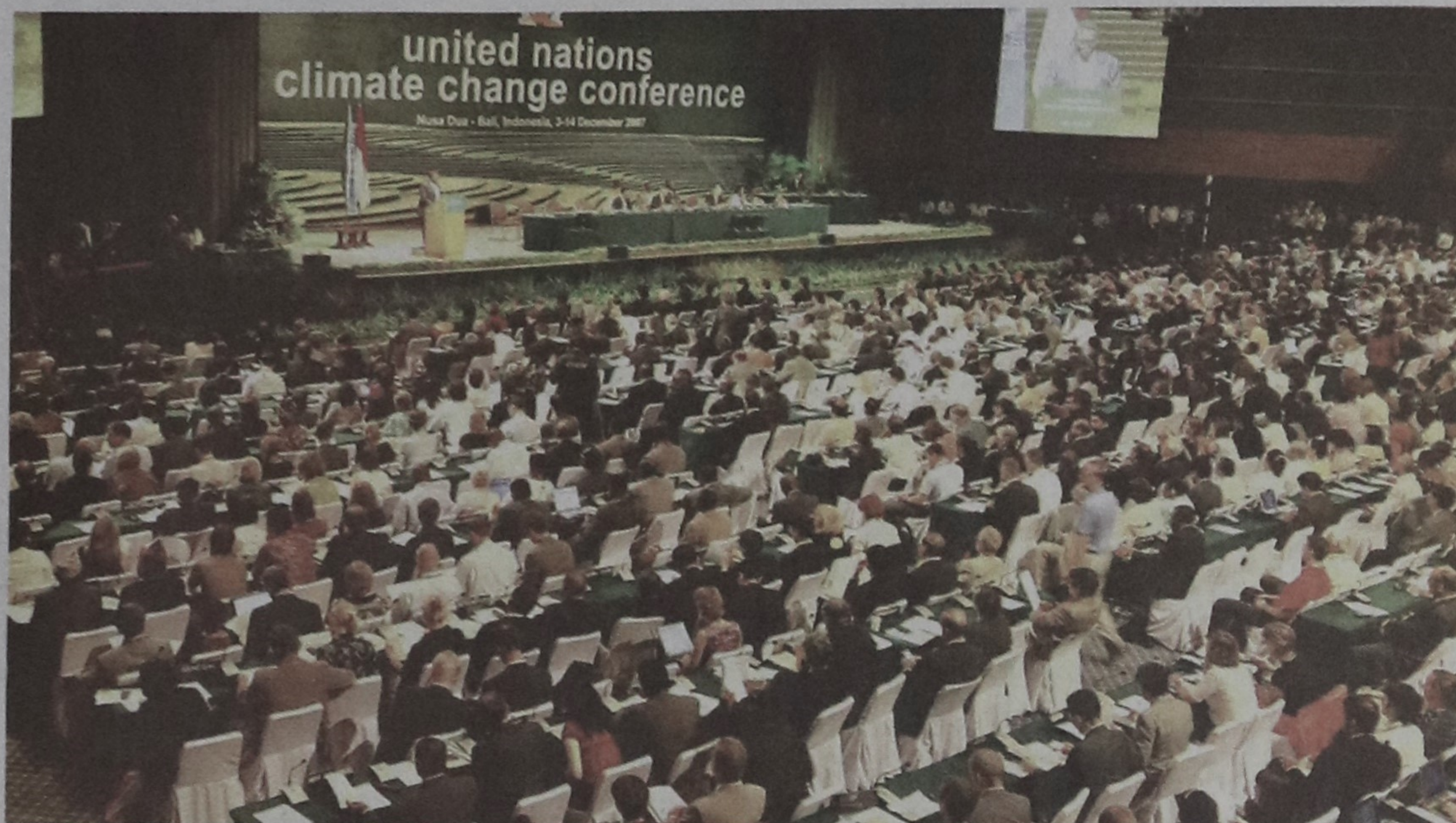


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Dreaded footsteps of climate change

