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Non-Toppling of the Fisheries Policy Pleaded

The disruption to several long-sighted plans and programmes, as a result of the Left and Right wing parties coming to power in succession every five years in Kerala, is natural. If we observe the situation over the last years, we can understand that the Fisheries Development and Management Policy has been toppled. The situation of one Government pronouncing a policy in the Legislative Assembly only to be drastically revised by the other should not recur. The State Government must have the willingness to implement the Fisheries Policy that has been jointly put together the Left and Right wing Governments and that has been approved by the Legislative Assembly. The prevailing situation is one of having to bring out an order to ban trawling every year. The Government must show the courage to come out with an order that will ban trawling during monsoons for the long term sustenance of fishery resources. The situation of Matsyafed is also no different. The situation of impinging upon cooperatives, with the change of Government, should not recur. The Government should initiate steps to democratize primary cooperatives and its apex body Matsyafed and to equally approach all functioning cooperatives on non-partisan terms. The distribution of banned nets should not at all be undertaken through the Matsyafed.

The Government must be prepared to strictly stop the use of country bombs for fishing by a small group of fishermen that can lead to the destruction of the fishery resources. The Government should also be prepared to understand that some communal groups are encouraging this group. Drinking water is one basic facility that should be made available to all fishing community at the earliest. Providing drinking water in all fishing villages will be a revolutionary change. The fishworkers hope that the Kerala Government shall give due consideration to this.

It has been understood that some people are in Delhi to seek permission for sea sand mining. The Kerala Government should take into consideration the protection of fishery resources and the sustenance of the fishing community and should not, on any account, permit sea sand mining in Kerala. We hope that the State Government is able to continue the policies pertaining to the fisheries sector that were started by the previous Government and devise long sighted programmes to bring about the overall development and to protect the interests of the small artisanal fishers.

Marine Aquarium Not to be Shifted to Tamil Nadu

Vizhinjam: There are indications of reconsidering the move to shift the marine aquarium and its allied research organization under CMFRI at Vizhinjam to Tamil Nadu. That an order in favour of this has been sent by the Prime Minister's Office to the Secretary, ICAR was communicated to the Kochi centre of CMFRI in the last days. The Secretary, ICAR, in his letter, has noted that this move was based on the directions of the Prime Minister.

This decision is in the backdrop of constant and varied pressures to sustain the marine aquarium and its allied research organization at Vizhinjam. The Principal Private Secretary of the Prime Minister, Mr.T.K.I.Nair and Secretary, Central Fisheries, Mr.Hakeem had actively intervened in this issue. Both of them were personally told of the importance of continuing the marine aquarium at Vizhinjam and its possibilities, at the CMFRI Marine Aquarium Camp.

In the meanwhile, the Chief Minister informed the Central Agriculture Minister of the inability of the State Government to take up the aquarium.

The threat to close the marine aquarium will end forever only if CMFRI takes over the 1.45 acres of land that was given free by the State Government for the setting up of aquarium.

Illegal Contract Appointment at Matsyafed

Thiruvananthapuram: In violation of the Court and Government orders, illegal contract appointment is going on at Matsyafed. The illegal appointment includes also those who have completed their contract periods in violation of the Supreme Court order that daily wage workers have no right for permanency and the Government order that temporary staff have to be terminated. This is at a time when permanent employees have been denied promotions. An allegation has come up that senior officials are taking high amounts of bribe for reinstating the terminated staff.

The criticism is also that in the past 9 years, there has taken place 325 illegal appointments. Orders have been released fixing salary of Rs.10000 to many who were engaged as temporary hands on low salaries. The Director Board that met in July 1997 started contract appointments in Matsyafed. It appointed two data entry operators and one accountant on contract basis to set right the accounts of housing loan installment and their repayments. These appointments were made saying that entrusting the work to a chartered accountant firm would result in an expense of Rs.75,000 per year. Several appointments later followed on this cover. There is also the criticism that most of these

appointments have been made from the year 2002. Such an appointment also was made on 8th March when the electoral model code of conduct was in place.

