

The 65th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

Address

by

Her Excellency

Sheikh Hasina

Hon'ble Prime Minister

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

The United Nations

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Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Mr. President,

I warmly congratulate you on your well deserved election as the President of the 65th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. I believe your wise and experienced leadership will bring great success to the Assembly proceedings. I also congratulate Dr. Ali Abdussalam Treki for his laudable contribution to the 64th UNGA as its President. I also thank Secretary General Ban Ki Moon for his tireless service to the United Nations and for world peace.

Mr. President,

Bangladesh is a secular, progressive nation fulfilling the promise of democracy, good governance, human rights, and the rule of law made by my father, the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the greatest Bengali of all times, from this podium thirty six years ago. This has also been in consonance with the objectives of the United Nations, which has been serving as the last abode towards fulfilling the hopes and aspirations of the hapless people of the world. Bangladesh has also been extending support to the United Nations' efforts in establishing democracy, human rights, peace and security also by taking effective steps in combating terrorism and external threats worldwide. I, too, am committed to ensure this continuity.

Bangladesh has established an International Crimes Tribunal to try persons responsible for war crimes and crime against humanity, including genocide, arson and rape committed during our war of liberation in 1971, and immediately thereafter. This action is in accord with the rule of law as reflected in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), which we have ratified and which aims at bringing perpetrators of war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity, to justice. I believe that only justice can heal the unforgivable, deadly wrongs of the past.

Here, I sadly recall the evil act of terror on 15 August 1975 that took the life of my father and the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and eighteen members of my family, including my mother, sister-in-laws, my three brothers, one of whom was only 10 years old. Even I had been a target of a series of assassination attempts ever since my return home from exile in 1981. The most horrendous period was when our secular, democratic party, the Awami League, was in opposition from 2001 to 2006. At that time, thousands of our party workers, supporters, and followers of the religious minority who voted for our secular party were mercilessly killed by systematic terrorist acts of the BNP-Jamaat-e-Islami Alliance government. The most audacious one was the open dastardly grenade attack on 21 August 2010 directed against me at a public rally. It was being held to protest against those terrorist attacks and killings, and by the time a dozen grenades had taken their toll, 24 innocent people, including our party's Secretary for Women's Affairs, Mrs. Ivy Rahman, the wife of our current President of the Republic, lay dead, with over 500 seriously injured.

Besides, there have also been attempts on members of my family but never have we bowed before the forces of terror. Being victims of repeated terrorist acts, my family and myself know this menace well. Clearly our rejection of terrorism is total as is our determination to eliminate it in all its forms. I want to unequivocally state that terrorism will not be allowed in the soil of Bangladesh. Precisely why we are a party to all terrorism-related UN Conventions, and accord them our full support.

Our firm policy against terrorism and love for peace had led me to negotiate the 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord, ending decades of internal conflict; and negotiate peaceful resolution of the violent uprising of our para-military border forces in 2009. In international sphere, our commitment to peace, essential for development, is reflected in our unflinching support of UN peacekeeping missions. Since 1988, Bangladesh has sent 97,000 troops to 24 countries on 32 such missions. In the period, we have lost the precious lives of 92 valiant soldiers. Our present troop contribution has made Bangladesh number one among UN peacekeeping troop contributing countries. Sadly, despite these involvements, our

presence in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations remains negligible, as is also our voice in planning strategies of peacekeeping missions. Therefore, in all fairness, this calls for our proportionate representation in the DPKO.

Mr. President,

Bangladesh has been adversely affected by global warming. Food security, displacement of people, depleting biodiversity, among others, is faced with serious threats due to climate change and global warming. Though our share of carbon gas emissions is negligible, we are its worst victim. Increasing frequency and ferocity of floods, cyclones, droughts, and other natural disasters, caused by this phenomenon, are creating havoc in the lives lost and the resources destroyed. Consequently, attaining the Millennium Development Goals is becoming a more difficult challenge. Climate migrants are already crowding our cities, putting a great stress on our limited infrastructural facilities, and causing social disorders. The situation would become catastrophic with a one meter rise of sea level due to global warming. This would inundate a quarter of Bangladesh, directly impacting 11 percent of our population, and leading to mass migration.

