

Goa taxi drivers' strike hits tourists hard

Tourists taxis in Goa stayed off the roads for the third consecutive day Sunday after a tiff with private tour operators, affecting a large number of tourists traveling to and within the state.

Taxi drivers throughout Goa are on a strike since Friday protesting against private tour operators conducting excursion trips for foreigners, which the taxi drivers claim is affecting their livelihood.

Florence Jones, a 29-year-old tourist who alighted at the Dabolim airport, had a tough time reaching Calangute, a major tourist hub in north Goa.

'There were no taxis about. There were some motor-cycle taxis, which are unsafe for long distance travel. There were two yellow and black taxis outside the airport who were trying to fleece passengers. I paid Rs.2,500 for a ride to Calangute, which normally costs Rs.900,' she said.

There were many others like Florence who found it difficult getting transportation from railway stations and bus terminals as well.

'Why is this happening right in the middle of the tourist season? Doesn't Goa need tourists anymore?' asked a harried Gaurav Chopra, as he and his family scoured the bus terminal at Mapusa for a taxi to take him to Anjuna Sunday morning.

The stand-off between taxi drivers and tour operators goes back to the 1990s and successive governments have been unable to solve the issue.

The current stand-off has created a fissure in the government, with state Public Works Department Minister Churchill Alemao pitching his weight behind the taxi drivers, targeting Chief Minister Digambar Kamat and Tourism Minister Mickky Pacheco for not solving the problem.

A delegation of the striking Tourist Taxis Owners and Drivers Association met Kamat Saturday night, but there was no solution in sight.

'We are the sons of the soils. The tour operators are depriving us of our income by conducting tours for foreigners. We want these tours to stop. Tour operators should only pick up passengers from the airport and drop them back,' association spokesperson George Fernandes told IANS.

'We have been assured that the tourism minister will meet us on Monday and find a solution,' Fernandes said.

But thousands of tourists traveling to Goa have been put to hardship thanks to the ongoing tussle between tour operators and taxi drivers.

The situation took an ugly turn Friday when taxi drivers threw stones on travel operator-run tourist vehicles carrying domestic and foreign tourists in several parts of the state.

Ralph De Souza, president of the Travel and Tourism Association of Goa, condemned the incident and said: 'We are already reeling under the effects of the [Mumbai](#) terror strikes. Such lawlessness will further cut down the number of tourists coming to Goa.'

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