The decision to employ temporary hands, subject to constraints, at Matsyafed was to facilitate the smooth flow of work till the select list was got from the PSC. It came to the notice of the Government that vacancies are not being informed at the appropriate time, temporary staffs are being permanently engaged and also that fresh appointments are being made outside of the employment exchange. Following this, the Government ordered on 2nd February 2004 that temporary staff should be engaged only through the employment exchange and that the others should be terminated. Since contract staff could not be engaged for more than 179 days, the practice is one of re-instating these staffs with higher salaries after the period. The salary of a computer programmer, who was appointed at Rs.3600 in August 2002, rose to Rs.6500 in two months. An order released by the Managing Director (E2/685/2006) has re-appointed the same person at a salary of Rs.10,000. It is also said that the amount of bribes, without any political interest, is the yardstick for appointments here.

Blue Lady in Gujarat Shores

Gujarat: The fishworkers are strongly in protest of using the Indian shores as the graveyard of ships carrying poisonous materials. The earlier attempt to break the French ship Le Clemencea in Gujarat shores ended in failure following protests from environmentalists. Again, preparatory work is going on to break open the Malaysian passenger ship, Blue Lady in Gujarat shore. Fishworkers and environmentalists have come to the fore in protest of this.

Women Fish Vendors – Problems and Solutions

Vincent Benedict, Director, MJM Centre, Mavellikara

Introduction

The fisheries sector has an active presence in all Panchayats, Municipalities and Corporations of Kerala, thanks to the bountiful and varied water bodies of the State. The contribution made by the fisheries sector towards the economy is significant. The fishworkers, who constitute 3% of Kerala's total population, contribute to 10% of the State Domestic Product. However the sector is today a situation of crisis. There has been an investment of crores of rupees in Kerala, targeted at the development of the fisheries sector after the tsunami. In spite of this, the fisheries sector is removed from the mainstream of the economy, and continues to be in a state of backwardness.

Even though the State has made formidable achievements in the fields of health and education, the fisheries sector in the State is woefully backward in these fields. In 1981, when the literacy rate of labourers in Kerala was 85%, the literacy rate of fishworkers was only 66%. When the infant mortality rate (IMR) of Kerala stood at 40 (for every thousand) in 1981, the IMR in the fishing villages was 85%. Thus, the fishing community today has still not been able to reach the general standards of development made by the Kerala society.

It is the responsibility of each local self government and voluntary agency to ensure that the policies of development are devised, after taking into account the possibilities of development of the fishing community in their respective regions, along with the needs of the workers that depend on the fisheries sector and the needs of the general community. The local bodies and voluntary agencies should see this as the requirement of the day. The development of the fisheries sector is to be ensured through devising comprehensive policies through participatory methods to take into account the local needs. The issues that need consideration include the long term sustenance of the fisheries sector, balanced development, scientific management, the social and economic welfare of workers, the problems of those engaged in fish retailing and trading and the problems of fish consumers.

Situation of Women Fishworkers

The fishworkers are the group that suffers maximum exploitation after the Adivasis in Kerala. The women fishworkers occupy the lowest rung among the women working community. The problems ailing the women in the community include traditional beliefs, superstitions, exploitation, financial inadequacies, illiteracy, state of social imbalance, poverty and exploitation by middlemen.

The participation of women in the fisheries sector is less compared to other sectors. The women do not have direct role in either fishing or fish production. The women are mainly

engaged in selling and processing of fish. Alcoholism among men in the community not only pushes families to poverty but also leaves the lives of women miserable.

