In Bangladesh, new information emerged concerning the lack of transparency and potential negative environmental impacts of a Chinese-funded coal power plant. In June, a report released by three local and international environmental NGOs found that the Environmental Impacts Assessment (EIA) of the Banshkhali S. Alam plant in Chittagong District downplayed information on how the project would affect air quality when fully operational. The EIA report, which was not made public, omitted the health impacts of the plant's air pollutants and mercury emissions. It contained misleading claims on the baseline air quality in the area as the plant's predicted pollution levels were set much lower than they would have been by using appropriate modelling. On 22 June, more than 100 activists from 21 countries petitioned China's government to withdraw all Chinese investment and involvement in the Banshkhali power plant. The petition claimed that the Bangladeshi government approved EIA downplayed information on the environmental and health impacts of the power plant.

Already under fire for massive human rights abuses in Xinjiang, Tibet, and other areas in China, Beijing now appears keen on strengthening its ties with the Taliban, a group that is notorious for the commission of severe human rights violations, possibly amounting to international crimes, in Afghanistan. On 28 July 2021, prior to the capture of Kabul by the Taliban, China's Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, hosted the head of the Taliban's Political Commission in Tianjin, China. At a media briefing on 3 September, Wang Yi stated that the Taliban believes that "BRI is good for development and prosperity in Afghanistan." According to media reports, China could extend the BRI to Afghanistan to exploit rich minerals and rare-earth mines in Afghanistan.

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In Sri Lanka, concerns emerged over the removal of environmental safeguards related to a China-backed highway project. On 19 July, the government removed part of the protected status of the Thalangama wetland area, in Colombo District, to allow China Harbor Engineering Corporation (CHEC) to proceed with a four-lane elevated highway project. According to environmental scientists, the construction of the highway risks to imperil rare species of birds and animals that inhabit the Thalangama wetland area. As a result of construction waste, water pollution, traffic, and emission pollution, the highway project is also expected to affect the livelihood of traditional paddy farmers and have adverse health impacts on local residents.
RIGHT TO LIVELIHOOD

In Pakistan, a series of protests against water and electricity shortages and impacts on livelihood hit a key China-backed infrastructure project. During June-August protests took place in the Gwadar port city area, Balochistan Province, where local fishermen, workers, and residents complained that resources had been diverted for the implementation of the Gwadar Port project [See BRI Watch Issue 0]. The protests by fishermen in the Gwadar District claimed that their livelihoods were being affected by the government’s decision to grant fishing licenses to Chinese trawlers.

LABOR RIGHTS

In Indonesia, reports surfaced of discriminatory hiring practices carried out by joint ventures involving Chinese companies. In June, it was reported that families in Longkotan Village, North Sumatra Province, complained that a Chinese-backed joint venture failed to uphold its commitment made in land purchase negotiating documents that prioritized hiring locals. The families reported that they were not provided employment opportunities despite their land being acquired by zinc mining company PT Dairi Prima Minerals, an Indonesia-China joint venture, with an attendant agreement that the company would prioritize hiring locals. Similarly, families whose land was acquired for the development of the Chinese-backed Batang Toru hydropower project in North Sumatra Province [See BRI Watch Issue 3] were promised employment but were not subsequently given any work on the power plant.

LAND RIGHTS

In July, it was reported that China’s overseas investments, including through BRI projects, resulted in the acquisition of large areas of land in Asia. According to Land Matrix, an EU-based land monitoring organization, Chinese entities have purchased or leased globally nearly 6.5 million hectares of land for mining, forestry, and agriculture purposes between 2011 and 2020. Through these acquisitions, Chinese companies have altered the landscape of several Asian countries, such as Myanmar, which accounts for over 25% of the share of land acquired or leased by Chinese companies globally for agriculture, the report found.