

Alakal - a fortnightly publication of the Kerala Swatantra Matsya Thozhilali Federation

High court approves of trawling ban

Kochi: The Kerala High Court has said that the trawling ban has been imposed with the intention of preserving the marine environment for future generations and that it cannot be interfered with. The Department of Fisheries had pointed out that there has been an appreciable increase in fish resources after the imposition of the ban and in view of this, the court approved the ban. Justice K Balakrishnan Nair rejected a plea by boat owners that the ban had no scientific basis.

Total fish landed in India for 2004 (in tons)

West Bengal	–	1,93,898
Orissa	-	79,194
Andhra Pradesh	-	2,01,348
Tamilnadu	-	3,92,753
Pondicherry	-	18,416
Kerala	-	6,16,839
Karnataka	-	1,92,816
Goa	-	83,147
Maharashtra	-	3,50,712
Gujarat	-	4,33,809
Andaman Is	-	26,120
Lakshadweep	-	7,684
Total	-	25,96,736

Reliance Industries guilty of murdering the environment

By Renee George

Of the 13 districts in Maharashtra, Dhanu is the largest. It has great cultural diversity and is geographically unique. With 51% forest cover, grasslands and a large livestock population, Dhanu just 2.5 hours away from Mumbai. The forests of Dhanu play an important role in maintaining environmental equilibrium of

Tarapur, Vaapi, Ankaleshwar, Surat, Thane and Balapur. The catchment that provides water to North Mumbai is also situated in Dhanu. The 800 ha thermal power plant established by Reliance Industries is literally destroying Dhanu's fragile ecosystem. Three hundred trucks of ash (about 3000 MT) is dumped daily by the plant and this is destroying rivers and farmlands. The ash deposits have formed a kind of cement on the river bed. Farmers along the river and fish workers are now in the throes of poverty. The deposit of ash on the river bed has led to extensive flooding and in 2003, 33 houses along the river were lost in floods. Another effluent from the plant, pumped into the sea, has destroyed the marine ecosystem. Fish workers living along the 35 km coastline of Dhanu are facing a big crisis, thanks to Reliance Industries. Chikoo farmers, when faced with this crisis, had shifted to other crops but none of them thrived. The wanton destruction of the river and marine ecosystems have brought poverty upon the farmers and fish workers of Dhanu.

Ineffective Laws

In 1991, Dhanu was placed under the Environment Protection Act (1986) but this move was overridden and the plant was established in 1996. Though the state government rejected the proposal, it was the Central Government that finally approved the plant. In 1996 October, the Supreme Court issued a comprehensive order favouring the company. Though the company claims it cares for the environment, its actions are contrary. The government has only been paying lip service in support of the farmers of Dhanu. When the previous Minister for Petroleum (NDA) visited Dhanu, he had stated that Dhanu is not going through an environment crisis but an economic one. In 2002, the BJP government requested the Supreme Court to do away the environment protection authority in Dhanu, sucking up to Reliance Industries but the Court refused. LPG was a more environmentally friendly alternative to the coal being used in the power plant. In Dadri, about 50 km from Delhi, Reliance is doing a 10,000 crore project that can generate 3740 mw of power using LPG. 22,000 ha of land has already been destroyed by the power plant. If LPG was used, this would not happen. The local people would like to take legal action against Reliance, for all it takes. The Environment and Science Associate Prof. of Mumbai IIT, Dr. Shyam R Adolkar has this to say: "Dhanu's environment has been degraded totally. If nothing is done, Dhanu will turn into a block of fly ash. The power plant is like a curse upon the inhabitants."

A Mumbai based environmental group had submitted a petition to the Supreme Court and the court had ruled that Reliance pay a fine and that the authority of the environmental protection agency be retained. Eight years passed without any action. In 2004, the Pollution Control Board of Maharashtra extended the permit of the company by five years. Dhanu's environmental protection authority's Retd. Justice Chandrasekhar Dharmadhikari said the authority had no right to take penal action and said only the government can do so. In 2005 March, the authority requested Reliance to use LPG instead of coal but the company refused. A letter sent to the government requesting action by the Pollution Control Board of Maharashtra received no reply. Despite all the evidence against the company, Reliance is hell bent on going ahead with the plant and in fact, it is thinking of increasing the output.

