

E-9 Ministerial Meeting Inaugural Session

Speech by

HE Sheikh Hasina

Honorable Prime Minister

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

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Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Mr. Chair of the E-9,
Her Excellency Irina Bokova, Director General, UNESCO,
Excellencies the Ministers and Heads of Delegation from E-9 countries,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Assalamu aliakum and a very good morning to you all.

I welcome you all at the inaugural session of the E9 Ministers on Education 2030. I extend my warmest felicitations to Mr. Nurul Islam Nahid, MP, Minister of Education of Bangladesh, on his election as the chair of the E9. I appreciate the immediate past Chair H.E. Mr. Muhammad Baligh-ur-Rehman, Minister of State for Federal Education and Professional Training of Pakistan, for his sincere efforts to take forward the E-9 goals during the last two years. I express my gratitude to the DG, UNESCO, for co-organizing this program and supporting the E-9. I also extend my sincere thanks to other participants.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We are living in a world where we depend on each other despite our diversity in culture, religion, race and language. Education, there, can play a bridging role in promoting mutual understanding, tolerance and friendship. Education also gives our societies foundation of right values and dynamism of aspirations and required competencies.

I see education for all or EFA programme in that context which brought E-9 into being.

The Era of SDGs we have stepped in makes it very timely and meaningful now to hold this E-9 Ministerial meeting and align and integrate particularly SDG-4 on education with our E9 initiatives and strategies taking along the lessons and achievements of MDGs and EFA. I believe this meeting is going to be a landmark event for that.

I also believe, this meeting will enable us to identify and seize the opportunities of securing a sustainable social, cultural, economic and environmental future for the world, which are the essences of SDG-4.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Created in 1993, the E-9 Initiative is still working on the common educational goals of nine developing countries representing more than half the world's population.

With the objective of enhancing cooperation and strengthening accumulated efforts among these countries, E-9 has become a common platform of North-South-South cooperation in the context of the new global education 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

SDG-4 aims mainly at ensuring inclusive and quality education for all and promoting lifelong learning. Keeping these global aspirations in mind, I hope, the esteemed educationists and policy makers present here will revitalize the past efforts and deliberate adjustments and new orientations for these nine countries sharing their aspirations, commitments, and priorities based on SDG 4-Education 2030.

This Ministerial meeting in Dhaka gives us a historic opportunity to collectively explore our response towards achieving SDG-4. The MDGs guided us for development efforts over the last decade and a half.

Bangladesh has been able to achieve most of the MDGs. Among our remarkable achievements are attainment of gender parity in both primary and secondary levels and nearly cent percent enrollment at primary level.

Gender parity has been a key element again in the newly formed SDG-4. Ensuring equitable and quality education, we believe, will lead us to effective learning outcomes as stated in SDG-4.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Inclusive, equitable and quality education and lifelong learning by 2030 might prove challenging to achieve. But we have to overcome that by sharing our respective initiatives, practices and plan of action for future. Concerted efforts would give us the most effective results. E-9 has to work in close cooperation for that.

We in Bangladesh have adopted a well consulted education policy in 2010. We are taking strategic policies and steps.

Some of those are: bringing poor students under stipend schemes; allocating additional resources to small ethnic, physically-mentally challenged and other disadvantaged groups; strengthening partnerships with private sectors/NGOs in hard-to-reach areas especially to include socially excluded groups; increasing scholarship programs to improve access to secondary and tertiary education; emphasizing on technical and vocational education to produce skilled manpower; and improving quality and ensuring inclusiveness of general education as well as lifelong learning.

Innovative methods and means adopted include application of information technology in learning, interactive classes, use of open and distance learning system.

We have already introduced one-year pre-primary education to make the children ready for schooling and increase enrollment. Keeping in mind the students' right to learn in their mother tongue at their early stage, we are publishing pre-primary books in mother language of small ethnic groups.

This has increased enrollment rate at primary level to around 98% and reduced dropout rate to 20% in 2016 from around 47% in 2011. Our distribution of free textbooks at the very first day of school has also contributed to this success.

Over 2.25 billion textbooks have been distributed since 2010 to our students at primary and secondary levels, setting probably the example of the largest of its kind in the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Lifelong learning is important for green skills and necessary for us to think collectively for one planet and involve all for a sustainable development.

Education supports social inclusion, helps reduce violence against women and promotes their empowerment. Learning environment in educational institutes, a component for sustainable development should be ensured by improving sanitation, water, hygiene and infrastructure. This would also have positive impact on health and education outcomes.

ICT education in schools would make education easier and upgrade skills and pupils' adaptability to new technologies. Challenges of terrorism, violent extremism and armed conflicts affecting human rights and peace and stability of our world today can be addressed with innovation, understanding, right attitude and farsighted policies.

We are reforming our curricula and learning materials keeping peace building in view.

To enhance quality, special emphasis must be given on teachers' education and training programmes. Attracting competent teachers for teaching is important. Considering the challenge of developing a qualified workforce for teaching profession policy options and incentive plans may be explored for motivation.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Education has been our national priority since the independence. Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman took some bold and visionary steps for the new country with a policy of universal education.

Reaping benefits of those visionary steps, Bangladesh is now ready to face the challenges of achieving inclusive and equitable education of quality and lifelong learning by 2030. Education is one of the areas receiving my government's highest budgetary allocation.

We expect timely and pragmatic recommendations and pathways coming from this E-9 meeting for realising SDG-4. I hope, this meeting would start the process of sharing our best practices, devising action plan and programmes, finding new modes of partnership as well as welcoming regional and international dialogues on education.

I am confident; you will work together for a connected and knowledge-based North-South-South in this process.

I hope, our journey towards quality with quantity in attaining SDG-4 will start from this meeting and 'Dhaka declaration' would come to be a source of our inspiration. I wish all the foreign delegates a wonderful and memorable stay in Dhaka and a successful outcome of this meeting.

Thanking you once again, I declare this Meeting open.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabondhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever.

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