



## National Committee for Saving the Sundarbans (NCSS)

[www.ncssbd.org](http://www.ncssbd.org)

12 April 2018

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**Subject:** *Call for action in view of continued disregard by the Government of Bangladesh of the UNESCO WHC 41COM (2017) decisions and recommendations on the Sundarbans World Heritage Site.*

Excellencies,

The National Committee for Saving the Sundarbans (NCSS), a coalition of more than 55 civil society and non-governmental organizations of Bangladesh having shared interest on environment presents solicits your kind attention to our grave concern that the Government of Bangladesh continues to deliberately and systematically disregard the decisions and recommendations under UNESCO WHC 41COM (2017). Our concerns are mainly related to:

- a) Continued construction of the coal-based power plant at Rampal without mitigation measures and prior to a comprehensive strategic environmental assessment [SEA]; and
- b) Indiscriminate setting up of large-scale industries adjacent to the Sundarbans World Heritage property.

Please find attached a position paper of NCSS containing detailed reasons for our concern. We call on you to consider the following specific actions in the interest of saving the Sundarbans World Heritage Site:

1. Include the Sundarbans in the agenda of the 42COM in July 2018 to review the risks the WH Site faces and assess whether its inclusion in the list of WH in Danger has been overdue;
2. Call on Bangladesh to immediately postpone the coal plant at Rampal including dredging for coal transport through the Bay of Bengal and Passur River until the SEA is complete;
3. Call on India to explain its involvement in the coal-based power-plant at Rampal in light of its obligations under Article 6.3 of the World Heritage Convention not to cause harm to World Heritage sites situated in other countries; and
4. Call upon financiers not to support any large scale industrial projects including the Rampal and Payra coal-based power plants.

We thank you in anticipation and remain available for any queries or support you may require.

Yours sincerely,

Sultana Kamal  
Convener

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## Position Paper of the National Committee for Saving the Sundarbans (NCSS) regarding violations of WHC 41COM April 2018

### A. Large scale industrial and infrastructure developments are proceeding before the Strategic Environmental Assessment has been completed.

Paragraph 4 of the 41COM decision on The Sundarbans “...welcomes the State Party’s decision to carry out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the South-West region of Bangladesh, including the property, and requests the State Party to ensure that any large-scale industrial and/or infrastructure developments will not be allowed to proceed before the SEA has been completed....”

Evidence of violation since 41COM:

1. In late July 2017, Prime Minister Hasina's Energy Advisor, Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury stated that “UNESCO's restriction [regarding large scale industries near the Sundarbans] is only applicable for “future” such projects, and that it doesn't put the Rampal project on hold,”<sup>1</sup> and that “Unesco in its latest report said the construction work of the plant will continue. We will take mitigation measures based on the environmental assessment.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, construction of the power plant at Rampal is proceeding. Appendix I below includes photographs of ongoing construction from August and September 2017.
2. On 24 August 2017, the High Court of Bangladesh directed the Government not to approve any industries within the 10km buffer zone (“Ecological Critical Area” (ECA) of the Sundarbans Reserve Forest. However, that same month, the Government’s National Committee on the Environment approved 320 industrial projects in the ECA, including 186 existing projects, 118 projects that previously had preliminary clearance, 8 new LNG plants and 8 other medium and large scale industries.<sup>3</sup> Environment and Forest Minister Anwar Hossain told the press, “As UNESCO now has no objection to the Rampal power plant, this will apply for other projects as well.”<sup>4</sup> The Mongla Export Processing Zone (EPZ) is set to expand many times over, with a US\$21.5 million leather processing plant<sup>5</sup> and hundreds of new industrial projects granted permits from central authorities.<sup>6</sup> On 5 April 2018, the press reported that the Department of Environment reported 190 industries approved in the ECA to the High Court, including 154 currently operating and 24 red category, highly-polluting industries.<sup>7</sup> On 8 April 2018, the press reported that the red industries had been recategorized as green, avoiding environmental assessment requirements entirely.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup><https://www.thedailystar.net/country/bangladesh-rampal-power-plant-project-construction-work-continue-tawfiq-e-elahi-1441519>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.thedailystar.net/star-weekend/environment/did-unesco-really-endorse-rampal-coal-plant-1432780>

