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Greens concerned over destruction of mangroves

P Sudhakaran, TNN Jul 17, 2013, 02:26AM IST

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KANNUR: The greens are up against a government project that aims to develop aquaculture in the state.

The environmental activists are against the brackish water paddy and shrimp farming system alleging that the mangroves are being destroyed for the agency for development of aquaculture, Kerala (ADAK) project.

"The state promoted the pilot project in kaipad land (brackish water areas) because this is the traditional farming method in such areas but now the environmentalists say that the farmers are destroying mangroves," said Dineshan Cheruvatt, fisheries deputy director, who is on deputation in ADAK for the implementation of this project.

"From next year onwards, we will do rice and shrimp cultivation only in Kattampally wetland areas where there are no mangroves," he said.

Environmental activist Bhaskaran Valloor said they opposed the project in places like Vellikkeel and Ezhom because "in the name of cultivation, they are reclaiming wetlands, swamps and ponds and it will affect the ecosystem."



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"Mangroves are also facing the threat of extinction in many places, and the ADAK project will literally prove to be dangerous for the same," he said.

But an ADAK official said that the small-time farmers are compelled to fell the mangroves in their paddy fields because they have no other place to cultivate and the mangroves are encroaching into their private lands thus denying them of their livelihood.

"Those who raise voice against the smalltime farmers fail to see the large-scale destruction of mangroves and also the initiatives taken by ADAK to grow mangroves in many places including the wetlands in Thalassery," said Dineshan. "The environmental activists fail to understand one thing. That the kaipad lands are also home to biodiversity and they are in a sense more beneficial to the society than the mangroves, so we should maintain a balanced approach."

Environmentalist Parayil Rajan said the issue of mangroves could be effectively addressed only if the government acquires the private land where mangroves are grown and take steps to protect it. "Even if the private owners are asked to protect mangroves, they will have umpteen justifications for felling it and the only way is to acquire it but political interests play spoilsport and the conservation efforts go waste," he said.

When contacted a Department of Social Forestry official also reflected the same feeling.

Though there are more than 18 varieties of mangroves here and it is against the existing environment regulations to cut it, the private land owners cannot be asked to save it at the cost of their livelihood, said an official. "We have heard there are lakhs of rupees set aside for mangrove conservation but we don't know how the authorities are using that money and as long as we don't have a proper conservation project in place we will not be able find a solution to such controversies," he said.

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