

Oyster initiative boosts profitable farming in Maha

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Kochi: Around one lakh oyster spat (larvae ready to attach to any surface) reared at the hatchery of the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), Vizhinjam, were successfully produced and transported to tribal coastal communities in Maharashtra to engage in profitable oyster farming. This initiative, in association with the Mangrove & Marine Biodiversity Conservation Foundation of Maharashtra, aimed to empower tribal self-help groups with high-yield, eco-friendly oyster farming, leveraging hatchery-reared seeds to boost livelihoods while conserving natural ecosystems.

In the first stage, millions of D-shaped larvae of the Indian backwater oyster (*Crassostrea madrasensis*) were reared at the hatchery using the broodstock collected from Kerala's Ash-tamudi Lake. Later, the scientists further reared these larvae to develop into spat ready for settlement in oys-

ter shell rens, as the production of attached spat is a crucial step in oyster farming. Each oyster shell then hosted 6.5 spat on average, ensuring optimal survival rates. These were securely packed in styrofoam boxes with seawater-soaked gunny bags and transported via a 30-hour train journey to Maharashtra.

Compared to wild-collected seed, hatchery-produced oyster seed offers several advantages as they ensure high survival rates, disease-free stock and uniform size, leading to better yield and predictable production cycles. CMFRI's principal scientist MK Anil said, "Unlike traditional aquaculture, oyster farming is a low-investment farming with no feeding involved and hence pollution is minimised. It is a high-return aquaculture practice that enables small-scale farmers to generate sustainable income." With adequate support such as access to hatchery-produced seed, rural farmers can venture into profitable oyster farming, he added.