

Council on Foreign Relations-CFR

Statement

by

H. E. Sheikh Hasina

Prime Minister

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

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Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

President of CFR, Mr. Richard N. Haas,
Distinguished Members of CFR,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Assalamu Alaikum and Good Afternoon.

It is a pleasure for me to be at **Council of Foreign Relations-CFR** and to meet its distinguished members once again. It has been almost 19 years when I was at CFR last. Since then, remarkable changes have taken place in many spheres in my country, Bangladesh. It is now recognized worldwide as a role model of socio-economic development, and a responsible humanitarian state. These achievements are due to our people's drive to realize the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's dream of Sonar Bangla or "Golden Bengal", a nation of prosperity and social justice for all. Thus, Secularism and religious freedom, and democracy and fundamental human rights are our principle guiding force as enshrined in our constitution. Bangladesh takes particular pride in religious freedom and communal harmony.

Bangladesh is also proud of its socio-economic development. It achieved the MDGs well ahead of the deadline, and is on way to attain the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Our target is to ensure that the development benefits reach all corners of the country. Our new slogan: "My village, my Town", aims to improve the quality of life of the villagers with fast economic growth and pragmatic public policies. This strategy and efforts have ensured Bangladesh to attain all the required criteria of becoming a developing country by 2024. The IMF Report 2019 recognizes Bangladesh as the 2nd largest economy in South Asia, and in PPP terms the 30th largest economy in the world. Asian Development Bank in its latest report mentions that Bangladesh is the fastest growing economy among the Asia-Pacific countries

This year, Bangladesh's GDP growth rate has hit a record high 8.13%, after registering 7.86% last year. It is not very far from achieving double digit growth. Our per capita income has reached US\$ 1909 which is close to the middle-income threshold. Bangladesh has attained food and energy security. According to the Spectator Index, Bangladesh achieved the highest GDP growth in the world during the last ten years.

Today Bangladesh is the 3rd largest producer of vegetables; 4th largest producer of rice; 5th largest producer of inland fisheries; and 2nd largest RMG exporter in the world. Sound macroeconomic fundamentals, political stability, pragmatic fiscal policy and export-led vibrant private sector, and more importantly, the determination and perseverance of our common people, guided by our policy governance, have been the main contributing factors of this economic miracle.

We have been working to turn the country into a "Digital Bangladesh since 2009, for expanding the ICT network across the country. The aim was to reduce the digital divide, enhance access to information, accelerate development and create new employment opportunities. The ICT coverage in Bangladesh is close to 100%. Bangladesh is now the 5th largest internet user in Asia. And, out of its 165 million people, more than 150 million are mobile subscribers, and 90 million internet users.

An important cornerstone of our policy has been women empowerment. We believe that equal participation of women and men is vital for optimum national development and progress. Women in Bangladesh are holding high positions all spheres of life including politics, government, parliament, local bodies, business, military, police and security agencies, as well as in UN Peacekeeping.

According to the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report 2018, Bangladesh is ranked first in South Asia and second in Asia on overall women empowerment. It is fifth in the world on political empowerment of women.

In global affairs, Bangladesh has consistently contributed in all ways possible to international peace and security. This emanated from Bangladesh's policy of "Friendship to all, Malice to none" as laid out by the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. This policy of goodwill has helped Bangladesh maintain good relationship with all countries of the world. It has also helped Bangladesh in peacefully resolving its land and maritime boundary issues with its two neighbours – India and Myanmar. Bangladesh has been always committed to supporting United Nations Peacekeeping missions. For decades, Bangladesh has remained one of UN's three top troop contributors. So far, Bangladesh has served in 54 UN Peacekeeping missions contributing 122,000 troops of which 119 gave their lives for the cause of peace.

Among the challenges, Bangladesh faces in its developmental journey is climate change. The frequency and intensity of cyclones, floods and droughts have increased over the years. It is estimated that if global temperature increases by 1° Centigrade by 2050, sea level would rise by one-meter submerging one-third of Bangladesh. My government has, therefore, adopted the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan in 2009. Under this plan, Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund was set up with own resources. Since then nearly 450 million US dollars have been spent on several hundred projects, mostly on adaptation and a few on mitigation.

The other significant challenge to our economic progress and humanity is terrorism and violent extremism against which we have taken a “Zero Tolerance” policy. We believe that terrorists do not belong to any religion or boundaries. I would like to propose the following steps in order to fight against terrorism and violent extremism:

First, Must stop the source of supply of arms to the terrorists.

Second, Must stop flow of financing to the terrorists and their outfits.

Third, Must remove the divisions within societies

Fourth, Must pursue the principle of peaceful settlement of international disputes through dialogue for a win-win situation.

Accordingly, we have equipped our law enforcement agencies and taken steps to socially isolate them. We have also taken digital measures to stem the spread of lies and hate narratives. In countering terrorism, we have excellent cooperation with both regional and global partners. As a result, since the Holy Artisan attack on 01 July 2016, there has been no major incident. Our people remain increasingly vigilant as we are committed to ensuring the safety of our people and supporting security situation beyond our borders.

The Rohingya crisis is a formidable challenge for us. Through a planned atrocity, the government of Myanmar cleansed its Northern Rakhine State of the Rohingya minority. They fled violence and atrocities and we opened our border to shelter them on humanitarian ground. This humane decision came from our own experience in 1971 during the war of independence when 10 million of our people took refuge in neighbouring India. I, myself, also became a refugee when my father and the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman along with 18 members of my family were brutally killed on

August 15, 1975. My younger sister, Rehana and I survived as we were abroad at that time. We were barred to return to Bangladesh for nearly six years by the then military dictator Ziaur Rahman and had to live as refugees in India.

We are providing humanitarian support to the best of our ability to the Rohingyas. We want a peaceful and immediate resolution of the crisis. Myanmar has created the crisis and the solution lies in Myanmar. The international community, particularly the EU, China and USA, have been extremely helpful to Bangladesh in dealing with the crisis. The world must take all measures to compel Myanmar to create conditions enabling the Rohingyas' safe, dignified and voluntary repatriation to their ancestral homes. We also urge you all to visit the Rohingya camps at Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. We believe, while in those camps, you will be shaken by their horrifying stories of atrocities at the hands of the Myanmar security forces and local vigilantes. I believe seeing their plight would wring your heart and you would want to see the end of their painful predicament the soonest.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish to conclude here and have a meaningful conversation with you all.