

Crops destroyed, not the will. Vaikom farmers at it again

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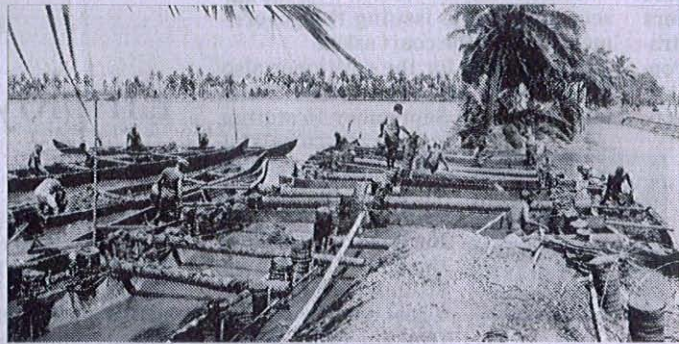
SURROUNDED by plenty of dikes, the lush paddy fields in Thalayazham grama panchayat in Vaikom appeared to be a collection of several gigantic ponds, formed as a result of the recent floods. The rich polders would have been seen otherwise in a fascinating yellow of matured paddy plants had the floods not ravaged the cultivation.

The entire paddy cultivation in these fields, having a growth of two to 45 days, has been destroyed in breach of bunds. While sailing through the Kottayam-Vaikom (KV) Canal and other interior channels, the sight is heartbreaking as months-long hard work of farm-

ers lay shattered in floodwater, wiping out their only source of income. The poor families of agricultural labourers living on the banks of these polders are struggling to resume life in their damaged houses.

This is not an isolated sight, rather common to the entire Upper Kuttanad region in the western part of Kottayam district. As per official statistics, 'virippu' paddy cultivation in 5,818 hectares - out of the total 5989 hectares - has been washed away. Overall, agriculture in 6,740 hectares was damaged for a cumulative loss of ₹491 crore.

Weeks later, refusing to bow down to setbacks, farmers are bouncing back with all out efforts to resume farming in the flood-ravaged paddy fields.



Farmers engaged in rebuilding the outer bund of Vanam South paddy polders in Thalayazham grama panchayat in Vaikom | **VISHNU PRATHAP**

"The breach of bunds caused heavy damage to our fields. We are trying to rebuild bunds to equip the fields for cultivation in September itself," said C P Karthikeyan, secretary of Van-

am South paddy fields in Thalayazham. Interestingly, these farmers' groups have raised around ₹10 lakh for the construction of bunds by availing bank loans in expectation that

the government will soon reimburse the expenses. "This apart, around 172 motors and pumpsets were damaged. They have been repaired to resume the dewatering process," said Muhammed Sherif, assistant engineer with the Agriculture Department.

While the floodwater has receded and farmers are going about resuming farming, another major threat looming large over them is the impending drought.

"Polders dried up and cracks appeared on the fields, threatening paddy plants. Though we are pumping in fresh water for the time being, we can't make it viable for long," said T V Shajimon, secretary of Enazham paddy fields, Thalayazham.