



**Embassy of India
Yangon**

**Speech
by
Shri Hardeep Singh Puri,
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at
The 3rd Asia Pacific Water Summit –
Water Security for Sustainable Development
on
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Your Excellency, Hon'ble Vice President U Henry Van Thio,

Ministers, dignitaries, ladies and gentlemen,

I would, at the onset like to thank the Government of the Union of Myanmar for the excellent arrangement and the warmth of the hospitality in your beautiful country.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the organisers of the Asia-Pacific Forum and applaud your efforts over the past two Summits.

The inclusion of Goal 6 in the SDGs, and the adoption of 2018-2028 as the International Decade for Action "Water for Sustainable Development", is in large parts thanks to the dedication of a large global community of well-meaning and committed activists in civil-society and of governments towards the cause of water security.

Goal 6 talks of 2 distinct aspects to water: its 'availability' and its 'sustainable management'.

These two aspects in turn bring out the intertwined, reciprocal and symbiotic nature of water and sustainable development.

Whether in its scarcity - which leads to water stress, decreased food production, and drought; or in its excess - which leads to floods and devastation - water is integral to sustainable development.

The 'availability' of water and sanitation is therefore an indispensable requirement for ending poverty, hunger, and malnutrition; improving health and education outcomes; promoting sustainable growth of communities; and preserving socio-economic stability.

If water is central to sustainable development, the manner in which we develop it will impact its availability and usage. This brings into focus the dimension of effective water 'management'.

As millions rise from poverty and societies urbanize, the nature of water usage itself evolves.

As one of the fastest urbanizing economies in the world, it is apt perhaps that I am representing India in my capacity as the Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs.

After all, rapid urbanization places unique demands on water, and also heightens the sensitivity of communities to water related stress and vulnerability.

India's own water policy is predicated on the 3R concept – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. The objective is to reduce dependency of water intensive industrial units on water.

I would like to propose three interventions this morning, which I believe require urgent attention.

First, any progress on water and sanitation targets requires a multi-level, multistakeholder approach.

Union, Federal, and Local Governments, need to coordinate their efforts, and work with civil-society organisations and the private sector.

In India, we have taken the first steps towards this approach under Swachh Bharat, or Clean India, Mission, which was announced in October 2014.

The mission was launched by Prime Minister Modi, who has made it his personal goal to achieve a clean India by 2019, the 150th birth anniversary of the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi.

The Prime Minister has made a subject previously considered taboo, a key focus of his governance agenda, giving it the salience it deserves.

Indian civil-society has responded to the PM's call for action.

The Swachh Bharat Mission has two main objectives – one hundred percent open defecation free India; and one hundred percent solid waste management.

There is now a growing realization that to champion change, each individual will need to take responsibility of his/her immediate environment, and work together towards a Clean India.

The PM's leadership and the response from civil-society has been backed by India's private sector. Corporates and Businesses have adopted villages, investing significant sums in the construction and maintenance of toilets.

Together, in a short span of three years, we have:

- Ensured 77% rural households have access to safe drinking water
- Increased National Sanitation Coverage to over 72%
- Halved the number of people defecating in the open in rural areas
- 1784 out of 4041 cities have been declared ODF
- Over half the number of wards have 100% door-to-door solid waste collection.

My second intervention focuses on the need for water connectivity.

By connecting water surplus regions with those that are water deficient, both within the geographical confines of a nation, and across its borders, we can achieve water management through water availability.

In India, the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation, has established the Interlinking of Rivers (ILR) Programme with aim of reducing the impact of floods and droughts; reduce farmers' dependence on rainfall and groundwater; and generate thousands of megawatts of electricity.

The renewed attention to river systems is also addressing the restoration of living parts in the river ecosystem, and the need to maintain the minimum ecological flows for the entire river stretch.

Trans-boundary water sharing treaties are more complex. They involve not just economic and ecological concerns, but also strategic imperatives. In India, we have worked with our neighbours Bangladesh and Nepal to reach amicable agreements, in consonance with the needs of all countries.

Lastly, from a developing country perspective, water security will be dependent upon access to finance and technology.

The attempts by the developed world at the UNFCCC COP23, to renege on their developmental assistance commitments, is worrying.

Without access to these funds, we will be unable to provide clean water and basic sanitation to the 4.5 billion people in our region who need it the most.

Further, the existing Intellectual Property Reform restricts the ability of developing nations to access the latest technologies.

As result, we are unable to institutionalise the latest practices in water treatment; harvesting rainwater and recycling waste-water remains minimal; and practices such as excessive groundwater extraction are the norm rather than the exception.

Ladies and Gentleman,

Over the past two decades, the Asia-Pacific community has achieved remarkable economic growth, and our future prospects too look bright.

I am proud to say, under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, India is making long strides to ensure the economic prosperity not just of its own people, but of those across the developing world.

The SDGs mirror many of the Indian Government's flagship missions such as Smart Cities, Make in India, Digital India, and Skill India. The Indian model of development will set the template for the 21st century.

However, despite the successes, water security remains a cause of concern.

Half of the countries in our region are water insecure; and we continue to remain the most vulnerable to water related disasters.

It is therefore incumbent upon us to ensure the centrality of water to our developmental needs, and by extension to the global developmental discourse, does not get lost.

I would like to conclude my address by quoting the words of the father of my nation, Mahatma Gandhi:

"The earth, the air, the land and the water are not an inheritance from our forefathers but on loan from our children. So we have to hand over to them at least as it was handed over to us."

Thank you once again for inviting me

and I wish you luck for the rest of the Summit.