

Coastal areas in Kerala will witness increasing sea surge in coming years: Experts

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Marine experts on Saturday warned that coastal areas in Kerala will witness an increasing trend of sea surge in the coming years due to rise in sea surface temperature. They were speaking at a webinar organised by the Kochi-based Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) as part of observing World Environment Day today. Voicing concern over the calamities faced by the coastal community due to high waves and sea erosion, the webinar sought restoration of coastal vegetation laying emphasis on mangrove forestation, which, according to the experts, act as bio-shield to the coastal belt in protecting the lives of residents in the region.

The webinar pointed out that the entire Kerala coast recently witnessed 'storm surge' during the two cyclones Tauktae and Yaas, a CMFRI release said here. Experts are of the view that such storm surges are likely to occur in the coast increasingly in coming years with the rapid warming of the waters in the Indian Ocean, according to the release. Cyclonic winds help form storm surge in the waters which results in high waves, sea erosion and flooding in the coastal hamlet. This was evidently seen recently, especially in coastal areas like Chellanam, they said.

Kerala's coastal region could be protected from the wrath of the sea to a great extent through restoration of mangroves and other biodiversity in the region, CMFRI Director Dr A Gopalakrishnan said. "Conservation of coastal biodiversity, which is in deterioration owing to many reasons including constructions, is the best long-term natural option for protecting the lives of coastal people from sea turbulence," he said, adding that mangroves act as a model bio-shield to the coastal stretch. "A recent study revealed that mangroves protect coastal wave actions and severe surges based on observations done in Mumbai coastal region. There are lots of ideal areas along the coastal stretch in Kerala which can be conserved for mangrove forestation," Gopalakrishnan said.

The webinar, which was attended by leading experts from the country who work on mangroves, recommended that restoration of coastal vegetation along the Kerala coast should be planned in a social forestry concept with public participation. Feasibility studies are required for identifying potential areas for mangrove forestation, it proposed. The webinar also suggested awareness programmes among different stakeholders to build a bio-green belt along the coast aimed at protecting the residents in the area. Participants included Dr N Vasudevan, Managing Director of Forest Development Corporation, Maharashtra, PP Pramod, Chief Conservator, Forest Eastern Circle and Custodian, Vested Forest, Kerala, Dr R Ramasubramanian, Director of Coastal Systems Research Programme at M S Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai and Dr Grinson George, Senior Programme Specialist at the SAARC.