

# Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum Annual Report 2001

## INTRODUCTION

Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum forum has seen 2001 ,a year with hectic activities and challenges. The projected marine fish landing was predicted to have an optimistic 2-3 % increase in 2001, but the practical field the annual catch per unit has gone down, though there has not been any significant increase in the fishing fleet. The notable charges that deserve mention include the increase in pollution level in the inshore waters, particularly in the sector and at the Sagar point-preferably due to the boon in the tourism and commissioning of the Haldia petrochemical Plant. Another important event is the drastic shrinking of the prime fishing grounds by several thousand square kilometers, due to testing operations for natural and gas and oil by the Reliance Industries in collaboration with the a foreign company.

Coastal industrial aquaculture has remained mostly stagnant at the earlier level because of experience of the setback it suffered from virus epidemic of 1998-99. The state Govt: sponsored and World Bank aided largest aquaculture project at Dadanpatrabar has been revised and improved and traditional multi-species farming through beneficiaries selected mainly from the local community ,has started stocking under direct supervision and financial assistance of the department of Fisheries .This is seen as a moral victory of the union ,since we were the ones who maintained a sustained campaign against the menace of industrial mono culture particularly the World Bank project.

Our sustained struggle for marine conservation triumphed Government of West Bengal did impose a ban on all forms of trawling from junelst to 15thAugust (75 days)in the territorial waters of the state. Virtually this implies a trawl -free period of five and a half months, since the three months viz. March April and may prior to the ban is the 'annual close season Unfortunately the Central Government did not impose a concurrent ban on fishing in the EEZ off West Bengal cost for the same period ,which they did for other coastal states.

This gave the Vizag based deep-sea fleet ,foreign fishing vessels (both poachers and permit holders). and trawls fleet from Orissa and AP a free run to plunder the fishing grounds of the sand heads and the eaternchannels. More over in the joint meet of the East coast states ;West Bengal proposed a uniform ban period for all. We learned from very reliable source that majority of the states supported this proposal.. But it is a matter of great regret that because of the adamant and uncompromising arrogance of a particular state-with tacit support of some high officials of the central Ministry of Agriculture-this noble attempt has been nipped in the bud. So the question of a uniform ban in the east coast is still in the wilderness.

As a fishery products-result of our continuous persuasion, we have succeeded to further consolidate our achievements regarding the social security aspects. The number of beneficiaries for the saving cum Relief scheme is raised to 7000 with the addition of 2000 new cases this year. 1000 women fishworkers have been provided with 2000 pair of gloves and 1000 pair of shoes by the state Fisheries department,

while 300 fish vendors received one bicycle and one plastic crate each. One core rupees has been for the development of infrastructure in the coastal fishing villages of Midnapur district.

We have been entrusted to give plans for tube wells link-Roads, toilet, ponds embarkments etc. A fund of Rupees ten crores has been sanctioned for the economic development of the traditional marine fishers of Contai coast. We are in the process of forming cooperatives in all the all the important fishing villages, for the implementation of this scheme.

Increased growth of influence of the union among the masses and in Govt. circles has invited dissatisfaction and anger of powerful political quarters. This trend is visible since last year, which we mentioned in our report too. Increase in the allocation of funds for the fisherpeople has made them restless to control the sector. Now they seem to have taken a vow to destroy the union by all means. Tactics like exerting pressure on the people through party and panchayaths, pressurizing the Govt. officials; personal allurements, intimidation and harassments of selected leaders have become a day to day affair. It has posed a serious challenge before the union. Unfortunately some people have succumbed to the pressure. We are really worried and alarmed. We request NFF for a serious discussion on this subject in the General body. In the above backdrop we present a brief report of union activities in west Bengal in the year 20001.

