

Residents launch agitation against beach sand-mining

Thiruvananthapuram: Large tracts of the beaches in the city are being relentlessly mined for sand, exposing the shoreline to heightened erosion and threatening houses along the coast. The local fishermen community in the Veli area constituted an action council and launched a protest movement to prevent the illegal activity on Sunday. The Kerala Swathantra Matsya Thozhilali Federation has expressed solidarity with the agitation

Hundreds of fishworkers took out a march from the Valiaveli Church to the Veli sandbar where they lit torches demanding a ban on sand-mining from the inlet region. Father Gomez and action council leaders T. Peter, Celin Nelson and Mathews Miranda were among those who participated in the march. According to Father Cleetus Gomez, parish priest at the St. Thomas Church, Valiaveli, hundreds of truckloads of beach sand were being removed from the Veli inlet on a daily basis. "Until last year, the cultural programmes organised as part of the annual church festival were held on the wide beach bordering the western side of the church. Most of the beach has disappeared this year as a result of the illegal extraction of sand," he said.

Local residents say that the large-scale removal of sand has left the remaining portions of the beach pockmarked with deep pits, creating a hazard for residents and unwary visitors. Scientists feel that sand-extraction could be a major factor behind the unprecedented erosion along the Thiruvananthapuram coast last year. Dozens of houses were washed away by strong tidal action and the seawall was damaged at several places. Hundreds of coconut trees were also uprooted by waves. Data recorded at the Centre for Earth Science Studies (CESS) here shows that the erosion along the Thiruvananthapuram coast in 2006 was the worst since 1980. "This is interesting because, excepting a few pockets like Poonthura and Beemapally, this stretch of the coast was considered the most stable in the state," says Dr.M. Baba, director, CESS.

"Sand acts as an effective cushion to absorb the impact of the waves. Deprived of this buffer, the shoreline is vulnerable to the invading sea. Seawalls also break down if there is no beach on the seaward side. The severe erosion in the Thumba and Veli areas and the damage to the big sea walls at Panathura, Poonthura and Beemapally show the extent of the problem," says Mr. Baba.

Fishermen are often witness to the illegal mining of sand but they are helpless to check the activity. Revenue officials said they had received reports of beach sand mining in the Pallithura area. The Veli inlet is the most heavily-mined area.

The saline sand removed from beaches is favoured as a foundation-filling material for buildings because it repels termites and rodents. Unscrupulous traders also mix the beach sand with river sand to reap more profit. "Removal of beach sand is prohibited under the CRZ norms. It is well within the powers of the district administration to crack down on the illegal activity," says Mr. Baba.

Night Vigil To Prevent The Sand Mining At Veli, Trivandrum

Thiruvananthapuram : Veli a costal village in Trivandrum the capital city of Kerala is facing the problem of sand mining in boats. Daily hundreds of boats sand is being shifting from the sea shore which creates lots of ecological imbalance in the costal region. When the last sea erosion happened 18 houses have been fully demolished and 25 houses has been partially destroyed in addition to that lot of coconut trees have been uprooted by the waves. The people of the locality is now aware of the reason for all these mishaps, so they come forward to prevent the sand shifting; since the sand shifting is a crime so they are doing it at night. Now the people are vigilant through out the night to prevent the same. People are helping the police department to book the culprits. As revenge to the same the sand miners had attacked the fish vending women.

Fish vending women as detained the police personals in the station; by the timely intervention of Rev. Fr. Cletus Gomes, Mr. Veli Varghese, Ward Councilor, T Peter, A Lukose the problem has been pacified for time being. As a result of the agitation six culprits were booked by the police and the boats and equipments used for the sand mining were taken in to custody. The night vigil by the Seashore Protection Forum has created a great impact in the near by villages also, they are also planning to protect the sea shore in line with Veli village.

Every night the strike starts at 09.00 PM and ends in the early morning by 04.00 AM. All villages are in turn part of the strike. A team of youngsters are patrolling though the sea shore in small boats with search lights like watch guards. The fisher men are very determent not to allow any body for sand mining; and they are actively involved in the preventive strike.

THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM Apr 26, 2007

Shhh! They're on guard against a plunder

Thursday April 26 2007 10:45 IST

T'PURAM: When the district authorities turned a blind eye to the issue, It was the residents' turn to make them see — with a new mode of agitation. To keep the sand-mafia away from the region, the residents of Valiyaveli have been putting up a night vigil in the area for the past three weeks. As many as 25 men from 30 family units in the area take turns to keep vigil everyday. They keep vigil from 9 pm to 5 am, after which they leave for their works. The womenfolk render their support by staying awake till midnight. The residents have come forward with all help by supplying food, water and blankets for those on guard.

“It's a silent mode of agitation by the fisherfolk. We want to tell the authorities that we mean business. We will withdraw the vigil only if they take a positive stand,” said T Peter, president of Swathanthra Matsya Thozhilali Federation.

The sand-mafia, however, continues to mine sand from beneath the two bridges in the area, thereby posing danger to their safety, Peter said. The railway bridge and the PWD bridge are the happening places now, he said. The men were forced to resort to the new mode of protest after gangsters owing allegiance to the sand-mafia

attacked womenfolk in the area and carried away their boats and fishing nets during night.

Though sand-mining has been banned in the area, it is being carried out in full fledge near the Veli Tourist Village, leading to the change of course of the Veli inlet and the formation of a deep pit. Two boys in the area had drowned in this pit after which the local people came out in the open against the mafia. They put up a hoarding declaring the area prohibited for sand mining and this led to an open fight.

On April 4, a group of women were assaulted and abused by a gang of 40 after forcibly dragging them out of a KSRTC bus in which they were travelling. The police had arrested six men in connection with this incident

Vigil stepped up against sand-mining (Hindu Daily)

Thiruvananthapuram: Residents of the Veli fishermen's village in the city have formed a vigilante group to prevent unauthorised sand-mining from these shore, believed to be the cause of environmental devastation of the coast. Volunteers of the Seashore Protection Forum patrol the seashore in small boats equipped with searchlights from 9 p.m. to 4 a.m. Environmentalists say large tracts of beaches in the city are mined for sand, exposing the shoreline to erosion and posing a threat to houses along the coast. According to Cleetus Gomez of St. Thomas Church, Valiaveli, hundreds of truckloads of beach sand are removed from the Veli inlet every day. The illegal extraction of sand has eroded the beach bordering the western side of the church.

Local residents say the large-scale removal of sand has created deep pits on the remaining portion of the beach, creating a hazard for residents and unwary visitors. Scientists say sand extraction could be a major causative factor for the unprecedented erosion along the Thiruvananthapuram coast last year. Dozens of houses were washed away by strong tidal action and the seawall was damaged at several places. Hundreds of coconut trees were uprooted by waves.

Sources said the fishermen were often witness to the illegal mining of sand but they were helpless. Revenue officials said they had received reports of beach sand-mining in the Pallithura area. The Veli inlet is the most heavily-mined area. State president of the Kerala Swathantra Matsya Thozhilali Federation T. Peter said the night vigil by the Seashore Protection Forum had created an impact in the neighbouring coastal villages also. "More villagers are coming forward to join the initiative," he said

Early this year, women fish vendors from Veli had to face the ire of the organised sand-mining workers. Six persons were booked by the police and equipment used for sand-mining were seized after an attack on the women. "It is then that we decided that we have to do something to check illegal sand-mining. The initial response to the night vigil was encouraging," said Mr. Peter.

As many as 30 family units under the church are involved in the vigil. Volunteers from each unit take turns to keep vigil. The boats are kept ready to accost sand-miners and the volunteers are provided with whistles to warn their team-mates. Mr. Peter said sand-miners had shifted their operations to the area near the railway bridge and

the roadbridge adjoining the VSSC campus. "The removal of sand has exposed the foundation of the two bridges, posing a threat to their structural stability. The wire fence bordering the VSSC campus has also collapsed as a result of the heavy sand mining," he said. Data recorded at the Centre for Earth Science Studies here show that the erosion along the Thiruvananthapuram coast in 2006 was the worst since 1980. Scientists point out that large-scale extraction of sand from the beaches at Thumba and Veli is the primary cause for the intensified coastal erosion.

The saline sand removed from beaches is favoured as a foundation-filling material for buildings, as it repels termites and rodents. Unscrupulous traders also mix the beach sand with river sand to reap more profit.