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Miscellaneous

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Environmental Problems of Jaffna Peninsula

An overview

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In this paper the key environmental issues of Jaffna peninsula are being identified with proposals for environmental conservation and enhancement. The environmental awareness and education to mobilize people to protect the environment should be given high priority. The main environmental challenges are,

Land mines and unexposed devices: The most serious environmental issue in Jaffna at present is the buried land mines and exploded devices scattered all over the land. Conservative estimate indicates that there may be a million land mines buried in Jaffna soil. This has been the most hazardous environmental peril and the gravest threat and deterrent to returnees settling back in their own home. So far hundreds of people including military personnel and combatants have died in mine blasts and several more have been maimed.

Water pollution: The water in the dug wells and open ponds are polluted in many ways

Salt-water intrusion has become a major environmental hazard. Inflow of seawater into fresh water bodies, over extraction of irrigation water for crop production, Sand harvesting from coastal areas, quarrying of limestone especially for manufacture of cement are found to be major causes. Other inorganic chemicals causing water pollution in Jaffna are nitrates and phosphates. This has been attributed to leachate from fertilizer and agrochemicals percolating drawn to ground water. Alarming increases in concentration of nitrates (above 66ppm) well beyond limits of tolerance according to WHO standards (50ppm) have been recorded in the early eighties. The most common organic pollutants are the petrochemicals from CTB workshop, petrol sheds, and service station and motor garages.

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Leached organic chemicals from refuse dumps, fermenting of fruits and vegetables in solid waste also pollute the water and cause both pigmentation and smell.

Human waste from lavatory pits, septic tanks, soakage pits etc. have been found to be high especially in urban areas including the Jaffna city bases on sampling and testing for coliform bacteria.

Most of the shallow dug wells do not have staining herbs and aprons and therefore rain water often over flows into wells carrying dust, debris, sewage material and other pollutants.

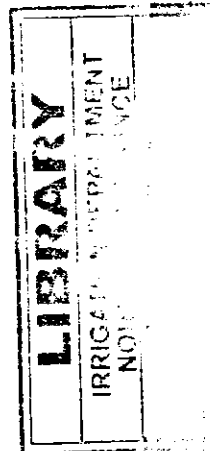
Nearly thousand ponds scattered all over the Jaffna have been neglected and have got silted up to the banks. Bacteria and mosquitoes breed freely under such condition and spreading dysentery, typhoid, cholera, malaria and dengue.

Pollution of sea beach: Most of the fisherman houses in Jaffna especially Jaffna city and gurunagar are congested hamlets. Toilet facilities are seldom provided. The beach being used as open toilet.

Storm water drainage in Jaffna city: Storm water drainage in Jaffna city is dependent on roadside drains and open canals. For several years with out any maintenance or repairs the drainage system has gone into destruction due to silting and side collapse. Residents' misuse such as dumping refuse into drains, canals and culverts. Entry of wastewater into storm water system has to be prevented.

Solid waste disposal: Much solid waste was collected and dumped in dumping grounds with out considerations for health hazards. Hospital waste, infectious clinical waste are being dumped into the environment causing spread of disease

Flora and fauna: The biodiversity in the flora and fauna in relation to the human habitat, that existed before the war has been drastically upset due to mass displacement of people. Vast extent of land especially around the high security zone have either been desertified or over grown with weeds and



thorny bushes. The valuable perennial trees like palmyrah and coconut were cut and removed.

Urgent action is required on speedy removal of land mines, prevention of salt water intrusion, desilting of ponds, implementation of agro and social forestry, rainwater harvesting, efficient micro irrigation system, rehabilitation of storm water drains, compost making with solid waste and pipe based sewage treatment and disposal.