



WORLD DESERTIFICATION DAY Bangladesh Perspective



Message

"Desertification Day" is being observed today throughout the world including Bangladesh. I am happy to know that elaborate programmes have been chalked out to observe the day with due importance. I congratulate all who are associated with this efforts.

Desertification as a consequence of climate change and other related phenomena has gradually been visible in various parts of the world. In our country, especially in the northern region, gradual loss in land fertility, continued downward trend of underground water level and alarming disappearance of forest and tree-cover are gradually becoming apparent as the primary signs of desertification. This process, if continued over a long period, could transform the entire northern region into a desert. This degeneration of the land resources which is very much scarce compared to population needs will cause serious adverse consequential impacts on our socio-economic standing. Observance of 'World Desertification Day' in Bangladesh, in this perspective, bears a special significance.

The observance of the day will create world opinion in checking such a catastrophic phenomenon. Scientists engaged in relevant fields of research, social and economic experts and public representatives and planners engaged in implementation of socio-economic development programmes at the state levels can, through their intellect and expertise, strengthen their approach towards preventing desertification and alleviating its catastrophic consequences.

I wish the 'World Desertification Day' a success.

Abdur Rahman Biswas
President
People's Republic of Bangladesh

Today is the 17 June — The World Desertification Day. This is for the first time in the history of mankind the World Desertification Day is being observed throughout the World. The Government and the people of Bangladesh have been also observing the day along with the World Community in a befitting manner. The United Nations General Assembly in its 47th Session adopted the resolution no. 47/188 for constituting an inter-Governmental Negotiating Committee to discuss how to combat drought or desertification in different countries of the world. An Inter-Governmental Negotiating Committee on Desertification (INCED) was accordingly formed which ultimately decided to hold an international Convention to combat the problems of desertification through holding a total of 5 sessions consecutively. Bangladesh signed this International Convention to Combat Desertification in Paris on October 14, 1994. The Government of Bangladesh has been actively considering the case of ratifying the Convention and necessary steps are being taken in this regard.

Desertification : International Perspective

The problems of desertification throughout the world are widespread. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) defines desertification in chapter 12 of the Agenda 21 as "Desertification means land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climate variations and human activities." About one fourth of the total population of the Earth lives in the dry land areas comprising one fourth of the land (including deserts) of the world. Of more than 100 countries that are subjected to its destructive clutches, desertification in the developing world, especially in the least

developed countries by now has taken a serious catastrophic shape. With the decline of the land productivity, the poor millions of these countries are being subjected to appalling lack of food security. This ecological set back has far long socio-economic effects and the countries experiencing the devastation virtually cannot face the problem without external financial and technical assistance.

Climate plays a significant role in the problems of desertification which culminates as a result of continuous degradation of land in the dry areas. The land usually gets squeezed as a result of pro-

quite visible that a state of desertification does exist at present in the geographical territorial boundary of Bangladesh. The Northwestern Barind area of the country experiences the primary indication of such a problem. In fact, the productivity of soil decreases as a result of prolonged and sustained drought and the land ultimately becomes arid. The scarcity of water (especially surface water e.g. rainfall, streamflow) remains as one of its main reasons.

Unilateral withdrawal of Ganges water by upper riparian India has caused tremendous adverse impacts on the ecological balance of the

yond the limits of national jurisdiction." The acute scarcity of water in the Northwestern region is pushing our country towards ecological catastrophe. Initial indications of desertification is gradually becoming distinct in these areas. In the context of impending danger of the Global Climate Change and Sea Level Rise, the Bangladesh Vulnerability Assessment Study predicts that with the change of climate, the Northwestern region of the country will constantly experience intensive droughts. Bangladesh is situated in the humid region and scientific research demonstrates that the country's Barind areas belong to the arid or dry sub-humid areas.

Data and information collected to ascertain the desertification problem in Bangladesh indicate that in spite of an annual rainfall of 49 inches, the Northwestern region of the country is heading towards serious desertification problems in about 74,200 square kilometer areas. Tremendous shortage of freshwater in the dry season accelerates the intrusion of saline water to low land areas. With the change in the Hydrological Cycle, the soil moisture gets reduced. The production of agricultural crops is thus hampered as a result of reduction of both surface and groundwater.

Conclusions

As we join the International Community to observe for the first time the World Desertification Day today, it is our resolute determination to direct all our national activities to conquer this human created havoc in the light of the decision of the international Convention to Combat Desertification. Let us all in the planet hope to ensure conservation of air, land and water resources through implementation of Agenda 21 against national, regional and global perspectives.

Akbar Hossain, Bir Pratibha

Minister for Environment & Forest
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh



longed drought which ultimately loosens the soil bondage. Sustainable land use should therefore be considered very significant for combatting the problems of desertification. With the degradation of land and indiscriminate destruction of forests, weather gets dried and intensified to a large extent. Use of water and its management therefore, appear to be significant in order to arrest land degradation.