Fish Sales

The women engaged in selling fish endure a lot of hardships. Women fish sellers with aluminum containers can be seen waiting in the shores at the break of dawn. The maximum number of women borrows from middlemen at high rates of interest for the purchase of fish. The women sell fish either through door-to-door marketing or in fish markets. For this, the women have to walk long distances daily with the load of fish in their heads. Most return home in the evenings after buying the essentials required for dinner. Thus, the incomes earned through fish sales by the women are often the means to meet the needs of the family. The harmful effects of globalization and modernization are grave threats to the poor women fish vendors. The governing forces that desire implementation of modernization and administration reforms aim at the suppression of the poor communities, instead of their welfare. As part of this, efforts are on to evacuate small traders and women fish vendors from markets run by the Corporations. It is necessary to follow the guidelines of the International Labour Organisation with regard to minimum age at work, health, skills and basic facilities at workplace. On this basis, foreign companies have started steps to take over the markets here. Measures have started for the taking over of supermarkets that sell all products, in the place of small retailers. The possibility of livelihood loss of a large number of people belonging to this group is higher. In this backdrop, the women engaged in fish sales have to re-think and change their strategies of selling.

Fish Markets

Fish markets are an important place of work for women engaged in fish sales. The women have to face several problems and insults at the markets. Though there are small fish markets in all Panchayats/Corporations, most of them are unhygienically maintained and thus women are forced to sell fish in unhealthy surroundings. Moreover, these markets lack safe drinking water or toilet facilities. Since the markets run by the local self governments are auctioned to individuals, the auctioneers take high rents for floor space from the women fish vendors. The markets can be modernized by devising developmental programmes after enlisting the support of Corporations and Grama Panchayats.

Lack of Transport Facilities

The women workers do not have transport vehicles for reaching fish from the landing centres to the markets and also to get back home from the markets. The women vendors are not permitted to board Government buses with the fish. The 'Vanitha' city buses run by the Matsyafed caters to only a small group. The women vendors are forced to travel in auto rickshaws and pick up vans, in inhumane conditions. The major portion of their meagre incomes is spent on meeting travel expenses. The local self governments and organizations should come forward to provide good transport facilities for the women fish vendors.

Women Fish Vendors and Middlemen

The women fish vendors meet their capital requirements by taking loans from middlemen at high rates of interest. Refusal by the auctioneers at the landing centres to loan fish to women only increases their financial problems. It is very difficult to meet day-to-day expenses after meeting the interest and the expenses on travel. The lack of savings habit and the exploitation by those who sell in installments prompt women to borrow for meeting household expenses and this increases their loan liability.

Their financial liabilities can be overcome by providing credit at low rates of interest by banks/other agencies and subsidies for fish sales.

Health Problems

Many women fish vendors suffer from occupational illnesses due to lack of cleanliness in the markets, their work load and unhealthy work practices. Common problems include headache due to carrying ice and fish as head load for long periods, arthritis, uterine problems and skin related ailments. They do not get the required medical help. They become forced to not go out for home and sit at home due to health problems. This is another reason for increasing their loan liabilities.

The health problems of women fish vendors can be overcome by providing vehicles for fish sales, gadgets for reducing chillness, measures to avoid carrying head load, provision of basic facilities in fish markets and by maintaining hygiene.

Recommendations and Solutions

1. Conduct detailed studies to understand the local market mechanisms and their problems. For this, the services of voluntary organizations, Government and other agencies, clubs, students of college/universities, experts in the fisheries sector and commerce can be used.
2. Study the market mechanisms in other States like Goa and apply thought to how these can be adapted to the local conditions.
3. Banks should provide adequate credit at low rates of interest for meeting the capital required for fish sales.
4. Put an end to the exploitation by middlemen and auctioneers.
5. The women should be involved in the fisheries sector. Set up centralized mechanisms for buying fish.
6. Ensure the availability of basic services in landing centres
7. Put in place mechanisms for reaching fish safe, clean and without injuries to the fish to the market place. Set up alternative ways to avoid carrying head load. Introduce policies to provide the necessary two wheelers, auto rickshaws and pick up vans for women to conduct sales.
8. Create policies for setting up drainage, toilets and providing drinking water in fish markets along with providing stalls, restrooms and temporary procuring sheds. Re-locate wayside markets.
9. Provide insulated plastic boxes for storing fish to small women fish vendors.
10. Put in place mechanisms for providing clean and well packed fish to customers
11. Set up mechanisms for storing the unsold fishes in the market itself

