

**Foreign Friends of
Bangladesh War of Liberation Ceremony
for Honouring**

Speech by
H.E. Sheikh Hasina
Prime Minister

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
BICC, Dhaka, 1 Kartik 1419, 15 December 2012

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

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

Assalamu Alaikum and a very good morning to you all.

This is another auspicious yet humbling occasion for Bangladesh and its people, as we have gathered here today to honour so many of our distinguished foreign friends whom we owe an immense debt of gratitude for their unqualified and outstanding contribution to our glorious War of Liberation.

As you know, we are celebrating the 41st anniversary of our Victory Day tomorrow. It marks the victory for our foreign friends as well, the cause they stood for. Honouring you in this month of victory makes the occasion more fitting and special. I like to take this opportunity to convey my victory day greetings to the countrymen as well as the foreign friends.

I am deeply honoured to be in your midst. Your presence brings back the memories of the tumultuous days of 1971 and also a feeling of reassurance. Earlier, we honoured 145 foreign friends and organisations, including former Indian Prime Minister Ms Indira Gandhi.

Today's august congregation exemplifies the strength and beauty of friendship and amity. This is also a rare opportunity for our people particularly the young generation to know and learn about their foreign friends and unsung heroes, many of whom worked behind the scene for our independence.

Distinguished Guests,

Our land had been the target of oppression from time immemorial; our people were subjected to all possible sorts of atrocities and injustices, the latest of which unfolded after the partition of 1947.

But each time our valiant and indomitable people had broken out, though at huge costs, of the shackles of subjugation. It was the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur, the greatest Bangalee of all times, who had seen us through all the odds since 1947.

Responding to his clarion call in 1971, the mass people of Bangladesh waged the epic liberation struggle and earned the independence of Bangladesh through a nine-month long bloody war.

We had little means but we drew strength from our high moral standing and triumphed over insurmountable adversities.

The support of our foreign friends came at a critical juncture when we were engaged in this unmatched battle-freedom-loving innocent people trying to ward off the wrath of a ruthless modern occupation army.

Our fault, we stood up against discrimination and fought for a just cause, self-determination. It was one of the darkest period of human history, a time of unprecedented genocide and brutalities the world has rarely seen.

It was immensely emboldening to find the majority of the world community on our side in our trying time. We knew that we were not alone, our foreign friends were out there helping us. It was such a source of inspiration.

In fact, it were our foreign friends who inspired people all over the globe and played the lead role in mobilizing the world opinion in our favour.

The just struggle for our emancipation received significant boost from their invaluable contribution. Their intervention helped change the approach of many countries which were initially not so sympathetic to our aspiration. They lent legitimacy to our cause, made the world pay heed to our saga of sorrow and humiliation.

Many of our foreign friends had little or no prior connection with Bangladesh. It would not have mattered anything to many of you had Bangladesh not become independent. Still you stepped forward, provided us moral, spiritual and material support. You simply listened to your heart, rose in protest against the atrocities perpetrated by the occupation army.

You associated with our aspiration and demand. You did it out of own conviction, in support of a just cause, not expecting any benefit out of it. You sometimes did it against your country's regime and often at your own peril. Here lies your magnanimity. Your contribution is, therefore, immeasurable, it cannot be repaid. It was purely a selfless act which would serve as glaring examples for the humanity and the posterity.

On this solemn occasion we are offering you, our distinguished foreign friends, the nation's deepest sense of gratitude for what you have done towards attainment of statehood by Bangladesh. Our tribute, as it may appear humble, epitomizes the sentiment of an indebted nation, the love of its people. It is the candid manifestation of how deeply we value our friendship.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My government is relentless in its efforts to turn Bangladesh into a happy and prosperous 'Golden Bengal' as dreamt by Bangabandhu, the Father of the Nation. We resolve to become a middle income country within a decade. Our achievements in institutionalizing democracy and Rule of Law, empowering women, upholding human rights, ensuring food security, expanding women education, improving child and maternal healthcare have been internationally acclaimed.

Going beyond, Bangladesh has also made its mark in the international arena-we are the leading voice on the issue of global climate change and an important contributor to maintenance of world peace. That we were least affected by the global financial melt down is a proof of our economic resilience. Our determination to fend off fundamentalism embodies our pursuit of secularism.

As we so do, we also continue to uphold the principles and values we fought for-equity, democracy, social justice, inclusive development and Rule of Law. It is not surprising that the world acknowledges Bangladesh as a country where moderation and tolerance are practiced; recognizes us as one of the emerging economic powers of the world. Our foreign friends are the equal partners of our accomplishments.

Dear foreign friends,

We are steadfast in our endeavour to live up to your expectations, turn Bangladesh into a country that you had envisioned while extending your support in 1971. We are proving that we are worthy of the trust and confidence you had reposed on us.

By honouring you, we are honouring ourselves, the nation feels happier. This reconnects and bonds us afresh with you and through it serves to enhance our relations with the countries you belong to.

We are grateful to you all for making it to today's event. You did not hesitate to respond to our call even though it came after more than four decades. Many of you have braved old-age complications, traveled thousands of miles, and ignored personal inconveniences just to be here.

These are the testimonies of the indelible bond of friendship, love that you still espouse for Bangladesh, the nation that you had a hand in its birth.

Our love and best wishes will be for you, always.

I thank you all.

Khoda Hafez.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever.