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VASCO: The Travel and Tourism Association of Goa (TTAG) has feared that the Government of India suspending all tourist visas and also keeping in abeyance visa-free travel facility to OCI cardholders due to coronavirus outbreak could deal a crippling blow to the travel and tourism industry both, in the State and the country.

Maintaining that the Government of India's decision to suspend all tourists visas till April 15 was a good step taken by the government. TTAG president Savio Messias was of the opinion that Goa was Coronavirus free and hence it was open for tourism. The Centre's decision will affect tourism in the coastal State. He hoped that tourism would come back in business within a month after the restrictions are lifted.

Messias said that due to the suspension of visas to foreigners and OCI citizens, many Goans working aboard would be affected. Many Goans are based in Europe and Gulf countries like Qatar and they cannot come to Goa while people who had come in Goa also cannot go back and now risk of losing their jobs.

He said that airlines companies were sympathetic and allowing cancellation and postponement of the journey and hoped that the other companies and hospitality sector would follow suit and be

sympathetic to its employees and allow them to report at a later date in view of Coronavirus which had become a global issue. The TTAG president said that despite the decline in foreign arrivals, domestic tourism would balance the losses in the State.

"After British travel group Thomas Cook declared bankruptcy in September 2019, we had assessed losses at about Rs 100 crore but this time it could be more and we cannot calculate as of now because it also depends on domestic tourism which should not be a problem at the moment. We are urging domestic tourists to visit Goa even though major events like conference and wedding are being canceled in hotels because it is not risky to travel to Goa," Messais said adding that those feeling unwell should get themselves checked and take precautions so that the virus does not spread around. This has to be everybody's responsibility, he added.

According to Messais, there used to increase in hotel bookings on weekends and the travel and tourism industry will now wait and watch the trend in the coming weeks. He hoped that there will be a spurt in arrival of domestic tourists due to discounts offered by the hoteliers and others during the fag end of the current financial year.