

Side Event on Autism
WHO South-East Asia Region Health Ministers' Meeting

Speech by

HE Sheikh Hasina

Hon'ble Prime Minister
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Dhaka, Thursday, 27 Bhadra 1421, 11 September 2014

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

The Chair,
Honorable Health Ministers from South-East Asia Region,
Dear Colleagues,
Persons with autism and developmental disorders,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamu Alaikum and Very good afternoon to you all.

I welcome you all at the Side Event on Autism organized marking the WHO South-East Asia Region Health Ministers' meeting. I also extend my best wishes to all suffering from autism and other developmental disorders in Bangladesh and elsewhere in the world.

We earned independence through the great war of liberation in 1971. The Proclamation of the independence stipulated the commitment to ensure equality, respect and social justice for all.

The Constitution of Bangladesh adopted under the leadership of the Greatest Bangalee of all time Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman also clearly specifies its stand against any discrimination against any person. In 1974, the Father of the Nation took initiatives to enroll visually impaired students in the country's 47 general schools.

During the Bangabandhu's rule in 1974, the Education Policy framed under the leadership of renowned educationist Dr Qudrat-e-Khuda contained the primary education curriculum suited to the mental and physical capability of the young learners.

But through the brutal assassination of Bangabandhu along with his most of the family members on 15th August in 1975, the prospect of a disparity-free education system based on the spirit of the War of Liberation has been shattered.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bangladesh has ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to uphold the rights and dignity of the challenged people.

The convention states that every human life is valuable and significant. States cannot deny the present and future potentials and principles of the persons with disability because of their non-representation with regards to the total population.

The persons with autism developmental disorders are not at all a burden for us. Many of the famous scholars were born with autism and other developmental disorders. I believe that many of our children can take them to that level if they are nurtured with proper nursing, social compassion and government patronization.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since our assumption of office, we have been working to establish an education system which is free from all sorts of discrimination. We have framed a new education policy that contains the guidelines to eliminate all barriers in the way of getting proper education by the disabled children.

Once, children with disability were not enrolled in the mainstream educational institutions in my country. You would be happy to note that over one lakh children with

disability are now studying in government and non-government primary schools across the country.

This has enabled the general students to know the challenges the disabled students face. They would learn how to respect the life of a struggling humanity. It will also help them to learn about mutual respect and social responsibility.

Bangladesh Children Academy has included the children with disability in their programmers. A Centre for Neurodevelopment and Autism in Children has been established at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University to cater primary healthcare to the autistic children.

We have taken steps to turn National Disabled Development Foundation into a Directorate to provide more services to the physically and mentally challenged people.

My daughter Saima Hossain Putul is the chairperson of National Advisory Committee on Global Autism Public Health (GAPH) Bangladesh. In fact, a resolution piloted by her was placed in the UNGA in 2012 to create global awareness about autism. This resolution was adopted by the UNGA in December 2012. This is indeed a rare honor for Bangladesh.

An international seminar on 'Autism Spectrum Disorders and Developmental Disabilities in Bangladesh and South Asia' was held in Dhaka in 2011 due to her personal efforts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We do have resource limitation but we don't have any dearth of sincerity. We would try our best to ensure development of disabled people with our limited resources.

Our Election Manifesto 'the Charter of Change' has specific pledges for the people with disability. We have already taken special measures for people with disability to ensure their education, employment, movement and communication.

The Autism Resource centre started its journey on the auspicious occasion of the observance of third autism awareness day in 2010 under the initiative of Social Welfare Ministry and national foundation for development of the disabled persons (Jatiya Protibondhi Unayan Foundation).

The foundation with the assistance from the World Bank is implementing a project named "Promotion of services and Opportunities to the Disabled persons in Bangladesh". Workshops were held in seven divisional headquarters to create awareness regarding disability and autism. The foundation also started free specialized school. Besides, bringing up cerebral palsy children, foster family service, tale-therapy, survey to identifying disability, registration and providing identity cards have been initiated .

The progress of developing Disability Storage Software is almost complete. Measures have been taken to provide free of cost treatment to at least 30 percent of poor autistic persons at the Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Memorial Specialized Hospital.

As per the commitment we have already taken special steps to ensure education, employment, movement and communication facilities for the special portion of population. A time befitting law has been enacted for these special people.

Provisions have been there to ensure personal security of the people with neurodevelopment disorders and autism.

Finally, I congratulate all the autistic people, their family members, people, and government and non-government organizations engaged in serving the disabled people.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the autistic and disabled people and their near and dear ones who joined and enriched today's function. I like to conclude with the expectation that the life of every autistic person fill with joy and happiness, and they grow with self-esteem. Thank you all again.

Khoda Hafez.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever.

...