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Thiruvananthapuram, Vizhinjam Port, Coastal Erosion, Widespread Damage, Southwest Monsoon

Battling grey expanse of Arabian Sea

Monsoon slows down Vizhinjam

The Southwest monsoon has affected work on the ₹7,525-crore Vizhinjam port project, and major components like the breakwater construction and dredging are expected to restart only by September. Senior officials of the Adani Group said work on the breakwater had slowed down to "minimal." Shortage of granite coupled with the inclement weather conditions had affected this work months ago, prompting the Adani Vizhinjam Port Pvt Ltd, the concessionaire, to inform the government that the Phase I deadline might be overruled. Dredging of the channel has also come to a standstill with the advent of the



Lawrence, a resident of Valiyathura, walks through the debris of houses destroyed by coastal erosion | B P DEEPU

TIKI RAJWI @TPuram


"THERE," young Vijay Bosco indicates a point some 15 metres from where he stands. "The seawall was there. We even used to have a small stretch of beach beyond it. That's where the fishing boats were hauled up."

Now, there's neither wall nor beach, just the thundering grey expanse of the Arabian Sea. "From up here, you can see the extent of the destruction," he continues, jogging up the stairs of a neighbour's house to the roof. The view from up there, as he says, is revealing. Frothing, roiling waves batter a rubble of granite - the re-

full fury over Kerala, the second line of houses on this stretch of the coast is also in imminent danger. But there is simply nowhere for the families to go. Classroom blocks in at least three nearby schools have been converted into overcrowded relief camps. Although the Fisheries Department has constructed 193 apartments for fishermen at nearby Mutathara, they have not been allotted yet. Persistent demands for the urgent construction of seawalls also fell on deaf ears.

The misfortunes of coastal Thiruvananthapuram began in November last year with the Ockhi cyclone. The situation worsened during April this year.

monsoon. "If the weather holds, we'll pick up. Otherwise, it gets affected by 30 per cent," a senior official of the group said.



mains of a seawall - and the debris of destroyed houses. Seawater washes over crumbled sections of walls and piping, bedding, plastic cans and assorted household items their owners - in the mad rush to safety - did not think fit to salvage. The entire line of fishermen residences that once faced the beachfront now resembles the aftermath of a cataclysm.

This is the grim monsoon-season reality of Valiyathura - and that of many fishing villages that dot the long coastal line of Thiruvananthapuram district. Lawrence, a wizened, weather-beaten fisherman, points to a blue house - or the remains of what once used to be a blue house.

"My daughter Maglin's home. They built it a year ago. After the sea took it, I moved her family to my home," he said.

With the Southwest monsoon in

when coastal erosion peaked. By the time the Southwest monsoon announced its arrival, the sea had invaded inland by several more metres. The inclement weather that has persisted for months has left the coastal community bitter.

Further south, the Vizhinjam fisheries harbour is teeming with activity, but the fishermen aren't exactly cheering. The boats - eight-man affairs rigged with outboards - are just in. Women and men jostle for elbow space around the bobbing craft. (Trawling ban is not applicable to the traditional fishermen here.)

"Ever since Ockhi struck, we haven't had much luck with the catch," says Richards, a local fisherman. He says the monsoon season has not been benevolent to the fishermen. "We are getting only anchovies, scad and small sardines now. For the catch to be considered profitable during this time of the season, you need to get squid and shrimp," he says.