

# Cancel Rampal power project

19 noted citizens urge Hasina, Modi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nineteen eminent citizens yesterday urged the prime ministers of Bangladesh and India to cancel the Rampal power plant project, saying it would pose a threat to the Sundarbans' environment.

The citizens who include former caretaker government advisers, environmentalists and politicians made the call at a time when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is visiting Dhaka.

In a statement, they also claimed experts at home and abroad had already showed that the power plant would emit thousands of tonnes of harmful gas and ashes every day once it became operational, putting the environment of the largest mangrove forest under threat.

Environmentalists have long been demanding that the project be scrapped for protecting the Sundarbans, a world heritage site declared by the Unesco. The forest lies both in Bangladesh and India.

According to experts, the recent capsizing of oil and fertiliser carrying ships in the region has caused a long-term harm to the forest.

The risk of accidents amid frequent plying of coal-laden ships for the power project could easily be predicted, read the statement.

"...India-Bangladesh jointly decided to construct the large thermal power plant within 14 kilometres of the Sundarbans in Bangladesh, ignoring public opinion and rules and regulations. The preparatory work for the construction of the plant is also underway."

The statement also pointed out that India's National Thermal Power Cooperation (NTPC) was not allowed to implement anything like the Rampal project in India.

"According to India's EIA [Environmental Impact Assessment] Guideline 2010, no power plant can be built within 25 kilometres of forests. But, the same rule was not followed in Bangladesh's case."

"... we hope that the prime ministers of the two countries will announce the cancellation of the Rampal power project which will destroy the Sundarbans and take initiatives for protecting and flourishing the forest," the citizens added in the statement.

Those who signed the statement include eminent rights activist Sultana Kamal, academician Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed, rights activist Khushi Kabir, child education activist Rasheda K Choudhury, Communist Party of Bangladesh President Mujahidul Islam Selim, environmentalists Syeda Rizwana Hasan and Abdul Matin.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee talk at the Sonargaon Hotel in the capital yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: PTB

## Connectivity vital for two countries

FROM PAGE 1  
the two countries and for the region," she added.

Hasina also mentioned that connectivity across the region would reduce inequalities and maximise welfare gains. The new trade facilitation measures incorporated in the agreements would create new opportunities for trade, investment and business.

"We've very good co-operation in power and energy sectors," she said in her statement.

The signing of the Coastal Shipping Agreement, renewal of the Trade Agreement and the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade as well as the flagging off new bus service were examples of their commitment to seamless connectivity across the region, Hasina said.

"We're transforming our relationship to a greater height," she mentioned.

On the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA), Hasina said with the exchange of the letters of ratification of the 1974 LBA, it brought peaceful end to a 68-year-old humanitarian issue.

"We're extremely happy that the land boundary issue has finally been resolved. I appreciate Prime Minister Modi's leadership in achieving it. It has been possible for his bold leadership," she said in the statement.

She thanked the people and all political parties in India for their unequivocal support to the agreement.

"In this context, I recall with gratitude the historic role of our Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the then Indian prime minister Srimati Indira

Gandhi."

Hasina recognised the contribution of Indian President Pranab Mukherjee. "We remember with deep gratitude the enormous contribution of India in our glorious War of Liberation."

She recalled that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in a speech delivered in Kolkata on February 6, 1972, had said, "As for us, we'll be wanting to cooperate with all concerned for creating an area of peace in South Asia, where we could live side by side as good neighbours and pursue constructive policies for the benefit of our people..."

"This visionary statement encapsulates how we look at South Asia. I believe we could collectively achieve greater peace, stability, progress and prosperity for the people in the region which was

the dream of our Father of the Nation," she added.

Hasina also mentioned that India is certainly Bangladesh's most important neighbour and one of the key development partners.

To bring balance in trade between the two countries, she said both countries agreed to establish Special Economic Zones in Mongla and Bheramara for India.

"We hope this would increase Indian investment in Bangladesh substantially. Today, we have signed a number of bilateral documents, covering diverse areas of co-operation."

These include economic co-operation, trade and investment, security, infrastructure development, education, science and technology, IT and culture.

