

# **The 7th Phase of Honouring Friends of Bangladesh Liberation War**

Address by

**HE Sheikh Hasina**

Prime Minister

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh  
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Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Hon'ble President,  
Distinguished Honourees,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Assalamu Alaikum and a very Good Afternoon to you all.

This is yet another auspicious yet humbling occasion for Bangladesh and its people, as we have gathered here today to pay homage to a group of distinguished foreign friends who stood by us during our war of liberation.

At the outset, I recall with deep gratitude the greatest Bangalee of all time, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. My tributes go to the martyrs of the liberation war and sympathies to the women who lost their innocence, and also to the members of the martyrs' families.

Our liberation war is the finest moment in the annals of our nationhood, when the peace-loving and unarmed Bangalees, through indomitable spirit and courage, fought and achieved freedom from oppressive rule, responding to the clarion call by the Father of the Nation.

Throughout his life, Bangabandhu served to shape the history and aspirations of his people. He rejuvenated them with the unbending spirit of Bangalee nationalism, charged them with unprecedented courage, valor and resilience, and finally inspired them to fight for their just cause.

Distinguished Guests,

As you know, our land - a tapestry of lush green endowed with nature's bounty - had been the target of oppression from time immemorial. Waves of atrocious assaults on our people for plundering the riches of Bengal had been there for thousands of years.

Peace of the plain-living and high-thinking people of this land was disrupted many a time. But the Bangalees never went into subjugation quietly; rather came up with resistance each time.

The greatest occasion for such valorous response arose when the Pakistani occupation forces launched a coordinated attack on the people of Bangladesh on the night of 25<sup>th</sup> March 1971 to quell their rightful demand for inclusive democracy and equitable development.

The mass killing that followed is considered as one of the most concentrated acts of genocide in human history. At that crucial juncture, we drew strength from our high moral standing to triumph over insurmountable adversities.

Then, you, the foreign friends of the people of Bangladesh, stood by us and organized the moral and material support of the world behind our just cause.

Your support reconfirmed that our cause was right and our struggle could not be trampled. You, the foreign freedom fighters for the cause of Bangladesh, rose in protest against the atrocities and pressed for urgent remedial action.

While the valiant Bangalee soldiers and freedom fighters fought the war in the battlefield, the journalists, litterateurs, film-makers, cultural activists, international civil servants and diplomats, among our foreign friends, lent their unflinching support from their respective areas.

You extended all possible help that included food, humanitarian relief, medical facilities, military training, access to global media, generation of public opinion and mobilisation of financial assistance.

You simply listened to your heart, understood our plight and shared our aspirations. Sometimes you faced great challenges and daunting problems; but your spirit could not be dampened.

The selfless act of supporting the just cause of a nation under attack rekindled your spirit in the face of recurrent challenges and threats.

The people of Bangladesh today join me in recollecting the immeasurable contribution of our innumerable foreign heroes. From that point of view, it would be wise to consider that honour conferred on one as honour conferred on all.

By honouring you, we are actually reaffirming our faith in the principles that we stood for - equity, democracy, social justice, rule of law and an enabling environment - for all citizens.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to mention here that Bangladesh has been able to initiate a process to bring an end to the culture of impunity the perpetrators imposed upon the nation and moved from denial of justice to the process of ensuring justice through fair trial of the people responsible.

The process is thoroughly independent. We are confident that the process would help us to close an unpleasant chapter in our history and allow us to proceed with greater clarity on our respective roles and responsibility.

It is a daunting task to bring the perpetrators to book after more than four decades of the crimes they committed against humanity. But we are determined and we need your support to finish the task.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bangladesh has made her mark within the domestic framework in the realms of socio-economic developments. Today, Bangladesh is a success story and role model for the developing world in areas such as poverty alleviation, universal education, women empowerment, improvement of child and maternal health care, and in maintaining commendable economic growth and macro-economic stability.

We achieved an average 6.4 percent GDP for the last four and a half years and stand at the 5<sup>th</sup> position in terms of achieving long-term growth braving the global recession. Bangladesh is now a role model in terms of social and human resource development and considered as one of the star performers in alleviating poverty. Some 5 crore poor people have been elevated to the middle class.

The social safety-net programmes, women education and universal education system of Bangladesh have globally been acclaimed. We are progressing fast in using technology, building modern infrastructure, developing trade and commerce and expanding foreign trade. Bangladesh is almost at the threshold of achieving self-sufficiency in food production.

My government has been relentless in its efforts to utilize the potential and talent of the people to turn Bangabandhu's dream of "Sonar Bangla" (Golden Bengal) into reality. We continue to uphold the fundamental principles behind our war of liberation and draw inspiration from there to usher Bangladesh in an era of unprecedented growth and prosperity.

We seek your good wishes in our journey to transform Bangladesh into a middle income country by the year 2021, the Golden Jubilee year of Bangladesh's Independence.

We lost many of our foreign friends for ever. I pay my deepest homage to them. Many of you came here braving physical inability and enduring hardship. Please accept my personal greetings.

I wish good health, happiness and wellbeing of all of you and your family members.

With these few thoughts, I once again take the opportunity to pay my homage and sincerest gratitude to the freedom fighters at home and abroad. I thank you all.

Khoda Hafez.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu  
May Bangladesh Live Forever.