



BANGLADESH FOOD SECURITY INVESTMENT FORUM 2010

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Address by
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Honourable Prime Minister
Respected Cabinet Colleagues
Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates from Development Partners
My colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen
As-salamu Alaikum and very good morning

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to be present here on the occasion of Bangladesh Food Security Investment Forum 2010. Let me convey my heartfelt thanks to the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management, Development Partners, USAID and IFPRI in particular for their endeavor to jointly organize this forum.

Distinguished delegates,

It is evident that we have achieved a very good progress in agriculture since our independence in 1971. Food production has tripled from 10 million metric tons to 30 million metric tons over the last 3 decades. This ensures our food security in terms of food availability. Now, we are confident that we will be able to feed the million mouths of the country under normal climatic situation without any assistance from outside. However, availability becomes a challenge to a greater extent during the years when we face natural calamities mainly caused by climate change. Besides availability issue, at this moment, there is an urgency to ensure other elements of food security, that is, access and nutrition. We have learned from our experience that without attaining self-sufficiency in food, donor dependent strategies for ensuring food security may lead to further insecurity and vulnerabilities.

Dear colleagues,

The country saw record food production and also some surplus in 1996-97 because of proper policy and effective measures that were adopted during that period. But, the trend did not sustain. Now, we have set a target to become self-sufficient again in food grain production by 2013. It is our vision to make nutritious food available to the people as well as ensuring their access. The government has been constantly pursuing the vision. However, climate change has appeared as an emerging threat to the attainment of the production targets and ensuring food security.

Distinguished participants,

Against the backdrop of even declining arable agricultural land by one percent per year we have progressed well in feeding a large population with agricultural production from a limited area. We have also taken initiative to ensure fair prices for the agricultural produces and access to food for a large number of poor people. We feel that diversification in agricultural cropping system will ensure the nutrition challenge for the people.

Respected Participants,

Considering the past experiences we feel that we have to produce our own food ourselves on our soil rather than waiting for assistance or imports from outside. Therefore, we have set out some priority areas for urgent action to make available the required inputs for production, proper marketing system for distribution and safety net programs for the poor with a limited income and ensuring diversification for nutrition security. In some areas we have expertise but we need financial assistances. On the other hand we expect technical assistances in some other areas where we can invest money on our own. There are also some areas where we need both.

You will be happy to note that in order to increase production as well as reduce cost we have emphasized extensive use of surface water. In order to keep the rivers and canals as the main sources of fresh and running water, we will have to continue dredging of the rivers which will also help in an expansion of irrigation coverage. We are planning to use solar energy to keep the irrigation pumps running. We will try to increase water use efficiency and shift to water efficient food crops both in terms of variety and value. We have planned to shift irrigation based rice farming to the south from the north and to use the north for high value crops. We have also emphasized on rainwater harvesting and ecosystem based crop zoning.

Distinguished Participants,

We have attached high priority to research and development of stress-tolerant varieties like salinity, cold, drought, flood, submergence and heat tolerant crop varieties. In addition to mechanization of agriculture we will take measures to minimize the damage to agriculture and rural economy caused by natural calamities due to climate change.

We are committed to supply quality agricultural inputs including seed and fertilizer to the farmers at affordable and low cost. Probably, you are aware of the introduction of 18.2 million Farmer's Cards and preparation of a database for the farmers. We expect that it will create an environment for better management of agriculture.

In order to keep the lifeline of the country functional we have planned for sustainable river management through capital dredging and bank protection of major rivers by way of constructing rubber dam and other measures. It is expected that if we can keep our rivers effective for irrigation we will be able to face the challenge of ground water depletion.

Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates from the Development Partners,

The present democratic government is committed to improve the livelihood and ensure food security of the people. We have undertaken a lot of activities to improve the present situation and invest a huge amount of money in attaining our vision 2021. I expect our Development Partners will come forward and extend assistance both in financial and technical terms in the areas of technology generation and dissemination, water resource management for better irrigation, adaptation and mitigation activities in agriculture to combat climate change effects, agricultural marketing systems

improvement and mechanization in agriculture including capacity building of scientists, extension workers and policy makers.

Dear Friends from Partner countries,

It is really a great occasion where we will be able to exchange our views and share our priorities. I expect you will understand the priority of the government and help us to ensure food security for the people in Bangladesh. We expect you will support our country driven ideas and priorities and keep your commitments by way of allocating from a minimum share of your GDPs to our development effort. We assure you of the best use of your assistance if we are allowed to implement our country driven programmes in a condition free environment.

Finally, I want to thank the organizers for giving me the chance to speak in this session. I hope this Forum will further strengthen the ties between Bangladesh and the Development Partners. I wish every success of the forum.

Thank you all.

Joy Bangla, Joy Bangabandhu.