

Arrival of Off Shore Casino Hubs Make Panaji Port Congested

Panaji – With Panaji port turning into an off shore casino hub, the ships carrying iron ore have complained about the congestion of their traditional pathway especially a narrow stretch in the Mandovi river.

The Mandovi canal, adjacent to the capital city of Panaji, a point where Mandovi river meets Arabian sea, currently has four off shore casino boats anchored in it.

This is in addition to the existing fleet of river cruises, ferry boats, hover crafts, water sport boats, yatches, fishing trawlers and feeder boats which are crowded along the narrowest strip of the river.

The iron ore carrying huge vessels, popularly known as barges, have complained to the government that such a congestion adversely affect their operations with the possibility mishap looming large.

„We are not against anyone’s commercial interests. What we want is that off shore casinos should anchor in the sea and not in the river. As per their licence conditions, they should operate five nautical miles off shore,“ All Goa Barge owners association president Atul Jadhav said.

He said that the association has already represented to the state government listing out the inconvenience caused to the barges traversing through Mandovi canal.

Around 150 iron ore loaded barges use this stretch of water to reach to the trans-shipper anchored mid-sea. „Barges cannot break their speed in water alike car. The response time is

more. If we want to stop the vessel, we need to reverse the engine," he explained.

Huge barges, at times 75 metres long, invariably dash against the vessel, if someone crosses its pathway. In the recent incident, two fishing trawlers were badly damaged while one trawler had sunk last year after hitting the barge.

The barge operation is major component of iron ore exports with around four lac tone of ore transported through them in Panaji outer harbour. The statistics available from Goa mineral ore exporters association reveals that Goa exports 30 lac tone of iron ore, of which 13 lac is through Panaji port.

Major portion is exported through Mormugao port trust, one of India's biggest port located 40 kms away from Panaji.

With political opposition to off shore casinos gathering momentum, the objections by barge owners is adding up to the anti-off shore casino moment.

„We fully agree that load on river Mandovi has increased. This is our concern as well," Lyndon Monteiro, officer on special duty to minister of ports, Fransisco Pacheco, said.

The port ministry is an authority to allow anchoring of the vessels in the port jurisdiction. „We have given them permission only after home ministry has cleared licences to them," Monteiro said replying to a query about increasing off shore casino vessels.

He said that the vessels, as per licence conditions, should operate five nautical miles in the sea, and can be anchored in the port temporarily.