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Environmental journalists from India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives meet in Kerala for workshop

Sea erosion rising at an alarming rate causes grave concern: counter measures discussed

By E.Weerapperuma

ecent reports in the local press claimed that ten metres of the Sri Lanka map have been devoured by the sea during the first three months of this year alone. This stretch of land which had been washed away by sea erosion resulted in the loss of valuable coconut land thereby reducing the country's coconut yield, a major source of revenue for Sri Lanka.

According to these reports, Nainamadama West, Muttuwa, Kurusagahapaduwa and the Taldeka coast belt in the Provincial Secretariat Division of Wennappuwa have been eroded and the main victims were fishermen. All of them had lost their homes. Another 60 families also face the threat of losing their homes due to sea erosion.

Fisherfolk at Mahawaduwage, a hamlet off Paiyagala were driven to desperate straits last week following tidal waves and sea erosion which washed away their houses and robbed them of all their worldly possessions. It was a very strong tide that had caused this havoc and took away everything the people had in seconds.

The Coastal Conservation Department operating under the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Ministry has identified Wellamankara, Lunawa, Moratuwella, Katukurunda, Paiyagala, Usmudullawa, Kalamulla, Seenigama, Hikkaduwa, Kinniya as areas most vulnerable to sea erosion.

Colombo Wellawatte-Mt.Lavinia, Akurala, Habaraduwa, Midigama in Weligama, Madihe in Matara and Rekawa (a major ground in coral mining) are also considered to be areas that come under over 2,000 years. We find references made to this the threat of sea erosion. In Puttalam the coastal strip comprising Kammalmoya, Wellamakara, Taldeka and Ulhitiyawa have suffered sea erosion during the past four years, according to sources.

It has been estimated that along the coastal segment extending to about 685 km from Kalpitiya to the Yala National Park Bay about 175,000 -285,000 sqm of coastal land are lost each year. From this (Kalpitiya Peninsula), the Coastal Conservation resource management. Department reported in 1990.

Erosion is the process by which material is removed from cliffs and beaches, causing the coastoccurs along many parts of the coast. The mud, sand and gravel that are removed by erosion are carried away along the coast by waves and currents, to be resupplying and maintaining marshes.

Not new phenomenon

The damage to the beaches, coastal conservation and the human habitat along the coastal belt will also cause the loss of coral reefs, seagrass beds, mangroves, estuaries, lagoons and habitable marine waters. The loss of habitats will cause reduction of fishing, navigation, recreation and other activities. At biodiversity in coastal and marine ecosystems, lower the productivity of fish and shrimp catch, reduce the diversity of mangrove cover, bring down bird population, degrade the general ecosystem according to

Sri Lanka is an island nation endowed with a rich variety of coastal and marine environs which are intrinsically linked with the history and economy of

Beautiful sandy beaches and mangrove forested estuaries provide the basis for the marine fisheries industry, coastal tourism and a host of other productive benefits. (National Environmental Action Plan (1995-1998) of the Environment Ministry revised

To this country sea erosion is not a new phenomenon. Our coastline is about 1,340 kilometres. Legends and narratives of coastal retreats go back to



Sea eroding into the railway line

phenomenon in the Mahavamsa.(Coastal Zone Management Plan of the Coast Conservation Department, 1990). However a retreating coastline was first viewed as a problem when a large number of people began settling down along the coastal belt during the early part of this century and concern for protection from sea erosion was shown in early 1920. The primary means of combating sea erosion at that time about 95,000-160,000 sqm are lost annually from the was the construction of revetments and groynes. By 137 km coastal segment that extends from the mouth the 1970s the country realised that erosion control of the Kelani river (Colombo North) to Talawila has to be a part of a broader program of coastal

Warning bells

The concept of coastal resource management is line to retreat inland. It is a natural process that comparatively new and earlier the resource capacity of the beach was considered inexhaustible and no planning effort was made for controlling its use.

The uncontrolled use and abuse of resources over deposited on beaches and other landforms such as the years has resulted in major erosion problems and spits and barrier islands. Some of the material ends degradation of coastal wetlands and lagoonal areas, up on the seabed or in estuaries and bays, thereby a report on "Shoreline Erosion in Sri Lanka Coastal Areas", prepared by the Coast Conservation Department in 1992, has revealed.

If the coastline is left unprotected, houses, hotels, businesses, public buildings and other coastal structures along the shore may be undermined by erosion. It may also undermine roads and contribute to the loss of degradation of valuable lands and disrupt times, especially during severe storms-erosion can even damage wharfs, sea wall and breakwaters that were built to protect coastal communities. The first warning bells were sounded as far back as 1952 in respect of possible sea erosion in the South when the Oueen Elizabeth Jetty was constructed in the Colombo harbour. It is claimed that a foreign engineer had predicted that if the jetty was built in Colombo harbour there would be sea erosion in the South. And we are witnessing this today. The end result of all this would be a loss of potential economic gains and the increase of coastal protection

Sri Lanka is not the only country where land and sea erosion are major threats. Other countries in the travelled in a motor boat over the backwaters of Kutregion share the same problem perhaps to a greater tanad and visited Allepey meeting people and peo-

the effects of empowerment of people and how best small. According to analysts industrialised countries those methods could be applied to face the sea ero- are the major culprits for this phenomenon.

