

TODAY'S PAPER

Published: November 28, 2009 00:00 IST | Updated: March 5, 2010 11:56 IST November 28, 2009

Post-26/11, Saurashtra coastal security found wanting

Manas Dasgupta

Only eight of proposed 27 police stations have come up in Gujarat

"Crocodile Group" to maintain constant vigil in Kutch-Saurashtra coast

Crying need for bigger and better craft to improve maritime surveillance

AHMEDABAD: Even a year after the Mumbai terror attack, nothing much has been done to revamp the coastal security on the vulnerable Saurashtra coast in Gujarat.

The suggestion of the Coast Guard for bigger and better vessels for the marine police to improve surveillance is being implemented haltingly. One of the three modern boats allotted in the Kutch-Saurashtra coast has developed a technical snag and is lying unutilised at the Navsari port in south Gujarat.

No vigilance stations

The proposal to set up vigilance stations in various key coastal areas, in addition to setting up the coast guard headquarter in Gandhinagar, is still in the pipeline except the Gandhinagar station.

After 26/11 that breached the coastal security in the Saurashtra region, the State government had proposed to set up 27 coastal police stations but only eight have come up so far and that too without adequate staff.

The Coast Guard has formed a special "Crocodile Group" with 40 trained officials to maintain a constant vigil along the Kutch-Saurashtra coast. On the occasion of the first anniversary of the Mumbai attack on Thursday, the group gave a demonstration on how to check infiltration through the sea route. But that could hardly bolster the scared fishermen, who are constantly under fear of yet another hijack by the Pakistani terrorists.

The genesis of their fear is the incident of "Kuber," a fishing trawler registered in Porbandar and which the Mumbai attackers had hijacked from the high seas. They used it to ferry the terrorists to reach the Mumbai coast after reportedly killing all the five fishermen on board.

No GPS on many trawlers

The State Fisheries Department claimed that more than 60 to 70 per cent of the registered trawlers had now been fitted with "Global Positioning System" (GPS) which would enable the State authorities to monitor the movements of the fishing boats in case of repeat of a "Kuber-like" incident, but the claim had been contested by various associations of the fishermen. They claim that in the last one year, very few fishing trawlers had been equipped with the GPS and in case of another hijack, they would meet the same fate as that of the Kuber crew.

Subsidy scrapped

The decision of the Fisheries Department to stop the subsidy on the diesel used by fishermen had also made the boats more vulnerable. The government was giving a subsidy of Rs. seven a litre of diesel up to a limit of 1,400 litres a trip.

With the withdrawal of the facility, fishermen were now carrying more than 2,00 to 2,500 litres of diesel to go deeper and stay longer in the high seas in search of better catch. However, this made them more vulnerable to straying into Pakistani territorial waters and get caught.

The fishermen are also in a quandary because of a recent order of the Fisheries Department at the behest of the Central government to cancel the registration of the fishing boats now in the custody of the Pakistani authorities.

Livelihood at stake

The notice for the cancellation of the registration of 423 fishing boats, more than half of which were registered at Porbandar port alone, was issued for security reasons following reports that Pakistan could misuse them to launch yet another "Kuber-type" attack. But this would take away the livelihood of hundreds of fishermen and their families as registration of new boats had been stopped since 2003.

The efforts by the fisheries associations to persuade the Centre to take up with Islamabad the issue of release of the seized boats had so far failed to yield any result. The State authorities pointed out that since 2003, Pakistan had stopped returning the seized boats and the captured fishermen, whenever released under a bilateral agreement between the two countries, were forced to come via the land route back to their coastal villages.

Plea to Centre

Saurashtra Fisheries Association secretary Manish Lodhari said the association had requested the Centre to allow registration of new boats in lieu of the vessels in the custody of Pakistani authorities. But a decision is still pending.

[Email the Editor](#)

Printable version | Aug 2, 2015 6:30:57 PM | <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/post2611-saurashtra-coastal-security-found-wanting>

/article150284.ece

© The Hindu