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District Administration should immediately put a stop to Sand Mining

The livelihood rights and right to water of the people of Vaippar region are being affected by sand mining. **People's Watch - Tamil Nadu requests that the District Collector and Superintendent of Police refrain from terrorizing people through the police department, harassing them by stationing policemen in villages, making arrests as a preventive measure and issuing orders like enforcing section 144 and should instead understand the livelihood problems of the people of the region and act in a manner that does not bring a bad name to the Govt.**

Taking news reports published in print media as source, People's Watch's monitoring team met the people of Vaippar region and conducted fact finding (15.09.06). The team went under the leadership of Mr. Henri Tiphagne, the Executive Director of People's Watch.

Vaippar River is the water source for nearly 250 villages coming under Vilathikulam Constituency in Thoothukudi District. Originating in the state of Kerala, this river traverses through Virudhunagar and Tirunelveli Districts and meets the sea in Vaippar Village in Thoothukudi District.

Kulathur, Vedapatti, Virusampatti, Vaippar, Keezha Vaippar, Puliangulam and Veppalodai Panchayats are situated on the banks of this River. Since ages, the people of these regions have been dependent on Vaippar River for agriculture which is their livelihood means. Vaippar River is also the drinking water source for the people of these villages and nearly 20 villages in Ottapidaram.

In the past 10 years the water resource of Vaippar River has been decreasing gradually. The primary reason for the depletion of the water resource of this region is the sand quarries set up here. During the rule of the previous Govt. sand quarries were set up in the 3 places of the Vaippar River coming under Vilathikulam constituency i.e. Sithavanayakkanpatti, Virusampatti and Kailasapuram. In all these 3 quarries Govt. guidelines have been violated grossly. It has been found in the fact finding that in violation of

the Govt. guideline that sand shouldn't be mined beyond 3 feet, more than 10 feet of soil has been quarried. The guideline which says that sand should be taken only in places that are situated 100 m away from the river bank has also not been followed.

Moreover, the people of this region have been demanding for a long time that a check dam should be constructed across the river as the flood waters of the rainy seasons flow into the sea and go waste. On days when the tide is high seawater easily enters the river which has deepened owing to continuous sand mining and renders the water brackish. Because of this the river water is becoming unfit for drinking and agriculture. To prevent this, the people of this region demanded that a check dam be built. Following this, for the first time ever, the Govt. of Tamil Nadu sanctioned funds to construct a check dam in Vaippar village. But the check dam couldn't be built with the 4 crore rupees that were allotted, since the region is erosion prone because of its proximity to the sea. So, on the recommendation of Govt. officials to the Govt., an amount of 7 crore rupees was allotted.

Following this *Bhoomi Poojas* were initiated. Meanwhile Govt. Order was issued to build check dam near Kottanatham, Vilathikulam also. Tender was issued but work has not been initiated and has been put on hold.

In these circumstances illegal sand mining is taking place on a continual basis in the name of sand quarries, affecting the basic livelihood of the people of this region. Since sand is being mined continually, there is the risk of seawater mixing with this river. If sand mining continues, not only will there be drinking water problems but agriculture will also become impossible. People of the coastal villages are already buying drinking water at the price of Re. 2 /- per pot. The fact that no decisions have been taken so far, despite numerous protests by these people, has affected them very much. Since the river has been converted into Govt. sand quarries, more than 30 villages have been affected so far.

At this juncture when the DMK Govt. is celebrating 100 days of successful rule under the leadership of Kalaignar Karunanidhi, this sand theft that is affecting people of the Vaippar region will create a bad name for the Govt. The fact that the District Collector and Superintendent of Police are accomplices to this activity will be deemed a black mark amidst the achievements of the present Govt.

The fact that the above mentioned issues are affecting the livelihood rights and the right to water of the people of Vaippar region will reflect against the Govt. of Tamil Nadu in the upcoming local body elections. People's Watch - Tamil Nadu requests that the District Collector and Superintendent of Police refrain from terrorizing people through the police department, harassing them by stationing policemen in villages,

making arrests as a preventive measure and issuing orders like enforcing section 144 and should instead understand the livelihood problems of the people of the region and act in a manner that does not disgrace the Govt.

People's Watch also requests that sand quarries be stopped immediately so that the check dams, which will preserve the water source of the people of this region, can be constructed soon. People's Watch also requests that the places that have been identified for setting up sand quarries now should be changed and that further actions should be taken in such a manner that the people of this region are not affected.