

Experts wise up to Alang's problems

A Unesco-sponsored meet will discuss 'wise coastal practices' for this environmentally fragile coastline in Gujarat

by V K CHAKRAVARTI

THE Paris-based Unesco has decided to extend its global project on 'Wise Coastal Practices for Sustainable Human Development' to the Alang and Sosia Ship-Breaking Yard (ASSBY). This yard is the biggest in the world and lies on the 1,600 km long Gujarat coastline.

Unesco has sponsored a two-day workshop at Bhavnagar on July 27 and 28 for forward planning of a pilot project on the coastal management of ASSBY. The workshop will also establish a 'UNESCO Chair in Sustainable Coastal Living' at Bhavnagar University (BU).

The workshop, which is being hosted by BU, will also prioritise the ongoing 'wise coastal practices' along the Gujarat coast through inter-sectorial and inter-institutional teams. Unesco has already initiated a detailed study on the impact of the Rs 700 crore Dholera Port Project, being implemented by the JK Cements Group, on a greenfield site, about 100 km from Bhavnagar.

BU has been a partner to the Unesco project since the latter initiated an Electronic Discussion Group (EDG) on the Internet to understand, define and validate wise coastal practices under the supervision of R Sudarshana, EDG member, during May-July 1999.

Sudarshana's underlying philosophy is: "Since industrialisation of coasts is inevitable, why not allow practical vision to shape the future through wise development practices?"

One fallout of the EDG was a site on the Dholera Port as "the beginning of wise (development) practices", which attracted global attention and prompted Unesco specialist L A Mandalla to visit the port site and assess how best

it could contribute toward the betterment of the economy and social uplift of the Bhal region, vast stretches of flat brackish land where not even grass grows.

Unesco chief Dirk Troost is scheduled to come from Paris just to attend the workshop, other invites being Sudarshana, former Planning Commission deputy chairman Y K Alagh, former IPCL chairman Hasmukh Shah, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda vice-chancellor Anil Kane, former BU vice-chancellor Vidyut Joshi and Dholera Port project (DPL) general manager Vinai Saxena.

The inclusion of ASSBY in the Unesco project is likely to generate further interest in improving the socioeconomic conditions of migrant workers

The inclusion of ASSBY in the Unesco project is likely to generate further interest in improving the socioeconomic conditions of migrant workers and the industry's impact, besides tackling basic issues like non-availability of fresh water. Environmental hazards faced by 30,000 migrant workers from toxic materials while recycling three million tonnes per annum (mtpa) of steel, has come under flak from global organisations like Greenpeace.

The inclusion of the Dholera Port Project in the workshop's agenda happened because of the promoters taking up several social

activities in and around the site during the last three years and particularly during the recent drought. The activities were taken up under the aegis of the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL) and included supplying free water to nearby villages through tankers and deepening ponds in eight villages to store rainwater.

The Unesco project was part of the global Agenda 21, endorsed by the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Brazil in 1992, which called for sustainable development of coasts and small islands. ♦