January 8th to 14th: DMF. Leader and chair person of the women Fish workers Association srimati Retna Majhi started indefinite fast in the morning of 8th January 2001 in front of Contai Meen bhavan were 2000 fishermen and women continued to sit in mass dharna in support of the hunger strike. W.B.Minister for legislative affairs Prof. Probodh Chandra Sinha visited the fasting shed on 9<sup>th</sup> January. Sri Swadsh Chakravarthy M.P.Mohamed Salim M.P.,Sri.Nitish Senguotha M.P. sent written message supporting the agitation. W.B. fisheries minister Sri Kiran may Nanda came down to the fasting shed on 10 January along with sri.Lakshman Chandra Seth M.P. and jilla Matsyakarmadhyaksha Com. Nishi Kanta Dhara. All of them addressed the gathering of fisher people sitting in mass dharna in the fasting shed. Fisheries Minister Sri Nanda accepted all our demands pertaining to the state government. The main among those are (1) Increase the number of beneficiaries of saving cum Relief Scheme, (2) To provide the fish vendors with bicycles and crates (3) to provide the women fish sorters with g loves and shoes, to increase fund allocation for the developments of coastal fishing villages and landing centres. He also expressed his full support for our 8 point demand to the central government. In response to the request of the minister the attending crowd of fisherpeople persuaded smt. Ratna Majhi to withdraw her fast while sri. Bhaku Charan Dhara took up fasting to continue still the 8 point demands are met. He continued fasting till 14 January noon when thousands of fishermen and women thronged in Contai town in a victory procession after receiving the text of the agreement between NFF and the two central ministers sri. Nitish Kumar and sri. Ram Naik. Leaders of different political parties and worker's Organizations visited the fasting shed on different states. NFF Chair Person was in the fasting shed right through.

January 27 Fisherpeople's conference and public meeting was held at Begua khali, Sagar, South 24 Parganas. It was organized jointly by the three associations of

Sagar island. Bhaku Charan Dhara, Ratna Majhi, Birendra Nath Shyamal ,Srikrishna Das , Sita Kar, Nitai Jana, Tajen Das Nirmalendu Das ,Hara Krishna Debnath and others addressed the public meeting. An organizing committee for Sagar Island was formed with Kanai Das of Beguakhali as the convenor. The public meeting was presided over by Sashanka Das president of Beguakhali Matsyajibi Samiti.

January 28th. A meeting of the leaders and activists of Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum was held at the office of Kakdwip Fishermen Association. It was presided over by Shri. Gangadhar Das where Bhaku Charan Dhara Srikrishna Das, Nirmalendu Das and Hara Krishna Debnath spoke. Leaders of Saagar fishworkers Forum also attended the meeting. February 6th; Annual General Body meeting of KMKMUS was held at Ma Basuli Malsya Khoti. NFF Chair person was the chief guest and a Jilla Malsyakarmadhyaksha Sri Nishikanta Dhara and ADF(marine) Contai Sri. Kishore Nag was the guest of honour.

February 28th. Ceremonial distribution of 300 bicycles and crates for fish vendors and 2000 pair of gloves and 1000 pairs of shoes for women fishworkers by the West Bengal Fisheries Minister Sri. Kiranmay Nanda was organized at Deuli Bangla, Midnapore. Mr. Kishore Nag ADF (marine) Contai Jilla Malsya Karmadhyaksha Sri Nishikanta Dhara, Sri. Nirmalendu Das, Sri Krishna Das, Bhaku Chandra Dhara, Nitai Jana, Amulya Kr.Bar, Lakshmi Narayan Jana, Birendra Nath Shyamal, Srikrishna Das and other leaders of DMF, KMKMUS and vendors' union attended and spoke on the occasion.

March 14th and 15th: NFF executive committee meeting was hosted by DMF at Diamond Harbour. West Bengal Fisheries Minister Shri Kiranmay Nanda came down to Diamond Harbour and attended the meeting to express his solidarity with and support to the NFF struggle.

March 16th: DMF Annual General Body meeting took place at Diamond Harbour. A new Executive Committee was elected with Sri Nitai Jana and Sri Tajendra Lal Das as President and General Secretary respectively. A detailed action plan for the proposed national agitation in July 2001 was chalked out in the conference.

March 28th: Farewell was accorded to the ADF (Contai) Sri Kishore Nag by the Kanthi Mahakurna Khoti Matsyajibi Unnayan Samiti at Contai Meen Bhavan on the eve of his retirement from the services. April 1st. Anti WTO day was observed by DMF through mass rallies, public meetings and demonstrations in Contai, Kakdwip Sagar and Diamond Harbour. A leaflet was printed on the occasion and distributed to the public in large numbers. Government's decision to remove restrictions on import of 1004 items including fish and fishery products was the point of focus of these protest rallies, and demonstrations. April 4th DMF submitted a memorandum to the ADF(marine) at Diamond Harbour on the demands

of the fisherpeople of south 24-Praganas. Sri. Nirmalendu Das Nitai Jana ,Gopi Nath Das ,Sri.Krishna Das smt. Ratna Majhi, Birendra Nath Shyamal and Ajit Patra were among the leaders participating in the deputation. June 5th: World Environment Day as 'mangrove Day' ceremonial mangrove plantation Programme was carried out in 3 fishing villages at Sagar and at Saula Creek in Contai. NFF Chair person inaugurated the ceremony in Sagar and KMKMUS chair person Srikrishna Das led

