

# News Round-up

## **Baywatch**

Massive pollution in the Bay of Bengal is threatening the stock of marine fisheries, and the volume of fishing in **Bangladesh** has declined alarmingly in the last few years, the official BSS news agency has recently reported.

Experts fear that fisheries resources might dwindle further, and fin fish and shellfish could become extinct if pollution in the Bay of Bengal's water continues. The Bay is enriched with nutrients, supplied by a network of rivers and their tributaries

The present problems spring from industrial toxic waste, oil spills, dumping of trash fish, illegal and overfishing, siltation and flood water

stagnation, increase in inland wastes, artificial hatcheries, fishermen's ignorance of the bay's fish stock and mismanagement of the marine sector.

A survey by the Fisheries Resources Institute of the Department of Fisheries, Chittagong University, revealed that the use of pesticides has increased by 400 per cent since 1977.

## **Giant needs**

In **Sweden**, giant shrimps are a relatively new product, not a traditional fare for which well-established eating habits have evolved. This fact is working to the

advantage of the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC), which, since 1995, has been trying to draw attention to the problem of the production of giant shrimps. The SSNC believes that it will be possible to persuade consumers and the trade to manage without giant shrimps.

The SSNC is working with several environmental organizations in the South — in Ecuador, Honduras, Malaysia,

Thailand and India — which are in various ways heavily involved in the problems associated with the demand for giant shrimps. The problems concern both farmed supplies and natural shrimps caught in the open sea. The SSNC is part of an international network that consists of members from producing countries as well as consumer countries.

## **Mangroves forever**

The rapid depletion of the mangrove forest area that once covered the entire coastline of Orissa in **India** is being cited as one important reason for the recent cyclone lashings that have been plaguing the coastline area.

Several times in the past, ecologists have warned that the Orissa coast was headed for major disaster. The first warning was issued in 1971, when a severe cyclonic storm battered the shores, claiming more than 10,000 lives, a number far surpassing previous records. Although the Orissa coast was subject to two devastating cyclones in 1885 and 1892, the 1971 cyclone was far more damaging. Several villages and

hamlets close to the sea near Paradip were swept away by waves and the toll was officially recorded at more than 10,000.

Citing these instances, ecologists claim that the

frequency of cyclones has registered an alarming trend since the 1970s and attribute it to the large-scale exploitation of the mangrove vegetation. Remote sensing pictures taken by Salyut-7 during the 1970s revealed that every year, nearly 2.5 sq km of mangrove vegetation has been depleted or cleared in the Orissa coast.

## **Virus at large**

A strange new virus is attacking the larvae of shrimp aquaculturists in the State of Sinaloa, **Mexico**, raising the mortality of Sinaloa's farmed shrimp. Mexican officials believe that the appearance of this new shrimp disease could give international environmental groups that are opposed to the industry a pretext to call for a boycott of Mexican seafood.

This new affliction, which some are

calling ENH virus, is said to be under control now, according to official Mexican sources, but the final diagnostic would not be known for another couple of weeks. Nevertheless, the president of the Aquaculture Chamber, admitted that in Nayarit and in the central zones and south of Sinaloa, there has been a high incidence of this new virus strain.

### ***Reserved for good***

The Islamic Republic of **Iran** has designated Govater Bay and Hur-e-Bahu as its 19th Wetland of International Importance. This 75,000-ha area comprises the

riverine and estuarine wetlands of the lower Sarbaz River, including permanent freshwater pools and marshes, mangrove

swamps and intertidal mudflats, and also the sandy beach of the adjacent Gulf of Oman coast in the extreme southeast of Iran (Persian Baluchistan) right up to the border with Pakistan. The site is important for *Crocodylus palustris* and wintering waterfowl, notably *Pelecanus crispus*, shorebirds, gulls and terns.

### ***World Fisheries Day***

Fishworkers all over the world celebrated the World Fisheries Day on 21 November under the banner of the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers (WFF), which has a member representation of 23 organizations from all the continents of the world. Although many countries have officially declared 21 November as World Fisheries Day, the day still remains an occasion for celebration by the workers.

The main idea behind the celebration, according Thomas Kocherry, Co-ordinator of the WFF, is to build transnational solidarity among the fishworkers of the world. Just as their seas do not have any boundaries, so too their love and solidarity find no boundaries. Apart from the celebratory aspect, it is also a day of thanksgiving and

affirmation of thanksgiving to our mother sea who is the protector and sustainer of our lives, and affirmation to protect her from all kinds of exploitation.

### ***Customary owners***

Indigenous fishermen of **Fiji** will soon be able to claim ownership rights to their customary fishing grounds or qoliqoli. Fiji's Cabinet has recently approved the drafting of new legislation to bring this into effect. The Cabinet says that the decision honours a long-standing request from the Great Council of Chiefs and on the recommendation of the Prime Minister and Minister for Fijian Affairs.

Until now, the Fijians' customary rights of usage of their qoliqoli have been provided for in the Fisheries Act. The ownership rights to these areas are vested in the State under the Crown Lands Act.

The Cabinet has been quick to reassure other communities in Fiji that their rights of access to the waters and fisheries will continue to be respected. Commercial fishing activities will still need to have a licence to continue.

### ***Pay, no pay***

The Government of **Kiribati** has agreed

on a revised working contract as well as new wages for Kiribati seamen employed on German ships. The seamen will now enjoy the same ratings as their German counterparts.

The agreement also

has a financial benefits component that will provide aid in the event of accidents and deaths. Those seamen who work on board ships plying in a war zone will now get 100 per cent of their salaries as bonus.

Meanwhile, Kiribati seamen employed on Korean fishing vessels are sore that they have not been paid salaries since June. Following the Kiribati government's takeover of the management of the seamen's employment conditions aboard the Korean ships, the families of the seamen were expecting the remittances to be paid regularly. The Kiribati government is said to be investigating the matter.