

No problems with more offshore casinos in Goa: Congress

Panaji: The Congress' Goa unit does not have a problem in opening up the state's coast to several more offshore casinos, as long as the vessels are berthed in the Arabian Sea, a party spokesperson Thursday said.

Addressing a press conference, party spokesman Vishnu Wagh said that the Congress was for the offshore casino industry, as long as the common man was not affected.

„With the offshore casinos parked in the Mandovi, there is congestion and pollution in the river, which affects the common man. If they move into the sea, the Congress will not have a problem as the common man will cease to be affected,“ Wagh said.

Chief Minister Digambar Kamat and Home Minister Ravi Naik had both skipped questions relating to the exact number of casinos, which would be allowed to in Goa's waters.

Ahead of the Lok Sabha polls next month, the state government has been under fire from the opposition and civil society groups for pursuing a pro-casino policy.

While the Congress-led coalition government had earlier maintained that only five casinos would be allowed by the Goa government, it subsequently issued licences to seven operators. The casino debate has taken a more aggressive turn after Kamat said Tuesday, that he could not put a ceiling on the number of casinos in Goa. There are presently six offshore casinos operating in Goa, with another vessel expected to be in operation soon.

Meanwhile, criticizing the BJP for dragging the name of Congress' central leaders like Ahmed Patel into the casino controversy, Wagh said the GPCC would demand action against the officials in the Captain of Ports office, who allowed offshore casino vessels to park themselves in the river without proper licencing.

„The Caravela casino operated from 2004 to 2007 without a licence from the Director General of Shipping,“ Wagh said, adding that the period coincided with the BJP's regime in power in the state.

„They have no moral authority to speak on the casino issue,“ he added.