"We also discussed the issues of sharing of water of 54 common rivers. We both reiterated our strong commitment to make our borders peaceful and prosperous. We also pledged 'zero tolerance' against terrorism and extremism," she added.

The PM also said people-to-people contact is the strongest of links.

"Together, we decided to open Bangladesh Mission in Guwahati, Indian Missions in Khulna and Sylhet. This again reflects our growing mutual confidence and shared commitment to expand our relationship."

"We have to translate the declaration into concrete deliverables. I assure you, Prime Minister, that we are committed to extend full support and co-operation in this journey," Hasina said.

**Narendra Modi** @narendramodi · 5h  
বঙ্গবন্ধু শেখ মুজিবুর রহমান, গণতন্ত্রের প্রতিমূর্তি, এক বিশাল ব্যক্তিত্ব এবং ভারতের এক মহান বন্ধুকে শ্রদ্ধা।

PMO India retweeted  
**Narendra Modi** @narendramodi · 9h  
Hello Bangladesh. I bring with me the affection & goodwill of the people of India.

PMO India retweeted  
**Narendra Modi** @narendramodi · 9h  
বাংলাদেশ, আমি আমার সাথে ভারতের মানুষের ভালবাসা এবং শুভেচ্ছা নিয়ে আসছি।

PMO India retweeted  
**Narendra Modi** @narendramodi · 8h  
Thank you PM Sheikh Hasina for the warm welcome. I look forward to a very good visit that will strengthen ties between India & Bangladesh.

PMO India retweeted  
**Narendra Modi** @narendramodi · 8h  
প্রধানমন্ত্রী শেখ হাসিনা, উষ্ণ অভ্যর্থনার জন্য ধন্যবাদ। আমি একটি সুন্দর সফর আশা করছি, যা ভারত ও বাংলাদেশের সম্পর্ককে সুদৃঢ় করবে।

Some of the tweets Indian PM Narendra Modi made on his Dhaka tour.

## Modi tweets to tag all along

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday made journalism redundant for Bangladeshi media in a nice way.

With his personal media team touring with him, the tech-savvy premier was not only posting updates on his Twitter and Facebook pages on all the major developments taking place during his day in Dhaka, but was also uploading photographs and videos on the events.

This helped the media and the public follow his Dhaka visit almost live.

The first prime minister in the Indian sub-continent to utilise the social media, to keep the public informed about his activities, also posted about things that the media do not usually have access to.

While starting for Bangladesh, he tweeted: "Leaving for Bangladesh. This visit is going to strengthen the bond between our Nations, benefitting people of our countries & our region."

To touch the hearts of the Bangladeshis, he posted several tweets in Bangla.

The first post in Bangla after he landed at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport reads: "বাংলাদেশ, আমি আমার সাথে ভারতের মানুষের ভালবাসা এবং শুভেচ্ছা নিয়ে আসছি।" which he translated into English this way: "Hello Bangladesh. I bring with me the affection & goodwill of the people of India."

After he was received by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who broke protocol to greet him on the apron, Modi posted in Bangla: "প্রধানমন্ত্রী শেখ হাসিনা, উষ্ণ অভ্যর্থনার জন্য ধন্যবাদ। আমি একটি সুন্দর সফর আশা করছি, যা ভারত ও বাংলাদেশের সম্পর্ককে সুদৃঢ় করবে।" In the next tweet he translated: "Thank you PM Sheikh Hasina for the warm welcome. I look forward to a very good visit that will strengthen ties between India & Bangladesh."

In the evening, he posted a picture of him presenting a gift to PM Sheikh Hasina with a caption, "Presented a hand-woven tapestry from Venkatagiri, Andhra Pradesh woven in Jamdani style to PM Sheikh Hasina."

Then again he put up a close-up of the tapestry's artwork showing "Kalpavriksh

tree & the Kamadhenu cow". Such finer details would not have otherwise come out in the public domain.

In the post "The bus services being flagged off are- Agartala-Kolkata Bus, Kolkata-Agartala bus & Dhaka-Guwahati bus services", Modi's Twitter page uploaded a live YouTube link through which people could view the inauguration of the bus services.