12. Make use of scientific methods for converting fish waste into manure
13. Control debt collections in fish markets
14. The women themselves should undertake auctioning in markets and their control
15. Encourage the setting up of units under the supervision of women for drying fish, creation of value added fish products, ready-to-eat and ready-to-cook products, net production and other allied areas at the local level.
16. Start fish marketing booths for the distribution of quality fishes at the local level. Eggs, milk, meat etc. can also be sold from these booths.
17. Introduce greater number of ladies buses for taking fish to the markets for sales.
18. Raise awareness among women on issues like dowry, exploitation by those selling in installments, excessive alcoholism among men, family life, family budget, exploitation by middlemen, education, cleanliness and environment.
19. Conduct discussions and seminars on the changing methods for marketing and the problems of the fisheries sector
20. Form women self help groups and take up employment policies under their leadership
21. Implement the minimum wage programme for women fish vendors

Draft Policy Guarantees Employment Security to Wayside Vendors

New Delhi: The National Commission for Enterprises in Unorganised Sector submitted the Draft Policy to the Central Government. The Draft Policy has recommendations for providing employment guarantee, including registration and loan facilities, to wayside vendors in towns. This Draft Policy is aimed at wayside vendors in the Class 1 towns of the country, also including Thiruvananthapuram and Kochi.

Those who sell in the wayside with no permanent buildings are brought under the definition of wayside vendors. This includes fish vendors and wayside eateries. These people have been grouped under the categories of those who permanently sell from a particular place, those who participate in the weekly markets and those who sell using carts. It is estimated that there are around 25 lakh wayside vendors. The Draft Policy aims at putting an end to the harassment from the police, 'goondas' and the unnecessary restraints by the Municipal authorities. The crux of the Policy is the Town Widening Committee (TWC), which has the representation of up to 40% of wayside vendors. The TWC will also have representatives from the Municipality, police and banks. One-third of the representatives of wayside vendors will be women.

It is responsibility of the TWC to issue registrations and identity cards. Registration fees and monthly tax will be levied from the vendors. There is no license for registration. However, when shop space etc. is sanctioned, preference will be given to those with registration. No limit has been fixed for giving liberal credit to wayside vendors. The TWC will have to intervene to solve problems that arise between the wayside vendors and permanent merchants.

The harassment from the police being seen as principal problem, the Commission has recommended amending the Indian Penal Code to provide protection to wayside vendors, said Dr.K.P.Kannan, Member. The Commission presided by Dr.Arjun K.Sengupta submitted the report to the Ms.Shelja, Minister, Urban Employment and Poverty Alleviation.

Total Ban on Fishing not a Solution

Kollam: The Fishworkers Seminar said that total ban on fishing will not be a solution for the sustenance of the fishery resources and demanded that trawling ban for three months has to be imposed during the monsoon and to restrict fishing by large inboard engine boats and banned nets. The artisanal do not engage in destructive fishing. The unscientific fishing however is detrimental to fishery resources. The seminar to explore if total fishing ban would be effective, under the leadership of Kerala Swathanthra Matsya Thozhilali Federation, was held at FDCP Hall, Kollam. The seminar was inaugurated by

the President of Kollam Theeradesa Federation Mon Ferdinand Kayavil. The State President of the Federation Shri.T.Peter delivered the keynote presentation. The District President Shri.S.Joseph presided over the function. The State Vice President Shri.S.James, District Secretary Shri.A.Andrews, Shri.M.Ambrose, Shri.S.Stephen and Shri.S.Francis spoke on the occasion. The Seminar declared that if the total fish ban were implemented, the artisanal fisherworkers shall strongly desist it.

Nuclear Deal Detrimental to Future Generations: R.V.G.Menon

Thiruvananthapuram: The scientist Dr.R.V.G.Menon said that the signing of the nuclear deal by India will be detrimental to future generations.

In other 40 years, solar energy will be widespread in India. Then, there will be no need for nuclear energy. The nuclear reactors to be set up for the production of nuclear energy have the potential of doing great damage. The consequences of these will have to be faced by future generations including fishworkers, he said. The nuclear plant at Koodankulam is situated in the sea shore.

