

Speech by President Mohamed Nasheed

**The National Defence College of Bangladesh
Mirpour Cantonment
8 October 2020**

- 10 minutes -

The climate crisis is a grave national security threat — to the Maldives, to Bangladesh, and to the world.

Because the world is burning.

The largest ice shelf in the Arctic has collapsed.

A third of Bangladesh was recently under water.

There were so many hurricanes in the Atlantic this year they ran out of names in the alphabet.

But vulnerable countries, like Maldives and Bangladesh, are not prepared to become the first victims of climate change.

Instead, we must do everything in our power to keep our heads above water.

[pause]

We harbour no illusions about the dangers.

And we are acutely aware of our vulnerability.

Climate change is a national security issue.

It is an existential threat.

The recent IPCC report is crystal clear: emissions must be reduced by around 50% in 10 years to stabilize global warming at 1.5 degrees.

Climate change is already upon us.

But that doesn't mean we are going to give up.

We plan to survive in a warming world, any way we can.

[pause]

That doesn't mean, however, we will destroy what's left of nature.

In our quest for adaptation, we don't want to concrete over coral reefs or bulldoze the mangrove forests, which protect us from storm surges.

We need to work with nature, not against it.

To restore nature as far as we can.

That's why we need soft, but smart, adaptation strategies.

We will build seawalls that encourage coral reef growth.

We will grow mangroves to protect ourselves from stronger storms.

We will use the latest science and cultivation techniques to grow corals that can survive hotter and more acidic seas.

Because some warming is inevitable even if we commit to zero emissions today.

Coral reefs are literally the bedrock of my country, the Maldives...

... just as the mangroves are so important to Bangladesh.

In the Maldives, all the islands, reefs and lagoons are made from, and protected by, coral reefs.

The Maldives is a living ecosystem; we cannot allow it to die.

We must not allow these crucial eco-systems to go extinct.

We call on all nations — big and small, rich or poor — to join hands with us to find crisis strategies that can save as much of the reefs as possible.

We must work together to salvage what we can.

[pause]

Of course, we cannot adapt forever, as the world gets hotter and hotter and hotter.

We must cut emissions - and fast.

It's madness for us to allow global CO2 levels to go beyond 450ppm, and temperatures to shoot past 1.5 degrees.

That can still be prevented.

If we come together on the basis of the emergency facing us, we can do it.

Every country on Earth will have hell to pay if we don't.

The Maldives is not prepared to allow that to happen.

And I know Bangladesh is not prepared to let that happen, either.

Instead, we will play our part.

Bangladesh is the current president of the Climate Vulnerable Forum — a group of 48 countries that are especially vulnerable to climate change.

Maldives is also a member.

I am proud to have been recently appointed, by the Honourable Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, as an Ambassador of the Climate Vulnerable Forum.

I am delighted that the Bangladesh Government, and the Climate Vulnerable Forum, just yesterday launched a new campaign to reduce global emissions.

The campaign, called *Midnight Survival Deadline for the Climate*, is calling on all nations to act.

Act by improving their ambition, on how they transform their economies to clean energy.

And submit this ambition, under Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement, by midnight on 31 December this year.

I applaud Bangladesh and the CVF for launching this worthy campaign, which we should all fully support.

[pause]

Although South Asian countries did not caused the climate crisis, I believe we have a real opportunity to fix it.

If South Asian countries unite behind a vision of prosperity and low emissions, we can lead the world on climate change, and take advantage of

all the progress that new, clean technologies provide.

South Asian countries such as the Maldives, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka... we all rightly aim to achieve middle income status, or even greater prosperity, within the next couple of decades.

If this development is done in a high-carbon way it is game over for the climate.

There will be no ice left in the Arctic at all, and my country will disappear.

We have to figure out a way through this conundrum.

To do that I'm appealing to countries to work with me, and a team of world-class energy experts, to draw up what the Bangladesh government has called "Climate Prosperity Plans."

These plans will aim to deliver the economic growth and prosperity that our countries rightfully demand, to eliminate poverty entirely and allow today's Least Developed Countries to reach middle income status by 2035-40.

And they will achieve this with new, clean technologies that allow our emissions to fall to zero.

In summary, we don't want eco-austerity, we want eco-prosperity.

We in South Asia may be climate vulnerable — but we are not victims.

We are leaders.

As Ambition Ambassador for the Climate Vulnerable Forum, it is my job to take our high ambition plans - our "climate prosperity plans" - to form the nucleus of a high ambition coalition that also includes the biggest and most powerful nations.

This is a new paradigm for climate.

Instead of "I won't, because you won't", we have "I will, because you will".

Instead of the blame game, we have the aim game.

Let's aim for high ambition, zero carbon, get back to 1.5 degrees and save the climate.

Thank you.

ENDS