Desertification in Bangladesh

In the light of the definition of desertification by the International Convention to Combat Desertification, it is

Barind areas of the country. This peculiar behaviour of our neighbour is in conflict with the interest of the resolution adopted by the Earth Summit on Environment and Development. The Rio Declaration in its No 2 principle pronounces "States have, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, the sovereign right to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own environmental and developmental policies, and the responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other states or of areas be-



Message

"World Desertification Day" is being observed for the first time on June 17 throughout the world. The concern on desertification which had been expressed from every corner of the world over almost a decade was echoed in the Rio "Earth Summit" in 1992 and culminated in the adoption of the International Convention to Combat Desertification in 1994. Bangladesh became a signatory to the Convention in October the same year.

The one-fourth of the total landmass of the world identified as 'drylands' is inhabited by one-fourth of the total world population. Seventy per cent of this "drylands" is now under threat of desertification. Desertification will inhibit agricultural productivity resulting in a serious disturbance in food security in the countries of the region identified as 'drylands' and, consequently, the poor people of these countries will be under tremendous strains. This will further aggravate the social and economic problems already prevailing in these countries.

Transboundary upstream withdrawal of international river-waters, drought and various phenomena related to climate change have made the primary symptoms of desertification gradually more pronounced in the northern region of Bangladesh. Agricultural productivity has been subject to gradual decline due to lowflow conditions, ground water table is in a process of gradual recedence, indiscriminate human interventions have resulted in gradual removal of forest as well as vegetation cover. As a consequence, land aridity is gradually gaining dimension resulting in land degradation and consequent desertification. All socio-economic activities including crop production in the region are being adversely affected.

In this perspective, observance of the "World Desertification Day" bears great significance internationally and nationally. I am sure that the prime aims of the observance of the 'World Desertification Day' would help create global awareness in combating desertification and provide guidance and inspiration to public representatives, administrators, scientists and planners engaged in relevant fields, nationally and internationally, in implementing their respective work plans to this end.

I wish the "World Desertification Day" a complete success.

Khaleida Zia
Prime Minister
People's Republic of Bangladesh

Prevent Desertification and its Catastrophic Consequences

Desertification Convention

Md Abdus Sobhan

Programme Coordinator
Department of Environment

BAKGLADESH is a signatory to the 'International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification,' which was adopted in October, 1994.

Use of major terms

"Desertification" means land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors including climatic variations and human activities;

"Combating Desertification" includes activities which are part of the integrated development of land in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas for sustainable development which are aimed at:

(i) prevention and/or reduction of land degradation;

(ii) rehabilitation of partly degraded land; and

(iii) reclamation of desertified land;

"Drought" means the naturally occurring phenomenon that exists when precipitation has been significantly below normal recorded levels, causing serious hydrological imbalances that adversely affect land resource production systems;

"Land degradation" means reduction or loss, in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, of the biological or economic productivity and complexity of rained cropland, irrigated cropland, or range, pasture, forest and woodlands resulting from land uses or from a process or combination of processes, including processes arising from human activities and habitat patterns, such as:

(i) soil erosion caused by wind and/or water;

(ii) deterioration of the physical, chemical and biological or economic properties of soil; and

(iii) long-term loss of natural vegetation;

"Arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas" means areas,

other than polar and sub-polar regions, in which the ratio of annual precipitation to potential evapotranspiration falls within the range from 0.05 to 0.65;

Principles of the Convention

— Parties should, in a spirit of international solidarity and partnership, improve cooperation and coordination at sub-regional, regional and international levels.

— Parties should take into full consideration the special needs and circumstances of affected developing country Parties, particularly the threat developed among them.

— Parties should develop, in a spirit of partnership, cooperation among all levels of government, communities, non-governmental organizations and landholders to establish a better understand-

ing of the nature and value of land and scarce water resources in affected areas to work towards their sustainable use.

Obligations of the Convention

The Parties shall:

— Adopt an integrated approach addressing the physical, biological and socio-economic aspects of the processes of desertification and drought;

— Integrate strategies for poverty eradication into efforts to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought;

— Promote cooperation among affected country Parties in the field of Environment Protection and the Conservation of land and matter resources, as they relate to desertification and drought;

— Strengthen sub-regional, regional and international co-

operation.

Affected developing country parties are eligible for assistance in the implementation of the Convention.

Concern of Bangladesh

Bangladesh concerned about increased moisture deficiency and less vegetation cover in the northern parts of the country. Abnormal changes in the weather such as long drought period and less rainfall, drastic fall in water table and consequent change in the soil properties and vegetation in recent years are quite an indication of semi-aridity in the region.

The Farakka Barrage in India has reduced dry season flows in that portion of the Ganges which flows through Bangladesh by 50%.

As a result, the country is in the threat of desertification

in its north-western and south-western region comprising an area of about 72,000 sq. km, which is 50 per cent of the total area of the country.

Reduced water flow in the major rivers during the dry season reduces the pressure at the salt water interface along the coast. Salinity in the south-western region has increased significantly in the dry season in recent years flooding the reduction of the Ganges flow. Presently about 38% of the country's territory and 33% of the population is affected by salinity in the water supply.

Mangroves in the Sundarbans are showing signs of top dieback. This is believed to be a result of increased saline intrusion along the Khulna coast.

Finally, with lower dry season flows there is less pressure counteracting the landward migration of salt water into underground aquifers in the coastal areas.

Courtesy :



Sonali Bank



Janata Bank



Agrani Bank