

Ministerial Session of ESCAP

Keynote Speech By

H.E Sheikh Hasina

Prime Minister

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

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Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Hon'ble Heads of State and Government,
Dr. Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Secretary of ESCAP,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning to you all.

I wish to express my sincere thanks to Ms. Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Secretary of ESCAP, for inviting me to address the sixty-sixth session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). The theme of the Session - "Addressing Challenges in the Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals : Promoting a Stable and Supportive Financial System and Green Growth" is most timely.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bangladesh emerged as an independent state in 1971 under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the Nation. He was also my father. As the war ravaged nation was on way to recovery, Bangabandhu and 18 members of my family was brutally murdered on 15th August 1975 by some misguided military personnel. Thereafter for many years, Bangladesh was ruled by military and quasi-authoritarian regimes. I lived in exile till the support of the people and the goodwill of the international community enabled me to return home. Then the election of December 2008 widely acclaimed as free and fair, restored democracy in Bangladesh, and elected my party, the Awami League, to form the current government with me as Prime Minister.

Bangladesh is now a democratic, secular, progressive nation engaged in eradicating hunger, poverty, illiteracy and all forms of deprivation. Bangladesh abides by established global values, norms, and standards, including human rights and the rule of law. Bangladesh also contributes to international peace and security with sustained participation in UN peacekeeping and UN peace building efforts. We are now pledged to transform Bangladesh into a peaceful and prosperous country.

Despite recent world wide economic recession, Bangladesh was able to maintain 6 percent growth rate. This was due to our economic policy which focused on agriculture, food security, rural development, employment generation, investment in infrastructure, health, education and social safety nets. Our major initiatives targets elimination of illiteracy by 2014; free education up to graduation level; increased pension for old people, widows; building more Shanti Nibash or old people's homes; cash and food transfers; national service for educated young people; more "Ashrayan" or homes for the homeless; increased support to "one home-one farm" programme; ensuring seeds, fertilizer, fuel; National strategy for maternal Health to reduce also infant mortality from 54 to 15; etc.

Distinguished Guests,

LDCs, low lying and small island developing countries are being severely affected by the impacts of climate change. Though our greenhouse gas emission is negligible, we are its worst victims. Bangladesh has adopted 134 climate change action plans, which include dredging of all rivers; planting crops resilient to drought, salinity and floods; among others. We have set up a Climate Change Fund with US \$ 100 million from our own resources, and a Multi-Donor Trust

Fund with the help of our friends. We are following a low carbon path to development, and creating a large carbon sink through forestation.

In COP 15 last December, the outcome did not meet our expectation but we supported the Copenhagen Accord as a forward step towards a legally binding agreement in COP 16 at Mexico City. The agreement must include all elements of the Kyoto Protocol and the Bali Plan of Action, particularly specific greenhouse emission cuts by all major emitters. The principle of differentiated responsibility must be upheld, and the fund promised in Copenhagen must be disbursed immediately under separate arrangement for the most vulnerable of the LDCs like Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives, among others.

Moreover, the recent global crises have affected the LDCs of the Asia Pacific Region with negative impact on trade, FDI, remittances, unemployment, ODA, and financial markets, reduction in capital flows and government revenue. Thus, most LDCs' efforts were held back in alleviating poverty and reaching their Millennium Development Goals. Now with the turnaround in global economy, more support and assistance must be given to the LDCs, landlocked and small island countries, for restoring their confidence, economies, and to set them on the track of sustained and scaled up development.

It is high time for development partners to come forward to help these vulnerable countries in their efforts. It is time for those who have not yet done so to meet their ODA of 0.7% of the GNI for developing countries, and 0.25 for LDCs by 2010, as reaffirmed in the Brussels Programme of Action. Based on our experience, I would stress on "investment in people" especially in empowering the weak to free themselves from poverty, hunger, ill health, gender discrimination, inequity and illiteracy.

We also need an early and fair conclusion of the Doha Development Round and a trade regime ensuring effective access of products of LDCs to the market of the developed economies. The discontents of developing countries, especially LDCs, have to be addressed for achieving a sustained open world trade regime. FDI need to flow more in LDCs' productive sectors to generate employment. LDCs should also have adequate representation in the governing structures of the IMF and the World Bank. In short, LDCs and development partners must work as honest and strong partners to attain success.

In January this year in Dhaka, the High Level Asia-Pacific Policy Dialogue on the Brussels Programme of Action for the LDCs was held. It produced the Dhaka Outcome Document, which indicates that the Brussels Programme has remained an unfinished agenda for Asia-Pacific LDCs, and that LDCs have lagged behind others in the region in achieving the MDGs. This session of ESCAP was requested to endorse the Document, and to send it as regional input to the global review of the 4th UN Conference on the LDCs to be held at Istanbul in May 2011. I would urge the distinguished delegates to kindly consider favourably and endorse the Dhaka Outcome Document for the said UN Conference. It is imperative that we all speak with a single voice on our development aspirations for the decade 2011-2020.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, let me emphasize that a democratic and secular Bangladesh is endeavouring its utmost for attaining the aspirations of our people. I believe with the valuable support of our friends and well wishers within our region and beyond, in ESCAP and in all UN agencies and international organisations, Bangladesh will succeed in doing so, and thus realize "Sonar Bangla", a land of happy people as envisioned by the Father of the Nation.

I thank you all.

Khoda Hafez

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever.

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