaking to the media, another tourist taxi operator, Britto Fernandes, echoed similar sentiments, saying that they hardly get any business with outside taxis picking up the hotel guests.

The situation has reportedly escalated to include intimidation tactics. Local opera-

“The outside taxi operators are the real mafia as they come and deny business to the local operators. The patience of the local tourist taxi operators is running out. Just imagine that these outside taxi drivers are carrying weapons with them. The government should intervene to protect the interests of the locals

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tors allege that outside taxi drivers are carrying weapons such as knives and swords in their vehicles. "The management is hand in glove with these private taxi operators. It's high time the authorities take strict action to prevent further inconvenience and possible violence," local operators stated.

Taking up cudgels for the Varca tourist taxi operators, local activist Warren Alemao said the outside taxi operators are the real mafia as they come and deny business to the local operators. "The patience of the

local tourist taxi operators is running out. Just imagine that these outside taxi drivers are carrying weapons with them. The government should intervene to protect the interests of the locals," he added.

The operators are demanding enforcement of existing agreements that mandate dedicated taxi stands for local drivers at hotels and have warned that if their concerns aren't addressed promptly, they may resort to more 'direct action', including potentially blocking hotel gates.

## Only 18 villas approved, not 90, as alleged: Mandrem sarpanch

Team Herald

PERNEM: Mandrem Sarpanch Rajesh Mandrekar on Saturday clarified that only 18 villas—not 90 as alleged by locals—were recently granted approval.

Mandrekar stated that a file seeking permission for 18 villas in Ward No. 7 was received six months ago, along with another proposal for seven different types of villas in Ward No. 9. Additionally, he said a separate proposal to approve 38 villas was also received around the same time.

“All applicants have submitted affidavits declaring they will not use water from within Mandrem village jurisdiction due to the existing water scarcity and will make their own arrangements

– Rajesh Mandrekar, Mandrem sarpanch

He emphasised that the project proponent had secured all necessary permissions, and that if the village panchayat had withheld approval, the applicant could have approached the Director of Panchayats for authorisation.

"All applicants have submitted affidavits declaring they will not use water

from within Mandrem village jurisdiction due to the existing water scarcity and will make their own arrangements," he added.

The sarpanch acknowledged that although the gram sabha had earlier passed a resolution against mega projects, the current proposals were approved solely because they had

obtained all requisite permissions from relevant authorities.

Earlier, a group of villagers met with the sarpanch and other panchayat members, demanding greater transparency and stricter environmental scrutiny before granting such permissions. They urged the sarpanch to put all approvals on hold until their objections are discussed and resolved.

The villagers expressed strong opposition to the recent clearances granted for luxury villa projects in the village.

## Cops intensify action on touts, drinking on beaches

PANJIM: In an effort to maintain law and order in Goa's tourist zones, the North Goa District Police, in coordination with the Tourist Police, have intensified action against touting and public nuisance activities.

"We will not tolerate any touting activity," said Superintendent of Police (North) Akshat Kaushal, noting that daily enforcement drives are being carried out across both North and South Goa districts.

So far, over 1,000 individuals have been identified as suspects in connection with various violations. Among these, 193 have been booked for drinking in public, 545 cases have been filed for littering, and 14 individuals have been charged with driving on the beach.

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## Taxi trouble: UK family harassed in Varca

She explained they had come to Goa on April 17 for her daughter's wedding, and were returning to the UK via Gujarat. "We booked a private taxi as we felt comfortable. We didn't want to book with the hotel."

Her daughter said, "It was a horrible experience. It was a bit scary with all the people fighting outside the hotel. The hotel staff didn't help us at all. No one came to assist or get involved. All this was happening right outside their property."

Describing how, over the previous few days, they found it difficult to get private taxis in Goa, the male tourist said, "They want you to pay exorbitant rates. And if you don't book from their stand, they cause trouble. You have to get their taxis, only their taxis, and they can charge you whatever they like."

This is not the first time a visiting tourist has complained about being harassed by local taxi operators if they choose to book an online taxi on

their own. While there have also been complaints about the performance of online taxi aggregators in Goa, the big concern amongst those who have experienced these issues is that they are being forced to take a decision and not allowed any choice.

Tourists in the group emphasised that the incident reflected poorly on Goa and even the country's reputation as a tourist destination.

