

Speech Ambassador Hennekens, Embassy Kingdom of the Netherlands, seminar IHC Merwede, Dhaka, 13 January 2010

1- Honourable Chief Guest, Mr Abdur Razzaq (MP and Chairman of the standing committee on Water Resources), Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr Derks, (Area Manager IHC)

Thank you for providing this opportunity to address you. IHC Merwede is a leading company in the dredging sector and IHC Merwede can assist you to improve inland water transport and river management by providing state of the art dredging technology.

The seminar illustrates that Bangladesh offers business opportunities. The Dutch dredger builders do good business here. The seminar also shows that Dutch dredging expertise is well-known in Bangladesh. You have (massively) decided to take time to listen what IHC Merwede has to say. Moreover, Bangladeshi entrepreneurs take keen interest to get connected to Dutch companies in the dredging sector. The embassy receives many requests for this, as do the Dutch companies in the sector. In other words, the Dutch reputation in dredging is renowned.

2- Bangladesh is at the heart of one of the largest deltas of the world. The delta has been created by the deposition of billions of tons of sediment carried by the three major rivers: the Padma, the Jamuna, and the Meghna. Each year, the major rivers of Bangladesh carry over one billion tons of sediment. This sediment load is increasing. Trees on the slopes of the Himalaya disappear, erosion increases, which in turn creates more sedimentation in the rivers. Also, huge variation of the river flow occurs as a result of the monsoon.

Sedimentation of the riverbeds and coastal areas of Bangladesh is huge. In certain coastal areas new land emerges at the speed of one kilometre a year. However, sedimentation also blocks water transport and rivers are forced to search for space to expand elsewhere. Thousands of hectares of fertile land are swallowed by the rivers, making 20 to 30 thousand people homeless annually.

The government of Bangladesh has given priority to the water sector and aims to improve the flow and navigation of the river systems. Dredging will be a key instrument to achieve this. The honourable Prime Minister compares the river system of Bangladesh with the arteries of a human body. There is no life without water. Water management is therefore essential to safeguard livelihoods and enable economic development.

3- Issues of water management connect our two countries. The Netherlands also lies at the heart of an important delta. Moreover, around 35% of the Netherlands lies below sea level so the very existence of our country depends on 24-hour water management. For reasons of survival, the Netherlands has built expertise in land reclamation, river restoration, and river stabilisation.

Dredging has always been an essential part of our water management. Currently we are undertaking a huge land expansion project in the North Sea making extensive use of dredging. The land will be used for further expansion of the Port of Rotterdam, so it can remain the biggest port of Europe.

The Dutch built their expertise in dredging over a period of decades. Dredging became an important export product and Dutch entrepreneurs share their knowledge and expertise with the rest of the world. The Palm Island of Dubai is a well-known example of Dutch dredging expertise. Not surprisingly two of the 'Big Four' dredging companies, are Dutch.

The Dutch dredging expertise has been facilitated by a state of the art backward linking industry. Technical universities, Research and Developments institutes, and different companies, continue to play a key role in building our knowledge on dredging.

IHC Merwede, the world leading dredger builder, and a technology innovator, is an important frontrunner in this sector.

4 - Over the years we have also learned that dredging should not be practised in isolation. Dredging is an expensive business and costs should be carefully mirrored against projected benefits. This requires

coherent government policy addressing all areas affected by water management. Our practice to conduct extensive feasibility studies is well illustrated in the case of the expansion of the Port of Rotterdam. A full meter of reports was required to determine the feasibility of this project.

We have also learned that dredging is not the only option on water management. We have learned to use nature's forces. Allow me to explain: as I have mentioned rivers contain sediment - sand -, basically. This sand is carried out to sea where it compiles itself in coastal areas to form new land. This process can be stimulated by the construction of cross dams which accelerates the land reclamation process.

In the Netherlands we manipulate the sea in such a way that the currents carry the sand from our major rivers and deposit the sand along our coastline. This way the sea currents strengthen our coastal defence. In a similar way, the currents of a river can be manipulated to carve a deeper river bed. The river then excavates its own river bed, which limits the need for dredging.

We call this concept 'building with nature' and the concept provides an economic viable and sustainable solution for water management.

5- Ladies and gentlemen, the Netherlands has been supporting Bangladesh since early independence. Water management has always had special emphasis in our bilateral cooperation. We support Bangladesh to strengthen its institutions - and stimulate capacity building - to facilitate the formulation of a coherent water management policy. We provide technical and financial assistance for coastal zone water management, which includes land reclamation. We support Bangladesh in its river management, including prevention of flooding and embankment erosion. An important part of our future support will be to assist the water sector in Bangladesh to develop a climate change adaption programme.

The base of this cooperation has always been the similar water management issues our governments are facing. I sincerely hope that we will be able to continue our cooperation in terms of 'government to government', 'business to business', and 'public private' partnerships.

I wish you a successful seminar.