

Experts predict death of 6 rivers

Sand-mining, degradation of tributaries, illegal fishing major threats

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Is Central Travancore fast becoming a graveyard of rivers and natural streams? At least this is what the studies conducted by a team of experts led by scientist Ajayakumar Varma hint at.

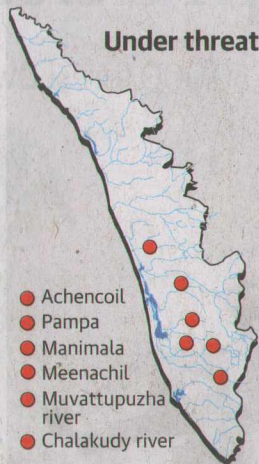
Dr. Varma has predicted that the Pampa will die in 55 years, if the present situation with the river system continues.

The study report, prepared by Dr. Varma and his team, gives just another 15 years for the Achencoil, 20 years for the Manimala, 45 years for the Meenachil, 30 years for the Muvattupuzha, and 15 to 20 years for the Chalakudy rivers.

Climate change

However, climate change and changes in the pattern of rains can improve or worsen the situation, says Dr. Varma.

Degradation of virgin



forests in the catchment areas, unscientific sand-mining, degradation of tributaries, pollution caused by garbage, and illegal fishing using poison, dynamite, etc. are posing major threats to these once vibrant river systems of region comprising Pathanamthitta, Kottayam

and parts of Alappuzha.

Dr. Varma said extensive deforestation in the catchments during 1940-1980 had resulted in drying up of many tributaries of these river systems, badly affecting the regular flow, especially during summer.

Land conversion

Land conversion as part of urbanisation too has blocked many natural streams leading to the rivers. Without sand deposit, the riverbeds have lost their water-holding capacity, leading to fast flow of flood waters into the downstream immediately after cessation of the rains.

The situation in the Pampa along the upper reaches of Kozhencherry amply testifies the degradation of the river system as a whole, says N.K. Sukumaran Nair, Pampa Parirakshana Samiti general secretary, who has been campaigning

for the Pampa river for three decades.

Lowering of riverbeds

Mr. Nair said the condition of bridges across the rivers as well as water pumping stations was precarious because of the drastic lowering of riverbeds.

Experts pointed out that sand-mining from the vicinity of the piers led to the caving in of the concrete bridge across Pampa in Ranni on July 29, 1996.

Mr. Nair says the Pampa and Achencoil, regarded as the lifeline of Central Travancore, are the worst affected by man's criminal negligence towards environment and river conservation.

He stressed the need for an integrated action plan for the conservation of the Pampa, Achencoil, Manimala and Meenachil rivers that empty out into the Vembanad lake.