To meet these challenges, we have adopted a 134-point adaptation and mitigation action plan. They include dredging of major rivers to restrict flooding, recovering cultivable lands for settling displaced people, and increasing capacity for producing more food grains. Other plans include afforesting 20% land area by 2015, thus creating a huge carbon sink; protecting biodiversity, strengthening coasts and river banks with green belts; modernizing disaster management with community participation; developing crop varieties attuned to climate change, changing agricultural practices; using clean coal technology; and adopting nuclear power and renewable energy. Meanwhile, over 14,000 shelters for cyclone victims have been strategically constructed to cope with cyclonic disasters.

Materializing the action plans needs enormous funds. An immediate measure has been the establishment of a Climate Change Trust Fund with our own resources, and a Climate Change Resilience Fund with assistance from development partners. At international level, in COP 15 last year, we worked hard

for a legally binding agreement, and an international “Climate Fund” for assisting countries most vulnerable to climate change. The compromise was the Copenhagen Accord which has so far failed to deliver its promises. Therefore, I urge the world leaders that at COP 16 this year, in their wisdom, conclude a positive agreement, based on the Bali Plan of Action, with agreed cuts on green house gas emissions, and real contribution to the international “Climate Fund”. I also urge them to adopt at COP 16 measures to ameliorate the adverse impacts of climate change faced by the most vulnerable countries, like Bangladesh; small island countries like the Maldives; and landlocked countries like Bhutan and Nepal; among other LDCs.

Mr. President,

The world is yet to recover from the world economic crisis. LDCs as well as developed countries are suffering from reduced exports. The crises are due to inequity and injustice resulting from an unfair international structure, which still remains mostly unchanged. The Bretton Woods Institutions (BHI) must now accommodate stronger presence of developing countries, especially LDCs. While the BHI can cater to long term development assistances, Bangladesh proposes establishment of a special fund under the United Nations to deal exclusively with SDRs and Grants. We also propose that all stakeholders respect country-led ownership of all development projects as enshrined in the Accra Agenda for Action.

The LDCs surely welcomes the development assistance they receive from the developed world. They would, however, be benefited more through receiving liberal trade concessions such as duty and quota free market access, trade capacity building, etc. LDCs also seek speedy end of the Doha Round of WTO trade negotiations, and fulfillment of OECD countries’ ODA commitment to developing countries of 0.7% of GNI, with 0.2% to LDCs as reaffirmed in the Brussels Program of Action. The LDCs have also been affected by unemployment at home, and by obstacles to migration for jobs abroad. Since remittances form a significant part of their GDP, economic recovery measures should assure employment opportunities and all rights of migrant workers, especially those from LDCs.

However, amidst the travails of the past years, Bangladesh has fared reasonably well in maintaining an annual GDP growth rate of 6%. This was possible for our pragmatic policies on food production, agriculture, rural development, inflation control, and keeping food and essentials prices within reach of the poor. Our policies on food security, during our previous government (1996 to 2001), had then made Bangladesh self sufficient in food, leading to our winning the FAO's "Ceres Award". This time around with the implementation of the National Food Policy, aimed at stable prices of fuel, fertilizer, seeds and other farm inputs, our government has succeeded again in ensuring sustained food supply to all.

Our government's aim is also to use ICT to accelerate our socio-economic development. Therefore, we are implementing ICT Act 2009 and ICT Policy 2009 to build the requisite infrastructure, and reach ICT to every nook and corner of Bangladesh. Already educational, local government institutions and rural communities are being connected to internet services. The process includes an "e-Center for Rural Community" connecting 8,500 post offices; a "High-Tech Park"; a network of e-governance; strengthening of telecommunication network; and satellite communication. Our e-services is now focused in improving agricultural information delivery, market access, education, healthcare, disaster early warning, law and order, and social safety net payments. Also, being implemented is an aggressive e-leadership program among Members of Parliament, top policy makers, field administrators and local administrators. We have already transformed 100 Union Parishads to host e-Centers in 2009, and expedited to process to cover all 4,500 Union Parishads by this year. In short, our government is determined to achieve a "Digital Bangladesh", and transform it into a middle income country by 2021, the 'Golden Jubilee Year' of our nation's independence.

