

63rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC)
Inaugural Ceremony

Address by

H.E. Sheikh Hasina
Hon'ble Prime Minister

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

South Plaza, Parliament Building, Sunday, 21 Kartik 1424, 5 November 2017

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Hon'ble Chair of the inaugural ceremony,
Hon'ble Speakers of CPA Member Parliaments,
Hon'ble Members of Parliament,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Excellency's,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Assalamu Alaikum and a very Good Morning to you all.

I am deeply honoured to be here to inaugurate the 63rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) in this historic city of Dhaka. I would like to welcome the distinguished guests on behalf of the people of Bangladesh, the government and myself. Conference of this kind would I am confident, give us a clearer insight into democratic values and practices.

We Parliamentarians being the people's representatives have the first and foremost obligations to preserve and maintain the faith of the people in democracy and Parliamentary Institutions.

Due to the pragmatic and far-reaching thinking of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, decision to join the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's (CPA) membership was taken in 1973. Our Hon'ble Speaker Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, MP made Bangladesh proud when she became the first women to be elected as the Chairperson of CPA in 2014. This is a testimony by the Hon'ble Members of the Parliament across the Commonwealth towards our commitment to democratic practices and values.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The cherished desire of the people of this land to establish a sovereign and an independent democratic country has been materialized through huge sacrifices. Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had led the struggle from the forefront. As a consequence, he had to endure confinement in jail for half of the Pakistan's 24 years' regime.

The Pakistani military junta conceded to arrange general elections in 1970 after a long and unbridled struggle waged headed by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Bangladesh Awami League earned an absolute majority in the elections. But the then rulers had tried to impose an undemocratic rule through exercising power instead of handing over power to the elected representatives.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in his historic speech of the 7th March aroused the Bangalee nation to get freedom and he called for a noncooperation movement. As the Pakistani military force started genocide through 'Operation Search Light' on the night of the 25th March in 1971, Bangabandhu declared the independence in the first hour of the 26th March. We earned an independent Bangladesh sacrificing 3 million lives and innocence of 2 hundred thousand women in the 9-month bloody war with Pakistani forces.

When Bangabandhu was engaged in reconstruction and rehabilitation of the war-ravaged country, the reactionary defeated forces assassinated Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman along with most of his family members on the 15th August 1975. I and my younger sister survived as we were abroad on that fateful night. We had been barred to return home. With the killing of Bangabandhu, the democracy was assailed and the era of military dictatorship started.

While in exile, I engaged myself in the struggle for restoration of democracy. Ending six years in exile, I returned home in 1981. I had to endure huge sufferings while struggling for establishing people's rule. Repeated attempts were made on my life along with house-arrest and internment.

We didn't restrain ourselves from the struggle for the restoration of democracy despite thousands of workers and leaders became victims of massive repression. We think that only a democratic polity can ensure uplift of people's living standard through fulfilling their basic needs.

After long 21 years, my party Awami League returned to state power in 1996 and we engaged ourselves to fulfill the basic needs of people not as a ruler but as a public servant. After an interval of 8 years, my party again came to the state power in 2009.

Our main aim is to build a hunger and poverty free Bangladesh through strengthening the foundation of democratic rule in the country. Aiming to fulfill the goal, we framed Vision 2021 and now are implementing the same devising specific plans.

Excellencies,

Friendship to all, malice to none- is our policy in maintaining relations with foreign countries. Especially, we are eager to maintain good relations with our neighbors. We have resolved long-standing problems of Ganges Water Sharing and Land boundary with India through signing treaties. Similarly, maritime boundary problem with India and Myanmar was also resolved amicably.

But the inhuman persecution meted out on the Rohingya population in the Rakhaine state of Myanmar and their forceful expulsion from their homeland have created instability in the region and beyond. Over 6.22 hundred thousand Myanmar nationals fled to Bangladesh to escape persecution. After 1978, another 5 hundred thousand Rohingyas came to Bangladesh at different times.

We have given temporary shelter to this huge number of people on humanitarian ground. I would like to request you all to discuss the Rohingya issue with utmost importance and exert pressure on the Myanmar government to stop persecution on its citizens and take them back at the earliest.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A new campaign of facing militancy and terrorism has been added to our efforts to eradicate hunger and poverty. Thoughtless acts of a section of people are claiming innocent lives. Militancy is not a problem of a particular country, rather it became a global phenomenon. A few days back, 8 precious lives were claimed on a New York road. We have to be united to get rid of this menace.

We are the worst victim of the climate change. This year we experienced excessive precipitation and recurrence of flooding that washed away our vast localities and damaged standing crops. We expect immediate implementation of the promises made at different times to offset the adverse impacts of climate change.

In Bangladesh, we have been striving hard to build a poverty and hunger-free democratic society. We have strengthened various democratic institutions, including national parliament and local government bodies. Elected representatives have been heading the local bodies from Union Council to Upazilas (Sub-districts), Municipalities, City Corporations, District Councils. Bangladesh now stands at the top among its south Asian neighbors in terms of women empowerment and achieving gender parity.

Independent and strong mass media are the vigilant watchdog of democracy. In the past few years we witnessed huge expansion of mass media. The freedom of mass media and people's right to information have been ensured.

We have been implementing the SDGs in continuation of the successes of the MDGs. The subjects of SDGs have been incorporated in our 7th 5-year plan.

Bangladesh has been in a journey through the roads of peace, democracy, development and prosperity. We have already been elevated to a lower middle income country. We expect that Bangladesh will emerge as a country of middle income on the Golden Jubilee of our Independence in 2021 and as a developed one by 2041.

Let us make this planet a peaceful, happy and prosperous abode for the entire humanity. I wish, your stay in Bangladesh will be joyful and memorable one. I also wish all success of the conference.

With these few words I declare the 63rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference open. Thank you all again.

Khoda Hafeez.
Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever.

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