

Report of the
CITIZENS' MEET
To Protest
Coastal Zone Management Notification
With a Special Reference to destructive tourism at Mandarmani
held at Seva Kendra, Kolkata on 29.7.07
organized by DISHA and National Fishworkers' Forum

Around 70 social activists, environmentalists, academicians, students, media persons, coastal fishworkers and concerned persons from Kolkata and different coastal stretches of East Midnapore and South 24 Parganas representing 24 organisations assembled to protest Ministry of Environment and Forests' plan to introduce Coastal Zone Management Notification based on recommendations of Swaminathan Committee. They deplored this as an attempt to open up the 8000 Km long coastal line of India for massive investment through SEZs, tourism, various industries, mining and other capital intensive activities and thereby further threatening the coastal ecology along with the life and livelihood of millions of people including the fisher folk who depend upon the natural resources of the coast.

Sri Sasanka Dev, Secretary, DISHA welcomed the participants and placed a brief introduction of the agenda.

Sri Prabir Biswas, President, Gana Udyog presided over the meeting.

Sri Harekrishna Debnath, Chairperson, NFF described the background in detail. He pointed out how the traditional marine fishers of India are playing an important role in the national economy. Their movement has been interrelated with conservation of marine and coastal environment as their livelihood is dependant on sustainable use of marine and coastal resources. He described how the Government of India has been effecting statutory changes to accommodate commercial plunder on the one hand and refusing to act upon the **existing restrictive provisions** to protect our coasts on the other. He said that the coastal fisher people of India together with all concerned social and environmental organizations and activists have already launched a nationwide struggle demanding scrapping of the proposed Coastal Zone Management Notification and introduction of a **comprehensive legislation** to protect coastal environment and the life and livelihood of the traditional fisher people. They have further demanded that pending the introduction of the comprehensive legislation, **Coastal Zone Regulation Notification of 1991** in its original should be rigorously implemented. Sri Debnath announced that this struggle would culminate in a simultaneous national action in the coastal areas on 9th August, 2007.

In his presentation "CRZ to CZM – Opening Up Our Coast to Plunder" Sri Pradip Chatterjee, Chief Coordinator, DISHA elaborately presented the scopes and limitations of **CRZ Notification**, which imposed a number of regulations to protect the coastal environment with the mention of **traditional and customary rights** of fisher people. He also explained how in last 16 years most of the 21 amendments of the original CRZ Notification diluted its spirit and gave way to large scale investments to plunder coastal resources. Swaminathan Committee was set up by the MoEF to review the situation. Principles suggested and observations made

by Swaminathan Committee sounded high and fine but his recommendations have been in complete conformity with the vested interests that engineered the amendments of the original notification. The pedantic exercise regarding drawing of setback/vulnerability line further obscured the scope of its implementation. Recognition or even mention of the **rights of the fisher people** is completely absent in these recommendations. The recommended coastal management turned out to be a techno-bureaucratic prerogative. He pointed that the proposed draft CZM Notification has been too reckless to prescribe that protective structures on the shore can be instrumental to do away with all restrictions and thus furthered the scope of plunder of the coast. Exposing the machinations of the Government of India in the Ministry of Environment and Forests presented through the draft of the proposed CZM Notification he urged an all out rejection of the proposed CZM Notification.

Sri Santanu Chacraverti, Asstt. Secretary, DISHA presented the case of Mandarmani where unscrupulous hoteliers have violated all norms and regulations in developing constructions on the beach destroying the beach vegetations, sand dunes, crab habitats with the support of the local authorities. The state level authorities, especially WB Coastal Zone Management Authority supported these blatant violations maintaining complete silence year after year. DISHA took up the matter with the High Court at Calcutta through a PIL. The Court ordered the authorities to take action in accordance to law and directed to inform DISHA about the nature of action taken within 10 weeks. Sri Chacraverti informed that 10 weeks have passed but any reply informing any such action has not been communicated. Mis-governance has become the order of the day and our coasts are not at all safe in the hands of our government. Civil Society must come forward and intervene.

A panel discussion comprising Dr.A.K.Ghosh, Gautam Sen, Tejen Das, Meher Engineer and Arijit Majumdar took place subsequent to the presentations. Dr. A.K.Ghosh pointed out that, not only in the issue of coastal environment, but also in every aspect of environmental issues, the Government is liberalising the laws in the interest of big investments. Sri Meher Engineer commented that the issue though coastal is of paramount importance to people living in other parts of the country as well since the severe degradation of environment would affect all. Sri Tejen Das pointed out that the city people savours fishes like Hilsa and Pomphret but they are more or less indifferent to protect the coastal waters that produce those. Sri Arijit Majumdar stressed on the necessity of responsible fishing. Only peoples' initiative and upsurge can save our land from the increasing commercial plunder he exclaimed. Sri Gautam Sen pledged support to the struggle against CZM and wished its success.

The meeting decided to issue joint statements:

1. To the MoEF protesting introduction of proposed Coastal Zone Management Notification, demanding comprehensive legislation to protect coastal environment and rights of the traditional fisher people and rigorous implementation of CRZ in original form till its enactment.
2. To the MoEF and Minister in Charge, Environment Department, Govt. of WB demanding immediate action to stop violations in Mandarmani (Copy enclosed).
3. To submit Memoranda to the Governor of West Bengal in protest of the proposed CZM Notification and destruction of coastal environment at Mandarmani.
