

'World Water Day-2018'

Speech by

HE Sheikh Hasina

Prime Minister

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

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Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

The Honorable Chairperson,
Dear Colleagues,
Distinguished guests and
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Assalamu Alaikum and a very good morning to all,

I welcome you all at the inaugural ceremony of the 'World Water Day-2018'.

I pay deep homage to the Greatest Bangalee of all times, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. I recall with gratitude the four national leaders, 3-million martyrs and 200 thousand women, who sacrificed their modesty for the cause of independence. I pay deep sympathy to the wounded freedom fighters and martyrs family members.

The United Nations adopted "Nature for Water" as the theme for World Water Day 2018 to encourage nature-based solutions for water problems. Importance of water is immense for environmental balance. Because, without water there will be no existence of living being.

Water, nature, environment and natural eco-system are dependent on each other. We know that any developmental activity has negative impact on environment. For this, formulation and implementation of environment-friendly development projects are required to preserve our nature and ecosystem. Therefore, investigation of the nature-based solutions for different kind of water problems is the demand of the present time and it must be encouraged. It is also required to maintain balance among water, nature and environment to meet the demand of present generation and to preserve the water and environment for future generation.

Potable water is not only essential for human being but also for the entire animal kingdom. Less than 1% water resource of the earth is considered as safe for drinking. As a result, the accessibility to drinkable water could not be ensured for about one billion people of the world till now. The form of water usage has been changed due to the increase of population, fast urbanization and technological differences. About 40 percent people of the world are suffering more or less from the problem of safe drinking water.

Our government has already made remarkable success in ensuring safe water for the people. As per MDG, 84% people were set to bring under safe water by 2015. But 87% people were brought under safe water supply in Bangladesh by the stipulated timeframe. At present, 98% urban population of Bangladesh is getting safe water.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bangladesh is a land of rivers. One-third of its total area is water resources. There are 405 small and big rivers, and 57 trans-boundary rivers in our country. Bangladesh is also the lower riparian of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna river. The water resources management of the country largely depends on the upstream countries.

The Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman established 'Bangladesh Water Development Board' as a separate organization for sustainable management of water resources and to accelerate the food production, land reclamation,

poverty alleviation and employment generation. He also instructed to purchase 11 dredgers considering the importance of dredging for the maintenance of the river system.

In 1972, Bangabandhu formed 'Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission (JRC)' on a permanent basis for trans-boundary water management.

As a follow up, the Awami League Government with its utmost sincerity was able to sign the historic 30-year 'Ganges Water Treaty' in December, 1996 between Bangladesh and India to share the dry season flows of the Ganges.

Present government has almost finalized the "Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100", an environment-friendly, integrated and strategic water management plan. The sustainable planning and development of water resources of Bangladesh actually depends on the equitable sharing and basin-wide management of the trans-boundary rivers- the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Barak/Meghna river basins. Our Government is perusing for regional cooperation for basin-wide water management of trans-boundary river waters.

A few significant programs among many such ones being implemented by our government in the water management are listed below:

- Formulation of National Water Policy 1999;
- Bangladesh Water Act-2013 Formulation;
- Formulation of the Environment Conservation Rules-1997;
- National Policy for Safe Water Supply and Sanitation-1998 formulation.
- 'Framework Agreement on Cooperation for Development' with India in 2011 to ensure the sustainable use of the water resources.
- Bangladesh Water Development Board has completed 825 projects since inception which has brought about 64 lac hector area under the facilities of flood control, drainage and irrigation.
- Additional 10 million metric tons of food grain is being produced annually which ensure the food-self-sufficiency of the country.
- In addition, 1030 sq. kilometer of land has been reclaimed from estuaries and rivers.
- We have constructed 139 polders in the coastal areas.
- For this, 133 Upazillas under 19 districts have been protected from the intrusion of saline water which provides favorable environment for crop production in the coastal areas of Bangladesh.
- Restoration of rivers and navigation route by dredging, prevention of river bank erosion.
- Protecting the lives and properties of the people of coastal areas from cyclone and storm surges by constructing coastal embankment.
- 17 polders have been brought under rehabilitation program in the first phase.
- Conserving environment, improving rural socio-economic conditions by arranging livelihood opportunities for the destitute people through 'char' development.
- The government has invested BDT 15250 crore in the Annual Development Program of water sector in last 5 years. A total of 57 projects have been completed in last fiscal year.
- The government has allocated BDT 4663 crore in the current fiscal year.
- Government has increase allocation for water resource development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There are no alternative to nature-based solutions for facing the mounting challenges of water resources management.

We must not waste water. Ground water is limited. So, the use of ground water should be reduced for sustainable development. Irrigation in agriculture should be done by surface water.

The government since taking over has given special emphasis on the restoration and development of natural wetlands, revival of the river and navigation through dredging, strengthening the coastal embankments considering the consequences of climate change,

maintaining the connectivity between the river and floodplain, creating buffer zone along the riverbank for the protection of environment and ecosystem.

A concept paper has been finalized for preparing 'dredging master plan' in order to dredge rivers, haors, baors, canals, ponds and wetlands of the whole country in a comprehensive manner.

The plan mandated Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority to dredge all the rivers dedicated for navigation except the Ganges-Padma, Brahmaputra-Jamuna and Meghna. Bangladesh Water Development Board to dredge all the rivers except the rivers related to navigation route and Local Government Engineering Department to dredge all the canals, ponds and wetlands.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The mighty Jamuna and Padma Rivers have engulfed about 1600 sq. kilometer of land in last 50 years. The width has been increased from 6-7 kilometers to 12-18 kilometers during this time.

There is no fixed boundary between river and floodplain. Defining the river course, boundary between land and river, plane form and buffer zones are essential for the management of the major rivers. The government has almost finalized a long term plan for channelization and stabilization of the major rivers which will enable to reclaim about 1600 sq. kilometer of land the rivers. It will ensure safe and secure environment for economic activities, live and livelihood along the both banks, conserve water in the river for dry season, ensure adequate flow to the tributaries and distributaries, prevent riverbank erosion and protect water dependent environment and ecosystem.

We should introduce innovative nature-based solutions for water resources developments and management in addition to the conventional solutions. Water pollution and misuse should be prevented. We should conserve natural water reserves and rain water for daily use. I call you all to keep our natural water free from pesticides, garbage and industrial byproducts.

I have been selected a member of the United Nations SDG affairs 'High Level Panel on Water' from the Asian countries for the outstanding performance in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by Bangladesh. This is a great honor for the country that enhanced our responsibility as well.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bangladesh is now a developing country. Our per capita income increased to USD 1610. Electricity production increased up to 16600 MW. We are providing electricity facilities to 90% of the people. GDP growth rate increased up to 7.28%. Padma Bridge is being built with our own resources. Metro rail and tunnel under the river Karnaphuli are under construction.

We intend to celebrate our fiftieth anniversary of independence by emerging as middle income country by 2021 and a developed one by 2041.

The government desires for an integrated and sustainable development of water resources to supply safer water to all people along with the target of achieving 'Sustainable Development Goals 2030' before the SDG's timeframe 2030. By implementing Vision-2021, we shall ensure safer water supply for all within 2021.

With these few words, I declare open the programs of 'World Water Day 2018'.

Thank you all.

Khoda Hafez

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever.

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