

# 'GST trap' hinders renovation of Fort Kochi's Chinese nets



The iconic Chinese fishing nets in Fort Kochi | EXPRESS

**KRISHNA KUMAR K E** @ Kochi

THE Chinese fishing nets — historic, cantilevered structures that define the coastline of Fort Kochi — are languishing in disrepair, their much-needed restoration stalled for years despite a ₹2.40-crore grant. The urgency for restoration was underscored when a worn out platform of one of the nets gave way, with 11 foreign visitors falling into the water last Friday.

While the tourism department had entrusted the Kerala Industrial and Technology Consultancy Organisation (Kitco) with the task of refurbishing 11 nets, the fishermen-owners point towards the insistence of the latter in having a GST (Goods & Services Tax) account for receipt of the grant, and cite it as the reason for not carrying out the repair.

In fact, the mishap involving the foreign tourists happened after a plywood plank, set up temporarily instead of hard wood, gave in, re-

sulting in the collapse of the platform.

Kitco, though, maintains that GST is "mandatory" for benefit of government funds, while promising that it will award a tender for urgent repairs in "four weeks".

"The delay in the repair of the Chinese nets happened due to bureaucratic require-

ment for the owners to secure a GST account. Why do the poor fishermen need to take a GST account? They are not doing any large business or export. In fact, the non-repair has been affecting their livelihood for years," said K J Sohan, former Kochi mayor and a heritage enthusiast. Compounding the loss, the valuable

teakwood and ironwood logs sourced years ago have started decaying.

Following the continued insistence, the owners finally formed a collective 'Fish Net Association' and secured a GST account. But, the owners lament that they have still not received the funds for repair. ● More on P5



**Why do the poor fishermen need to take a GST account to get a grant? In fact, the non-repair has been affecting their livelihood for years**

K J Sohan, former Kochi mayor and a heritage enthusiast