

World Water Day-2019

Speech by

HE Sheikh Hasina

Prime Minister

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Bangabandhu International Conference Centre, Dhaka, Thursday, 27 Chaitra 1425, 11 April 2019

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Respected Chair,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamu Alaikum and a very Good Morning.

I welcome you all on the occasion of the World Water Day-2019.

At the onset of the day, I render my profound respect and honour to the greatest Bengali of all time, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. I humbly recall our four martyred National leaders, three million martyrs of the liberation war and two lakhs mothers and sisters who made their supreme sacrifice for our independence. I extend my sincere and deepest sympathy to the families who lost their near and dear ones in the fight for our freedom.

The theme of this year World Water Day is 'Leaving No One Behind', which is also the main theme of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). United Nations has declared the right to water as a human right. Sustainable Development Goal-6 explicitly states to ensure the right to availability to water for all by 2030.

Distinguished Guests,

Sustainable Development Goals were set in 2015. Around seven years ago in 2008, we declared Vision-2021, where time bound plan was included for ensuring safe drinking water for all. We have ensured access to safe drinking water to 80 percent of our populations so far. We will be able to ensure access to safe drinking water to 100 percent of our populations before 2030.

One third of the total area of Bangladesh is covered by water. Over time, life and livelihood of the people of this country were concentrated centering water. Due to its geographical location, our country's water management is dependent on the upstream countries. Realising the importance to this matter, the Father of the Nation set up 'Joint River Commission-JRC' in 1972 for trans-boundary water management. In its continuation, the Awami League government after coming to power in 1996 signed the Ganges River Water Sharing Agreement with India and accordingly achieved the rightful share of the Ganges water for 30 years. Our discussion on sharing water of other common rivers with India has been going on. We have signed the Framework Agreement on Cooperation for Development with India in 2011.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our once mighty rivers have died due to various reasons. Our rivers have been filled up due to the construction of unplanned dams and roads, upstream sediments and river erosion. As a result water retention capacity and navigability of many mighty rivers have been lost. We have taken various initiatives to bring back the navigability and restore channels of the major rivers through dredging. Besides, strong coastal dams have been built and connection of rivers has been made with floodplains.

Various programs have been implemented with special emphasis on the development of buffer zone along the banks of rivers in order to safeguard environment and eco-system.

Distinguished Guests,

After the Independence of Bangladesh, the government of Bangabandhu collected seven dredgers for river protection and ensuring navigation. After a long gap, the Awami League government managed 14 more dredgers during its 2009-2013 regime. At present, Ministry of

Water Resources has 22 dredgers, and Ministry of Shipping and Bangladesh Navy have 44 other dredgers. Collection of 80 more dredgers is under process. During our current regime, 10 thousand kilometers of waterways will be made navigational through extensive river dredging.

Discharge of industrial wastes to rivers and wetlands must be stopped. In the meantime, drives have been carried out to remove illegal structures on both the banks of rivers surrounding the capital. Similar drives will be conducted to other areas of the country. I am ordering the authorities concerned to make sure that no one keeps illegal occupation of any river.

Respected presence,

A 500 meter wide permanent greenbelt along the coasts has been built in order to protect the coastal areas from natural calamities including storms and surges. Initiatives will be taken to implement the Ganges Barrage project to extend irrigation facilities, prevent salinity and obtain freshwater from the basin of the Sundarbans.

Whenever Bangladesh Awami League assumes to power, it has given special importance on the proper management and development of water resources. The Father of the Nation Bangabandhu established the Water Development Board in 1972. Awami League government adopted a comprehensive plan for development of water resources after coming to power in 1996. At that time we enacted different laws, rules and policies including Environment Protection Rules, Safe Water Supply and Sanitation Policy, National Water Policy, and Bangladesh Haor and Wetland Development Board.

We enacted 'Bangladesh Water Rules' in 2018 under which the integrated water resources management committees have been formed at the district, upazila and union levels. Besides, initiative has been taken to establish an international standard water resource training and research institute under the Ministry of Water Resources.

Excellencies,

As the world's largest Delta Bangladesh is the most vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters. We have formulated 'Bangladesh Delta Plan-2100' in order to ensure our desired developments through overcoming the climatic odds.

In 2014, we achieved around 1.19 lakh square kilometers of maritime areas by settling maritime disputes with neighboring countries. This vast territory in the Bay of Bengal has created a huge potential for flourishing the Blue Economy. We have already undertaken plans to ensure the maximum and sustainable use of our marine resources.

Sustainable development goals are inter-related. Integrated water resources management stipulated in the SDG-6 is closely related to SDG-14, which is about safeguarding the marine ecosystem. There should be a holistic approach to protect the entire water ecosystem, which includes rivers, estuaries and sea. Recognizing our success of water resources management as part of the accomplishment of MDGs, I have been nominated as a significant member, and representative from Asia to the United Nations High Level Panel on Water. Thus, our responsibility to set Bangladesh as an international role model for water resource management has been increased.

I believe, with our combined efforts, we will be able to achieve water resource related SDG targets before 2030.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Safe drinking water is now a universal problem. Few billion people in the world today are deprived of safe drinking water. Due to the shortage of water supply, we need to be more conscious and economical to the use of water. At the same time, we will have to reduce our dependence on groundwater and increase the use of surface water. Especially wastage of water in our agriculture sector must be prevented. Water reservoir will have to be built in order to preserve water. And that water will have to be used for irrigation. In this case, I think it is possible to meet the demand of water by preserving rain water.

In the urban areas, many of us waste water for no reason. The water supplied by WASA is very costly because it has to be brought from river and supplied to the city dwellers after purifying it. Many people in this city still do not get adequate water. So wastage of your water means to deprive another.

On this World Water Day, I want to call upon all-we will not waste a single drop of water, this shall be our commitment.

Distinguished Guests,

We have already secured status as a developing country. Our GDP growth in the 2017-18 Fiscal Year was 7.86 percent, which is expected to jump to 10 percent in 2023-24. In 2005-06 during the BNP-Jamaat government time, the per capita income was only \$ 427, which would increase to \$ 1909 in this Fiscal Year. To keep continue our advancements; we have to ensure sustainable use of all natural resources including water. Only then can we build a prosperous and developed nation free from hunger and poverty as Father of the Nation had dreamt.

Thank you all. I announce the happy inauguration of World Water Day-2019 programmes.

Khoda Hafez.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever.

...