Dr.R.V.G.Menon was delivering the keynote address in the Seminar on 'Indo American Nuclear Deal and India's Energy Security' conducted in Trivandrum by the environmental agencies in Trivandrum remembrance of Chernobyl disaster.

America will try to impose pressure on India through this deal. There has been no answer on the question of where the waste generated from nuclear energy will be processed. The other countries have kept away from experimenting with nuclear energy taking into account these consequences. Dr.R.V.G.Menon said that the nuclear lobby has been satisfied with the signing of the nuclear deal. Ms.Maglin Peter presided over. The officials of Electricity Board, General Secretary of the Association Shri.Pradeep, Shri.P.R.Sreekumar and Shri.V.Harilal spoke on the occasion.

Camp Evaluation

Mavelikkara: The Federation General Secretary Shri.P.P.John has informed that an evaluation, of the leadership training camp, computer training and socio-political expansion conducted by the Kerala Swathanthra Matsya Thozhilali Federation with the support of Indian Social Institute in the previous years, will held on Friday, 19th May from 10 am to 4 pm at the Mavelikkara MJM Centre.

Fisheries Sector: Election Manifesto of Left Democratic Front

1. Development of a comprehensive coastal development policy including the 1400 crore rupee fund sanctioned for tsunami rehabilitation, support of the Finance Commission for construction of sea wall, Plan funds of State and local governments and funds from other schemes being implemented in the coasts. This comprehensive programme will include fishing harbours, landing centres, coastal roads, drinking water, cleanliness and housing. The policy developed by the Central Government, 'PURA' will be used for providing basic amenities in coastal regions. The backward condition of basic amenities in coastal regions will be remedied in five years.
2. Pass the Comprehensive Water Management Policy. Provide the right for fishing and resource management to local fishermen. The right of first sales will be given to cooperatives of fishworkers. In this regard, follow-up activities on the programmes envisaged by the previous Left Wing Government will be taken up and implemented.
3. Impose strong pressure on the Centre for providing free kerosene to fishworkers for fishing activity.
4. Impose strong pressure on the Central Government to cancel licenses of foreign trawlers. Devise a new programme for encouraging deep sea fishing.
5. Serious steps will be taken to protect the right of fishing of the artisanal fishermen, in the wake of activities in the lake shore and sea shores for tourism development. Immediate steps will be undertaken to prevent pollution of water bodies due to water tourism.
6. Steps will be taken to resolve issues in housing of artisanal fishermen on account of the implementation of the Coastal Zone Regulation Act. A special scheme will be devised for rehabilitating all interested fishermen staying within 200 metres of the sea, in the wake of the tsunami.
7. Create policy measures to ensure the contribution of fish exporters in the Fishworkers Welfare Fund. Savings schemes to tide over off season months will be effectively put in place. Welfare measures will be increased.
8. Encourage the setting up of decentralized units engaged in value added fish processing.
9. Re-start democratic fish farming. Encourage fish farming in ponds and canals. Fish fry will be put in common water bodies to promote fish breeding and growth.
10. Protected fish breeding centres will be set up. Ornamental fish farming will be encouraged.
11. Fishworkers cooperatives will be democratically re-constituted. The Matysafed Managing Committee will be re-constituted.
12. The necessary facilities for women fish vendors will be ensured in fish markets. Separate marketing centres will be set up for these people.

13. All families in Kerala will be given houses in the next five years. The poor will be given free houses.
14. Water Policy will be framed keeping in mind the view that availability of water is the right of the society.
15. Issues that arise out of the implementation of Coastal Zone Regulation Act in the housing of traditional dwellers will be resolved.
16. Special steps will be taken for the conservation of mangroves
17. The sand mining in the regions of Thrikkunapuzha and Arattupuzha in Alleppey district will not be permitted due to environmental reasons
18. Water bodies, including lakes are fast turning poisonous, on account of unscientific tourism development activities and the discharge of effluents into these. To prevent these, comprehensive policies will be framed and implemented.
19. Title deeds to purambokku settlers. Those staying in land for which title deed cannot be given will be rehabilitated.