Earlier in the day, when he visited the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in Dhanmondi, Modi did not forget to take pictures of the house from the outside and inside and post those on Twitter.

One of his tweets on his visit to National Martyrs Memorial in Savar read: "Memorial gives impression of rising from the ashes like a phoenix. It symbolises courage & determination of people."

In his Facebook post, followers could see Modi paying tributes to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman standing in front of his portrait. The post says: "Saluting an icon of democracy, a towering personality & a great friend of India, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman."

Modi gave a similar post on Twitter.

**22 DEALS SIGNED, RENEWED**

- Agreement on Dhaka-Shillong-Guwahati bus service and its protocol
- Agreement on Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala bus service and its protocol
- MoU between Bangladesh-India coast guards for maritime security
- MoU on prevention of smuggling and circulation of fake currency notes
- MoU on blue economy and maritime cooperation in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean
- MoU for a project under IECC (India Endowment for Climate Change) of Saar
- MoU on an exclusive Indian Economic Zone to promote Indian investment in Bangladesh
- Cultural exchange programme for the years 2015-17
- Statement of intent on Bangladesh-India education cooperation (adoption)
- Agreement between Bangladesh Submarine Cable Company Limited (BSCCL) and Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) for leasing of international bandwidth for internet
- MoU between Dhaka University and India's Council of Scientific and Industrial Research for joint research on oceanography of the Bay of Bengal
- MoU between Rajshahi University and India's Jamia Millia Islamia University for educational cooperation
- Handing over of consent letter by Insurance Development and Regulatory Authority (IDRA), Bangladesh, to Life Insurance Corporation (LIC), India, to start operations in Bangladesh

## Route to lot of hopes

FROM PAGE 16  
have the opportunity to open up a new business avenue, he said.

A total of 15 cargo vessels ply between India and Bangladesh via Singapore and Colombo, Hamid said, adding that the number would be 50 by the end of 2016 since entrepreneurs were either expanding their capacity or investing in shipping companies.

Under the agreement, Indian vessels would be allowed to carry goods using Chittagong and Mongla sea ports in Bangladesh.

Bangladeshi ships would also be allowed to carry goods using the Indian sea ports, including Visakhapatnam of Andhra Pradesh, Paradip of Orissa, and Haldia of West Bengal.

In the agreement, 10 ports (five in each country) have been named as ports of call. In Bangladesh, the ports of call are Narayanganj, Khulna, Mongla, Sirajganj and Ashuganj. In India, the ports are Kolkata, Haldia, Karimganj, Pandu and Silghat.

Ports of call are ports where a ship docks in the course of its journey to load/unload passengers or cargo, obtain supplies, or to have repairs done.

"The coastal shipping agreement will boost bilateral trade," Modi said in his speech after signing several deals. "We will work together to harness the rich potential of our relationship. And, we will address our challenges in a spirit of friendship and from a position of mutual

trust and confidence," he said.

"Our agreements reflect this vision and commitment. We have renewed existing trade and transport agreements. We have added new dimensions to our economic ties," Modi added.

Sumit Mazumder, president of CII (Confederation of Indian Industry), the apex Indian trade body in a statement on Friday, said, "The trade has the potential to touch \$10 billion by 2018."

The balance of trade between the two countries is heavily tilted towards India. Bangladesh's imports from India were recorded at \$6.03 billion in 2013-14 fiscal year and \$4.78 billion in the previous year, according to data from the commerce ministry.

Bangladesh's exports to India were worth \$456.63 million in 2013-14 compared to \$563.97 million the previous year.

In order to reach the \$10 billion target, the two countries should aim at opening new land customs stations, harmonisation and recognition of standards, pruning of negative lists, and banking and finance cooperation, said Mazumder.

The coastal shipping route have been launched under the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT) that was signed between the two countries in 1972 for increasing trade and commerce through river routes.

### SPECIAL NOTICE

As per National Board of Revenue and Government order, all mobile phone services will now incur 5% supplementary duty. Accordingly all mobile phone services will incur 5% supplementary duty, on top of it 15% VAT will be applicable on call rates and all other mobile phone services, effective from June 4, 2015.

