

Statement
by
Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, Honorable Prime Minister,
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh,
Chiang Mai, Thailand, Monday, 20 May 2013

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished Prime Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Assalamu Alaikum.

To be in Thailand is always a delightful experience. Then again to be in Chiang Mai and its pristine setting is truly inspirational. It would surely inspire the meet to openly reflect on the critical challenges facing water and livelihood of our peoples. I thank Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra for inviting me to the "Second Asia-Pacific Water Summit". I am also grateful to her and to the wonderful people of Thailand for the gracious hospitality extended to me and to my delegation since our arrival here.

Water security is a growing worldwide concern. Thus, 2013 is being observed as the "Year of International Cooperation on Water". As we meet today, we carry with us the burden of more than three-fourth of the Asia-Pacific countries facing serious water security situation. A recent ADB Study shows that although the Asia-Pacific Region has become an economic powerhouse, there is not one developing country that could be considered as water secure, in the entire region.

Today, the world is convinced that human security constitutes food, energy, and water security. And, that there exists an increasing inequality in access to water and sanitation. The situation is worsening due to the precarious state of the rivers and the wetlands. In our region, particularly in South Asia, water security is challenged by booming population, unplanned and rapid urbanization, pollution and over-extraction of ground water. Climate change is aggravating the situation even more.

The competing use of water can no longer be seen in isolation. They need to be balanced so that our individual and collective development and the quality of life of billions of people, especially the poor, continue to improve. Today, rising investment and consumption are transforming landscapes and lifestyle in our region. Asia accounts for 60 percent of the 7 billion world population. We are told that by 2030, the Asia-Pacific region will have a gap of up to 40 percent, between the demand for and supply of water.

Let me highlight a few critical areas that deserve our attention and urgent action.

First. National Development Planning must include improving agricultural water productivity, achieving energy objectives, and satisfying the growing industrial water requirements in an integrated manner. Agriculture accounts for around 70 percent of overall freshwater requirement. As our economies improve and the demand on agriculture increases, so does the demand for water. It shrinks our freshwater sources and depletes our groundwater resources. In countries like Bangladesh where land is scarce, we need to improve the efficiency of water use in cropping, in production and in processing. We also need to develop varieties of rice and cereals that are less dependent on water but tolerant to the existing stress.

Second. To address these challenges properly, we have to move beyond the limits of Intellectual Property Rights. This is critical for our collaboration in development and transfer of technology. For countries like Bangladesh, lack of access to technology often limits us in creating life saving options; effective tackling of arsenic contamination of groundwater; successful harvesting of rainwater and recycling of wastewater. Therefore, access to water related technologies are essential for countries like Bangladesh to accomplish "green economy" in the post Rio+20 World.

Third. Management of water is a governance challenge as well. Bangladesh has been successful in the development of thousands of small scale water user cooperatives at the grassroots. They have shown that water governance and management can be improved through local, homegrown initiatives. We are also encouraging use of traditional knowledge and practices, especially the community based ones, as these have been successful with minimum inputs. Aside policies on effective water governance, investment in reduction, reusing, and recycling of water would ensure judicious management of limited groundwater resources. In recognition of this, Bangladesh adopted the Water Act, 2013.

Fourth. Water is precious and the flowing rivers have contributed to economic growth; social development; social and cultural roots; political stability; and determined cross border engagements. For sustenance and navigability of our rivers, Bangladesh had from 2009 started dredging them. South Asian nations share water of trans-boundary Rivers to meet demand of their dense population, growing economies, and ecology. While sharing trans-boundary river water is complex, Bangladesh and India had agreed on long term water sharing of the River Ganges. For equitable sharing of water of other trans-boundary rivers, and to secure river basins and ecosystems, South Asian states are working on agreements and joint governing institutions. I believe if a network of Asia's River Basin Organizations is established, all our countries could share each other's experience and knowledge on this important issue.

Fifth. In Asia, more than one-tenth of the global population lives in coastal areas on a meter or less above sea level. In Bangladesh, one-fifth of its land area exists and 30 million of its people live in such a state. Bangladesh is also exposed to frequent floods, cyclones, salinity and sea level rise. These natural disasters have led us to create community based disaster risk preparedness and management, to make the communities resilient, and reduce fatalities. Vulnerability to climate change has also led us to implement climate change adaptation and mitigation plans. These plans come under the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, which was adopted in 2009. Bangladesh's experience in this area is available to all to share.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The right to water is primary and not derived. Through ages water has led to human conflicts all over the world. Some are now still ongoing. Only judicious settlement of access to and management of water resources is the solution to these conflicts, and for peace. Also, various human rights call for sustainability of water resources. Water and human rights are linked, and sustainability of water

resources is vital for economic, environmental and social benefits. Thus, there is an urgent need for water management frameworks, and knowledge sharing networks, for cooperation.

The United Nations and the Human Rights Council have pronounced the right to access water and sanitation. In the post-2015 Development Agenda, therefore, universal coverage of water supply and sanitation, on the basis of non-discrimination and equity, should be a key development goal.

Madam Chair,

Water is life. Water is common. Water is our wealth. These are not mere rhetoric. These are borne through ages in Bangladesh out of our conviction in everyday life in the cities and villages. I thank Prime Minister Shinawatra again for inviting me to share my observations on caring for precious water and its future to meet the need of our progeny. Our contributions in the Summit would surely strengthen our collective endeavor to achieve water for all. Bangladesh shall play its role in ensuring that access to water stay a guarded right for humanity and nature to sustain life in our mother Earth.

I thank you all.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever.
