

Prawn culture lab at Narakkal opened

By Our Staff Reporter

Union Minister of State for Fisheries and Agriculture Shah Nawaz Khan has advised scientists, engaged in the exploitation of nature's wealth, to bear the development of the rural economy in mind.

He was inaugurating the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute's prawn culture laboratory building at Narakkal, near Cochin, on Thursday.

The Minister commended CMFRI scientists for their researches leading to the discovery of abundant resources of the commercially important white prawns (*penaeus indicatus*) in the surf area of the backwaters of Cochin.

Mr. Khan disclosed that the CMFRI was working on an ad hoc scheme on marine prawn culture and propagation which was sanctioned to it by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research.

Suggesting that vast tracts along coastline be utilised for culturing prawns and fish, he noted the gesture of the Kerala Government in making available four hectares of culture ponds at Narakkal for this laboratory to develop its technology, paving the way for a significant expansion of the fishing industry.

Mr. Khan said production had utilisation of marine resources despite a record indicating a doubling in fish production over the past 25 years (from 5.8 lakh tonnes in 1950 to 11.8 lakh tonnes in 1974) and urged for more of our 4 lakh square kilometer fishable area to be brought under intensive activity. The present catch was less than half the potential yield estimated by scientists.

The Minister said the Centre had taken steps to provide more vessels capable of staying out at sea for many days, more harbour and storage facilities along the coastline.

Mr. Khan said production had to increase not only from capture fisheries, but also from culture

fisheries. The scientists state that some of the near-shore fishing grounds, especially off the south west coast, are now being almost fully worked and that is particularly true of the prawn grounds off Kerala.

The prawn catches of this country amounted to 1.7 lakh tonnes in 1974 which forms 14 per cent of the total marine fish landings. More than 80 per cent of the exportable varieties of prawns were landed along the south west coast of India.

In addition, substantial quantities of prawns were also caught from other waters having tidal influence. It was very necessary for us now to develop advanced techniques for culturing this valuable group of marine animals he said.

Kerala, which accounts for over 60 per cent of the prawn catch, offers ideal conditions for culturing these. At present a traditional form of prawn culture existed over 4,500 hectares in central Kerala.

But the prospects for improvement were very high. The research conducted by the CMFRI showed that the yield of 500 kg to 2,000 kg of prawns could be harvested per hectare over six months from culture in low-lying coastal fields, and that the production rate could be increased considerably by introducing a system of selective stocking and feeding with artificial food.

The findings had reflected a growing awareness of the situation, facing the prawn industry which often finds difficulty in procuring raw material for export, Mr. Khan noted.

Mr. R. Madhavan Nair, pioneer in the seafood export industry, who presided, called for a formulated plan for conservation of the marine resources.

Unless there was proper husbanding this would lead to depletion in course of time, he warned and suggested there be some regulation in the fishing activity especially during the spawning season, as done by Mexico where there was a fishing ban for four months each year.

Mr. Nair suggested that India should take better advantage of the possible external assistance from the FAO and the Asian Bank.

He said many of the South East Asian competitors in marine export industry had availed these to their advantage. The huge UNDP-aided mari-culture project in Indonesia was an example, he added.