Meanwhile, the private taxi operators who had been hired by the family denied any wrongdoing. The operators said they were directly booked by the guests and had not come to the hotel to solicit customers.

"We were only there to pick up the passengers who had booked with us," said a driver. "The fight started when we were stopped by them (the Varca taxi drivers who have a local taxi stand near the resort). We didn't start anything — we were defending ourselves and asking why we were being blocked."

## Pernem police nab linesman accused of molesting minor

Team Herald

PERNEM: The Pernem police on Saturday arrested Sameer Korgaonkar, a resident of Khajne, Pernem, in connection with the recent assault of a minor girl. He was apprehended from Bhedshi village in Sindhudurg district, Maharashtra.

Korgaonkar, employed as a lineman with the Electricity Department, had been absconding since April 15. The incident occurred on April 14 at approximately 6:30 pm in Khajne, when the accused allegedly abused the minor girl, made de-



The youth, working as an electricity linesman, had been absconding since April 15. The Pernem police tracked him down to Sindhudurg in Maharashtra, and arrested him on Saturday

rogatory remarks about her modesty, and deliberately grabbed her T-shirt collar, pulling her towards him.

When the 17-year-old girl resisted, Korgaon-

kar reportedly caught her hand and tore her T-shirt, thereby outraging her modesty. He further threatened her with dire consequences, including death.

A case has been registered against Korgaonkar under Sections 352, 79, 74, 75, and 351(3) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), as well as relevant provisions of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act, 2015, and Section 8(2) of the Goa Children's Act.

Pernem PI Sachin Lokre is conducting further investigations.

## Balancing conservation & community: The debate around Nanda Lake's Ramsar status

Team Herald

MARGAO: For 23-year-old architect Rachel Fernandes, water is no longer just a utility—it's a teacher. And nowhere did this lesson unfold more powerfully than at Nanda Lake, a 42-hectare wetland in her home State of Goa.

Growing up in Marcela, Fernandes was surrounded by marshy landscapes, but it wasn't until her thesis at Goa College of Architecture and research for her Goa Water Stories project, that she truly grasped their value. Now pursuing a master's in architecture and sustainability at the University of Kent, she's made it her mission to reframe how we view wetlands—not as wastelands, but as vital, living infrastructure.

"Wetlands like Nanda Lake regulate floods, support biodiversity, and sustain livelihoods through fishing and farming," she says. "But they're vanishing under the pressure of development, and that's a conversation Goa needs to have."



Yet for many residents, the Ramsar designation brought more anxiety than pride.

"There's been very little consultation with those who live off this land. People fish here, grow rice, and rely on the lake during the dry season," explains Fernandes, pointing out that a top-down decision, even with good intentions, can feel like an imposition.



Scan the QR code to experience Rachel Fernandes and Ryan Bhengra's project, 'Nanda Lake- Goa's first Ramsar site'



Designated a Ramsar site in 2022, Nanda Lake is located in Cacora, Quepem, in South Goa. It's among the state's largest wetlands, sitting near a Zuari River tributary. Intermittent freshwater marshes feed into a sluice gate system that balances flooding and flow—playing a critical role in local water management.

Plans to build a wetland research and observation centre at Nanda have heightened tensions. Villagers worry that increased tourism and institutional oversight will restrict access or disrupt traditions. Fernandes encountered this unease firsthand during a conversation with a local fisherman—one that left a lasting impression.

"He had no formal education, but his ecological knowledge was profound. He could describe how fish populations have declined, how the water quality has changed, and how the marshes helped absorb monsoon floods. His understanding came not from textbooks, but from a lifetime of experience. His thoughts reminded me that genuine sustainability combines modern



understanding and traditional wisdom," she recalls.

It was a reminder that sustainability isn't just science—it's stewardship. And while modern conservation tools matter, they must align with community knowledge and practices that have kept these ecosystems alive for generations.

Today, Nanda Lake faces a familiar litany of threats: invasive species, garbage pollution, and overfishing. Shrimp farming and aquaculture bring economic benefits but can severely damage wetland systems. Meanwhile, the slow conversion of marshland into farmland or real estate—often with the help of dykes and drains—has reduced the lake's capacity to manage floods or sustain biodiversity.

