

Sand-Mining at Dadanpatrabar

A brief (and slightly belated) coastal bulletin

Dadanpatrabar is located in Ramnagar II block, Purba Medinipur District. However, even to those who are not well acquainted with the area, it is easy to indicate the location nowadays—the place is very close to Mandarmani.

Dadanpatrabar is a major fish-landing centre run by the local fishing community (such community managed fish land centre is called *khoti*). As in the case of other Purba Medinipur *khotis*, a large proportion of the fish is dried, to be sold as *shuntki*. Fishers have traditionally used a portion of the wonderful beach to dry the fish.

Beaches, of course, are immensely lucrative resources for reasons other than fish-drying. Constructing tourist resorts is one reason, of which the neighbouring environmental monstrosity called Mandarmani constitutes a prime instance. The other reason is sand-mining. This is major environmental threat all over the country, as recognized by the Supreme Court and the National Green Tribunal.

West Bengal hitherto has not witnessed any major sand-mafia like some other parts of the country (for example, Maharashtra). However, that just might be changing.

On 28 June 2014, a team, reportedly led and supervised by none less than the Joint BDO of the Ramnagar II Block came and mined sand on the beach, in the zone that the fishers dry their fish (the zone is not in use now as this isn't the *khoti* season).

When the fishers pointed out that the miners had no business mining sand at a traditional fish-drying site, the officer reportedly said that he was acting under instructions from the BDO and would desist only on orders from the latter.

Sand-mining continued on the next day, 29 June. It ended that day because, on the one hand, local pressure had built up against the mischief and also possibly because the miners had largely got what they had come for.

The local fishers complained to the DM over phone on 28 June. They submitted a formal complaint on 1 July. They also complained to the Assistant Director of Fisheries (Marine) at Contai, resulting in a visit, on 2 July, by the Director of Fisheries, one Deputy Director, and the ADF (Marine). The fisheries officers, reportedly, condemned the sand-mining.

In addition to the assault on fishers' livelihood, a major concern is that sand-mining was undertaken at a veritable beach site completely covered under the CRZ notification 2011, under the *Environment (Protection) Act*, 1986.

Section 3 of the said CRZ notification declares the following as prohibited activities within the CRZ:

(x) *Mining of sand, rocks and other sub-strata materials except,*

- (a) those rare minerals not available outside the CRZ area,
- (b) exploration and exploitation of Oil and Natural Gas.

So far as the particular site where the sand was mined is concerned, there is no scope whatsoever of any confusion about its CRZ status. For, the site is at a stone's throw from the water line during moderate high tides and clearly on the seaward side of the HTL (highest water line during spring-tide), as shown even by the rather poor picture below. Therefore, it is not merely a CRZ area where various activities, *including sand-mining*, are banned, but is within the *highly restricted CRZ I zone*.



You can see the waterline and the fishing boat in the background

The CRZ restriction is in addition to the judgement of the National Green Tribunal, which has declared that sand-mining, in whatever locality, cannot be undertaken without proper environmental clearance from the SEIAA. *It seemed evident from the exchange between the local fishers and the Joint BDO that the latter was either not aware of the various environmental restrictions on the activity he was supervising, or chose to ignore them.* The gross illegality of the activity has been rendered more offensive by the reported involvement of a government officer.

Environmental governance of the West Bengal coast is close to being non-existent, notwithstanding the creation of a new Coastal Zone Management Authority in 2012, headed by the Principal Secretary, Department of Environment. The mischief at Dadanpatrabar has been brought to his notice and to the notice of the Environment Minister through letter sent on 4 June 2014. A general diary has also been registered at the Ramnagar Police Station.

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