

India's Second off-shore Casino Based in South in Trouble

Panaji: India's second off-shore casino based in south Goa is in trouble with the locals, in no mood to accept the vessel, which is hindering the fishing trawlers.

"The casino will adversely affect the livelihood of local fishermen, whose trawlers wade through the narrow river strip where the casino vessel is scheduled to be stationed," Elvino D'Silva, chairman, Assolna-Velim-Cavelosim-Betul (AVCB) traditional fishermen, stated.

The 13-metre-long luxury catamaran converted into live gaming casino by Hotel Leela Ventures will be the second off-shore floating casino in this tourist state, which permits gambling dens in the water.

The first casino, Caravela run by Advani Pleasure Cruise Company Ltd, is also based in Goa, in the waters of Mandovi River here.

Goa chief secretary J P Singh, said that the government has heard the agitators and the venture operators and will give its decision only after examining the issue thoroughly.

The second casino, licensed by the state government in September 2006, was supposed to be launched in this month. But the locals have their own apprehensions about this venture, which, according to them, would encroach upon their traditional fishing business.

The casino is planned in River Sal running across Cavelossim village in South Goa where Leela owns their hotel property.

"Around 800 fishermen operate around the area in River Sal. It

will affect the moment of fishing trawlers (boats),'' feared Edwin Barretto, sarpanch, Cavellossim panchayat.

The agitators in a novel protest on Independence Day had blocked the river by queuing their canoes and trawlers in the river. The struggle got a shot in arm when local Church came in full support of the agitating fishermen.

''No government has right to remain in office if it has no interest in the welfare of the citizens,'' Fr Mavrick Fernandes, executive secretary, Council for social justice and peace, which is a wing of Goa church, stated.

The priests from neighbouring villages of Assolna, Ambelim, Velim, Tolleacanto, Baradi and Betul have also joined the agitation, which comes a major boost for the agitators and set back for the casino.

The locals have also objected to the dredging activity to accommodate the casino vessel stating that it will affect the rich marine ecology. ''Many people get shell fish in the river bed... we will be affecting it severely,'' Fr Fernandes said.

While locals are up in arm against this proposed venture, the tourist taxi association (beach hotels) south Goa have come in full support of the casino.

''We support the move of the government to allow floating casinos in Goa, especially the floating casino in Cavellossim, in the River Sal,'' media advertisement released by association read.

The advertisement, published on all the major newspapers in the state, states since the government has considered, tourism as an industry these kind of projects indirectly help the local people.

''Taxi owners from south Goa will benefit as this will generate lot of business for the taxi drivers,'' it adds.