

# Petition to the Secretary-General of the United Nations

The Secretary-General  
United Nations  
New York

Excellency,

On behalf of the people of Bangladesh, we appeal to you to convince India to stop constructing dams on upstream rivers that flow through Bangladesh.

In a clear violation of various UN conventions and the 1996 Ganges Water Treaty between Bangladesh and India, the Indian government recently announced its decision to go ahead with the project of constructing the Tipaimukh dam (hydro-electricity plant) on a river which feeds two major river systems in Bangladesh.

India's unilateral action to dam and withdraw water ignores international conventions, such as the Ramsar Convention on Wet Lands (1971), the Helsinki Rules (1966), the UNEP Convention on Biological Diversities (1992), the 1992 Framework Convention on Climate change, the 1994 Convention on Desertification and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses. In addition, India's unilateral decision violates the spirit of the Millennium Declaration by 191 Member States of the United Nations, which pledges: "To stop the unsustainable exploitation of water resources by developing water management strategies at the regional, national and local levels, which promote both equitable access and adequate supplies" (Chapter IV, para 23).

The construction of this dam will have profound negative environmental, ecological, economic and social impacts on the Bangladeshi people. Yet, neither the construction nor management plan for the Tipaimukh dam has been shared with Bangladesh. There has been no exchange of information or data regarding the impact of the dam on the ecology, environment, fishery, wildlife and, most importantly, on the lives and livelihood of the people living upstream and downstream of the dam.

Excellency, the proposed Tipaimukh dam is to be located 500 metres downstream from the confluence of the Barak and Tuivai rivers, which lies in the south-western corner of India's Manipur state. When completed it will be a huge earth dam (rock-fill with central impervious core) rising to about 180m above sea level and will have a maximum reservoir level of 178m. It will have an installation capacity of 1,500MW with only a firm generation of 412MW (less than 30 per cent of installed capacity).

The proposed dam is located in one of the most seismically volatile regions in the world. An analysis of earthquake activity within a 200km radius of the proposed Tipaimukh dam site reveals that hundreds of earthquakes have occurred in the last 100-200 years. Within the 100km radius of Tipaimukh alone, 2 major earthquakes of magnitude +7 have taken place in the last 150 years -- the last major earthquake was in 1957 which was located about 75km ENE of the dam site. The seismic volatility of the area therefore raises the very real possibility of a dam failure.

Excellency, we not only dread the catastrophic consequences of dam failure due to earthquakes. We also fear that this project will accelerate desertification in Bangladesh. Bangladesh obtains 7 to 8 percent of its

total water from the Barak in India's north-eastern states. The dam will choke the flow of water in the Surma and the Kushiara Rivers, and will ultimately dry up Meghna, the third biggest river of the country.

The Tipaimukh dam will also transform and devastate the ecosystem of the Sylhet region in Bangladesh and India's Monipur state. It will affect the production of both rice – the staple food - and fish – the major source of protein. It will also seriously affect the flora, fauna and biodiversity of the region. Millions of people are dependent on hundreds of water bodies, fed by the Barak, in the Sylhet region for fishing and agricultural activities. This dam by destroying the livelihood of people, especially the poor, will have a serious long term impact on poverty and security in the region.

Excellency, as the World Commission on Dams observed in its report, the hazards of dam construction outstrip their benefits. The World Commission which analysed the environmental, economic and social impact of the world's 45,000 large dams, concluded that the overall costs of dams, to both man and nature, are mostly negative, and “an unacceptable and unnecessary price has been paid to secure ... benefits”. Dams are notorious for creating great environmental change and force massive human resettlement of people who live where the lake is created. The World Bank estimated in 1994 that 300 large dams forced some four million people to leave their homes.

Hydroelectric dams, once regarded as clean renewable energy source, have turned out to be significant generators of greenhouse gases given off by decomposing vegetation in tropical reservoirs. Even the prevention of flood is a mixed blessing. Due to decrease of river flows downstream, sea-water flows up and penetrates the ground. Most crops cannot survive increased salinity.

Excellency, India has been constructing dams on 53 common rivers that flow through Bangladesh. We have seen the adverse environmental impacts of India's Farakka dam/barrage project at the upstream of the mighty Ganges which flows into Bangladesh as Padma, and dams/barrages on the Tista river. The Farakka and Tista dams have transformed the northern districts of Bangladesh almost to a desert and contributed to the arsenic contamination of ground water.

Excellency, we appeal to you, in the name of humanity, for the sake of the environment and ultimately for regional and global security, to stop India from this act of vandalism. We also urge you to demand that India agrees to shared-management of all common rivers in the spirit of the Millennium Declaration.

Yours sincerely,

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