



To:
Dr. Andreas Weidler, CEO
Fichtner GmbH & Company KG
Sarweystr. 3
70191 Stuttgart
Germany

10 May 2021

Re: Urgent concerns regarding Fichtner's involvement in Matarbari (Phase 1) coal-fired power project in Bangladesh

Dear Dr. Weidler,

We jointly write to raise urgent human rights and environmental concerns regarding coal-fired power plants in Matarbari, Cox's Bazar District, Bangladesh.

In previous correspondence dated 29 May 2020 and 11 June 2020, civil society groups expressed their grave concern about your involvement in the Rampal coal power plant in Bangladesh and requested you to not be involved in the Rampal project or any further environmentally harmful projects near the Sundarbans.

Today, we draw your attention to significant issues with the 1,200 MW Matarbari coal-fired power plant (Phase 1), which is under-construction on Matarbari Island in the southeastern coast of Bangladesh. The project is being developed by Coal Power Generation Company Bangladesh (CPGCBL) and Sumitomo Corporation, among others.¹ Fichtner GmbH & Company KG is acting as a consultant as a part of a joint venture with Tokyo Electric Power Services Co., Ltd. (TEPSCO), Nippon Koei Co., Ltd and SMEC for “engineering, procurement and construction selection, construction supervision and monitoring of environmental issues”, among others.²

A second phase with additional 1,200 MW capacity is proposed to be built with funding from JICA.³ JICA recently appointed TEPSCO to conduct a ‘Preparatory survey’ on Matarbari (Phase 2).⁴ These power projects would damage the lives and livelihoods of local communities and our climate.

¹ JGlobal, [‘Asset Data: Matarbari Coal Fired Power Plant \(1200MW\)’](#) (Accessed 30 June 2020, subscription source).

² Daily Star, [‘Matarbari power project appoints consultant’](#) (8 January 2015).

³ Energy Bangla, [‘Plan to construct 2nd power plant to reduce cost of Matarbari project’](#) (31 May 2019).

⁴ JICA, [‘評価結果： Bangladesh 国マタバリ超々臨界圧石炭火力発電建設事業フェーズ2準備調査 \(QCBS\)’](#) (August 2020).



Human rights impacts faced by project-affected communities

The construction work for Matarbari plant (Phase 1) blocked natural drainage systems and water gates, which were used for draining flood water during monsoon rains and cyclone-induced storms. The blockage of these drainage systems “result[ed] in water logging after heavy rainfall, causing immense suffering for locals”.⁵ In 2018, local communities reported five incidents of children drowning.⁶

Phase 1 of the Matarbari plant is being built on land used for shrimp farming, crop production and salt production, which has affected the livelihoods of Matarbari residents.⁷ In 2019, five years after the first land acquisition, many landowners claimed not to have received adequate compensation.⁸

Risks from air pollution caused by the Matarbari plant

In Bangladesh, where the air quality has been ranked among the worst in the world,⁹ pollution from Matarbari (Phases 1 and 2) has been estimated to cause 6,700 premature deaths during the plants’ operational years.¹⁰

Bangladesh has one of the world’s biggest pipelines of coal power under development.¹¹ If built, Bangladesh’s proposed 29 coal plants would emit 4,600 million tonnes of carbon dioxide throughout their operating lifetime.¹² All of Bangladesh’s proposed coal projects, including the Matarbari plants, are inconsistent with the Paris Agreement’s climate goals.¹³

Climate change posing physical and transitional risks

The Matarbari coal power projects and their associated infrastructure are highly vulnerable to physical risks, given extreme weather events exacerbated by climate change. Coastal areas of

⁵ Khobor Torongo, ‘[মহেশখালী মাতারবাড়ীতে বৃষ্টির পানিতে জলাবদ্ধতা সৃষ্টি হওয়ায় সীমাহীন দুর্ভোগে পড়েছে হাজার হাজার মানুষ](#)’ (14 July, 2019).

⁶ Relief Web, ‘[Cox’s Bazar: Maheshkhali - Water Logging](#)’ (9 July 2018).

⁷ Waterkeepers Bangladesh, ‘[The tourist capital of Bangladesh endangered by plans to build the largest coal power hub in the world](#)’ (November 2019).

⁸ ActionAid, ‘[The people of Matarbari Island make themselves be counted](#)’ (18 April 2019).

⁹ IQAir, ‘[2019 World Air Quality Report](#)’ (February 2020).

¹⁰ Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA), ‘[Air quality, health and toxics impacts of the proposed coal power cluster in Chattogram, Bangladesh](#)’ (22 September 2020).

