
Mangroves menaced by oil and gas companies in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh the remaining virgin rainforests are near to extinction. The whole Bangladesh mainland and its off-shore areas are gradually being leased for oil/gas explorations. Even the Sundarbans, considered a world heritage and the largest mangrove forest of the globe and only remaining habitat of royal bengal tiger is being occupied by the exploration activities of oil/gas companies.

The affected area is one of the 23 blocks into which the government divided the national territory for the oil/gas exploration activities by foreign multinational companies. The measure has already been implemented in nearly half of the country area and is affecting several ecosystems rich in biodiversity, like the virgin forests of the hilly eastern part of Bangladesh, stretched from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal.

The Sundarbans is a vast tract of mangrove swamp forest situated on the southwest corner of Bangladesh and forming the lower part of the Ganges Delta. The name 'Sundarbans' is derived from the term "Sundari", a reference to the large mangrove tree that provides valuable fuel. It extends for about 160 miles (260 km) along the coast of the Bay of Bengal from the Hugly river Estuary in India to the Meghna River Estuary in Bangladesh. The whole tract reaches inland for 60-80 miles (100-130 km). A network of tidal rivers and creeks intersect numerous islands. Along the coast, the forest passes into a mangrove swamp; which is virtually uninhabited. It is one of the last reserves of the royal bengal tiger and the site of tiger preservation project. In addition, it supports other mammals, more than two hundred species of birds, as well as crocodiles, other reptiles and amphibians. The Sundarbans is also important for its estuary fisheries and for being a safe winter quarter of several hundred migratory birds. The cultivated northern area yields rice, sugarcane, timber and betel nuts, etc. This unique mangrove forest, comprising a more than 10,300 square kilometre area, has been earmarked as Block nr. 5 in the government's division. It has been leased out to Shell Oil & Cairn Energy for oil/gas exploration

Friends of the Earth-Bangladesh is seeking international support to halt Sundarbans destruction. Letters of concern can be sent to the following authorities and media in Bangladesh:

- Mr. President Justice Sahabuddin Ahmed, Government of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh.
- Mr Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.
- Mr. State Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources, Prof. Rafiqul Islam.
- Mr. Sayeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Ministry of Forest and Environment.
- The Bangladesh Observer.
- The Independent.
- The Daily Star.
- The Financial Express.
- The New Nation.
- UNB.

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