Reliance is targeting the power needs of Mumbai. In the 90s, Reliance emerged the largest share holder of the Bombay Suburban Electric Supply Company and gradually took complete control of the company. To ensure profits for its Bilaspur coal mine, Reliance is insisting that coal be used in Dhanu.

It is indeed a relief that the agitation by the people of Dhanu is not supported by funds from abroad. The local populace have organised themselves and formed organisations like Parisaar Bachao Samiti, Dhanu Bachao Andolan, Kasthikari Sanghatan and are fighting for this noble cause. The fight against Reliance, which has brought ruin upon fish workers and farmers of Dhanu surely deserves the support of the people of Kerala.

Just give us some money

By Mustafa Desamangalam

What are the obligations of a democratically elected government towards its people?

This is a question which has been asked time and again by many people from different wakes of life. It clichéd, no doubt, but there are some who keep asking this question. Who are they? They are the tsunami affected people, numbering over 3000, located in Alappad and Aratupuzha. How else can these tsunami affected people remind the people and the government, now that the fourth estate, the mediators between the people and the government, has ditched

them? It's seven months since the tsunami struck Kerala and these people haven't received benefits announced by the government. 2727 families spent terrible days in relief camps and school verandas. Activists from the fish worker community like Magline Peter, Sabu, Saju, Biju and Vinu, who led the affected people's agitations against the government can't help ask the same question. These affected fish workers were rehabilitated from camps to shelters made of tin - shelters that couldn't meet their primary needs. They spent two searing months in these abominable tin roofed contraptions till the rain came as a blessing. Overflowing septic tanks and unhygienic surroundings have become unavoidable features of their life today. These suffering people have been forgotten by the media. Despite the enormous amounts of unaccounted money that poured into the government's coffers, the rehabilitation of 2727 families is carried out in a pathetic manner. The rulers of Kerala could have been more considerate when rehabilitating the tsunami affected. Protesting against government apathy, the affected people organised several agitations, most of them before the royal palace of the rulers at Thiruvananthapuram. No one in god's own country paid heed to their woes. A government that ignores the humanitarian aspects of people deserves no respect whatsoever. The ruling gods were busy with sand mining, bus fare hikes and private professional colleges. Let the students battle the police. Let atrocities be committed against journalists. If it wasn't for this mayhem, the rulers would be an unemployed lot.

Fish workers and the adivasis are not helpless people. Even if the rulers ignore them, they'll survive. But government apathy has no justification. Mankind has never before seen such rulers. Maybe they are new avatars. They may or may not rehabilitate the tsunami affected people. Ministers will keep riding express highways, tsunamis will come and go but whatever happens, just give us some money.

Fish workers march to AG's office

Thiruvananthapuram: Demanding the withdrawal of the fish import policy, ban on foreign trawlers, Diesel and kerosene subsidy, a separate ministry at the centre for fisheries, fish workers led by the Fisheries Coordination Committee marched towards the office of the Accountant General. The leaders of the committee warned of a state wide agitation if government apathy towards fish workers continues.

The march was inaugurated by the CITU Secretary, PK Gurudasan. T Peter (KSMTF), Austin Gomes (Fish worker Congress), Fr. George Gomes (TSSS), AK Bawa (AITUC), Pulluvila Lawrence (UTUC), J Stephen (Janata Fishworkers Union), John JP (Cordination Committee) and FM Lazar addressed the gathering.

The march began at Palayam and was led by leaders from various unions like Anto Elias, Pozhiyoor Johnson, M Paul, T Nelson, Snagappan, Bosco Koshy, Valerian Isaac and Frisca Kurishappan.

Hearing on kidney racket turns violent

Trissur: For releasing details of a people's hearing to the media, on the kidney racket, an attempt was made to attack Bindhu, a fish worker. Racketeers, under the influence of alcohol, attempted to thwart a people's hearing at PG hall, Trissur. Mundakkal Vinod, 24, a victim of the racket had appeared before the Human Rights Commission. He was promised Rs.90,000 and given Rs.20,000 before the operation. After the operation, when he asked for the remainder, they threatened him.

In a separate incident, another youth from the fish worker community hailing from Kollam was similarly deceived and when he asked for the remaining money after the operation, the racketeers tried to kill him in a road accident. Auto rickshaw drivers found him and took him to a police station. When he was brought to the station, he had a bulge at around the operated area, the police said. Despite registering a complaint in the police station, no action was taken and it is believed that the police are in support of the racketeers.

