

Ex-adviser sees Bangladesh as 'agent for change' not climate victim

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Former caretaker government adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman has spoken strongly for Bangladesh being presented as an "agent for change" and an example of best practices in coping with disasters, rather than solely as a climate change 'victim'.

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Zillur, executive chairman of the non-government organisation Power and Participation Research Centre, also criticised the spread of what he termed 'migration panic' with focus on rising sea levels.

'EXAMPLE OF BEST PRACTICES'

Regarding the Copenhagen climate summit, Zillur said: "The image of Bangladesh will not be bright presenting it as a victim.

The people of Bangladesh should be presented not as victims but as "agents of change", he said.

"Bangladesh can in fact set an example of the best practices for survival in a hostile environment in initiating plans to weather this 'silent humanitarian disaster'," he said.

Briefing the media Saturday on his return from coastal regions, he presented a scenario of humanitarian disaster and struggle, but also in situ preparation, by the people to cope with changing climate.

He said about 43,000 Aila-hit victims are squatting on vulnerable embankments in Shyamnagar and Ashashuni upazilas of Satkhira, and Koyra and Dakop upazilas of Khulna.

Some 8 breach points are daily threatening the lives of more than 300,000 people living in the vicinity of these areas, said Zillur.

'MIGRATION PANIC BEING CREATED'

He asked the Bangladesh government, world leaders and the Copenhagen summit to show the path of survival for the people of endangered regions, instead of creating a panic about rising sea levels and displacement.

The government and scientists have been highlighting that 20 million people will be displaced by rising sea level along the coast of Bangladesh.

"Steps should be taken immediately by government and non-government agencies to support the struggles of these people to survive in their own regions," he said.

The former adviser said neither the government nor NGOs had taken proper initiatives to help climate victims in the long term.

"These people have been abandoned and left to turn into paupers after cyclone Aila this year and Sidr in 2007," Hossain Zillur said.

The ex-adviser said poverty reduction programmes should be made the focus of discussion for the southern regions alongside finding ways of dealing with impact of climate change.

"It is right that the threat to Bangladesh is being highlighted, but we must think of ways to make the affected people capable of sustaining livelihoods instead of seeing them as victims or scaring them with scenarios of migration," he said.

"We have to get over the idea of 'migration panic'. We have to find ways from our respective positions.

"Otherwise the rate of poverty will increase and all development plans will be futile."

'TRIPLE AGENDA'

The former adviser spoke of an "emerging triple agenda":

- comprehensive rehabilitation of embankment along entire coastal belt
- rebuilding and maintaining a green barrier, now threatened by deforestation
- an agricultural re-awakening in coastal Bangladesh, the last single-cropping agri area in the country

Source: bdnews24.com