

Pest hits port's biodiversity

■ Marine organism from the Central America destroys native habitat

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VISAKHAPATNAM, OCT. 6

Vizag's inner harbour area has been invaded successfully by a marine organism from the Central America, *Mytilopsis sallei*, which has over the course of few years destroyed the local biodiversity and overtaken the habitat from native species.

It is globally recognised as an invasive species and has its presence across the entire East Coast of the country and acutely in Vizag. This specie causes bio-fouling at the harbour, a phenomenon in which unwanted organisms get accumulated on wet surfaces. Dr M. Balaji, of the Institute of Wood Science and Technology, says, "*Mytilopsis sallei* was first detected in Vizag harbour in 1967 and gradually it started overtaking the local habitat. Now it has resulted in an eradication of more than 90 per cent of the native marine species.

As the species does not have any natural predator here, their population has increased dramatically."

Mytilopsis has been found out to be very adaptive to various climatic, tidal and temperature conditions.

Dr Balaji says that it is almost impossible to eradicate this pest now as the species has been found to be averse to toxins and is actually found in areas which are found to be highly polluted. Scientists from the IWST continuously conduct research at Vizag's har-



A file photograph of the inner harbour of the Visakhapatnam Port Trust.

AP should gear up to fight pest

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With Andhra Pradesh planning to harness maximum potential out of its seaports for fueling the state's economy, it needs to protect itself from becoming a feared destination for shipping industries.

Ports of Andhra Pradesh, mainly the Vizag port has become home to one of the most feared marine pest, the *Mytilopsis sallei*. These are 25-30 millimeter

small organisms which attach themselves to almost any wet surface resulting in an unwanted and unwarranted growth.

These species hold serious threat to the economy of shipping business. *Mytilopsis sallei* attaches itself to the hull of ships affecting the hydrodynamics of ships. Dr M. Balaji, of the Institute of Wood Science and Technology, says, "The species attach themselves to a ship's hull in hundreds

of layers resulting in an increased drag on the ship because of which more propulsion power is required. This results in an increased fuel consumption which in turn increases the financial burden on shipping companies."

He further said, "These fouling organisms not just attach themselves to hulls but also to sensitive electronic equipment and marine structures which disturbs the entire shipping industry."

bour to identify the growth of *Mytilopsis* and other organisms which cause fouling. He further said that the scientists of IWST are con-

ducting research across major ports of the East Coast of India including Howrah, Haldia, Paradeep, Chennai and Tuticorn in collabora-

tion with the National Institute of Oceanography to prepare a report on the issue to be submitted to the central government.

Turning pest into revenue

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While the marine pest, *Mytilopsis sallei* is a big nuisance for shipping industry, there are no completely effective ways to control it.

However, experts feel that rather than breaking head over the robust pest, it is better to find out if the pest is edible so that revenue can be generated through its export as a marine delicacy or as pet food and poultry feed.

Eight major ways have been found to have some effect against the pest which includes chemical antifoulants, exposure to air, changes in salinity, deprivation of oxygen, application of copper compounds, chlorine, hydrocarbons and use of endosulphan.

However, these techniques either prove very costly or are harmful to the nature if practiced.

According to reports available online, Darwin port in Australia spent a whopping \$2.2million to get the port eradicated of the pest. Dr Balaji says, that if any of the food processing institute conducts research in its nutritional value then Vizag can make a killing by harvesting it.