

**Speech of Mr. Quamrul Islam Siddique, President, Bangladesh Water Partnership on the occasion of  
Launching Asia Pacific Water Forum (APWF) in Manila**

Mr. Yoshiro Mori, President of Japan Water Forum and Former Prime Minister, Government of Japan  
Mr. Haruhiko Kuroda, President, Asian Development Bank  
Ms. Erna Witoelar, UN Special Ambassador for Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific  
Dr. Kotaro Takemura, Secretary General of Japan Water Forum  
Very good afternoon to you all.

I am very pleased to be present here in the Official Launching Ceremony of Asia Pacific Water Forum here which was formed during the Fourth World Water Forum held in Mexico in last March and we all strongly supported formation of such a forum to face the common water related challenges in Asia Pacific region and solve those through collaborative efforts in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

About 58% of the world's population lives in the Asia-Pacific region out of which 40% of the world's poor live in South Asia. The countries of South Asia except Sri Lanka and Maldives lie within the large river systems in the world – the Ganges, the Brahmaputra, the INDUS and the Irrawaty which are transboundary in nature. These river systems support agriculture-based livelihoods of about 650 million people out of total 1.5 billion in South Asia. Every year the South Asia region face recurrent floods and; droughts, river erosion, landslides and glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOF) are common phenomena in the region. Besides the region being located in the coastal belt, is handicapped by cyclones, tidal surge, tornadoes, recent Tsunami and climate change. Again being located in seismic belt, the region face disasters like earthquake. A common platform can be of immense help to the economically weak region like South Asia to join hands to face disasters and the challenges in their wake.

Now it is widely accepted that River Basin Management can offer a sustainable development strategy that will enable to focus on threats to the environment, quality and quantity of water and supporting an economically viable, environmentally sustainable and socially equitable basis of water resources management. The judicial and integrated management of water in the transboundary river basins in South Asia with regional cooperation is of utmost importance for social and economic development in the region and water can be used as engine for such development. The South Asian countries with 1.5 billion population needs to be prepared with early warning system, adequate pre-disaster preparedness and post-disaster management structures and mechanisms in order to be better equipped for disaster situations in future. To reduce the risk of water related disasters like floods in the region a joint effort and technical capabilities are needed for prediction and monitoring of the magnitude, duration, timing and location of those disasters. A high level transboundary river dialogue is required to promote regional cooperation between the countries and ensure a flow of data and information to help facilitate mitigation of floods disasters and tackle other issues of river flow. The Third South Asia Water Forum organized by GWP-South Asia held in Dhaka in July, 2004 recommended for formation of Ganges River Basin Organisation as a regional institutional framework and start for such regional cooperation on river basins in South Asia. in the line of Mekong River Commission which has established such an enabling cooperation among the riparian countries. I think the Asia Pacific Water Forum can take an initiative for formation of such a River Basin Organization on the Ganges river as because without collaborative efforts, the water related problems in South Asia can't be solved. In the 13th SAARC Summit in Dhaka, the South Asian leaders also

called for integrated and coordinated efforts to face natural calamities and to take urgent actions to manage disasters in South Asia.

Implementation of IWRM and achieving water efficiency is a challenge in the region. Reliable availability of adequate quantity and quality of water for increasing agricultural and industrial production and environmental flow will continue to be an important factor in the coming century. Water efficiency must be achieved therefore by the region through reducing water loss in agriculture, growing more crops per drop and reusing waste water for non-potable uses through its treatment to meet the increasing need of water of the growing population.

Although much has been achieved in last decade, the overall picture of sanitation in South Asia still remains dismal and the practice of open defecation, unsanitary disposal of human excreta and other unhygienic practices by the majority of people in the region is a serious threat to the quality of life, control of disease and the environment. Bangladesh held the First South Asia Conference on Sanitation (SACOSAN) in Dhaka, in October, 2003 where the countries of South Asia agreed on the need to pursue common strategies under a common definition of sanitation to accelerate the progress of good sanitation and hygiene promotion in South Asia in order to improve people's quality of life and reduce child mortality and morbidity and fulfil the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the commitments made in the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg. The second SACOSAN is just being held in Islamabad in Pakistan this September which indicates the collaborative minds of the region to achieve the MDGs on WSS.

All of these call for huge investment in water sector. In these contexts, I think the Asia Pacific Water Forum has selected the three themes - 'Water Financing', 'Disaster Management' and 'Water for Development and Ecosystems' appropriately to address all water problems in the region and for its collaborative efforts to solve those.

I wish every success of the Forum.

Quamrul Islam Siddique  
President, Bangladesh Water Partnership  
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