The racketeers, centered around Trissur, have allegedly threatened Bindhu and activists of the Human Rights Commission, said the Human Rights Convenor, Sujoby Jose.

Seminar and book launch

Kozhikode: A national seminar on Fading Images of Decentralisation in Fisheries Sector was conducted by MCITRA of Kozhikode. The scientific consultant to the government of India, Rangan Dutta inaugurated the seminar. Development in the fisheries sector is also the responsibility of organisations working among fishermen and any development must take into account the socio economic and

scientific aspects, Dutta said. A book, Fading Images of Decentralisation in Fisheries was also launched at the seminar by Rangan Dutta. The discussion that followed was moderated by D Sanjeev Ghosh, Joint Director, Fisheries.

Prof. Jayraj Raghavayya (Centre for Excellence), Sumit Sarkar (Ass. Prof. IIM), CM Sushant (Scientist, Water resource Exchange Centre), T Krishnamoorthy (TRY Chennai), Ravindran Nair (Ex Joint Director), NK Subramanian (Trissur District Panchayat President), Radha Madhavan (Ex Fisheries Registrar), KH Babujan (Alappuzha District Panchayat President), Sarasu (Farokhe District Panchayat President), P Shreeja (Malabar Coastal Women's Federation), Vinod Krishnan and Hari Babu, addressed the seminar. Fr. EJ Thomas chaired the seminar; Baby John gave the welcomed the gathering and KP Devdas said the vote of thanks.

Janadhikara yatra greeted state-wide

Palakkad: Anti-Coca cola-Pepsi agitation ended at Thiruvananthapuram. To strengthen the agitation further a yatra set out from Thiruvananthapuram headed for Plachimada. It was greeted and welcomed at more than 100 satyagraha centres. The yatra was inaugurated by the NAPM leader, Medha Patkar. The combined efforts of fish workers and adivasis are responsible for the state government's appeal against the soft drink company, in the Supreme Court, said the leader of the agitation, Mayilamma. Vilayodi Venugopal said, that NAPM's involvement in the agitation has taken it to a national level. The agitation will be strengthened further, said the NAPM State Convenor, Suresh George. TK Vinodan, Sujoby Jose, P Sivakumar, Robin Keraleeyam, Shaji, Ravindran Cheeyarathu were among those who addressed the gathering.

Satyagraha by tsunami affected people

Thiruvananthapuram: Demanding speedy rehabilitation of the affected and an enquiry into the alleged misuse of tsunami funds, the Tsunami Affected People's Forum from Alappad organised an agitation at the Secretariat. The Forum blamed the government for deliberately misleading fish workers on matters regarding the misuse of tsunami funds. It also called for an enquiry against revenue officials who are responsible for the diversion of funds, raised for the welfare of tsunami affected fish workers, to the hill districts like Idukki, Kottayam and Pathanamthitta.

The satyagraha was inaugurated by the Forum's Convenor, G Sabu. T Peter, President, KSMTF; District President of KSMTF, John JP; SP Saju; Ragini; L Thamara; D Biju; Vincent Benedict and Maglin Peter addressed the gathering. The Forum warned that it would intensify the agitation if the government continues its apathy towards the tsunami affected people.

Coastal development agency formed

Thiruvananthapuram: A coastal development agency was formed with the Minister of Fisheries, Dominic Presentation as Chairman and PJ Francis as Vice Chairman. KS Manoj, MP, TN Pratapan, MLA, PKK Bawa, MLA, Advocate KK Radhakrishnan Kurnagapally and Alphonsa John are unofficial members. Chief Secretary Planning, Local Self Government, Finance, Health, Agriculture, Tourism, Water, Village Development, Fisheries Secretary, Fisheries Director, Chairman KSEB, Fishermen Welfare Fund Board Chairman, Kerala Water Authority Managing Director, Harbour Engineering Chief Engineer, Kubumbasree Executive Director, KSEB Distribution Member and the presidents of three coastal Panchayats are members of the governing body. The Vice Chairman will be the chairman of the Executive Committee. The executive committee members are Finance, Fisheries, Planning and Local Self Government Secretaries, Director Fisheries, MD Water Authority, Chief Engineer Harbour Engineering and the KSEB Distribution Chief Engineer.