<sup>3</sup><http://en.prothomalo.com/environment/news/156015/Govt-approves-320-industrial-projects-around>

<sup>4</sup>*Id.*

<sup>5</sup><https://www.thedailystar.net/21-5m-leather-plant-at-mongla-epz-61260>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.thethirdpole.net/en/2018/03/16/rapid-industrialisation-poses-pollution-risk-to-the-sundarbans/>

<sup>7</sup><http://www.thedailystar.net/country/department-of-environment-submits-report-bangladesh-high-court-against-190-establishments-in-10-kilometers-sundarbans-1558504>

<sup>8</sup><http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/environment/2018/04/08/greens-amendment-favors-lpg-factories-endangers-sundarbans/>



3. A massive complex of coal-fired power plants totaling 9000 MW is being constructed at Payra, roughly 40km east of the World Heritage site.<sup>9</sup> These plants will send acid rain and mercury into the Sundarbans. Cooling water intake, coal ash disposal and effluent disposal will harm the *ilish* fishery that makes up 12% of the fish catch of Bangladesh<sup>10</sup>, and is one of the most important fish of the Sundarbans and Bay of Bengal.<sup>11</sup>

**B. An adequate management system for shipping to minimize negative impacts on the property, including from dredging, has not been put in place.**

Paragraph 8 of the decision “...requests the State Party to ensure adequate provision of funding and human resources for the implementation of the plan once it is adopted, ... and requests furthermore the State Party to put in place a management system for shipping to minimize negative impacts on the property, including from associated activities such as dredging;”

Evidence of violation since 41COM:

1. NCSS is unaware of any evidence of any improvements in the management systems related to shipping or dredging to minimize negative impacts to the property.
2. Ship traffic on the Passur River continues to increase without adequate regulations or disaster management systems in place.

**C. Capital dredging of the Passur River has begun, though there is no publicly available Environmental Impact Assessment for dredging that includes an assessment of impacts on the World Heritage site.**

Paragraph 9 of the decision “[r]eiterates its request to the State Party to undertake the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for any future dredging of the Passur River to include an assessment of impacts on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property, as requested by the Committee;”

Evidence of violation since 41COM:

1. NCSS is unaware of any EIA for dredging of the Passur River that includes an assessment of impacts on the Outstanding Universal Values (OUV) of the World Heritage site. Dredging the Passur River and Bay of Bengal channel could severely impact many of the species that contribute to the OUV of the Sundarbans, including Ganges and Irrawaddy dolphins.<sup>12</sup> These and other marine mammals (Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin, Indo-Pacific Bottle-nose dolphin, Spinner dolphin, Bryde’s whale, and Minke whale) have been recently documented near the dredging corridor.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup><http://www.dailyindustry.news/move-underway-to-create-9000-mw-power-generation-hub-at-payra/>

<sup>10</sup><http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/environment/2017/06/12/payra-coal-fired-power-plant-threat-ilish-sanctuaries/>

<sup>11</sup><http://en.bdfish.org/2013/03/migratory-pattern-route-abundance-hilsa-shad-tenualosa-ilisha/>

<sup>12</sup><https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B3Rnn2y2GDfbdHNqZ25QcTVnMnM/view>

<sup>13</sup><https://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/swatch-no-ground-treasure-trove-marine-lives-1407508> ;  
<http://en.prothomalo.com/environment/news/170663/Tigers-on-new-sand-bar-of-Sundarbans>;  
<http://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/article/1452191/%E0%A6%B8%E0%A7%81%E0%A6%A8%E>



2. In November 2017, the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council approved TK 712 crore(roughly US\$900,000) for capital dredging of the outer bar of the 131 kilometer-long Passur River shipping channel.<sup>14</sup>
3. In February 2018, NCSS documented capital dredging underway at Hiron Point, inside the Sundarbans South Sanctuary area of the World Heritage site. We also present a photograph and a document discussing the Mongla to Rampal dredging project. See Appendix II for photographs of the dredging vessels and the noted document.