Urgent actions for the next five years



DR. ATIQ RAHMAN

CLIMATE change is emerging as the most important issue threatening the basic securities of food, water, energy, livelihood and human life. Bangladesh has been identified by the scientists and policy makers across the world as one of the most vulnerable countries bracing for climate change impacts which have already started affecting her rather severely. Though some small islands such as Maldives and Tuvalu are threatened by prospects of obliteration, Bangladesh remains the most vulnerable country with respect to the extent of population to be affected and possible human displacement due to climate change induced sea level rise. The threat of extreme events like cyclones, floods and river bank erosion, drought, increase of sea level rise and salinity conspire against the country and force Bangladeshis to confront the various insecurities lying ahead.

The causes of climate change are global in nature while the impacts are felt locally and often with extreme consequences. The poor are the most vulnerable to climate change, particularly in developing countries because of their lack of capacity to cope with the impacts.

All political, development and environmental expert opinions in Bangladesh agree on one single principle that poverty must be alleviated immediately. But climate change threatens poverty eradication efforts and undermines the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Furthermore, the international financial instability and insecurity threatens the poor through increased food prices and shortage of food grains in the global market. Hence it is imperative that the challenging of climate change, poverty alleviation and ensuring sustainable development must be addressed simultaneously.

Climate change impacts

Bangladesh is facing various climate changes impacts and climate related extreme events due to its location and being an extremely flat delta in its early hydro-geological state of formation. Recently, the country is experiencing various climate related natural disasters and extreme events like prolonged and repeated floods in the northern and central parts, severe cyclones and increased salinity in the coastal districts and drought in the northwestern parts. These are affecting the physical environment, ecosystems and natural resources bases severely almost every year. There is severe river bank erosion

induced by enhanced flooding. River bank erosion is one of the key drivers creating environmental migrants and refugees. The climatic events have deadly consequences on agriculture and food security; water, human health and human securities. Bangladesh experiences overflow of water causing floods in the monsoon and scarcity of water in the dry season due to change in hydrological patterns, rainfall and regional water flow patterns. These have been linked with global warming and climate change. This situation will be aggravated due to increasing global warming and climate change.

It is apprehended that the possible sea level rise will affect the country by inundating coastal areas of Bangladesh. Possible sea level rise will affect the coastal ecosystems, water, agriculture and food production. One meter sea level rise may dislocate about 35 million people from coastal districts by the year 2050, if not earlier. These may create severe problems for rural livelihood, local, regional and sectoral development such as agriculture, water and health. The emerging climate refugees will put enormous pressure on the urban economy and infrastructure as well as on basic services such as water supply, power, health, sanitation and demand for energy.

Actions initiated to address climate change

We, as a country alone, can do very little to tackle the causes and consequences of the climate change problem. Hence, we have to work collectively with the world community. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) gives us the scope and structure to work together and raise our voice to the global community and influence global decision making in our favour. Over the last two decades, some leading scientists, think-tanks and government policy framers from Bangladesh have been raising the issues locally and globally. These have yielded some early results for the country. A number of research, implementation and institutional initiatives have been undertaken over last two decades by the government, NGOs, research centres and the affected communities. Some of more recent key initiatives already undertaken so far are:

- Formulation of National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA)
- Establishment of the Designated National Authority for implementation of Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects
- Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy

and Action Plan (BCCSAP), which was presented at the London meeting in September, 2008

- Creation of a Budget line for Climate Change and allocation of Tk. 300 crore for Climate Fund by the Government of Bangladesh in 2007

- The General Economic Division (GED) under the Planning Commission has undertaken an assessment of climate change impacts on Poverty Alleviation, MDGs and Economic Growth of the country

- UK-Bangladesh meeting for Multi-donor Trust Fund for Bangladesh generated UDS 150 million for the country from the UK government

- Bangladesh cabinet approved in principle the Climate Change Trust Fund and has set up two committees on February 2, 2009. The committees will oversee the operation and appropriate use of the climate change Funds as well as guide implementation of BCCSAP

- Bangladesh is hosting World Conferences on Community Based Adaptation (CBA) to Climate Change. The First and Second CBA conferences were held in 2005 and 2007 while the Third conference is scheduled in February, 2009, all in Bangladesh.

