

Title for the Action Alert Link: Don't Let Open Pit Coal Mine Destroy Homes, Lives & Mangrove Forests in Bangladesh

Tens of Thousands of People Will Be Affected By This Destructive Project: Impacts on People, Land, Food & Water Forewarned

The Phulbari Coal Mine Project would establish one of the world's largest open pit coal mines in northwest Bangladesh, forcibly displacing as many as 130,000 people, including more than 2,200 indigenous households.

The project would acquire and destroy nearly 6,000 hectares of land, 80 percent of which is fertile agricultural land that produces three crops per year. This land currently serves as a vital rice bowl for a country in which half of all people do not have enough to eat (are food insecure, or exist below the 'nutrition poverty line' of 2,122 kcal per day).

Project plans clearly state that the company's UK-based investor, Global Coal Management Resources Plc, will **not** replace the lands of those evicted - despite that fact that the vast majority are farming households that depend on their lands for food and their subsistence. It is of grave concern that this planned and forced eviction of tens of thousands of people with no land-for-land compensation is planned in one of the world's most densely populated, land-scarce, and economically poor countries.

Project plans also threaten people's right to water. An Expert Report commissioned by the Bangladeshi government found that as many as 220,000 people would suffer reduced access to water needed for household and agriculture use and deteriorating water quality, as a result of de-watering operations required to keep water out of the mine's pit, which would lower the water table by 15-25 meters throughout a vast region.

Threatened communities are fighting to protect their lands and livelihoods, despite threats, intimidation, and the use of lethal force against them. Efforts to push the project forward have already resulted in bloodshed. In August of 2006, paramilitary forces opened fire on thousands of demonstrators who united to protest the mine, killing three people, including a 14-year-old boy, and injuring more than 200 people. In December of 2007, the World Organization Against Torture expressed serious concern that "further violence, ill-treatment and even deaths may ensue if local communities again seek to give public expression to their opposition"

Environmental Threats

The Phulbari Coal Mine Project poses many serious environmental risks, including threats to the world's single largest remaining mangrove region: the Sundarbans Reserved Forest (SRF).

The SRF contains over half of Bangladesh's remaining natural forest, encompassing approximately 600,000 hectares of land and water. This ecologically sensitive forest supports an extraordinary range of biodiversity, with 453 recorded species. In addition to nesting sites for several turtle species, it provides a critical habitat for at least 58 rare and threatened species, including the spotted deer, saltwater crocodile, Gangetic dolphin, and 117 species of waterfowl. Of particular note – it is also home to Bangladesh's last remaining population of the endangered royal Bengal tiger.

In recognition of the vital importance of this unique and sensitive mangrove ecosystem, the entire

SRF was declared a reserve forest in 1875. It was subsequently designated an internationally significant wetland under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance in 1972. The SRF includes three wildlife refuges, all of which are on UNESCO's World Heritage Site List.

Despite the Sundarban's formal protected status, plans for the Phubari Coal Mine Project call for the transport of coal through the SRF. If this project goes forward, up to 8 million tons of coal per year would be transported by a fleet of barges traveling down three rivers for approximately 58 miles, to reach a floating offshore reloading facility, where the coal would be transferred to large seafaring ships. Portions of this 58-mile transport corridor are aligned through the SRF. The floating transfer facility would be anchored off Akram point, which is located within the SRF.

With a fleet of 8 barges each traveling 33 hours to complete a single trip over the 36 year lifespan of the mine, the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) for the project concluded that the potential for oil spills is "extremely high risk." The ESIA further identifies the risk that fuel could contaminate the Sunderbans Reserved Forest as "one of the most significant issues associated with the Project. In the event of a "worst case scenario" oil spill, the ESIA notes, "it is likely there will be damage to the SRF shoreline" and "extreme mortality or severe damage to mangroves and other shoreline plant species."

Furthermore the resulting reduction in fresh water hydrology will have a deleterious effect on both the mangrove vegetation and the wildlife of the area, as both depend on an already reduced volume of fresh water, whereby further reduction of fresh water will result in a dangerous increase in salinity within the Sundarbans. This can cause massive mangrove die-offs and undue stress on affected wildlife and nearby local communities.

Additional threats posed by this project include:

- massive greenhouse gas emissions resulting from a mine expected to produce up to 15 million tons of coal per year
- aquatic species impacted by the repeated dredging of the Pussur River required to allow for coal transport by barge and the diversion of two other rivers
- toxic soil extending far into a regional network comprised of hundreds of small interlinked rivers
- groundwater contamination resulting from rail corridor operations for coal transport and soil contamination at the Coal Terminal
- aquifer induced land subsidence
- major airborne pollution due to increased emissions of airborne particulate matter [PM] as well as gaseous air emissions and toxic metals

Read more at the [International Accountability Project's](#) website.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION NOW TO HALT THIS DESTRUCTIVE PROJECT

How you can help: your letter can make a difference. The campaign to halt the Phulbari Open

Pit Coal Mine is at a critical turning point, with a decision on whether to approve this project expected at any time and a new Prime Minister in place.

Below is a sample letter for your use and names/addresses where you can send it.

Dear {insert name of person you are writing from list below}

I am deeply concerned about plans to construct one of the world's largest open pit coal mines in Phulbari, and the impacts on the tens of thousands of people whose homes, lands, livelihood, and communities are threatened by this project, including at least 2,200 indigenous people.

The fact that most of the people who would be forced off their lands are from farming households that depend on their land for their livelihoods and subsistence is of great concern - particularly because project plans clearly state that their lands will not be replaced.

Because the vast mine would destroy an important agricultural region that produces three crops a year, I am also concerned that it threatens Bangladesh's progress toward achieving food security.

The impact on access to water is a further concern, with as many as 220,000 people expected to suffer reduced access to water for household and agricultural use as a result of dewatering operations at the mine, that are expected to lower the water table by as much as 15-25 meters in an area extending far beyond the mine itself.

Additional environmental risks posed by this project are numerous and grave. Bangladesh's Sundarbans Reserve Forest is the largest remaining mangrove forest in the world. This UNESCO-protected ecosystem supports many critically threatened species, including the royal Bengal tiger, and provide a life-saving natural buffer against the devastating impacts of floods, tropical storms, and cyclones, to which Bangladesh is so vulnerable.

As such, the Sundarbans Reserve Forest deserves and needs to be protected as a national resource and treasure. Yet the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment for the proposed Phulbari mine clearly states that plans to transport coal by a fleet of barges and offload it to ships at Akram Point pose extremely high risks to the Sundarbans. Experts also warn that the risk of acid contamination of soil and water is extremely high in this project.

I am aware that the opposition to the proposed Phulbari mine within Bangladesh has been strong and sustained - despite the use of lethal force in August of 2006, when thousands of people gathered to protest the mine were fired upon and three people were killed, including a 14 year old boy. I am also aware the World Organization Against Torture has expressed concern regarding the potential for further violence and bloodshed in this project it is pushed forward without the consent of those most directly affected.

In light of the magnitude and gravity of the risks posed by this project, I respectfully request that you to do everything in your power to oppose plans for open pit mining at Phulbari and ensure that this project does not move forward.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

{Insert your name here}

NAMES & ADDRESSES OF PEOPLE TO WRITE

1. Name & title: Sheikh Hasina,
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Address: Prime Minister's Office
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2. Name & title : Advocate Mostafizur Rahman, M.P,
HON'BLE STATE MINISTER
Ministry of Land,
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3. Name & Title: Dr. Towfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, BB, Adviser to the PM
Prime Minister's Office
Old Sangsad Bhaban
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