Encroachments expose Periyar banks to flood risk

Shutters in Chalakkudy, Periyar rivers opened to prevent holding up of water

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The rare phenomenon of simultaneous opening of the shutters of Cheruthoni and Idamalayar dams may result in the discharge of larger volumes of water, thus increasing the impact of flooding in low-lying areas along the banks of Periyar.

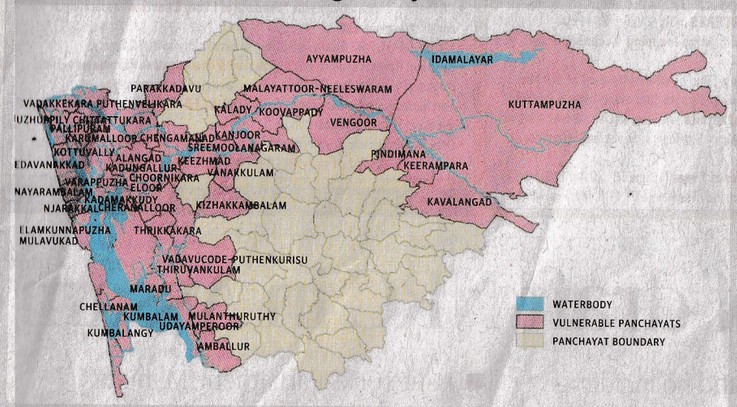
The peak power generation coupled with drop in intensity of rain in its catchment areas may have enabled the authorities to withhold the issue of second warning in the case of Idamalayar dam. All shutters of Bhoothathankettu dam remain open to facilitate the smooth flow of water to be released from Cheruthoni dam.

Besides, the shutters of all regulators in Chalakkudy and Periyar rivers have been opened to prevent holding up of water. "With the release of water from the Cheruthoni dam, there will be an unavoidable inundation of low-lying areas from where people will have to be evacuated till water recedes. Aluva, Kadungalloor, Karumalloor, Kunnukara, Kalamassery, and Puthenvelikkara are among the areas that are likely to be affected in the district," Irrigation Department sources told *The Hindu*.

The department is expecting the shutters to be opened by August 4 or 5.

The release of small quantity of water is unlikely to cause much of a flood, since the water level in the Periyar has subsided from what it

Panchayats vulnerable to flooding in Periyar



Keeping their fingers crossed

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Mithun Mohan has a faint memory of the time when the Periyar was in spate, and water literally kissed the doorsteps of his ancestral home at Eloor before receding without further breach.

It was back in 1992 when the sluice gates of Cheruthoni dam were opened last. With the authorities setting in motion the protocol for opening the dam shutters yet again, Mithun wonders whether his family would be lucky a second time.

His ancestral home has gone, and in its place stands a modern one. But, more ominously, so as the paddy field behind his home where now stand a few houses. "The plot that separates our home, which is around 50

The Idukki arch dam. People fear evacuation if the shutters are finally opened.

So, this time if water surges beyond control, we will have problems," said Mithun.

That is an anxiety shared by quite a few people living along the banks of the Periyar many of whom fear an evacuation if and when the shutters are finally opened.

K.A. Siyad, living at Thuruth, a virtual island in the Periyar in Aluva, has a more

marooned during the monsoon in 2013.

His relative Jawad Ibrahim, residing at Chowara near Aluva, was spared during the monsoon fury five years ago when water stopped short of entering his home. He feels that things might be different this time around, as evacuation seems a real threat as things stand.

Sajith N., living alongside the Periyar at North Kalamassery, recollects memories from the monsoon of 1988 when the river surged to the bottom layer of his three-layered plot, while the house was on the top most layer.

Sights of inundated roads and flooded houses during the monsoon of 2013 remain fresh in the memories of Sajitha Siddique, since her

'Beware of misinformation campaign'

Any alert over release of water to be published on Collector's official FB page

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A high-level meeting at the district collectorate on Monday appealed to the public not to be misled by the misinformation campaign on social media over the opening of the shutters of Cheruthoni and Idamalayar dams.

People's representatives, including MLAs, called for stern action invoking the IT Act against those found creating panic by spreading baseless stories through social media. The meeting was convened by District Collector K. Mohammed Y. Safirulla in the backdrop of the prevailing situation in Idukki and Idamalayar dams and the potential situation in the wake of the opening of their shutters.

Alerts over the release of water from dams, if the situation so warrants, will be published well in advance on the Collector's official Facebook page www.facebook.com/dcekm. Official communication from the government will also be disseminated through print, audio, and visual media. Besides, public announcement will be made to reach out to people along the banks of the Periyar. The

Call for caution: District Collector K. Mohammed Y. Safirulla addressing a high-level meeting at the collectorate on Monday in the backdrop of the prevailing situation in Idukki and Idamalayar dams.

rely on such official sources for alerts with regard to opening of dam shutters.

Water is rising at a slow rate at Idukki and Idamalayar. There is no emergency situation to open the shutters. The water level has to rise by another eight feet for the shutters of Idukki dam to be opened. Idamalayar is still 2.50 metres short of its full carrying capacity.

Maximum power generation is under way at both dams and, so far, only first alerts have been issued for both. A trial release of water will be carried out only 24 hours after the third alert. Ample time will be given to people to evacuate and to take care of their possessions. Relief shelters have been kept ready in the event of evacuation of people from the banks of the Periyar. A battalion of the National Disaster Response Force also remains stationed in the district.

The first alert for Idamalayar dam was issued when

metre-mark. The second and third alerts will be issued after water level touches 167 and 169 metres respectively. The first alert in the case of Idukki dam was issued when the water level crossed 2,390 feet. The second and third alerts would follow when the water level surged past 2,395 feet and 2,399 feet respectively. Mr. Safirulla said a trial release of water by opening the shutter by 40 cm to assess water flow would precede the phased opening of shutters. Water will be released for a maximum of four hours.

The Collector said precautions in the event of opening of shutters have been taken. Army, Navy, Air Force, and the Coast Guard remain on standby mode. Boats will be deployed for rescue operations in inundated low-lying areas. All shutters of Bhoothathankettu reservoir remain open.

Fifty-one local bodies figure in the list of vulnerable

ken in these areas. The meeting took stock of the arrangements made at schools and other institutions for opening relief camps and buses and boats for moving people.

The Collector asked the Revenue Department to provide details regarding relief camps to the local body authorities and reminded that the situation demanded concerted efforts by people's representatives and officials.

The meeting called for a permanent disaster management set up with regard to water flow along the Periyar. Just as residents along the river banks are vulnerable to accidents, 'flood tourists' are equally prone to mishaps. The meeting urged the police and Forest departments to turn away all visitors during such situations.

Residents in islands and river puramboke should be kept alert, while care should be taken to avoid