

WORLD UNITES TO SAVE OCEANS

First UN talks kick off today

AFP, MIAMI

World leaders convene at UN headquarters next week for the first major bid to solve the toughest problems facing our oceans, from coral bleaching to plastic pollution, overfishing and rising seas due to climate change.

The Ocean Conference in New York June 5-9 attempts to rally nations big and small to make meaningful changes to preserve what is arguably the Earth's most important resource, experts say. US President Donald Trump's recent decision to withdraw from the Paris climate accord is anticipated to be a hot topic at the talks, which no high-ranking US officials are expected to attend.

But despite Trump's decision Thursday to end US participation in the Paris deal, which drew worldwide condemnation, experts at the Pew Charitable Trust said the United States has been a part of crafting a broad "call to action," and is expected to sign it.

"We are committed to halting and reversing the decline in the health and productivity of our ocean," says the three-page document, which also expresses alarm at the impact of climate change on the ocean.

The call to action is expected to be signed and released at some point during the week-long conference, which will bring government officials, ocean advocates and some heads of state to New York. The US pullout from Paris means other nations will lead the way at the UN talks, particularly small island nations that have the most to lose from rising seas.

"How can you worry about someone who is not in the room?" said Ambassador Ronny Jumeau, permanent representative to the United Nations for the Seychelles islands.

"Look at who is here, who is sitting in the front row, and say, 'Now what are we going to do about this?'"

SEE PAGE J3



Cost-effective and environmentally friendly solar driven irrigation systems are becoming popular across the idyllic countryside of Bangladesh. This juxtaposition of modernity and quaintness is helping transform the lives of farmers across the country.

FILE PHOTO

Solar smile for farmers

Clean energy makes irrigation easy, cheap

WASIM BIN HABIB and TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Even two and a half years ago, worry over water for irrigation would cast a shadow on Uday's hope for a good harvest.

In every Boro season, the farmer had to hire a diesel-run pump and buy diesel worth Tk 6,000 to grow crops on four bighas of land in Jhenidah's Hardevpur, a village which had no electricity until last month.

Yet, the machine could not pump out enough water due to depleting water level there, leading to poor yield.

Like Uday Shankar Biswas, some 300 other farmers suffered the same fate every Boro season but things changed drastically after several solar powered pumps were installed in that remote village in January 2015.

Now, the farmers spend much less to get the water they need. This year, a bumper yield and a good profit brought a huge smile to their faces.

"Can you imagine many of our farmers harvested up to 40 maunds of hybrid paddy from a bigha of land? Our famers had never been that happy before," said Uday.

Talking to The Daily Star, Nazmul Alam, another farmer, said the solar-driven pumps helped them grow three varieties of crop -- Boro, Aman and Robi and the cost was comparatively low. To use the pumps, a farmer has to spend Tk 5,000 during the Boro season, Tk 1,400 and Tk 600 during the Aman and Robi seasons, he added.

Like in Jhenidah, thousands of other farmers across the country are getting benefits from such pumps, which are becoming popular day by day.

With the world leaning towards renewable energy, the use of solar energy has

also increased considerably in recent times in Bangladesh as the energy is environment friendly and comparatively cheap, say experts.

The use of solar energy in irrigation is gaining popularity owing to cost-effective financing and an innovative business model. It has opened up a new door in the agriculture sector as farmers can boost their farming yields through irrigation round the year, they said.

In addition to benefiting the farmers financially, the pumps contribute to reducing the gradually increasing pressure

SEE PAGE J2



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