The process and methods for integrating climate change into development has been initiated by research communities and development agencies in Bangladesh. The government has been taking more progressive role in the UNFCCC negotiation process and gives support to Least Developed Countries (LDCs) initiatives. Several projects have been initiated mostly by NGOs and research communities on adaptation to climate change for build-

ing capacity and learning early lessons. Government of Bangladesh has proposed at the COP-14 in Poznan in 2008 the establishment of an international adaptation Centre, preferably to be located in Bangladesh. Moreover, an initiative has been undertaken to establish a tertiary education centre based in a reputed university in Bangladesh entitled International Centre for Climate Change and Development.

Immediate and urgent actions needed

The above seems to be an impressive list, but it is the first step towards the enormous tasks of confronting the severe effects of climate change on the people of Bangladesh, its ecosystems, society and economy. Though responding to climate change is a long-term and multi-decade process, the response in the terms of five years by all actors including government, political parties, research communities, NGOs, development agencies and partners is going to prove critical to strengthening formalities of a sustainable adaptation strategy.

The immediate actions for the next five years must focus on implementation of the six pillars and action programme under the BCCSAP. The six pillars include: a) Food security, social protection and health; b) Comprehensive disaster management; c) Infrastructure to ensure and enhance the assets; d) Research and knowledge management; e) Mitigation and low carbon development; and f) Capacity building and institutional strengthening. The several programmes under the six pillars emphasise on: building resilience of vulnerable community to protect their lives and livelihoods; developing climate resilient agriculture and cropping systems for ensuring food security; tackling new diseases and improving health systems and ensuring drinking water and improved sanitation; strengthening capacity of the government department and the community for disaster preparedness; improving and rehabilitating existing infrastructures; creating new infrastructures considering emerging climatic hazards and associated risk; development of strategic energy plan, promotion of renewable energy and its efficiency for reduction of carbon emission; and scientific and actions research for both knowledge generation and community actions for climate risk reduction.

Bangladesh's future depends on reducing the risks of climate change. For that Bangladesh must also demonstrate leadership in the global negotiating process. It is fortunate that Bangladesh has a few of the world's leading institutes, scientists and negotiators. Their efforts must be consolidated for both national planning and

action as well as harnessing international goodwill and supports. The Government of Bangladesh with other key actors must undertake the following actions:

- Ensure harmonisation between its own agencies such as Ministry of Environment and Forests and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Planning and other relevant agencies;
- Implement NAPA and BCCSAP programmes simultaneously, with emphasis on each pillar of the country strategy;
- Influence international development partners and countries to support Bangladesh in its climate actions;
- Organise training and enhance manpower for better negotiations and international climate diplomacy;
- Develop a strong national position demanding compensation for climate related damages, recovery and adaptation actions as well as addressing issues of climate refugees;
- Promote the Bangladesh's cause as a victim and severely impacted country in all international fora;
- Build capacity in existing institutions of human resources development on climate friendly sustainable development; and
- Prepare for a low carbon development path and ensure energy efficiency and security for all citizens.

Such actions must be part of the mainstreaming climate change into development policies, programmes and projects in all sectors. The emerging political will must be harnessed at all levels towards integrated climate friendly development and risk reduction.

The central focus for the next five years is rapid and coordinated actions. The major thrust would be on implementation. Through discussion, negotiations, scientific research, finance mobilization, capacity building and demonstrations of good adaptation and mitigation practices must be strengthened, the emphasis must be laid on implementation and best utilisation of available funds.

Accountability, transparency, comprehensive inclusion of all key actors in this phase will ensure future resource mobilisation and supports from global partners for Bangladesh. The international goodwill that exists now must be harnessed further for sustainable development, climate risk reduction and poverty alleviation -- simultaneously in Bangladesh.

Dr. Atiq Rahman, Executive Director of BCAS and the Winner of the UN-Environmental Award, Champion of the Earth 2008.

