



GIS will benefit fishermen in a big way: Union Minister

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Kochi

UNION Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Sudarshan Bhagat on Friday said Geographic Information System (GIS) was essential for fishermen as it would reduce their effort and the cost of fishing.

Interacting with the fisherfolk as part of a programme organised by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) here in connection with its 70 anniversary, Bhagat said climate change was one of the major obstacles to the growth of the fisheries sector.

The representatives of the fisherfolk organisations urged the government to grant fishermen dearness allowance as a compensation for the decrease in the availability of fish since 2012.

"According to studies, the fisheries sector in the state has incurred an estimated loss of around ₹10,000 crore during past three years. The dip in the availability of sardine has severely affected the fishermen in the state," said Charles George, president of Malsyathozhilali Aikyvedi. He also urged the setting up of a separate ministry for fisheries.

The fishermen also sought steps to include cage farming under the Prime Minister's Mudra project. "Government support is essential for launching cage farming in the backwaters on a large scale. Insurance cover for cage fish farming is another de-



Union Minister Sudarshan Bhagat interacting with K V Karthikeyan, his wife K C Rekha and their family members during a function organised by the CMFRI to honour them in Kochi on Friday | MELTON ANTONY

mand. The Centre should form a policy for cage fish farming," said Rajeev, a farmer from Chettuva.

The traditional fishermen urged the minister to initiate steps to set up a harbour exclusively for them in Vypeen. They said fishing activities in the area were restricted after the Petronet LNG Terminal started functioning. Pollution of Periyar also came up for discussion during the interaction.

The minister said appropriate decision would be made after looking into the grievances raised by the fishermen. "The state government will be asked to initiate steps to solve the issues," Bhagat said. CMFRI director A Gopalakrishnan said the institute had taken measures to formulate a mariculture policy to promote cage farming at the national level.

'Fisher couple' honoured

Union Minister Sudarshan Bhagat honoured K V Karthikeyan and his wife K C Rekha of Kundazhiyoor, near Chettuva, in Thrissur - the country's first 'fisher couple'. The minister draped 'ponnada' on the couple and presented them with a plaque. The couple has been venturing into the sea together for the past 13 years since their marriage. As a token of support for their project to launch open sea cage farming, seeds of high-value fish were also presented to them. Rekha, who broke all conventional practices in fishing, is the first woman in the country to venture into the sea. Though many women are engaged in fishing in backwaters, there is no record of any woman going to sea for fishing along the Indian coasts.