

[Alakal](#) - a fortnightly publication of the Kerala Swatantra Matsya Thozhilali Federation

Federation seeks Withdrawal of Fish Import Policy

Thiruvananthapuram: Under the leadership of the state committee of the Kerala Swatantra Matsya Thozhilali Federation, fishworkers organised a march to the Secretariat to press for the following demands: stopping of fish imports and prevention of the misuse of funds collected for tsunami relief. The march was inaugurated by the Federation President, T Peter. Hundreds of fishworkers marched with oars and flags from VGT hall towards the Secretariat.

Faced with depleting fish resources, the fish import policy would adversely affect fishworkers. This policy will affect thousands of women now engaged in fish vending and many more small-scale fish vendors. The fresh, nutritious and inexpensive fish now available in our markets would soon be replaced with frozen fish which contain various chemicals and toxins, said T Peter.

The General Secretary of the Federation, PP John, JP John, KV Raphel, PV Pavitran, M Ambrose, KC Prasad, Anto Elias, S James, Freesca Kurishappan, Rajan Lazar, Valerian Isaac, Martin Benny, CP John and K Badusha spoke during the event.

Archives

Fishworker Agitation on April 4th before Parliament

Thiruvananthapuram: Demanding for the withdrawal of the fish import policy and the fair-price distribution of kerosene, the National Fishworkers Forum's executive decided to agitate before the Parliament in a meeting held at Thiruvananthapuram. In the meeting the Chair person, Harekrishna Debnath and the General Secretary ND Kohli demanded the speedy rehabilitation of the tsunami affected people and the restoration of their livelihoods.

Government to Oppose Fish Import Policy

Kochi: The state government will make all efforts to dissuade the central government from importing fish from Thailand, said Dominic Presentation, the Minister for Fisheries. He said he will meet the related central ministers and brief them on the consequences of the fish import policy on traditional fishworkers.

Tsunami Relief Funds Misappropriated

Thiruvananthapuram: The government has not been able to provide adequate relief, rehabilitate or provide means of livelihood to the tsunami affected people of Kollam and Alappuzha Districts, so far. Meanwhile, applications from people who are not eligible for relief are reportedly piling up in government offices and this is entirely due to the government policy on this issue.

The inclusion of places that have no connection with the sea is confusing. People from these inland areas have already availed themselves of the free distribution of food rations for fishworkers. The Minister for Revenue, KM Mani claims that 3054 hectares of agricultural land has been damaged by the tsunami and the Department of Fisheries has gone on record to state that 2.5 crores worth fish farms and hatcheries have been destroyed while the actual people who suffered the onslaught of the tsunami are still on their knees, seeking solace.

In the Aftermath of the Tsunami ...

T Peter (State President, Kerala Swatantra Matsya Thozhilali Federation)

The Asian tsunami that occurred on December 26 2004 was an eye opener. Earthquakes cannot be predicted but tsunamis can definitely be predicted and the scientific community across Asia could have easily issued warnings. But somehow, this didn't happen. It exposed the ineffectiveness of the scientific community. In the coming days, let us hope they can warn us much earlier. The fact that the tsunami has turned public attention upon fishworkers is heartening. A much neglected sector has suddenly got the attention of the media and the government.

It is time we realised the consequences of interfering with the natural processes of nature. For seventeen years, a private firm has been engaged in sand mining off the Indonesian coast with the permission of the Indonesian government. Most of the reclamation work carried out in Singapore was done with the sand mined from Indonesia. Manavalakurichi and Alappad, two of the most affected areas in India have a history of sand mining which undoubtedly contributed to their destruction.

The overwhelming response, from all quarters, to the tsunami is heartening but the long term rehabilitation and the restoration of livelihood of the affected has been neglected. Long term relief work and rehabilitation should take into account the fragility of the coastal ecosystem. This narrative does not seek to discuss the issues concerning Tamilnadu or the rest of the countries affected by the tsunami but it seeks to air some of the issues concerning the affected in Kerala.

Government agencies are trying to take advantage of the enormous funds that have poured into their coffers. The Department of Irrigation plans to spend crores of rupees in the name of the construction of sea walls while the PWD is busy trying to find ways to spend money building roads and bridges. While emergency relief operations were underway, the Department of Revenue was trying to rope in the funds received in the name of the Tsunami. The government claims it has spent crores of rupees for affected fishworkers but not even one-tenth of the amount has actually been spent. The unusually large expense account and travelling expenses of government officials working in the affected areas is now known to everyone.

