

## Experts against commodification of water supply

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Experts Monday stressed that South Asian countries must come out of the ages of disputes over the exploitation of water resource of shared rivers and move towards a mechanism of basin-wise management for a better future for the population in the region, reports UNB.

Addressing the launching of a report on water and human development, they also cautioned against the increase in unsustainable agricultural and industrial use of water as well as against the commodification of water supply in the region that is being considered a major threat to human security and development.

The report, titled 'Human Development in South Asia 2013: Water for Human Development', was prepared by Mahbub-ul Haque Centre, Pakistan, and the launching in Bangladesh was organised by Institute of Governance Studies (IGS) of BRAC University at BRAC Centre.

Referring to the report, BRAC University Vice-Chancellor and leading river expert of the country Prof Ainun Nishat said it has rightly put in the issue of trans-boundary river management as one of the major concerns for development activities in the region in the coming days.

The report analysed the impact of water availability on people's ability to survive in the region.

The overview of the report says: "South Asia is at a critical juncture with respect to its water resources. The management of shared river systems needs to evolve from a unilateral or bilateral perspective to a regional one, where optimal and sustainable use of water is ensured."

Ainun Nishat noted that India and Bangladesh should work out a basin-wise management of the water resources.

Besides, Nepal and Bhutan in South Asia and China must reach a consensus for a basin-wise management of the shared rivers, he added.

He also cautioned against the approach of maximisation of water use in agriculture and power generation.

Bangladesh-India-Bhutan have already started discussing basin-wise management of the shared rivers,

but the Energy Ministry in Bangladesh is pushing for it in the wrong way - to maximise the use for hydropower generation, he said.

Nishat said about 14-15 agencies are dealing with various aspects of water management in the country in one way or other, but with no apparent coordination among them.

The researches on water situation of the country are not properly being reflected at the policy level, while the policy recommendations are not also being implemented due to lack of institutional capacity, he observed.

He also slammed a recent hype in the media about a recent prediction from the government's side that the food grain production of the country can be doubled in near future.

"Only seed and fertilizer wouldn't work for increasing the production. It involves the availability of water," he said.

Nishat added that 92 per cent of the surface water available to Bangladesh comes across the borders and the agricultural use of the groundwater has already exhausted the reserve.

The third chapter of the report, titled 'Water for Economic Development', said, "More than the increased pressure on agriculture, the Green Revolution has patronised crop varieties and cropping pattern that induce inefficiency of water use."

"Modern agricultural practices have reduced the water retention potential of the soil and increased the demand for water. The shift from organic fertilizers, substitutions of water prudent crops to water thirsty crops and reliance on new varieties of seeds that are more water intensive are some examples of how modern agricultural practices have driven water inefficiency," it added.

The report also cautioned against the commodification of water, terming it a threat to equitable distribution of water.

"It makes market forces alone determine access to water, there'll be high inequity and people's needs will not be met if water prices are set too high, especially for the poor, who will not be able to afford it," said the report.

Former University Grants Commission (UGC) chairman Prof Nazrul Islam, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) trustee board member M Syeduzzaman and CPD distinguished fellow Debapriya Bhattacharya also addressed the launching ceremony.