

## **Bangladeshi and Indian Prime Ministers urged to protect Sundarbans from coal-fired power plant in open letter signed by more than 70 civil society organisations**

**Today, more than 70 non-governmental organisations from around the world called for the cancellation of the proposed Rampal coal power plant, in an open letter to the governments of Bangladesh and India. The proposed 1320 megawatt Rampal plant, construction of which is planned to start soon, would threaten the world's largest mangrove forest, the Sundarbans in Bangladesh, as well as the health and livelihoods of millions of local people.**

The Sundarbans is a Ramsar-listed wetland and also includes a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It has an extremely rich biodiversity and is of critical importance for globally endangered species, including the Royal Bengal Tiger and Ganges River Dolphin. The Sundarbans also plays a key role in mitigating the impacts of climate change, acting as a carbon sink in its undisturbed natural state, and as a barrier against cyclones, storms and other natural disasters that would become more frequent and intense as more greenhouse gases are released into the atmosphere.

"The unique ecosystem and biodiversity of the Sundarbans are under severe threat from the planned Rampal power plant," said Wally Menne of the Timberwatch Coalition in South Africa. "Local peoples' right of access to natural resources from the mangrove forests would be at risk. Although Bangladesh has the fundamental right to develop, this right belongs to all of its people, including the most marginalised, and should not be monopolised by big corporations whose only aim is to make profits, often at the expense of the environment and local communities."

The Rampal power plant is a joint project of India's state owned National Thermal Power Corporation and the Bangladesh Power Development Board. In October 2016, UNESCO's World Heritage Centre and the IUCN identified four key main impacts<sup>1</sup> related to the power plant's construction: pollution from coal ash by air, pollution from wastewater and waste ash, increased shipping and dredging, and the cumulative impact of industrial and related infrastructure. They both recommend the cancellation of the Rampal power plant project.

"The availability of so-called modern technology is being used as an argument in support of the Rampal project, but this will definitely not keep its pollution to a minimum level," said Amanda Tas from Protect the Forest, Sweden. "During recent years, coal-carrying vessels have sunk, and one oil spill has already occurred in the area. Rather than to build a climate-damaging coal-fired power plant, both India and Bangladesh should develop renewable sources of clean energy, respecting the environment, and benefiting all inhabitants of the Sundarbans. This must also include the most marginalised, who being largely off the electricity supply grid, and would not benefit from energy produced by the proposed Rampal power plant."

In the open letter, the organisations call on political decision-makers to immediately halt the Rampal power plant project and other commercial projects in the Sundarbans and its surroundings, and to increase investments in renewable solar and wind power projects. They also urge the Government of Bangladesh to uphold the right to assemble, and to protect the safety of people that exercise this right, including the right to protest against government-approved projects. In January, police used teargas and water cannons against peaceful protesters, injuring about 100 people during a hartal in Dhaka, which was held to save the Sundarbans.

Read the open letter here: <http://skyddaskogen.se/sv/rapporter-och-dokument/rapporter?view=download&id=51>

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<sup>1</sup> IUCN & World Heritage Centre (2016). *Report on the mission to the Sundarbans world heritage site, Bangladesh, from 22 to 28 March 2016*; <http://whc.unesco.org/en/documents/148097>

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