

Lack of strong outer bunds proves a calamity for Kuttanad residents

BIJU E PAUL @Kainakari

IF only strong outer bunds as suggested by the M S Swaminathan Research Foundation had been in place, Kuttanad wouldn't be drowning in sorrow right now.

As the rice bowl of Kerala grapples with one of the worst floods in history, the contrast in stark. Houses and fields protected by strong outer bunds escaped nature's wrath, while those that lacked permanent bunds were breached.

According to Vavakkad resident Ratheesan, the absence of strong bunds is the reason for people's plight.

"Some of the paddy polders were constructed with strong outer bunds under the Kuttanad package and they survived the heavy flood. More than 350 houses in the Vavakkad South paddy polder are protected with outer bunds. So, the solution to the problem is the construction of permanent outer bunds. The paddy polders of Naduthuruth, Irumbanam and Vavakkad South survived because of the strong bunds constructed a few years ago," he said.

Vavakkad South Padasekhara Samiti member Balan said strong outer bunds and continuous discharge of water saved many houses. "We are safe because more than Rs 2 lakh was spent in the past week for protecting the bund."

However, Vavakkad resident Sasiyamma was not so lucky. "Thanks to the hard work of my daughter who is in the Gulf, I had built a house two years ago. But the breaching of the bund has dashed all my dreams. My house has been destroyed and household items washed away," she said.

People affected by the flood complained that officials were denying relief citing various reasons. At the same time, official laxity and legal tangles are delaying distribution of relief materials by the Civil Supplies Department.

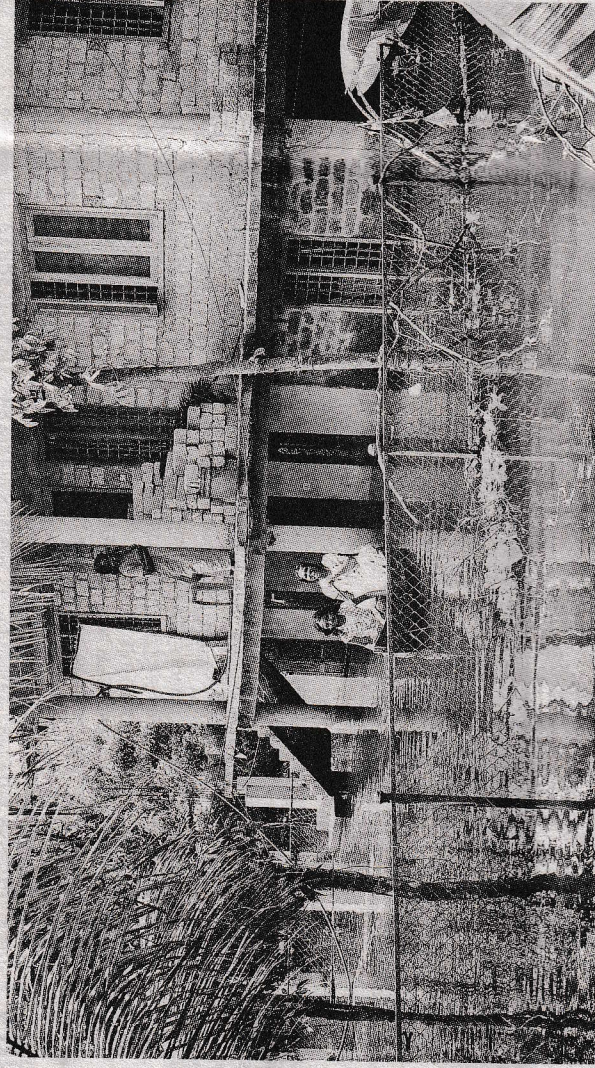
Kochukattuthara resident Shaji lambasted the attitude of people's representatives.

"The Kuttanad MLA never visited the affected area. He is a native of Kuttanad and he knows the plight of the people, but he never visited the areas or pacified the affected people," he said. "He visited Kuttamangalam along with the Central team and left. The MLA's absence is a major problem in coordinating the rescue operations and distribution of relief to people."

Fishing vessel with four goes missing

Kochi: A fishing trawler with four fishermen on board was reported missing off Lakshadweep on Sunday. The Coast Guard is said to have deployed a Dornier aircraft as part of the mission to locate Fairhana and Samudra Prahari was diverted to the vessel's last recorded position. Separately, the Navy sent out search boats, along with local fishermen, to expedite the relief and rescue mission. A Naval Dornier aircraft also joined the search party by night.