"My research has changed

The Ramsar tag, granted under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, aims to protect fragile ecosystems like marshes, lakes, and mangroves from unsustainable development and degradation. It is named after the Iranian city where the convention was signed in 1971. In 2022, Nanda Lake earned this recognition

Nanda Lake is a birder's paradise. Rich in biodiversity, it provides a habitat for a variety of migratory waterbirds, like the Common Kingfisher, Black-headed Ibis, Wire-tailed Swallow, Red-wattled Lapwing, Intermediate Egret, Little Cormorant, Lesser Whistling Duck, Brahminy Kite, and Bronze-winged Jacana

the way I see water," Fernandes says. "It's not just something we use—it's something that holds ecosystems together. Wetlands store carbon, filter pollutants, and support livelihoods. But once we start carving them up, the damage is hard to undo."

Her dream for Goa? A future where development doesn't bulldoze heritage and ecology in the name of progress.

"We need to stop seeing wetlands as obstacles. They are our buffers, our safety nets. If we lose them, we lose more than water—we lose balance," she says.

Goa Water Stories is a collaboration with the Living Waters Museum, the Centre for Public Policy and Governance at the Goa Institute of Management, the Goa University and the Sunaparanta Goa Centre for the Arts.

## Filicide in Valpoi? Father-son duo arrested for killing younger son

Team Herald

VALPOI: In a dramatic twist to the murder of 24-year-old Shravan Barve, the Valpoi Police on Saturday evening arrested his father Devidas Barve and elder brother Uday Barve, 34, for their alleged involvement in the crime.

Earlier in the day, the police had arrested a 43-year-old man, Vassudev Ozekar, a resident of Ambede in Nagargao. During sustained interrogation, Ozekar reportedly broke down and confessed to his role in the murder. Crucially, he disclosed that the deceased's father Devidas and elder brother Uday were also involved. According to police sources, Ozekar was employed

by Devidas, who is a landlord based in Honda.

While the motive behind the murder is yet to be confirmed, police said there had been frequent disputes between Shravan and his father in the past. Shravan had been living separately in a farmhouse at Valpoi, while Devidas and Uday resided in Honda.

The investigation gained momentum following the discovery of Shravan's body under suspicious circumstances on April 15. His body was found dumped in the bushes near the Hanuman Temple at Ambede in Nagargao. A post-mortem examination revealed that Shravan had died due to compression of the neck, confirming death by strangulation.

As part of the probe, the police had earlier detained and questioned as many as 18 individuals, including several family members, in connection with the case. Though most were released after initial questioning, police indicated that they could be summoned again as the investigation unfolds.

The breakthrough in the case came less than 24 hours after a group of Shravan's family members and concerned villagers staged a protest march to the Valpoi Police Station on Friday evening. They had demanded the immediate arrest of those responsible for the murder and action against any attempts to shield the accused.

## Chaos and disappointment at Margao market as shoppers scramble to buy beef for Easter meal

Team Herald

MARGAO: Margao witnessed chaotic scenes on Saturday morning as an unexpected beef shortage disrupted Easter preparations. Local meat shops, especially those at the South Goa Planning and Development Authority (SG-PDA) market, were overwhelmed by crowds hoping to purchase beef, only to find supplies severely limited.

Despite arriving early, many customers returned home empty-handed, expressing frustration and accusing vendors of not providing prior notice about the shortfall.

"We had customers lining up as early as 6:30 a.m., but the supply we received was nowhere close to meeting the demand," said Rahim Bepari, a vendor at the SG-PDA market. "Our beef consignment arrived around 7:30 a.m., and within two hours, we had to close shop."

The shortage led to long queues and rising tempers outside several beef outlets



across Margao. Many said such disruptions have become a recurring issue during festivals. "This happens too often," said Camilo D'Souza, a visibly upset customer. "We come early to avoid the rush, but even then, there's no guarantee we'll get what we need. It's extremely frustrating during festivals when beef is an essential part of our celebration."

Another resident, Romaldo Dias, stressed the cultural and emotional importance of beef during Easter. "For many Goan households, Easter isn't complete without beef on the table.

The authorities need to treat this as more than just a supply issue — it affects our tradition and joy."

According to vendors, beef supply to South Goa has been inconsistent in recent months. While the reasons remain unclear, some suspect regulatory restrictions, logistical delays, or reduced availability from suppliers. Consumers are now calling for government intervention to ensure a more reliable supply, particularly during religious and cultural festivals when demand peaks.