

Prawn culture scare for one, integrated governan

Focus on Chilika threat

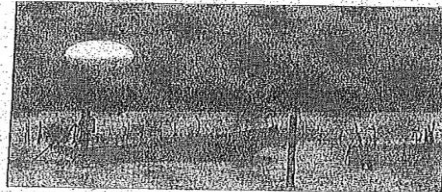
ASHUTOSH MISHRA AND
SUBHASHISH MOHANTY

Bhubaneswar, Feb. 6: Chilika - Asia's largest brackish water lake - is under pressure from the mushrooming prawn farming structures that surround its boundaries.

Prawn culture in Chilika has taken centre stage as scientists and government agencies have geared up to prepare a coastal eco-system health assessment report card for this overstressed wetland. The exercise is being sponsored, among others, by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the government of India and the Chilika Development Authority.

Ajit Pattnaik, chief executive officer of the Chilika Development Authority, said he was aware of prawn farming in the lake area and the concerned district administrations have been demolishing the prawn farming ponds from time to time.

"A law is being framed to tackle the issue," he said, adding that the Chilika Development Authority had done its



Chilika Lake

bit for the hydrological restoration of the lake.

The study for the report card will focus on three overarching aspects - fisheries, water quality and bio-diversity - each indicative of the health of the lake which straddles three districts of the state. The report card is expected to be ready within four months.

UNEP representative Anja Dutta said that demographic concentration, being high along the state's coastal stretch, there was intense pressure on Chilika's resources. This is an aspect that requires an in-depth study for it involves various issues of sustained livelihood.

However, sources said that

the team involved in the making of the report card would also be focusing on the interplay of currents which had led to the opening of a new mouth of the lake at Gahakunda jeopardising the livelihood of people in the nearby villages on the shore a few years ago. When the phenomenon occurred, water entered some of the villages ruining the chances of fishing by the local communities completely.

However, official sources said that things had changed over the years with people of the Gahakunda area not only getting ample opportunity to fish but also engaging in activities to promote tourism in the area. The proposed study is expected to help the local people further with regard to pursuing their livelihood needs.

In another development, 35 dead birds were seized from the lake today by a team of forest officials. They, however, failed to arrest the poachers. Migratory birds coming to the lake in winter face a threat from poachers who reside in villages on the periphery of Chilika.