Sujata has been diverted to search the area, which is expected to arrive late on Sunday evening.



People rely on a country boat to move around in front of their flooded house in Kainakari, Kuttanad, on Sunday | ARJUN ANGELA

Stranded lives

KUTTANAD	AMBALAPPUZHA	CHERTHALA	CHENGANNUR	KARTHIKAPALLY	MAVELIKKARA
472	130	10	29	76	5
Relief camps	Relief camps	Relief camps	Relief camps	Relief camps	Relief camps
1,30,748	33,540	1,231	4,478	23,416	5,638
Inmates	Inmates	Inmates	Inmates	Inmates	Inmates



₹25 Cr
Approximate loss



Distribution of relief was never delayed due to legal tangles. The officers should be vigilant about the pathetic state of people in Kuttanad. A government order is not necessary to distribute relief to the people. The Collector is the government during emergencies and he can take steps for emergency relief
— P H Kurian, Additional Chief Secretary

People forced to survive on dirty water

BIJU E PAUL @Kainakari @Kainakari

LOOK around and what you see is only water, but it is not clean enough to take bath in. And when thirst becomes severe, they hesitantly turn to the polluted water even though they know it contains all the filth and poison.

"The shortage of drinking water is a major cause for concern. We are scared of epidemics. We are worried about our children, but what else can we do?" asked Sudarsan.

To see off every day is a pain for him and several other hapless people, yet they keep themselves busy preparing food for themselves and others at the gruel centres.

Sobhana, 63, Koolipurackal House, Vavakkad North, who is

staying in the corridor of her neighbour since water entered her house, said, "We have been in utter distress for the past one-and-a-half months. We don't feel anybody is out there to protect us. The food served at the gruel centre is the only relief to my four-member family."

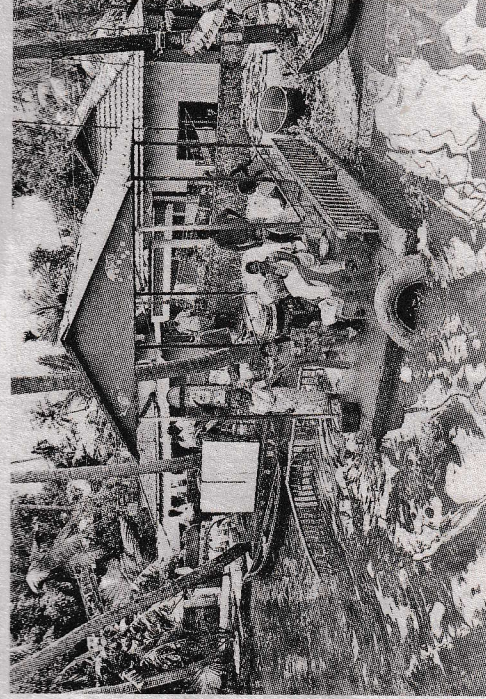
"The government keeps saying everything needed has been distributed to the affected people, but we feel the government departments and local self-governing bodies are apathetic towards us," she added.

Those who have better access to roads are more fortunate as food and medicine reach them first. Those living in the interior areas bear the brunt. Nights are really worse as a sense of fear looms, especially since there are

not enough places to sleep.

Women are staying in some makeshift elevated accommodation. Some 40-50 people, including children, are staying in 500-600 sq ft area. Many male members have stayed back, having managed to put cots and some essential equipment on the roof of their houses.

"Some people in our neighbourhood who have their houses above water level have shown great compassion to accommodate others in their houses. We're grateful to them. What's disgusting is a visible lack of coordination of relief measures by the MLAs and ministers. It has worsened the situation," said panchayat member B K Vinod, even as he looked skywards, hoping for the sun to shine bright.



People wait for relief material at a gruel centre in Kainakari on Sunday | ARJUN ANGELA

Strong winds likely to hit coast in next 24 hrs

Kochi: Strong winds from mainly the westerly direction, with a speed ranging between 35-45 kmph and 55 kmph, are likely to hit along the Kerala coast and over Lakshadweep area for the next 24 hours. Sea condition will be rough to very rough along the Lakshadweep area and in southwest, central and north Arabian Sea. Fishermen are advised not to venture into the sea along Lakshadweep area, southwest, central and north Arabian Sea, according to a statement issued by the India Meteorological Department.