

**'Bangladesh Liberation War Honour' and 'Friends of Liberation War Honour'
Conferring Ceremony**

Speech by

HE Sheikh Hasina

Hon'ble 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 very good morning to you all.

It is a singular honour for me to be in your midst at this solemn ceremony of awarding 'Bangladesh Liberation War Honour' and 'Friends of Liberation War Honour' to those whom we owe a debt of gratitude for our hard earned freedom. Today, we are an independent nation; a nation proud of the sacrifices to defend its honour and dignity, a nation proud of its heritage, tradition and culture, and a nation proud of its untiring endeavours to attain inclusive development that ensures people's well-being in spite of formidable challenges.

In our pride, the foreign contributors to our liberation war in 1971 have been equal partners. We owe you our sincerest gratitude, and profound respect. I am happy that today Bangladesh as a nation seeks to recognize the invaluable contribution of our comrades from across the globe. It is a fitting occasion to pay homage to these unsung heroes of our War of Liberation, our hard-earned independence.

Distinguished Guests,

The Bangalees long yearned for respect as a nation, and have been in the pursuit of self-determination. But the partition in 1947 did not result in any significant change in the fate of the people of our land. We experienced neglect, discrimination and oppression. The Bangalees continued to be deprived from their legitimate rights in all spheres - civil, political, economic, social and cultural, all included. In this context, general elections were held in December 1970-January 1971 where people gave the Awami League a landslide majority and an overwhelming mandate to serve the people.

However, the Pakistani authorities did not fulfil their promise. They rather imposed an unjust war on us. Our fearless people, however, were not daunted by the use of brutal force. They rose to face the situation with heroism and bravery. They commenced a historic struggle for national independence on 26 March, 1971. The inspirational pronouncement came from the greatest Bangalee of all time, Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

We sustained torture, and loss of lives and property. The innocent people were subject to all kinds of crime against humanity, rape and arson included. The occupying force committed numerous acts of genocide on our people. Our people, however, stood up in courage and secured freedom in December 1971 through a glorious War of Liberation.

As our people were steadfast in their resolve and determination to gain independence, we received unflinching support from people outside who found legitimacy in our cause and therefore stood by the principles we sought to uphold. They rose in protest against the atrocities committed

on the people of Bangladesh. They associated with our aspiration, and our demand for equality, human dignity and economic and social justice. They extended moral, mental, material, political, diplomatic, logistic as well as military support to our just struggle.

Support came from all levels and directions - students, teachers, intelligentsia, professionals, media persons, and politicians to mention a few. They extended all available help that included food, shelter, humanitarian relief, medical facilities, and military training. Most importantly they accorded greater voice to our legitimate cause, facilitated access to global media, generated public opinion and mobilized financial support. Their unstinted moral and material support was a constant source of inspiration for our valiant freedom fighters.

Support came from the neighbourhood, from the region and also from distant countries and different societies. Support came from people and institution, regardless of their socio-economic standing, political divide, origin, religion and creed. The support was total, universal and unqualified. We are beholden to you for our national identity- a national flag to unite us and a national anthem to inspire us.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is, therefore, only natural that Bangladesh pays rich tributes to these heroes. By honouring them, we are actually reaffirming our faith in the principles we stood for - equity, democracy and democratic practice, inclusive development, social justice and the rule of law. By honouring them, we are honouring the millions who stood alongside us and protested against violations of equality, respect and honour. Since we stood for a right cause, we were destined to win. But our foreign friends and allies had infused greater confidence in us and played a catalytic role in gaining independence.

Today, when an independent Bangladesh forcefully articulates the requirements of self-determination, democracy and development, we are beholden to you for the inspiration and confidence. Today, we are able to keep our head high, because of your invaluable support and unfathomable sacrifice four decades ago. The `Bangladesh Liberation War Honour' and `Friends of Liberation War Honour' thus signify a deep sense of gratitude from our whole nation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is impossible to count the contributors and isolate their individual role. It is meaningless to try to measure their contribution and sacrifice. Hence, it would perhaps be wise to consider that Honour conferred to one as honour conferred to all. While we may confer this Honour to others in future, we believe that today it is yet another occasion when we recognize all those who stood with us, in the most critical time of the history of the Bangalee nation. This is a token recognition of our respect for your show of unity with a nation that was fighting for rights, respect and dignity.

Today, we are resolved to transform Bangladesh into a middle income country within a decade. We seek your good wishes so that Bangladesh can secure what we had aspired in 1971, what we pursue now, and what our Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman envisioned for our people in future - a true Sonar Bangla. This is what we would endeavour to achieve, this was what you perhaps dreamt of an independent state - Bangladesh.

With these few thoughts, I once again take this opportunity to pay my homage and sincerest gratitude to the freedom fighters from home and abroad.

I thank you all,

Khoda Hafez.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever.

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