**D. There is no evidence that the environmental impacts of the Rampal plant will be assessed as part of the SEA. There are no adequate technological measures to mitigate these impacts.**

Paragraph 10 of the decision “Also takes note of the mission’s concerns about the likely environmental impacts of the Rampal coal-fired power plant on the property arising from air and water pollution, a substantial increase in shipping and dredging, and additional removal of freshwater from an already increasingly saline environment and requests furthermore the State Party to ensure that these impacts are comprehensively assessed as part of the SEA and adequate technological measures are put in place to mitigate these impacts, in order to avoid damage to the OUV of the property;

Evidence of violation since 41COM:

1. NCSS is unaware of evidence that mitigation of pollutants from the power plant is being seriously considered as part of the terms of reference of the SEA. We are concerned that any mitigation measures eventually recommended by the SEA will be too late if the design of the plant is not fundamentally altered before construction. NCSS commissioned several independent expert reviews of the plant<sup>15</sup>, which identified three key mitigation measures for the plant:
  - a) No coal ash should ever be disposed of in this low-lying, seismically active region.<sup>16</sup>
  - b) State-of-the art emissions control technologies for SO<sub>2</sub>, NO<sub>x</sub>, PM and mercury must be used: flue gas desulfurization (FGD), selective catalytic reduction (SCR), fabric filter/baghouse (FF), and activated carbon injection (ACI).<sup>17</sup>
  - c) Shipping of coal and coal ash on the Passur River should be avoided entirely.<sup>18</sup>

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%E0%A6%97%E0%A7%8B%E0%A6%B2%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%AA%E0%A6%BF-  
%E0%A6%A1%E0%A6%B2%E0%A6%AB%E0%A6%BF%E0%A6%A8

<sup>14</sup><https://www.thedailystar.net/country/pashur-channel-get-massive-dredging-1498336>

<sup>15</sup> All expert reviews are available at [www.ncssbd.org/resources](http://www.ncssbd.org/resources).

<sup>16</sup><https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0Z2WgWYzVDoTIFwakVoWUNrUVpIR0tzYzc3aGY2ZkV5eS00/view>

<sup>17</sup><https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0Z2WgWYzVDoYUhmZl1VzAyTEhDNkplYjBUWGI5a0tpUXF3/view> at 4-5.

<sup>18</sup><https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B3Rnn2y2GDfbdHNqZ25QcTVnMnM/view>

## Appendix I.



Ongoing construction of the power plant at Rampal, August and September 2017.

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## Appendix II.



Capital dredging equipment near Hiron Point on the Passur River, 27 February 2018.



Capital dredging equipment near Hiron Point on the Passur River, 27 February 2018.

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Capital dredging equipment on the Passur River between Mongla and Rampal, 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018.

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**APPENDIX-V**

**Basic Information of Proposed Project**

1. Name of the Project	:	Capital Dredging in Pussur Channel from Mongla Port to Rampal Power Plant
2. Sponsoring Ministry	:	Ministry of Shipping
3. Executing Agency	:	Mongla Port Authority
4. Objective of the Project	:	Main objective of the project is to achieve adequate depth in the Pussur Channel from Jetty no. 9 of Mongla Port to 13 km. upstream to ensure smooth and safe movement of vessel carrying imported coal for power plant of Bangladesh-India Freindship Company Limited (BIFPCL) at Rampal, Bagerhat.
5. Estimated Cost of the Project	:	I) Total: Tk. 16650.00 lac (Cash F.E. 7466.80) II) GOB: Tk. 16650.00 lac (Cash F.E. 7466.80) III) P.A. : -
6. Proposed Implementation period	:	i) Date of commencement: July, 2016 ii) Date of completion: June 2018
7. Source of Financing	:	GOB
8. Main Items of project	:	i. Dredging works (38.81 lac cum.) ii. Construction of Dyke (3.28 lac cum.) iii. Procurement of Pickup- 1no. iv. Procurement of Motor cycle-3nos. v. Procurement of Speed Boat (1no.)
9. Cost Benefit Analysis	:	(a) Net Present Value (NPV) (i) Financial : 4237.32 (ii) Economic : 9710.01 (b) Benefit-Cost Ratio (BCR) (i) Financial : 1.27 (ii) Economic : 1.63 (c) Internal Rate of Return (IRR) (i) Financial : 25.34% (ii) Economic : 31.47%