

**Tenth Session of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers
Inaugural 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

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests and Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Assalmu Alikum.

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to speak at the inaugural ceremony of 10th Session of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers of the OIC. I am very happy and delighted to welcome you all in Dhaka.

At the outset, I would like pay homage to the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman whose charismatic leadership led the nation in achieving independence in 1971. Soon after independence, he left no stone unturned to ensure holistic development through ensuring economic empowerment of the people. He had firm trust on humanity and mutual cooperation.

Bangabandhu used to believe in the synergies of mutual cooperation and being imbued with collective notion joined OIC in 1974. Since then, Bangladesh continues to maintain friendly relations with all member-states and plays significant role to uphold Muslim Solidarity in pursuit of the great Islamic values of fraternity, justice, cohesion and inclusion as a whole.

We all know that tourism is the fastest growing sector greatly contributing to the generation of foreign exchange and employment across the world. To this end in view, the conference bears a great significance for future cooperation and coordination on a broader spectrum in the uplift of the tourism industry of the OIC member states.

It will also open up newer scope and horizon for coming closer in respect of economy, trade and commerce, and building bilateral relations to a major extent.

Distinguished Delegates,

As you know, refugee crisis has become very acute across the globe creating endless sufferings and distresses to the displaced people. Bangladesh has been facing the crisis for years together with the latest influx of forcibly displaced Rohingyas from Myanmar.

Out of humanity, we have provided temporary shelter to the Rohingyas who fled to Bangladesh to escape the atrocities in their homeland.

I express my heartiest thanks and gratitude to OIC and other international organizations, and the countries of the globe for their great support to the cause of the Rohingya refugees. In this respect, the multi-dimensional role of OIC is commendable. As the collective voice of the Muslim world, its support and cooperation to its member-states is helping safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world.

There are numerous scopes and opportunities around us to work together for the betterment and welfare of the people of Muslim Ummah. In view of the current global scenario, the relationship among the OIC member-states should be based on mutual trust, understanding and cooperation. Exchange of knowledge and expertise in various fields can help everyone to improve their level of standard. I think tourism is one of the areas where we have greater opportunities and potentials to work together.

Islamic Economy has become a new phenomenon. It continues to grow and be operated by the Muslim community around the world. Because of the universal acceptability of the Islamic products and services, and a large consumer community, it has a huge potential to develop faith-based Islamic products and services.

These products and services have become popular even in the non-Muslim communities. At the same time, we should work together to preserve and conserve the Islamic culture and heritages.

Here Travel and Tourism have occupied a significant portion with other Islamic products and services. Halal Foods, Islamic Finance, Halal Pharmaceuticals and Cosmetics, Halal Tourism are some of the growing sectors of the Islamic economy. In order to develop these sectors, member-states of OIC need enhanced cooperation and partnerships both in public and private sectors.

Distinguished Guests,

Soon after the independence, the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman realized the potentials to develop tourism as an economic sector.

For this reason, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation was established in 1972.

Bangladesh has a lot of resources for developing tourism industry. Cox's Bazar, the longest unbroken beach in the world with the longest marine drive, the Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forest in the world and the home of the Royal Bengal tiger, Kuakata, the daughter of the sea, are the great attractions for the tourists. Bangladesh is a riverine country crisscrossed by hundreds of rivers that have made the land scenic and beautiful.

Hundreds of green tea-gardens in the north-eastern part of the country will give you the exciting natural surroundings for holiday-making. Thousand-year-old historic and archaeological sites, vibrant culture and living heritages are also the big attractions for the international tourists. And above all, the friendly people of Bangladesh, their hospitality and the glorious history of sacrifice for freedom will be the memorable experiences for you.

As an economic sector, we have given tremendous importance and emphasis on developing tourism in Bangladesh. We formulated a National Tourism Policy in 2010 to ensure sustainable development of tourism. To implement the policy, Bangladesh Tourism Board has been established in 2010. It has been identified as a thrust sector in the Industrial Policy-2010. The Government provides attractive investment facilities for the local and international investors.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have been implementing many mega projects across the country to develop infrastructure and connectivity. A 6.15-Kilometer-long bridge is being constructed over the mighty river Padma. It will create overland connectivity between Dhaka and southern part of the country, including the Sundarbans.

Construction of an international airport in Cox's Bazar, the tourist capital of Bangladesh, is underway. This will facilitate the tourists to fly directly to Cox's Bazar from any part of the world. Cox's Bazar is being connected by rail network also. We are also taking initiatives to expand infrastructural and recreational facilities for the tourists. Besides these, world-class facilities are also being made available in different parts of the country in the private sector.

The theme of the conference is "**Promoting Regional Integration through Tourism**". So, it is imperative to build an adhesive and cohesive relation among the member states in various fields of economy and culture, including tourism.

Here capacity building, knowledge and technology transfer, exchange of expertise, human resources development, occupational skill development, private sector and stakeholders' integration, strong institutional networking should be the prioritized areas to embark on.

Distinguished Delegates,

I am grateful that Bangladesh has been selected as the Chairperson of the 10th Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers for the next two years. During the tenure, Bangladesh will make the best possible efforts to develop tourism in the OIC member-states through integration and networking of all member countries and institutions. I do believe, Bangladesh would be able to create landmark achievements during its Chairmanship for the next two years. I reaffirm my support and cooperation to the OIC in the field of tourism.

I hope that the outcome of this conference would give guidelines for all member-states to foster greater cooperation and interconnectedness. I wish the conference a great success.

I thank the Hon'ble Secretary General of OIC, Hon'ble Tourism Ministers and Heads of Delegation, Heads of different OIC Institutions and the delegates and officials who have come to Dhaka to attend the conference. I hope, your stay in Bangladesh would be pleasant and memorable one. Thank you all, again.

Khoda Hafez.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever.

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