Simultaneously, our government's drive is to attain 100% primary school enrollment by 2011, and 100% literacy rate by 2014. Our highest budget allocation is on education. Tuition, books are now free for school students of up to Grade 12. Computer and internet facility are being provided free of cost to schools for familiarizing students with their use. To encourage school attendance, we have

started providing lunch to students, and cash incentives to parents. Though Bangladesh has achieved the MDG target of gender equality at secondary level, our plan is to provide free tuition to girls up to undergraduate level. It is because I firmly believe women's equal involvement is vital for a nation's development. Gender equity and human development are our top priority concerns.

Our government has revived the "National Women Development Policy" adopted during our last tenure of office (1996-2001). At present, beside the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, the Deputy Leader, and a Whip, there are 5 women cabinet ministers and 45 MPs against reserved seats. Moreover, 19 women MPs have been directly elected. Women also occupy 30% reserved seats in all local governments. They are encouraged to participate in politics and administration, and are recruited in all professions, including the armed services. They are also serving in the United Nations peacekeeping operations.

We have also made arrangements to provide pension to distressed and widowed women, as well as residential accommodation for both genders in Old Peoples Homes. Our social safety nets also include programs for minorities, the marginalized, disabled, and mentally challenged. Ashrayan or homes for the homeless; "One Home, One Farm" policy to alleviate poverty; cash and food transfer programs etc are the other programs.

A new policy provides for employment of one member from every poor family. Another new initiative is the National Services Policy for providing youth and female with employment and skill development. Moreover, research opportunities have led to new discoveries, particularly over climate change resilient crops. A recent success is genome sequencing of jute fibre assuring improved quality of jute products, a biodegradable option to hazardous synthetic products.

Health is another area receiving special attention with the implementation of the National Health Policy adopted during our previous term. This policy provides for establishment of one community clinic for every 6,000 people. Our plan is to locate 18,000 such clinics, in the first phase, to reach basic health services to people's homes. For safe motherhood, a National Strategy for Maternal Health has

also been adopted, with program to reduce infant mortality rate to 15 from 54 per thousand live births. Our target is also to complete 100 per cent immunization by the end of our present tenure of government. Since my government assumed office, maternal mortality rate has been reduced from 2.9 to 2.6, and infant mortality to such a significant extent that our successes have been recognized with an award by the United Nations.

Indeed, despite the world food, energy, economic and climate change crises of the past years, Bangladesh, with the support of the UN agencies, bilateral and multilateral partners, has made satisfactory progress. In fact, our achievement on MDG-1 on poverty alleviation, MDG-2 on universal primary education, MDG-3 on gender equality and women empowerment are encouraging and on track. In fact, our government with all its sincere efforts intends to raise 12 million people out of poverty, which would be halve of the number now living in that sad state, by the MDG time frame of 2015.

Mr. President,

Our unflinching commitment to peace finds expression in our annual flagship resolution “Culture of Peace” in UNGA sessions. Recent years have shown an extraordinary record of co-sponsorships because of the reference to the International Mother Language Day. Ever since this “Day” was adopted by UNESCO, in recognition of language martyrs who gave their lives in 1952 for their mother tongue “Bangla,” it is celebrated worldwide with growing fervor every year. Since “Bangla” is spoken by nearly 300 million people worldwide, has a rich heritage in literature, history and in other fields, our parliament adopted a resolution requesting the UN to declare “Bangla” as one of its official languages. I fervently appeal to you all for acceptance of our very legitimate request.

Mr. President,

Every passing day the peoples of the world are being drawn closer as one village with the fast developing technologies, and new challenges like climate change, terrorism, and economic interdependence. Indeed, our destiny is now one,

as is our burdens and responsibilities. It is now obvious that only by mobilizing, and optimizing our synergies, it is possible for us to create a world of shared peace and prosperity. We have no alternative but to discard our self centered, shortsighted interests, and work in unison for a world, which our children, and theirs, would inherit, and remember us with fondness and in gratitude.

I thank you, Mr. President.

Khoda Hafez.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever
Long live the United Nations.

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