The government had made many promises to fishworkers affected by the tsunami but most of them remain unfulfilled. Pension and other dues owed by the government to fishworkers have now been paid but taking money from the tsunami fund to do this is not to the government's credit. The tsunami fund is for the affected people and not for settling government debts. The government should give priority to the health and educational welfare of fishworkers and the restoration of their livelihoods. Strong and eco-friendly houses should be built for those who lost their dwellings. Restoring only 50% of the losses of the people who lost means of livelihood and the remainder to be given as loans is unfair and unreasonable. This pathetic attitude of the government will have disastrous effects on the crisis-ridden fishworker community. In Tamilnadu, the government joined hands with voluntary organisations in rehabilitation work and restored means of livelihood but in Kerala, the affected people had to resort to agitation to bring about some change in the government apathy.

There are moves by the government to relocate fishworkers from coastal areas in the name of tsunami relief. The government plans to relocate them to an area 200 meters away from the coast line. If this is so, the government has to assure the fishworker community that this stretch of land will not be given to sand miners and tourism developers. This 200 meter stretch of land must only be used for the

storage of fishing equipment, the processing and drying of fish and for the cultural activities of the fishing community.

The construction of the sea wall should not be seen as a panacea for the incursion of the sea. It should be built only in areas that are very prone to sea water incursion. With the sea wall, at 500 meter intervals, 100 meter break-waters should be constructed, stretching out to the sea. In other coastal areas, mangroves and casuarina growing should be encouraged as eco-shielding against the incursion of the sea. In Tamilnadu, Andhra and Orissa, the effects of the tsunami were less in areas that had natural barriers. The greening of the coastal ecosystem, its care and protection will also provide employment opportunities to fisher folk. It will also prevent the misuse of funds siphoned in the name of coastal protection. Illegal sand mining from coastal areas expose the already sensitive coastal ecosystem to the risks of sea water incursion. Tons of sand being mined for construction and reclamation purposes should be stopped immediately. Environment friendly developmental projects should be undertaken by government agencies to protect the coastal ecosystem.

The funds collected in the name of tsunami relief should only be used to the welfare of the affected fisher folk. The state government should account for all funds collected from the central government, philanthropists and voluntary agencies in a transparent manner. They should assure the people that these funds will not be misused. It is a source of embarrassment for the people of Kerala to know that funds are misused in the name of tsunami relief. False claims that losses were incurred to shrimp farmers and the agriculture sector should not be encouraged by the Department of Revenue. There have been instances of free rations issued to the affected fisher folk being distributed among affluent people not entitled to the privilege. This is a clear indication of the misuse of the grants collected in the name of tsunami relief. According to a government publication, Janapadham, numerous revenue villages that are in no way connected to the sea have been listed as tsunami affected. When implementing World Bank and ADB projects in tsunami affected areas, the government intends to use these revenue villages to siphon funds. The fishworker community understands these insidious intentions by the government and let them be forewarned than the community will hit back, with an intensity that matches the tsunami, at those forces that seek to disrupt their lives.

The government decision to exclude foreign agencies from establishing relief centres in the tsunami affected areas of India is commendable.

But there are plans underway of accepting a grant of deep sea trawlers from the European Union in the name of tsunami relief. This move has been welcomed in some quarters. Trawling is one of the most environmentally harmful fishing techniques and the monopoly of rich business men who are in no way connected to the fishing sector. This decision to accept the grant of deep sea trawlers would strike a death blow to the already tottering traditional fishing sector. The state and central governments should take note of this and respond in a manner favouring the traditional fishing community. The community will be forced to resist such moves if the state and central governments continue to be callous and apathetic towards fisher folk.

Fisher folk are of the opinion that the tsunami has damaged the ocean floor and this has affected fish harvesting adversely. Fisher people along the coast are in the throes of starvation. The scientific community should not ignore the observations of the fisher people. Scientists working in the fishery sector should take into account the experiences and observations of the fisher folk. They should conduct observations and studies of the post-tsunami sea bed taking into account the subsistence and future of the fisher people. The welfare of the fisher folk, who provide cheap and healthy source of protein to the common man, should be on the agenda of all welfare activities. The post-tsunami phase is ideal for the conservation of the wealth of the oceans and coastal eco-systems. Officials, the scientific community, fisher people, trade unions, voluntary organisations and the media should join hands, discuss and put forward suggestions to the state and central governments. Activity that focuses on the preservation and conservation of the coastal environment is the need of the hour. All activity that happens on the coastal regions require a coordinated effort from all agencies. The construction of fishing harbours by the Port Authorities, the building of sea walls by the Irrigation Department should be coordinated closely by the Fisheries Department and the concerned scientists. We hope that all these departments will come together and work hand in hand during the post tsunami phase and contribute to the welfare of the fisher people.

