

Panjim: Chief minister Laxmikant Parsekar on Tuesday raised the issue of Russian tourists in Goa indulging in illegal activities, including running businesses sans the mandatory visa, with the consul general of Russian Federation in Mumbai, Alexey Novikov. Alexey, along with Aline Novikov and honorary consul of the Russian Federation in Goa, Victor Albuquerque, had paid the CM a courtesy call. Parsekar said he raised various issues, including that of the illegal activities. "Russians arriving in Goa on tourist visas should not be involved in businesses," he said he told Alexey. There have been several instances in past tourism seasons of fallouts between locals and Russians, on account of the latter running restaurants, pubs, taxi services etc. This is especially in the northern coastal belt of Pernem, which includes the CM's constituency, Mandrem.

Parsekar said around three lakh Russians visit the state during the season and some are involved in businesses, illegally, which eat into the earnings of locals involved legally in tourism-related services. "I told him that Russians are running taxis, running restaurants, doing business, the only thing left is for them to become by voters," Parsekar said he quipped.

Alexey requested the CM to withdraw cases, including criminal, against Russian nationals, to which Parsekar said he asked for specific cases that the government could examine.

Alexey also requested the state government to acquire land for the construction of a chapel in Goa so that Russian tourists, predominantly orthodox Christians, can go to and pray. Christmas, celebrated by Russians on January 6, is a big celebration among those holidaying in the state.

While Russians are a close second to Brits in the number of foreign visitors Goa receives, several are long-term visitors who have settled in the coastal belt of North Goa, particularly Morjim. As per police information, some are also involved in illegal activities, including the supply of narcotic drugs.

The recent parliamentary consultative committee meeting on coastal security, chaired by Union home minister Rajnath Singh, had taken note of the increasing activities of Russians and Israelis in Goa, which may be dangerous to coastal security.

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