¹¹ Market Forces ‘[Choked by Coal: the Carbon Catastrophe in Bangladesh](#)’ (6 November 2019).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Dan Tong et al, ‘[Committed emissions from existing energy infrastructure jeopardize 1.5 °C climate target](#)’. Nature volume 572, page s373–377 (2019).



Bangladesh are highly prone to floods, cyclones and storm surges,¹⁴ as can be seen from the effects of Cyclone Amphan.¹⁵ Even in a scenario roughly consistent with the Paris Agreement's temperature limits,¹⁶ the entire Matarbari island is projected to be inundated at least once a year by 2050.¹⁷

In addition to physical climate risk, transitional risk associated with concerted efforts towards global decarbonisation are shifting investments away from coal towards clean, renewable sources of power.¹⁸ The Matarbari coal projects are therefore at severe risk of becoming stranded in the event that the Paris climate goals are met.¹⁹

Labour issues during Covid-19 lockdown

Despite strict government orders to halt works due to COVID-19, 3,000 labourers at the Matarbari construction site were forced to work. In April 2020, the workers went on strike demanding their right to safe health. Matarbari plant's co-sponsor CPGCBL denied any grievances by workers and stated that work will continue.²⁰

In addition, on 13 July 2020, unsafe working practices resulted in the tragic death and serious injury of several workers at the Matarbari coal project site, according to news reports.²¹ A worker died when an electric pole at the Matarbari site, which was being worked on by electricians, fell to the ground. Two other workers were also severely injured and hospitalised.²²

Contradictions to policy commitments

Your company identifies environmental protection as a key corporate aim,²³ and by providing engineering and consultancy services in the areas of renewable energies and the environment, "Fichtner experts assist in implementing measures for environmental and climate protection all over the world".²⁴ Any involvement to support the development of coal power in a climate

¹⁴ Climate Analytics, '[Decarbonising South & South East Asia: Bangladesh](#)' (May 2019).

¹⁵ The Guardian, '[Super-cyclone Amphan hits coast of India and Bangladesh](#)' (21 May 2020).

¹⁶ Climate Central, '[Flooded Future: Global vulnerability to sea level rise worse than previously understood](#)' (29 October 2019).

¹⁷ Climate Central, '[Coastal Risk Screening Tool](#)' (Accessed 10 April 2020).

¹⁸ Oil Price, '[Are Investors Ignoring The Largest Financial Risk Ever?](#)' (3 June 2020).

¹⁹ Alexander Pfeiffer et al, '[Committed emissions from existing and planned power plants and asset stranding required to meet the Paris Agreement](#)' 2018 Environ. Res. Lett. 13 054019 (2018).

²⁰ Prothom Alo, '[মাতারবাড়ী বিদ্যুৎকেন্দ্র লকডাউনের দাবি, কর্তৃপক্ষ বলছে কাজ চলবে](#)' (10 April 2020).

²¹ 1News Bangladesh, '[মহেশখালীর কয়লা বিদ্যুৎ প্রকল্পে শ্রমিকের মৃত্যু আহত ২](#)' (13 July 2020).

Cox's Bazar News, '[মাতারবাড়ী কয়লা বিদ্যুৎ প্রকল্পে শ্রমিকের মৃত্যু](#)' (13 July 2020).

²² Ibid.

²³ Fichtner, '[Quality, Safety and Environment - Our Quality Standards](#)' (Accessed 25 Feb 2021).

²⁴ Fichtner, '[Business Sectors - Renewable Energies & Environment](#)' (Accessed 25 Feb 2021).

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vulnerable country like Bangladesh goes against your commitment to environmental and climate protection.

Our Ask

Companies and institutions involved with the Matarbari coal power projects (Phases 1 and 2), face significant financial, reputational and material transitional climate risks.

We strongly urge you to confirm that your company will not be involved in Matarbari (Phase 2) or any other coal-fired power and coal infrastructure project in Bangladesh.

We look forward to your response. In addition, we would like the opportunity to discuss the Matarbari coal projects and your company's environmental considerations in greater detail. Please contact us at munira@marketforces.org.au with your response.

Sincerely,

S. Munira

Munira Chowdhury
Energy Finance Analyst
Market Forces²⁵

Tonny Nowshin

Tonny Nowshin
On behalf of the international citizens' alliance for Saving the Sundarbans

Fenna Otten

Fenna Otten, tropical forest campaigner
Robin Wood

c.c.:

Tilman Herzig, Managing Director, Fichtner GmbH & Company KG

²⁵ Market Forces is an affiliate project of Friends of the Earth Australia that engages the financial and corporate sectors on environmental issues. We are supportive of local community organisations in Bangladesh that seek to address climate change issues and prevent the environmental degradation that results from the expansion of coal-fired power.

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