The fact that the representatives from the coastal regions are responsible for the implementation of the above said should not be forgotten!

Fishing Forbidden in the pretext of Turtle Conservation

Bhuvaneshwar: The leader of National Fishworkers Forum Shri.K.Alaya complained that thousands of fishworkers in Orissa have been forbidden from fishing by the Environment Ministry, in the pretext of turtle conservation. Demonstration in protest of this will be conducted on 8th June, informed Shri.K.Alaya.

Utilize Investments of Foreign Malayalees for Kerala's Development

Thiruvananthapuram: The Seminar held at the Press Club to mark the day of universal protest against ADB demanded that various political parties come out publicly to announce their stand, of accepting financial assistance attached with strings provided by the World Bank and ADB, to resolve the present financial crisis in the State. The Seminar demanded that new Government to effectively utilize the 6000 crore fund available through investment for foreign Malayalees for the development of Kerala.

Prof.Varghese George and Prof.Koshy Mathew made presentations about ADB loans. Shri.Roy Mathew (The Hindu) moderated. Shri.Swaroop Roy (Equations), Shri.T.Peter (Kerala Swathanthra Matsya Thozhilali Federation), Dr.Thomas Varghese, Fr.Eugine Pereira, Shri.Sridhar, Shri.P.G.Padmanabhan and Shri.T.Anto Elias spoke.

No Reason for Fear Anymore

Neendakara: The District Collector Shri.B.Srinivasan said that the fishermen have no reason for fear even while venturing into deep seas and can safely return back ashore thanks to the availability of several safety gadgets today. He was inaugurating the

exhibition cum seminar on safety equipments for fishing vessels conducted by District Fisheries Department Office at Fisheries Station.

Life jackets ranging from Rs.950 to Rs.2000 have been designed in five different types according to the body weight. The air filled tube called 'Lifebuoy' is available in different prices according to its quality.

The EPIRB, if thrown into the sea in the event of an accident helps to call the attention of Marine Enforcement Agency by shining using radar facility.

Bells are also used to intimate nearby boats by some fishermen in the event of accidents. Wireless kit for communication, emergency ration kit to preserve food for six months and fire extinguishers were also exhibited.

The life saving equipments for a boat can be bought for less than Rs.50,000. The Government has made compulsory the use of life saving equipments in fishing vessels. The Seminar was inaugurated by Shri.P.G.Tensing, Official of the Fisheries Department. Shri.Sukumar (Fisheries) presided over.

Shri.M.S.James, Shri.Charlie Joseph, Shri.Thuruthel Ravi, Shri.A.Andrews, Shri.P.Sheikh Pareeth, Ms.S.Sujatha, Shri.M.Venkitesan, Shri.G.Rajendran, Shri.K.Rajasekharan and Shri.V.Vivekanandan also spoke.

Dynamite Fishing Rampant

Thiruvananthapuram: The use of dynamite for fishing by some fishermen of Vizhinjam led to protests along the near shore waters from Veli to Vizhinjam. Country bombs were blasted even while the police and officials of marine enforcement looked on. When other fishermen tried to stop them, the police intervened and calmed the fishermen. The fishermen disbursed only after the marine enforcement hired a boat (it does not have a patrolling boat) to chase away fishermen who used country bombs.

The District President of Kerala Swathanthra Matsya Thozhilali Federation Mr.John.J.P and Secretary Mr.Anto Elias have demanded that the Government take strict measures to stop fishing by the use of country bombs.

Discussion Meet

Thiruvananthapuram: A discussion meet on the Coastal Zone Regulation Act in the light of the S.Swaminathan Committee Report will be held on Monday, 29th May 2006 from 10 am to 4 pm at the Trivandrum Press Club Hall. Dr.M.Baba (CESS) will deliver the keynote address. A panel of scientific and technical fisheries experts will lead the discussions. Contact Phone: 9447429243

