

Fishermen keep off research buoys

Pheroze L. Vincent

NEW DELHI: There's an unlikely contributor to the accurate projections of the paths of Phailin and Hudhud cyclones. Several research buoys in the Indian Ocean, which collect data on the waters and the atmosphere, used to be routinely tampered with by fishermen. Awareness programmes and inputs to fishermen on potential fishing zones by government institutions have led to a drastic reduction in vandalism of these buoys. This has improved forecasting.

"To save diesel, fishermen used to anchor their boats to these buoys in order to remain stationary. Buoys also act as fish aggregators. A local ecosystem develops around them which attract fish and barnacles. Hence, fishermen prefer to lay nets around them often destroying the equipment," T. Srinivasa Kumar, Head of Advisory Ser-

Weather forecasts improve as vandalism of research equipment comes down

vices and Satellite Oceanography Group at the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), Hyderabad, told *The Hindu*.

INCOIS, which places several buoys in collaboration with the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT), Chennai, and the Ministry of Earth Sciences, has recovered equipment with their fasteners sheared off by lashings of fishing nets. Some buoys have even been recovered with bullet holes after being used for target practice by mariners.

Since 1993, the government has been issuing advisories to fishermen on Potential Fishing Zones (PFZs). These



A buoy that is a part of a tsunami warning system.

are prepared using data from satellites and oceanographic research to predict where shoals of fish gather at a given time. Now these advisories are sent through myriad platforms including text messages, global positioning system,

notice boards at harbours and email. The economic benefits of these advisories have been estimated at Rs. 34,000 crore per annum by the National Council of Applied Economic Research and have also led to a reduction in diesel consumption.

"Fishermen now understand that our research can bring prosperity. Fear of tsunami still exists and they realise that these instruments can give early warnings," R. Venkatesan, Head of Ocean Observation Systems at NIOT, told *The Hindu*.

NIOT held a workshop for the fisheries department, NGOs and fishing unions of the Bay of Bengal rim countries and this was followed up by an outdoor publicity campaign in eight languages. State fisheries departments have also done the same. Mr. Venkatesan said these measures had resulted in a drastic reduction of incidents of vandalism.