Ensure sea safety

Thiruvananthapuram: The South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies organised a one-day workshop on 'Traditional Fishworkers and Sea Safety' at TDFH Hall. The Coast Guard, Marine Enforcement Wing, Department of Fisheries, Representatives of fishworkers and trade union leaders participated in the workshop.

The Chairman of SIFFS, Antony Augustine, chaired the workshop. A Robert welcomed the gathering. G Harikumar, Director Fisheries, inaugurated the workshop. The President of the KSMTF moderated the workshop. All the concerned departments should ensure that fishworkers get all the safety equipment they need, he said. VN Roy, Executive SIFFS, made the key note address. Dy Cmtt Coast Guard Gajraj Singh, Fisheries Dy Director VS

Shobhana, Marine Enforcement SP VC Soman and SIFFS OBM Executive Ansalam spoke for the workshop. T Nelson proposed a vote of thanks.

The workshop urged fishworkers to promote safety and discussed the various issues concerning safety. The workshop recommended the following safety equipment be carried on all boats:

- A day time distress signal – sea rescue streamer
- A night time distress signal – hand held strobe light
- Lifebuoy
- Jack Knife
- Fresh water and dry food rations
- Sails and simple riggings
- Waterproof compass
- Powerful waterproof flashlight
- Radar reflectors

“America, America!”

Thiruvananthapuram: The KSSP and KSMTF organised a discussion on the 60th anniversary of the American bombing of Hiroshima. There are instances of worldwide protests against American imperialism and military strategy, said Cherian Philip, who inaugurated the discussion. The world needs to watch carefully every move America makes, he added. PS Rajasekharan and Sajan (Doordarshan) also spoke on this topic. The Secretary of the KSSP, S Vijayakumar welcomed the gathering and KSMTF President, T Peter, proposed a vote of thanks.

A music video titled “America, America!” directed by KP Sasi was screened for the gathering.

Seminar held in Mahe

Mahe:Under the leadership of the KSMTF Malabar sector, a seminar on Fisheries Conservation and Coastal Regulation was held at the Mahe Fishermen Community Hall. The seminar was inaugurated by the Pondicherry Minister of Health, E Vasantaraj. A new fishing harbour in Mahe, free bicycles for all students below ninth standard, food, footwear and uniforms are part of the development planned in the fisheries sector, he said. In addition, there will be financial assistance during lean months, Rs. 500 grant and 100 kgs rice dole during the trawling ban period, he added. KSMTF President T Peter said the key note address. CIFT Scientist George Joseph, KSMTF General Secretary PP John, TK Siddique and CM Jolly addressed the gathering. P Sukumaran chaired the seminar. K Mustafa welcomed the gathering and Shaheeda proposed a vote of thanks.

Computer training for fishworkers

Thiruvananthapuram:With the intention of bringing latest developments in the IT sector into fisheries, the KSMTF and SIFFS jointly conducted a training for 25 activists, selected from different districts, from the fishworker community at the Kovalam Animation Centre. The classes were conducted by Anwar Sadat (IT Mission), VS Wilfred (Computer Programmer, SIFFS), Amarnath Raja (INAPP), and Satish Babu (Inapp). Modern equipments like GPS, Fish Finders and mobile phones should find their way into the artisanal fisheries sector and that they should be used as safety and weather forecasting tools, said T Peter, inaugurating the training session. Owners of trawlers are using satellite technology to find fish and this must be made available to the artisanal sector, he added. The KSMTF General Secretary PP John proposed the vote of thanks.

Nabard to aid fisheries department – Dominic Presentation

Paravur:The Minister of Fisheries, Dominic Presentation said that the department will be implementing a 50 crore project with assistance from NABARD. He was inaugurating a stadium at the Paravur Municipal Government Higher Secondary

School. 30 crores are to be used in the construction of fishing harbours and fish landing centres and 20 crores to be used for road building, he added. The assistance from NABARD will be available next year, he said.

No one has helped the fishing community – KV Thomas

Alappuzha: The ex Fisheries Minister KV Thomas said that no government has actually come to the aid of fishworkers. Tsunami rehabilitation was a complete failure and that was because the government did not consult with the organisations working among fishworkers, he said. No one can go ahead with projects like mineral sand mining, that affect fishworkers, he added.