

STRANGLING THE GOOSE THAT LAYS GOLDEN EGGS



Waste from a beverages company outlet at Cherthala being drained into the Puthiya Thodu, which is connected with Vembanad lake



Reema Narendran | ENS
T'Puram, March 17

THE black clams of the Vembanad wetland have a history of supporting a number of industries in the state, including Travancore Cements Ltd (TCL), Travancore Electrochemicals and Pallathra Bricks and Tiles Ltd. For the very same reason, these live organisms - villorita cyprinoides var cochinesis - got labelled as a mineral resource, requiring fishermen to get a licence from the Mining & Geology Department to collect them.

While fishermen largely take only such quantities of clam from the lake that they need, the industries use huge dredgers and completely mine out the fossilized white shell deposits. They are only concerned about short-term benefits. Even the expert committee that looked into the impact of mechanised dredging seemed to be more on a diplomatic mission rather than a fact-finding one.

“We don’t want TCL shut down. We want it to switch to a more sustainable resource-utilisation model, such as a transition to raw materials comprising a mixture of limestone and shells, devoid of meat or gypsum. It can also diversify into pharma products as the shells are excellent sources of calcium, or into cosmetics such as face cream and tooth paste,” says Anti-dredging Agitation Committee member Binu.

The equally myopic vision of other companies, which see wetlands as wastelands, has reduced the 36,500-hectare wetland to just 12,700 hectares.

And, the destruction need not always end with reclamation. At Cherthala, a beverages company has been spewing untreated effluents into Puthiya Thodu and Vembanad, spreading a number of diseases among the people living nearby.

In Kochi, the ongoing reclamation activities for mega-projects like the Hi-tech City, the Vallarpadam container terminal, Kochi Marina and the LNG terminal will further shrink the lake.

Proponents of the Hi-tech City on the Valanthakkad island say only 20 per cent of the construction would be carried out on the island. “That is what they say all the time. They will first construct a road, widen it and then reclaim the land on both sides, completely destroying the fragile ecosystem,” says Sahajan of Valanthakkad.

If it is the mega industrial projects which exert pressure on the wetland in Kochi, in Alappuzha and Kuttanad it is the real estate mafia. One frequently sees ‘for sale’ boards on the paddyfields in Kuttanad, especially near the Alappuzha-Changanassery road.

“Some people refuse to grow paddy purposely, they don’t even give it on lease, so that after a few years it becomes fallow land,” notes Kuttanad Vikasana Samithy executive director Fr Thomas Pee-lianickal.

According to certain projec-



The shells of black clams being taken from Perumbalam island to neighbouring states, where they fetch a good price

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tions, at the current rate of reclamation, this wetland of international importance may vanish in just 50 years.

As of now, the Vembanad wetland is the proverbial goose that lays golden eggs for the flourishing tourism sector. It is more than two decades since it all began, yet there is yet to be a serious move to assess the carrying capacity of the lake, the environmental impact of waste discharge, the effects of oil spills from houseboats and of reclamation. But thankfully, the perpetual conflict between development and environment has reached a consensus at certain resorts at Kumarakom and Mararikulam, where wetlands are so beautifully conserved that they have become examples of responsible tourism. With absolutely zero reclamation, these resorts have natural canals, marshes, paddyfields and even prawn and fish farms right on their premises. They use water from the lake and use them after treatment. They do not discharge waste outside the resort. There the houseboats, the emerald-green paddyfields, the cackle of migratory birds, the buzz of dragonflies, the serene backwaters and even the karimeen (pearl spot) to charm tourists from across the globe.

Not too late, at least one industry in the region has started realising that without conserving the environment, without the paddyfields and without the birds and bees, there will be no tourism.

And without the goose, there will be no eggs.

(to be concluded)

(The study was conducted with a fellowship from the Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi)

‘LeT has 2 support groups in Kerala’

NAZEER WAS IN CHARGE OF THE SUPPORT GROUP OF LeT IN NORTH KERALA

Kannur, March 17

LASHKAR-E-TOIBA (LeT) has two support groups in Kerala, according to Thadiyantavide Nazeer. He made this disclosure during his interrogation by the police team here on Wednesday.

Going by the revelations made by Nazeer, who is now under the custody of the police here, he was in charge of the support group of LeT in north Kerala. His main assign-

ment was to recruit youths for terrorist activities. He also told investigating officials that LeT had given him Rs 75,000 during his stay in Bangladesh after four Malayali terror suspects were killed in Kashmir. The funds for the Kerala operations came from Gulf countries, according to police sources. The interrogation of Nazeer and Shafas, another suspected terrorist remanded to police custody by the court on Tuesday, will continue for some more days. ■ ENS

SELECTION OF BOAT CREW ADHERE STRICTLY TO NORMS: HC

Express News Service
Kochi, March 17

THE Kerala High Court has directed the Kerala Tourism Development Corporation (KTDC) that appointment of boat drivers and supervisors should be strictly in compliance with the provisions of the Kerala Public Canals and Public Ferries Act.

The court criticised the KTDC for appointing a non-qualified person as boat supervisor by relaxing the norms. “If this is the way the KTDC is making appointments, there is no wonder that a boat tragedy occurred in the lake at Thekkady,” the court said.

Justice S Siri Jagan issued the directive while disposing of the petition filed by Kuruvila Joseph a boat sank with the KTDC, challenging the promotion of boat driver N Thevan as boat supervisor. Kuruvila, a boat sank with the KTDC at Aranyanivas, Thekkady, is a holder of Boat Master’s Certificate issued under the Kerala Public Canal and Public Ferries Act. In the petition, he alleged that Thevan did not have the required qualification and his appointment as boat supervisor was illegal.

The KTDC was of the opinion that there were no rules regarding the appointment of boat supervisor and Thevan was promoted as he was the senior-most employee in the feeder category. Finding that Thevan’s appointment was illegal, the court said it was surprising to see that a person who does not have any qualification was appointed the master of the boat by relaxing all three required qualification. “Driving a boat is the job of an expert and qualified person. Safety of the passengers is in the hands of boat driver,” the court said.

The court quashed the appointment of Thevan as boat supervisor. However, the court said that Kuruvila, the petitioner was not entitled to be appointed as the supervisor as he did not have service qualification as stipulated by the Rules. The court directed the KTDC that those who do not have required qualification should be terminated from the service or shifted to other sections.

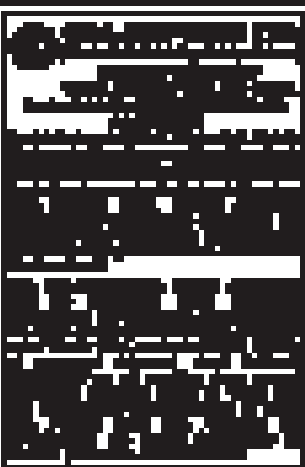
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Explosives recovered from school

Kannur, March 17

A small quantity of explosive materials and an empty tinbox used to make country bombs were found under a staircase at the Government UP School at Chalahad here. The bomb squad of the police rushed to the spot and took the explosives to the police station ■ ENS



ജനകീയ കലാകൃതികളുടെ പ്രദർശനം

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