Seminar on Tsunami Disaster and the Preservation of Fisheries

Thiruvananthapuram: The preservation of fisheries in the wake of the tsunami disaster was the subject of a seminar conducted by the Thiruvananthapuram Social Service Society. The seminar was inaugurated by Archbishop Dr. Soosapakiyam. He spoke of the need to allay the fear brought by the tsunami upon the fisher people. The

following papers were presented during the seminar: Tsunami and the care of fisheries, Fish resources, natural calamities and coastal conservation, Coastal protection laws, by Prof. B Madhusudhana Kurup, Dr. Thomas and T Peter, respectively. The seminar was moderated by Mon. James Culas; Fr. Varghese Kattuparambil chaired the seminar, Fr. Romance Antony addressed the seminar, Fr. George J Gomes welcomed the gathering. Dominic Presentation, the Minister for Fisheries was the chief guest.

CUSAT bags 1.28 Crore grant for Ocean Bio-technology Research

Kalamasseri: The Vice-chancellor of the Cochin University of Science and Technology, Dr.PK Abdul Aziz said that the university will receive a grant of 1.28 crore for ocean bio-technology research. Only a few universities in India have qualified for this grant.

The genetic classification of ocean's micro-organisms will be the one of the project highlights.

The coordinator of the fish disease control centre, Dr. ISB Singh will lead the project. Dr. Rosamma Philip, Dr. AV Saramma, Dr. Sarita G Bhatt, Elias and Dr. A Gopalakrishnan will be the co-investigators of the project.

Petition submitted for Kerosene Distribution

Kollam: Kerosene required for fishing purposes was held up post-tsunami without being distributed to fisher folk. The KSMTF submitted petitions against this move before the District Collector and to Civil Supplies authorities. The KSMTF Kollam District President, M Ambrose and the District Secretary A Andrews lodged protests against the decision to hold up kerosene despite the centre having released a large quota.

Coastal Student Victim of Campus Violence

Thiruvananthapuram: Magdonal, a first year MCA student from Kulathoor Engineering College was violently beaten as part of ragging by a group of students belonging to the same college. The students also hurled abuses at the fisher folk community.

The group allegedly called him a Mukuva and insisted he comes to college wearing the garb of a fisherman before beating him up. This heinous act is an insult to the people of Kerala and the student community. The Principal should ensure the student gets adequate police protection while appearing for his examinations and the miscreants should be identified and arrested immediately. If the college authorities do not take action, the fishworker community will be forced to march towards the college, said T Peter and Anto Elias, the State President and the District Secretary of the KSMTF. They also lodged protests against the issue.

Repair Tsunami Damaged Vellanathuruthu – Azheekal Road

Karunagapally:

The tsunami damaged Vellanathuruthu – Azheekal road is yet to be repaired. The soil on the sides of the road was swept away by the sea and the road is still unfit and dangerous for vehicular traffic. The huge pits on either sides of the road still remain unfilled.

The PWD claims that the road is still under the jurisdiction of the Panchayat and that the PWD needs their permission to repair the road. The Panchayat authorities claim that they have already granted permission to the PWD. This confusion between two departments is delaying the repair of the road.

Sea wall Ineffective against Tsunami

Thiruvananthapuram: The building a sea wall along the 590 km coastline of Kerala is not appropriate, says Dr. TD Murthy, an expert on tsunamis. A sea wall is practical only in areas that have industries, ports and nuclear projects like Kochi. Natural and environment friendly barriers like mangroves etc are more effective, says Dr. Murthy. More than sea walls, an early warning system against tsunamis would be more effective. As a follow up of the Delhi discussion on tsunami warning systems, a meeting is scheduled to be held at Goa soon. The details of the Indian tsunami warning system will be finalised during the Goa meeting, said Dr, Murthy who is also the advisor for tsunami warning systems.

The project will cost about 150 crores and will be implemented in five stages. An earthquake mapping centre will be the first stage, a wave study station, specialised software for the above, a warning station and lastly, a special news dissemination centre.

Earthquakes measuring more than 6.5 on the Richter scale can cause tsunamis. Even if the secondary shocks are stronger, they may still not develop tsunamis. It is often the first quake that gives out the most energy.

India's heavy population makes it the most ideal place for situating the Indian Ocean warning centre. The warning centre is expected to be completed by September 2007.