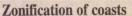
Environment journalists of the Maldives and Bangladesh came out with the following facts: due to a climatic change a sea level rise by one meter would inundate 17 per cent of land of Bangladesh which is already a land scarce and a densely populated coastal country.

If the sea level rises one metre from the present level, the whole of the Maldives would go under has however suggested that the buffer area should be water and would be completely wiped out from the face of the earth.

The views expressed by these journalists were supported by the Maldivian President Abdul Gayoom when he said that over 40 per cent of the inhabited islands of the Maldives were facing a serious erosion problem, which was physically threatening the settlements on them." Erosion may be an early warning of an impending disaster. The average height of our islands is only one metre above sea level", he said addressing the opening session of the Governing Council of the Colombo-based South Asia Co-operative Environmental Programme, (SACEP), a press release from the Maldivian High Commission said.

President Gayoom who was in Sri Lanka last week made an appeal to the international community to help his country to overcome the environmental problems facing the people of his Indian Ocean archipelago, the press release added.

Most of the environment journalists from the



According to media reports, there is a need for zonification of coasts in coastal states like Kerala and Karnataka. A report has been prepared by the Centre for Earth Science Studies(CESS). The Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) wants to have a 500 metre zone declared. The Kerala State Government reduced to 50 metres.

One million of Kerala people are fishermen and 2.5 lakhs of them go fishing daily. Another two lakhs of people are involved in allied jobs.

The Chief Minister was of the view that the CRZ norms could be applied only to coastal areas and not the banks of Kerala rivers and backwaters.

Although the situation in Sri Lanka is not so serious it could lead to such a situation eventually if timely action is not taken to control sea pollution and

The sea around Sri Lanka and the globe is polluted at an alarming rate with plastic and polythene, organic and industrial affluence. The ocean needs to be kept clean as minute algae plant found in the, ocean generate 80 percent of oxygen given out into the atmosphere.

The prediction

The prediction is that the sea level will start to rise at a faster rate over the next century, and that many areas of the United States-and the rest of the world-will be subjected to increased risk of coastal

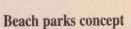
Prevention of coast erosion is a pure engineering activity whatever methods are used. The best approach would be the combination of appropriate methods in properly designed schemes with the aim of developing a sandy beach and maintaining it under normal wave conditions.

Mr. R.Radhakrishnan, President of a leading NGO endorsed this view when he said that sea erosion was a major problem in Kerala where coastal area was 590 kilo metres and 470 km was under

The 'Green Revolution" introduced after independence had "killed the area" by reclaiming the land without planning. A proposal to construct a bridge, they found to be directly affecting the fishing

The Marine Regulation Act of 1980 in Kerala was intended for that purpose. This Act has demarcated the sea and identified an exclusive area where the traditional way of fishing could be allowed and directing the mechanised boats for deep sea fishing.

In Sri Lanka steps are being taken to educate the public on this issue and the Coastal Conservation Department in collaboration with the Dehiwala-Galkissa Municipal Council recently launched a campaign to educate the school children over the dangers of sea erosion hoping that they would be the best agents to convey this important message to their



The concept of introducing 'beach parks' while ejecting the beach squatters would also influence the people to stop coral mining which causes sea erosion, the officials of the department believe.

The Government has passed the necessary laws to prevent wanton destruction of sea coral that causes sea erosion. The Coast Conservation Act of 1981 is one of them.

The enforcement of law has to be stronger to prevent a possible calamity. This Act prohibits mining, burning or possession of coral or its transport. Setting up of lime kilns along the coastal strip is prohibited.

Those who violate the laws and involve themcommon global problem rather than an 'individual selves in mining corals would be dealt with severely Global climatic change transcends geographical and their goods and equipment would be confiscat-



Rock stones as barriers

Bangladesh and Maldives recently met in Thiru- SAARC countries felt that the problem was closely vanathapuram, Capital of Kerala State for a work-related to global warming, which according to them, shop on "Threats to Coastline" organised by the Forum of Environmental Journalists of India (FEJI) refrigerators. and funded by the World Bank. Sri Lanka was represented by the Sri Lanka Environmental Journalists Forum (SLEJF).

They were assisted by Chief News Editor Jose Panachipuram and sub editor, Mr. S. Harikrishan of the Malayala Manorama newspaper.

The journalists visited tourists areas in Trivandrum district, Kannur, Kottayam, Kumarakom and ples organisations facing the threat of sea erosion in Environment journalists from India, Sri Lanka, the state. They also had the opportunity to find out boundaries and would affect every nation, big or ed, under the Act.

is accelerated by the use of sophisticated goods like They blame the so-called developed countries for

'dumping' sophisticated products in the Third World

countries. Global warming results in raising the sea level which in turn in the extinction of many island Hence it was felt that the problem related to global warming and the resulting sea erosion that creates anxiety in the island nations should be looked at as a

problem' of small countries.