

Founded on 31.10.1920

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# अखिल भारतीय ट्रेड यूनियन कांग्रेस All India Trade Union Congress

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Attention Nirmala Karunan

DATE : 20-1-2009

Shri. Vijay Sharma,  
The Principal Secretary,  
Ministry of Environment and Forests,  
Government of India.

Dear Shri Sharma ji.

**Subject: Concerns on Dhamra Port and its impacts on the Olive Ridley Turtles and the Bitharkanika National Park and Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary.**

This letter is to convey my concerns regarding the upcoming Dhamra Port Project in Orissa and its impacts on the local environment and wildlife, including the Olive Ridley Turtles. Gahirmatha in Orissa is one of the world's last and largest mass nesting sites for the Olive Ridley Sea Turtles. Every year, between November and May, hundreds of thousands of Olive Ridley turtles congregate and mate in the coastal waters, before the females emerge on the beach in tens of thousands to nest *en masse*, a phenomenon called the *arrabada*, one of the natural wonders of the world.

But over the last decade, the beaches have become a mass graveyard, with over 100,000 dead turtles washed ashore, victims of illegal mechanized fishing. The Dhamra Port Project is now the latest threat to the turtles and the local environment, as the port is being constructed less than 5 km. from the boundary of the Bitharkanika National Park and less than 15 km. from the mass nesting beaches of the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary.

The Bitharkanika National Park is a hot-spot of biodiversity. Home to the largest population of salt water crocodiles in India and more than 215 species of avifauna, it is also the second largest mangrove ecosystem in India and harbours more than 70 species of mangrove and its associates.

This is worldwide known that mangroves are biggest protection from the cyclones. Here we are talking about the coastal areas of Orissa which has the threats of cyclones.

There is evidence of turtles in the offshore waters near the port site, through data generated from two studies conducted by the Wildlife Institute of India (in 2001 and another initiated in 2006-2007 which is currently ongoing). Another study in 2007 of the port site and adjoining areas discovered the presence of horseshoe crabs which use the area as a nesting ground in large numbers. The study also detected the presence

of rare species of snakes, including one *Fardonia leucobalia* that was recorded in Orissa for the first time and the presence of rare species of amphibians, including the Crab-eating frog *F. cancrivora* that has never before been recorded in mainland India.

There are serious concerns that the port poses a threat to the turtles, other species and the larger environment of the area through dredging, construction, light and noise pollution, the risk of oil and chemical spills, and the secondary development and urbanization that will come up around the port.

In this regard, I am strongly disappointed to note that your department and the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, has taken its responsibilities towards wildlife protection and conservation lightly. While the development of the port might be an issue of state jurisdiction, the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests cannot take its responsibilities towards wildlife protection lightly. All species of marine turtles in India are protected under the Schedule I List of the Wildlife Protection Act at par with the tiger. The Government of India has also stated its commitment to protect its turtles, by becoming a signatory to the Indian Oceans and South East Asian Marine Turtle Memorandum of Understanding in 2006.

The development of the Dhamra port is in violation of the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forests in 2003 in the Manual on Eco (Turtle) Friendly Coastal Development produced together with the United Nations Development Fund, Wildlife Institute of India and the Madras Crocodile Bank Trust which states that "No ports, harbours and jetties should be planned within a range of 25 km. from any important nesting and congregating site."

Further, in May 2000, the Regional Office (East) of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, in its communication to the PCCF, Department of Forests - Wildlife, Government of Orissa, demanded action to be taken on account of violation of the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, by the construction of the Dhamra Port. As per this communication, during the site visit of the National Environmental Appellate Authority to the proposed Dhamra Port, it was found that the port lies within the Banipahi protected forest block and that construction had started in clear violation of Section 2 of the FCA 1980, as the permission of the Central Government for non-forestry use of the land had not been sought. In spite of these violations, the construction of this port is currently ongoing.

Keeping the Ministry's primary responsibilities towards wildlife, endangered species and protected areas in mind, I would like you to apprise me on the action taken by the Ministry to ensure that the wildlife and environment of the Dhamra area is being protected.

Looking forward to your reply,

Yours Sincerely



(Amar Jeet Kaur)  
Secretary