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To,

Smt Jayanthi Natarajan
Minister of State (I/C)
Ministry of Environment & Forests
Paryavaran Bhawan
New Delhi

Dt: 18.09.2012

Hon'ble Minister,

Sub: Proposal for forest land in Kutch Wildlife Sanctuary

As you are well aware, the issue of Diversion of 79.474 ha of forest land in Kutch Desert Wildlife Sanctuary and Wild Ass Sanctuary for construction of Gaduli to Hajipur-Odma-Khavda-Kunariya-Dholavira-Maovana-Gadakbet-Santalpur road came up for discussion during the 25th meeting of the Standing Committee of the National Board of Wildlife.

As discussed, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that 'Flamingo City', as Kutch Wildlife Sanctuary was famously popularised by India's patron ornithologist, Dr Salim Ali (who incidentally was one of the major influences on former Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi's extraordinary vision concerning environmental issues) is the only breeding ground for the two species of flamingoes found in India. The entire population of flamingoes in India--possibly the whole Indian subcontinent--is dependent on this sanctuary for its flamingoes. In Dr Salim Ali's words, in the non-breeding season, the flamingoes "*disperse far and wide along with the newly fledged young in small flocks or large feeding concentrations, frequenting coastal lagoons and salt pans at Point Calimere, and in Saurashtra and Sri Lanka, and also frequent brackish lakes such as Sambar in Rajasthan, Chilika in Orissa, and others.*"

Flamingo numbers across India are already falling very drastically. In Chilika, which used to record winter counts in the range of 5,000 flamingoes only a few years ago, now, in 2012, hardly sixty are present. Point Calimere, too, has recorded drastic declines.

Why flamingoes continue to faithfully favour 'Flamingo City' is largely attributed to the peculiar conditions of a saline desert inundated by rains to form a shallow, salty lagoon, making conditions ideal for them to breed. Successful breeding is essentially a consequence of the dynamic flow of water. An influx of fresh water that flows in from the Luni river in Rajasthan, and also from northern Gujarat and Pakistan, and the saline water which provides a rich flow of nutrients in which microorganisms, crustaceans, algae and fish thrive, making for a breeding ground of not just flamingos but also of rosy pelicans, avocets, and a host of other birds. The plan of the proposed road does not take into account the importance of this cocktail of fresh and salt water. The construction of the road

will impound the water, affecting the quality and quantity of the food chain and threatening the fragile eco-system.

It must be reiterated that the report of the three member expert team consisting Dr MK Ranjitsinh, Shri Divyabhanusinh and Dr Asad Rahmani clearly states *“if the proposed road is allowed to be constructed, it will in all probability result in the abandonment of this breeding site, and India will thus lose the only breeding site of the flamingoes, which in turn could spell doom to the population of these birds in the Indian sub-continent.”*

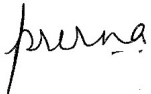
Importantly, too, were this road to come up it will also destroy the sacred and unique mangrove forest of 'Shravan Kavadia'. This *Avicennia* mangrove is one of its kind in the world. Located more than 100km inland from the sea and completely landlocked, these *Avicennia* trees are enormous in stature, extraordinary for mangroves anywhere. Significantly, the site visit report also mentions out that the real intent behind the road is to boost tourism in the Kutch.

Most importantly, such ecological devastation seems pointless given that there is accessibility by a perfectly viable alternate alignment and I quote the site report, “is feasible, cost-effective, easy to build and would serve a greater use” and “would not have a significant impact.”

May I urge you to consider the grave ecological consequences cited above and reject the proposal when it comes up again before the next meeting of the Standing Committee.

Thank you.

Yours Sincerely



Purna Singh Bindra