

Khulna's Water Could Become as Saline as Sea in 50 Years: Ainun Nishat

Water and climate expert Ainun Nishat has warned that within the next 50 years, Khulna's water could become as saline as seawater, leading to major environmental changes in the Sundarbans and the surrounding coastal regions. The shift could alter local biodiversity, increase salt-tolerant pests, and reduce traditional crop production by half.

Speaking on the second day of the 3rd Coastal Water Convention 2026 at CSS Ava Centre in Khulna, Nishat highlighted the urgent need for community-based water management, climate justice, and evidence-based policy interventions. He stressed that embankments must be repaired promptly and water sources protected to safeguard coastal communities.

Using a recent hurricane in Florida as an example, Nishat cautioned that a similar storm surge in Bangladesh could send floodwaters as far as Faridpur. He also noted that while urban water services are provided by WASA and DPH, there is no dedicated authority to ensure safe drinking water for marginalised populations in peri-urban and rural areas. Effective transboundary water management with neighbouring countries is also crucial.

The three-day convention included 14 thematic sessions attended by students, researchers, development workers, engineers, policymakers, and journalists. Discussions focused on solutions to coastal water salinity, including desalination, rainwater harvesting, safe water technologies, water quality and pollution risks, GIS and digital modelling for flood and cyclone management, river basin governance, SDG 6 budget tracking, and gendered impacts of water scarcity.

Other issues highlighted were community-led freshwater governance, climate-resilient WASH services, solid waste management, and water-dependent humanitarian security for coastal and maritime fishing communities.

The opening plenary was chaired by Khairul Islam, Regional Director for South Asia at WaterAid, who emphasised linking research, community experience, and governance reforms to ensure water security in the face of climate change.

National and international development organizations participated in the convention. Key speakers included Prof. Kazi Mariful Islam of Dhaka University, Prof. Anwarul Qadir of Sundarbans Academy, Mohammad Zobair Hasan of DORP, and Abul Kalam Azad of ActionAid Bangladesh.