



# MEDIA RELEASE

**ATT: News Editor**

**ATT: Chief Reporter/ Correspondent**

For immediate release

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## **Bangladesh part of Sundarbans tiger census starts tomorrow**

The Bangladesh part of the joint India/ Bangladesh census of Bengal tigers will start tomorrow (February 26), 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'.

The Minister for Environment and Forest, Mr. Shahjahan Siraj, will inaugurate the census at 2 pm in Mongla. On February 27, more than 50 teams will set out from Mongla to comb the Bangladesh part of the Sundarbans in search of tiger paw prints, or 'pugmarks'. The teams will finish their work on March 3. From the collected prints scientists can ascertain the age, weight and gender of individual animals, and estimate their numbers. The method involves collecting tigers' paw prints by making plaster impression during low tide of prints left in the mangrove mud.

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. Earlier this week six officials from the Indian Forest Department arrived in Bangladesh to share with their counterparts here their experiences from the census already completed in the Indian part of the Sundarbans.

Last month, 30 census teams carried out the tiger count throughout the Indian part of the Sundarbans. Afterwards experts said that the data -- which is yet to be fully analyzed -- indicated there maybe more tiger cubs than expected. If this proves to be true, then the Bengal tiger population may be increasing. However, these initial indications are yet to be confirmed by a comprehensive analysis of both the Indian and Bangladesh data. Government officials expect that a full report detailing the state of the Bengal Tiger in the Sundarbans will be ready by July 2004.

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.



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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.

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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.