the function at Saula, Sri Himangshu Giri, Anchal Pradhan of Kalindi, Anchal Panchayet Inaugurated the ceremonial plantation of mangrove saplings at the Saula creek. He assured all cooperation of the local Panchayath for the aforestation programme taken up by the fisherpeople. June 15th-16th. Two days training and orientation camp for the union activists was organized by DMF at the NFF office at Diamond Harbour This was part of preparations for the ensuing nation wide agitation and indefinite hunger strike by Thomas Kocherry. The CRZ notification and supreme Court judgement on aquaculture were the main subjects. NFF chairperson conducted the camp where 28 leaders from units participated.

July 3rd Fisherpeople's convention was organized by Kanthi Mahakurma Khoti Malsyajibi Unnayan Samathi (KMKMUS) at Sri Aurobinda Stadium Contai,. This convention was inaugurated by NFF chairperson Industrial Aquaculture and marine environment was the theme of the convention. KMKMUS president Sri Srikrishna Das presided and Sri Pradip Chatterjee of Disha- an eminent environmental Activist and DMF. President Sri Nitai Jana were among the speakers.

## JULY AGITATION

102 July 2001 about 3000 fishworkers and fish vendors including 500 women blocked the Kolkata high way from 10 Am to 12 noon in support of the indefinite fast of Sri Thomas Kocherry and also to press for the strict implementation of monsoon trawl ban in the territorial waters of West Bengal. Veteran leader Sri. Nirmalendu Das Amulya Kumar union leaders Nitai Jana Srikrishna Das Ratna Majhi Rajkumar, Panda Ajit Patra, Birendra nath Shymal, Tauran Paikera, Biksh Kar and Sunirmal Paikera MLA. Lead the blockade.

11 July 2001. In Contai more than 3000 fishworkers stormed the town with a huge mass rally presided by a colourful cycle rally. This virtually brought the traffic to a stand still for several hours. Discussions were held with SDO and the ADF and memoranda were handed over to them. About 2000 fishworkers sat in Mass fasting for a day in Kakdwip in support of the National demands and indefinite fasting of Sri Thomas Kocherry

13 July 2001. Fishworkers blocked the BDO office in Sagar from 10 AM They also blocked the Sagar-Kachuberia Highway simultaneously and practically paralysed the whole Sagar Island for the day The BDO of Sagar held a long discussion with the leaders of the agitating fisher people and promised to implement all demands relating to local administration and also assured to communicate their other demands to the state and central governments immediately. On these assurances the fisherpeople withdrew the blockade in the afternoon.

KMKMUS President Sri. Srikrishna Das, Vice President Sri Lakshmi Narayan Jana and vendors' union leader Sri. Achinta Pramanik participated in the NFF agitation in Delhi.

August 3 – 6\* Leadership development training camp at Dadanpattalar. A training camp was

organized at Dadapatrabar (for the leaders of Kanthi Mahakuma Khoti Matsyajibi Samiti, Venders' Union and the women's group) from 3<sup>rd</sup> to August to 6 August 2001. The NFF chairperson Sri. Harekrishna Debnath conducted the training camp. Sixty participants from different fishing villages attended. Participants appreciated the effort and expressed their desire to organize similar camps in other areas.

August 30- Sept. 2: Leadership development training camp at Junput: In the light of the tremendous response to the training camp. Organized in Dadanpatrabar KMKUS organized at Junput from 30 August to September 2 2001. Sri. Harekrishna Debnath Nitai Jana , Srikrishna Das, and Birendra Nth Shymal conducted training 30 participants attend the camp. WB Fisheries Minister Sri Kiranmay Nanda visited the camp and expressed his keen interest the syllabus and methodology of the training Dr. Utpal Kanti Sar, ADF (marine) Contai, took personal interest in the camp and provided helpful inputs in the camp. September 12 and 14 : Workshop on marine fisheries of West Bengal at Diamond Harbour and Digha: Two workshop's on marine fisheries of WB were organized jointly by the Fisheries Survey of India and the Govt. of WB in Diamond Harbour and Digha on the 12 and 14 September respectively. Mis Nita Chawdhury, IAS; Dr. V.S Somvanshy, DG, FSI, Dr. L.Ramalingam, Senior scientist FSI; were the resource persons, while Kiranmay Nanda inaugurated. We participated in these workshops in a big way and success fully made our points highlighting the need for conservation of resources for a real development of marine fisheries

October 2d-4. NAPM Training camp in Trivandrum: DMF leaders Sri. Hiralal Das Roy. Gopinath Das Nitai Jana, SrikrishnaDas, Milan Das and Reena Roy participated in the NAPM training camp in Trivandrum from 2 - 4 October 2001.