When an abnormality is observed in the sea, says Dr. Murthy, don't stand on the sea shore watching it. Move quickly away from the coast as soon as possible. Dr. Murthy, a native of Andhra Pradesh, is credited with the establishing of a tsunami warning centre in Canada. He is presently in India on an invitation from the central government.

KSMTF forms Wing in Kovalam

Thiruvananthapuram: The KSMTF has formed a wing in Thiruvananthapuram, Kovalam. The elected officials of the new wing are: President, S Reji; Vice President N Rabeekhan; Secretary, T Joy; Joint Secretary, S Samkutty; Treasurer, V Nesan. A Badusha, H Karim and S Thangarajan were elected as committee members.

The KSMTF State President, T Peter inaugurated the meeting held to elect the officials and the District Secretary, Anto Elias presided over the election.

Fishworker Agitation in Kollam

Kollam: Fishworkers from Kollam organised a protest and marched towards the Collectorate to protest against government apathy towards the tsunami affected and pressed for their speedy rehabilitation. The march which had thousands of women and children participating was inaugurated by Mercykuttiamma. She demanded that the CM show accounts for the money collected in the name of tsunami relief.

The protest committee Chairman, M Ambrose, Convenor, H Basil Lal, Secretary F Jacob and Adv. Ben Morris addressed the gathering and later submitted a petition to the District Collector. The protest was led by A Andrews, N Marian, S Robert, S Christopher, D George and Johnson.

Government Approves Chellanam Mini-harbour

Kochi: The construction of the Chellanam mini-harbour has got government approval, informed Dominic Presentation, the Minister for Fisheries. A fund of Rs. 17 lakhs for the first stage of the project has been released, the Minister said. The total cost of the project is 5 crores.

State Budget Ignores Fishworkers

Thiruvananthapuram: The Minister for Finance Vakkom Purushotaman presented a state budget that ignores the crisis-ridden fishworker community. The scope of wireless stations for sea rescue will be extended to northern Kerala, the budget promises but he has ignored the fact that the existing wireless infrastructure is flawed and not operational. It is more than a year since the Ponmudi wireless station stopped functioning. Meanwhile, the construction of a sea wall (the best opportunity to siphon funds) has been given top priority. There is nothing new in the working of the Coastal Development Authority that hasn't been said in the previous four budgets.

In a post tsunami scenario, where thousands of fishworkers are in the throes of hunger and destitution, this attitude by the state government is deplorable.

National Fishworkers Forum Leaders Visit Tsunami Affected Regions

Kollam:

The leaders of the National Fishworkers Forum visited the tsunami affected regions of Kollam. The Chairperson, Harekrishna Deb Nath and the Gen. Secretary, ND Kohli visited the affected regions in Tamilnadu and Alappad in Kerala. They comforted fishworkers who had lost their craft and gear in Kollam and those who had lost everything in Alappad. In a meeting organised at Alappad, Harekrishna Deb Nath, T Peter, Sasikumar, KC Prasad, Jyoti Krishnan, Sreekumar, Adv. K Sanal

Kumar and Vincent Benedict spoke. In a petition to the Chief Minister, Harekrishna Deb Nath requested the rehabilitation process to be speeded up.

Tsunami Affected People Picket Highway

Karunagapally: The most severely affected people of Alappad Panchayats picketed the highway for seven hours protesting against government apathy. They demanded that the rehabilitation process and the restoration of livelihood be done in a fixed time scale.

At the Fisheries Minister's request, the District Collector rushed to the spot and assured the people that he would personally take steps to address their grievances. The strike was called off then. The convenor of the tsunami affected people's forum, Sasikumar; Adv. Sanal Kumar, Sreekumar, Venugopal, KC Prasad, Jyoti Krishnan, Sabu, PV Pavitran, and Maglin Peter addressed the gathering.

Seminar on Conservation of Inland Fisheries

Pathanamthitta: A one-day seminar conducted by the Department of Fisheries and the District Panchayat at the Kadapra Matsya Bhavan courtyard requested that inland fishworkers be included among the list of tsunami affected and that projects based on inland fishery conservation should be implemented by both the Department of Fisheries and organisations working in this sector. Elizabeth Mammen Mathai (MLA) inaugurated the seminar that was chaired by the District Panchayat President KK Royson. MJM co-ordinator Vincent Benedict presented a paper on Fishworkers and Fishery Conservation.

Ambika Mohankumar, Franci P Antony, Annamma George, PP John, TP John, C Francis, MS Satyanadhan, and S Ajayakumar addressed the seminar.