

Second Ministerial Meeting on Rural Development in Asia-Pacific Region

Inaugural Session

Address by

Honourable Prime Minister

Sheikh Hasina

Dhaka, Wednesday, 27 January 2010, 14 Magh 1416

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Chairperson of CIRDAP Governing Council,
Distinguished guests,
Delegates,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamu Alaikum and very Good Morning.

It is my pleasure to be here with you at the inaugural session of the Second Ministerial Meeting on Rural Development in the Asia-Pacific Region organized by the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives in collaboration with the Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP).

On behalf of myself and the government of Bangladesh I extend my heartiest welcome to all in the meeting at this historic city of Dhaka.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

It is our privilege to be the host country of the centre and be one of the signatories to the agreement that brought CIRDAP into being 30 years back. We believe that as a prime regional institution with a huge network in the field of rural development, CIRDAP has vast potentials to offer to and gain from the member countries through mutual collaboration and cooperation.

We, as the host country, appreciate CIRDAP's efforts to explore possibilities and optimize the benefits that could be reaped through close cooperation, involvement and interaction among the CIRDAP member and non-member countries.

I am glad to note that a joint Bangladesh-CIRDAP Ministers' Meeting on Rural Development in the Asia-Pacific region was held in Dhaka on 8-9 April in 1987 out of which 'The Dhaka Declaration on Rural Development' came. This underscored the expression of political will and commitment to rural development at high policy level in the region.

We reiterate our commitment once again towards rural development and poverty alleviation by hosting the Second Ministerial Meeting in Dhaka. I am optimistic that the meeting will give enormous opportunities to CIRDAP to strengthen the ties between countries in the region leading towards contextualization of the rural development and poverty alleviation issues with the current changes and challenges facing the countries due to globalization.

Distinguished guests,

Bangladesh was emerged as an independent and sovereign country on the 26th of March in 1971 under the leadership of the greatest Bangalee of all time, the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He gave vision and direction to the country for employment of the poor and the deprived. However, the trend has been faltered following the assassination of Bangabandhu along with his most of the family members on August the 15th in 1975. As a result, poverty, especially rural poverty, is still a big problem for all of us. To overcome this problem, Bangladesh and all other member countries have been implementing various development activities. But we are yet to reach at our desired goals.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A huge portion of the world population is living in this region, but they possess very limited resources compared to the developed world. Besides, a number of challenges we facing are identical among the member countries. These are unemployment, natural disaster, lack of safe drinking water, low productivity in agriculture, rural to urban migration, inadequate food and energy supply etc. The region as a whole, and certain countries, including Bangladesh in particular, has been suffering from the huge burden of over population. Besides, the countries are facing increasing threats of terrorism

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Environmental degradation and shortage of energy are also hampering our developments. Global warming is also an alarming issue for all of us. Due to industrialization and excessive emission of green house gases by the developed world, global mean temperature is shooting up resulting in the sea-level rise. This will cause inundation of large land masses of the low-lying countries in the Asia-Pacific region, especially in countries like Bangladesh and the Maldives, rendering hundreds of millions of people homeless.

So, this is also a very alarming issue for us. With regard to Bangladesh, I would like to add that in the recently held Copenhagen Climate Summit, we have been able to draw the attention of the whole world about the severe consequences Bangladesh will face in the coming days without virtually contributing any harm to the environment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We should also be aware of the impacts of globalization and spread of market economy. It brings rapid urbanization, excessive use of energy resources and large scale migration from rural to urban areas. In addition, climate change and its consequences on socio-economic conditions of large population of rural areas in this region adversely affect not only livelihoods but also national and regional stability.

Now it is time to address these issues immediately, otherwise rural development and poverty reduction programmes will not produce any lasting effects.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Though we have diverse socio-economic, political, cultural and technological backgrounds, all member-countries are facing many identical problems and challenges. Individual countries are working to solve those problems and challenges by their own. In some cases, individual efforts are successful but sharing experiences to overcome problems and challenges by the member countries of CIRDAP might give better and more fruitful results.

We also need to identify the emerging challenges and opportunities of globalization in our regional context. The threats of climatic changes on low-lying countries have already been identified. To face globalization, investment and export of commodities should be increased. In the wake of increasing natural calamities and globally prevailing economic recession, the food security of the poorest people is seriously at stake. We need to use our collective endeavour and wisdom to find out workable solutions to these common problems.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the mean time, the government of Bangladesh has undertaken different initiatives at national and international levels. Poverty alleviation has been given utmost importance in our national strategy called Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS). My government has further expanded safety net coverage as well as volume of support under safety net programmes, increased agricultural subsidies, ensured uninterrupted power supply for irrigation and introduced National Service system to provide at least one employment per household.

From this year, my government has been implementing a massive rural development programme known as 'Ekti Bari Ekti Khamar (One house, one farm) with the objective of optimal utilisation of land and other resources as well as employment generation in rural areas.

We have also reintroduced the upazila system to strengthen local government system in the country. We have taken various price control measures to stabilise market and ensure reasonable price of agricultural commodities for the producers.

To materialise our vision of Digital Bangladesh by 2021, we have taken various measures, including expansion of ICT in the public sector.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We, the member countries, need sharing of our experiences of poverty reduction with each other that could help us mutually. CIRDAP may be a platform in this regard for the member countries. I am glad to know that during the Second Ministerial Meeting experts of all member countries are working together to formulate new policy and action plan on common issues.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,

Finally, I wish the Ministerial Meeting of CIRDAP a great success and wish all of you to have a pleasant and enjoyable stay in Bangladesh as our valued guests. I would like to conclude here and declare the CIRDAP Second Ministerial Meeting open.

Thank you all.

Khoda Hafez.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever.

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