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For immediate release

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Bangladesh and India start joint tiger census tomorrow

Bangladesh and India will start a census of tigers tomorrow (January 14) with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The census is among the first activities between the two countries under a cross-border initiative aimed at preserving the world's largest Mangrove forest, the 'Sundarbans'.

Located partly in India (40 percent) and partly in Bangladesh (60 percent), the Sundarbans eco-system is steadily deteriorating due to population pressures and the weak enforcement of existing regulations on both sides of the India-Bangladesh border.

National attempts to save this world heritage listed habitat are underway but differing management approaches in the two countries have overlooked the fact that the Sundarbans is a single eco-system. In 2002 top officials from both countries reached an understanding to share knowledge and techniques to protect the Sundarbans. The new tiger census is a tangible result of that commitment. UN officials are welcoming the start of the census as a historic milestone in cross-border collaboration to protect globally significant biodiversity.

National efforts to assess the number of Bengal Tigers in the Sundarbans have been undertaken before using satellite images and a method called 'sampling', where tigers are counted in particular habitats and the figures are extrapolated to estimate numbers in similar habits. However, a method that involves collecting impressions of tigers' footprints left in the mangrove mud during low tide has proven most accurate. From the footprints scientists can ascertain the age, weight and gender of an animal.

Earlier this week six officials from the Bangladesh Forest Department traveled to West Bengal to join their Indian counterparts begin the census. While there the officials will also learn new skills for trapping 'stray' tigers and relocating them in the wild. Upon their return the Bangladeshi officials will train a further 200 Forest Department staff in the new techniques.

During the first week of February the joint tiger census is expected to begin in the Bangladesh part of the Sundarbans, and Indian experts will work with the survey teams here. The census is expected to reach all corners of the world's largest mangrove forest and provide the first consolidated population figures on the Bengal Tiger.



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Local communities living in and around the Sundarbans will be consulted during the census for their first-hand knowledge about the habits of tigers in the areas where they live. To further preserve the dwindling tiger population these communities will receive training on helping to relocate 'stray' tigers.

"As a safety precaution villagers generally kill tigers that wander too close to their settlements. We estimate that five to six strays animals are killed by villagers in Bangladesh each year," UNDP Programme Officer, Aminul Islam said.

Relocating tigers with the help of local communities has proven very effective in India, where villagers now alert the Forest Department of potentially troublesome animals.

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Background information:

- ✂ The Sundarbans is one of the last great coastal wetlands left in the world.
- ✂ The Sundarbans region includes two heritage sites, one in India and the other in Bangladesh.
- ✂ It has unique biodiversity and is home to the endangered Bengal Tiger; and a number of other threatened species, such as the *Sundari* tree, which is found nowhere else in the world.
- ✂ Over six million people live in the Sundarbans – 3 million in Bangladesh and 3.5 million in India.
- ✂ Population pressures and weak enforcement of existing regulations are causing the destruction of the Sundarbans on both sides of the border between India and Bangladesh.