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Kochi, Ready to Face Emergency

# Kochi all geared up to face emergency

Tech A Boon;  
Reclamation  
Of Lake, Paddy  
Fields A Bane

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**Kochi:** If the shutters of Idukki are to be opened now, there are both advantages and disadvantages compared to 1992 when the dam was opened last.

While rampant encroachment on flood plains, reclamation of paddy fields and Vembanad backwaters post-1992 paint a sorry picture, the advancements in the disaster management and precautionary would come handy for the rescue operations to a certain extent.

## IDUKKI DAM OPENING

When Idukki dam was opened in 1992, water levels in paddy fields in Perumbavoor, Kummathunad and Muvattupuzha taluks had risen to six feet. The water from the dam was routed through various canals and rivulets before it was drained out to the vast paddy fields in different parts of the district. "Now, most of the paddy fields have been reclaimed and so it won't be able to accommodate the water inflow from various canals, which serve as outlets from Periyar and Muvattupuzha. Adding to the woes is the rampant encroach-



**BEING PREPARED FOR CRISIS:** Scuba vans at Gandhi Nagar Fire and Rescue Station in Kadanvanthra. The vans are kept ready to meet any emergency in Ernakulam and Idukki districts due to rise in water level incase if shutters of Idukki dam are opened

ments on either side of the river from Kodanad to Aluva," said C R Neelakantan, environmentalist and state convener of Aam Admi Party.

Most areas, including Cochin International Airport Ltd, which were flooded in 2013 when Bhoothathankettu was opened were either paddy fields or part of the river which was later encroached. "Ultimately, the water has to run off to backwaters. Various studies show that around two third of Vembanad Lake had been

levelled in the past two-and-a-half decades. We hope that there may not be a grave situation this time. But, we are going to face crisis in the coming years," Neelakantan said.

According to environmentalists, the major threat they foresee in case the dam is opened is the collapse of bridges downstream. "After the dam was constructed the width of the river was reduced to some 20 or 30 metre along the 30km stretch from Cheruthony to Karimban. The original width of

the river was around 400m before the construction of the dam. Later, flood plains of the river, which comes to 350-380 metres were encroached upon. When dam shutters are opened, the uprooted trees flowing down may also damage the dams like Lower Periyar in the downstream," said C M Joy, environmentalist.

"But, the damage would be less when compared to 1992. Then, the water level of the river was high due to heavy rain. This time the water level of Periyar is much

low. Still, at least 1,500 people will have to be rehabilitated," he said. According to the officials who were part of rescue and rehabilitation process in 2013, advancements in science and technology would be helpful this time. "Then, the mechanism to check disasters was new. Many of the officials were clueless as to what to do. So, we hadn't any plan," said Renu, deputy collector, land acquisition, Palakkad, who was actively involved in disaster management activities in 2013.

Control rooms  
in Aluva, Idukki

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**Kochi:** The Kerala fire and rescue services of Ernakulam division are not taking any chances and have geared up to combat any casualties resulting from water entering houses along the banks of Periyar.

As part of disaster management, fire force will deploy 360 personnel in both districts. As many as 120 will be deployed in Idukki and the rest in Ernakulam. Eleven scuba vans, 10 ambulances, 15 rubber dinghies, 18 inflatable tower lights, 50 chain saws, lifebuoys, ropes and life-jackets have been arranged to address any casualties. Emergency control rooms will be opened in Aluva and Idukki. As many as 50 scuba teams have been readied to be part of disaster management.

"If emergency arises requisitioning more manpower, services of officials from Kottayam, Alappuzha and Ernakulam districts will be utilized. We have asked all personnel to be on duty by cancelling their leave and off days. We have ensured that all equipment is functional," said R Prasad, director (technical) of fire and rescue services department.

Motor transport station officer Sayyad Ba Hassan will lead strategic operation for deploying vehicles in Idukki and Ernakulam. When the red alert is issued, fire force will start evacuation procedures as per the direction of district administrations.

The emergency control room number is 9497920129 in Aluva and 9497920163 in Idukki.