October 28 & 29 :DMF Executive committee meeting was held in Diamond Harbour. Plans for NAPM agitation against WTO, Global Fisheries Strike, World Fisheries Day celebrations were worked out in detail. Special responsibilities were assigned to each one. It was decided to print 2000 posters and 10000 leaflets and 10000 badges for the World Fisheries Day. November 8: DMF organized a mass deputation to the ADF (marine) Diamond Harbour on 8 November on the demands of the fishworkers of south 24 - Parganas - particularly Sagar and Jambudwip. Sri Nirmalendu Das. Nitai Jana, Gopinath Das, Tajen Das, Santhosh Das, Gangadar Das, Prabhakar bar,

Sasankan Sekhar Das, Kanai Das, Himanshu Mondal, Abdul Montal were among the leaders in the deputation.

November 10: General Body meeting of Sagar Matsyajibi Forum, the Sagar Island unit of DMF took place at Ganga Sagar, South 24 Parganas. An executive committee was elected with Sri. Kana Das and Satya Hari Mondal as president and secretary respectively.

World Fisheries Day: It was a complete strike in marine fisheries in WB on 21 Nov. in response the call of the WFFP. The day was celebrated with hoisting of National and Organizational flags in the fishing villages , Felicitations of veterans and brilliant students of the fishing community. mass rallies, public meeting and cultural functions etc Major events of the day took place in Contai, Kakdwip and Sagar.

1) Contai: Thousands of fishermen and women from all the coastal fishing villages of Contai sub division congregated in Contai town in colourful procession conversed in a huge public meeting at Veerandra Smriti Sauda after the rallying round the town. The public meeting was presided over by the local MLA, and chairman of Contai municipality Sri Sisir, Adhikary. NFF Chairperson and general secretary of World Forum of Fisher People (WFFP) Sri Hare Krishna Debnath was the chief guest of the function. Sri Sailajaj Das Ex. MLA, Sri Kishore Nag, Special officer (Fisheries) and DMF President Sri. Nitai Jana addressed their meeting. All the speakers expressed their high appreciation of the fisher peoples endeavor for the protection of the oceans environment and livelihood of the depended masses.

2) Kakdwip: World Fisheries Day was celebrated in Kakdwip with great enthusiasm. Thousands of fishworkers came to Kakdwip in hundreds of fishing boats from Jumbudwip and other far-flung areas. More than five thousand fishermen and women brought out a huge rally in Kakdwip town. They submitted memorandum to the SDO SDPO, and other officials. A public meeting was held after the rally. Veteran Freedom fighter Sri. Hiralal Das Roy, was the chief guest of the function while Sri Gangadhar Das presided. DMF secretary, Sri. Tajendra Lal Das and Sri Santosh Das were among the speakers. This event was highlighted in the news papers and electronic media.

3) Sagar.: World Fisheries Day was observed with great festivity in Sagar. It was a complete fisheries strike on Nov 21" But the main public meeting was organized on 22 November, at Ganga Sagar with fisheries Minister Sri Kiranmay Nanda as the chief guest. Local MLA Sri Bankim Maity Ex. MLA Sri, Prabharjan Mandal, DMF leaders Sri. Nitia Jana Sri Nirmalendu Das, Sri Gopinath Das, Sri

Bhaku Charan Dhara, Sri Tajen Das and Prabhakar Bar addressed the meeting. It was a historic event for the Fisheries sector of Sagar. The minister expressed his great pleasure in seeing the awakening among the fisherpeople. He declared a package of development and welfare programmes for the hitherto neglected fishing community of Sagar and other neighboring islands. Conclusions: It is true that there can not be any sustained movement without a strong organization. Again it is equally true that an organization can not be strong without sustained movements - which may be political, social, economic or cultural, But in the core of this axiom there remains a plain truth - properly trained man power. Keeping this in view DMF plans to take up organizational training as a priority in the coming year. Recognising the fishing community through co-operatives will also remain a very important task ahead of DMF.

Nital Jana.  
President

Tajendra Lal Das  
General Secretary