

**Keynote Speech by Hon'ble Foreign Minister at UN Water Conference
Interactive Dialogue 2 on *Water for Sustainable Development, Valuing Water,
Water-Energy-Food Nexus, and Sustainable Economic and Urban Development***

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.

I appreciate this opportunity to deliver the keynote at this Interactive Dialogue Session.

Water-related SDGs Globally:

Water is not just limited to SDG6, but features across the 2030 Agenda covering other SDG targets. The international track record with SDG6 and other related targets are best be termed as 'mixed'. In addition, there remains a wide disparity in the performance of developed and developing countries. An aggregate account of progress with certain SDG targets would perhaps raise our hopes, and would risk glossing over the dire situation in some particularly water-stressed contexts.

It is certainly not encouraging that, at the current rate of progress, 1.6 billion people worldwide, especially in LDCs, are likely to remain without access to safe drinking water. Likewise, 2.8 billion people would still be denied access to safely managed sanitation services by the end of this decade. No wonder, the UN SDG Report 2022 makes a compelling argument that the international community needs to make fourfold progress on the current rate of gains to ensure universal access to drinking water, sanitation and hygiene.

Water quality in rivers, lakes and aquifers in low and middle-income countries is compromised, mostly due to untreated waste water discharge. There is no monitoring data for the quality of water that 3 billion of the world population depends on. Likewise, more than 733 million people – one tenth of the global population – live in areas with high and critical level of water stress. These facts make it imperative for the Global Water Action Agenda to put the spotlight on financing, technologies and innovations that can help address water scarcity and crisis for those that remain the furthest behind. We must rise to the challenge by withstanding the pandemic aftermath, the intensifying climate crisis, and the volatile international financial environment. We must take water initiatives as a

game changer to leap forward to achieve sustainable development for us and for our future generations.

Expectations from International Community:

We must remain mindful that we had built in a portfolio of options for the Means of Implementation for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015 and reached agreement on a negotiated document on financing for international development and technology transfer. It is critical that we engage in a realistic stocktaking of the concrete deliverables against the international commitments captured in those documents. Maintaining the *status quo* with the international financial architecture will not allow us to fulfill the commitments.

Despite all odds, 16 LDCs including Bangladesh are now in different stages of graduation. The Secretary-General correctly said, graduation must be rewarded, not punished. We reaffirm that we do not seek charity from our development partners; instead, what we seek are our dues under various internationally agreed development commitments, including SDGs. Developing countries like Bangladesh continue to score progress on most water-related SDGs, and such track record should dispel any misleading notions about their absorptive capacity or mismanagement risks.

Valuing Water:

Our government has undertaken an exercise on ‘valuing water’ with a view to introducing shadow prices for water-intensive sectors like agriculture, industries, urbanisation, and ecosystem conservation. This can build on the work we have already done with regard to climate sensitive budgeting and climate risk-informed development planning and implementation.

The work on ‘valuing water’ is expected to accelerate our related national development strategies concerning renewable energy, waste-to-energy, coastal embankments widening, mangrove forestation and so forth. In fact, much of the success with ‘valuing water’ would hinge on circular use of water, sustainable freshwater withdrawal, groundwater recharge, climate-smart urban development, and equity-based trans-boundary water sharing.

We stand ready to share our experience with other countries in a comparable setting, and would urge UN Member States to recognise ‘valuing water’ as an achievable objective for the Water Action Decade.

Water-Energy-Food Nexus:

The UN Water Conference is a renewed opportunity for the international community to revisit the potential role of water in addressing the ongoing food, fuel and financial crises. It is acknowledged that water-use efficiency is still relatively low in the agriculture sector in most countries, resulting in enhanced water stress. It would be crucial to increase water-use efficiency for irrigation through adoption and promotion of climate-smart technologies and systems.

In Bangladesh, our government has been investing in climate adaptation focusing on the water-agriculture nexus through promoting salinity- and submergence-tolerant crop varieties, expanding indigenous practices like floating agriculture, and supporting social forestation for sustainable livelihood opportunities. We are also encouraging use of renewable energy for irrigation purposes, and extending climate-smart aquaculture and livestock through Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). It is also a policy choice to consider water as an enabler of climate mitigation, including through exploring the potentials of offshore wind energy, floating solar systems and hydropower imports.

We underscore the need for enhancing climate financing for both water-related mitigation and adaptation actions. We urge our development partners to also offer adequate incentives for their private sectors to consider investing in our projects under Bangladesh Development Plan 2100 and Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan.

Finally, since water is our life, we must do our outmost to protect, preserve and promote our water resources, rivers, seas and oceans.

Thank you all

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
