



Siruvani, known for its sweet water to turn sour?

PHOTO: DC

Siruvani project faces eco threat

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COIMBATORE

Feb. 6: The Siruvani-Silent Valley eco programme initiated by the Kerala government and the plan to make Siruvani a tourist destination has kicked up a controversy with the green activists criticising the initiative stating that it could contaminate the water, considered one of the world's sweetest.

The project was recently initiated by the Kerala government to provide infrastructure facilities like a facilitation centre, interpretation, ticketing, transportation and accommodation so as to woo a large number of tourists from Kerala to Siruvani and the Silent Valley.

But the alleged initiative of the Kerala to launch boating facilities in the Siruvani dam that supplies drinking water to the entire district has irked environmentalists. "Boating facility at Siru-

vani would mean contamination of water. Vehicle movement in the area would disturb wildlife and providing entry into thickets would result in the destruction of forest cover. Water for Coimbatoreans is more important than tourism revenue for Kerala," alleged eco-warrior and national awardee M. Yoganathan.

C. Rajendran, district forest officer (DFO) of Manarghat, denying that there was any proposal to set up boating facilities at Siruvani dam, added that the government had banned entry of vehicles from Singapara checkpoint to Siruvani dam for the past three years because of increased pollution and the resultant environmental degradation. All-leviating the concerns of the green activists, a senior official said that the eco-programme would not affect Tamil Nadu and the prohibition on the entry to the public from Tamil Nadu into Siruvani would continue.

M Rafi Ahmed | ENS
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THE slogan 'Grow more trees' seems to be redundant in the context of government machinery's deforestation exercise under the guise of road widening work.

Eco activists, who are up in arms against felling of trees on Mettupalayam Road for taking up four-laning work on this stretch, told Express that they took the initiative to conduct night-long sample study between Kavundampalayam junction to Thudiyalur junction on how to widen the road without axing the trees.

Detailing the outcome of the on-the-spot survey taken up by a six-member team led by Dr Ramesh, Mattram Trust coordinator Aravind Kumar said that width of the road between Kavundampalayam junction and Thudiyalur junction is anywhere between 58.61 feet and 89.42 feet.

"Our intention is mainly to ensure road widening work is initiated without cutting down trees since we felt it could be executed without disturbing the trees. It's easy to pull down trees, but difficult to grow them to the level what it is now," Aravind said, adding the team members physically measured the long stretch.

Eco activist Yoganathan said they had prepared a road map on how four-lane could be laid without felling of trees. There is ample space on both sides of the road which could be utilised for widening keeping the trees on either sides.

"We are ready to explain this in detail, if the district administration or the highways department convene a meeting to hear eco-activists," Yoganathan said adding the government machinery should seriously consider the road map.

Aravind Kumar said they had been fighting a lone battle with the contractors who had bought the trees in auction. Neither the district administration nor the highways department are bothered to save the trees.

The one-year-old Coimbatore-based Mattram Trust has been playing a pivotal role in preventing felling of trees. The members used to rush to the spot when they come to know of cutting down of trees across the city. Due to their intervention, they could save some trees.

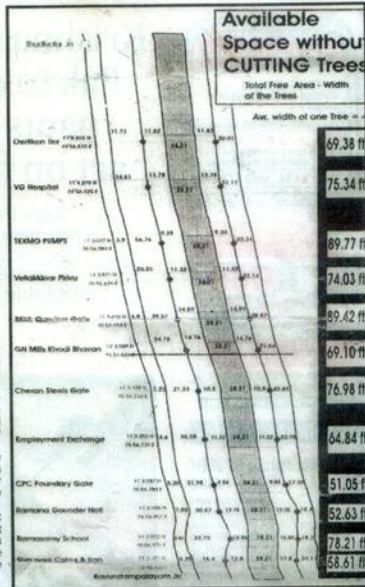
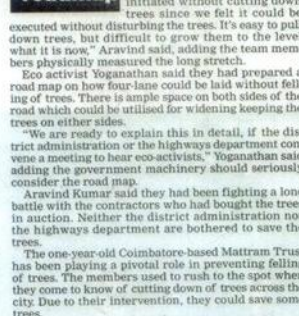
There are about 650 trees between Kavundampalayam junction and Thudiyalur junction which the highways department have marked for felling. We are concerned about saving those trees. Similar is the case with Narsimhanaickenpalayam to Perianaiickenpalayam where there are roughly 650 trees which too would be axed."

Mattram Trust made fruitful attempts urging the Assistant Director, Highways Department, to convene a joint meeting with the environmental activists to sort out the issue. The AD failed to lend a ear to the repeated pleas.

Express spoke to District Forest Officer I Anwardeen to elicit information about felling of trees when he said it is inevitable in the course of development. Moreover, the forest department has no statutory power to ban felling of trees except for rose wood, teak and sandal wood which comes under scheduled list category.

The eco activists, who wanted to protect the environment, are yearning for an audience with the district collector to present their sample study result.

Greens' roadmap



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