

40th Anniversary of Bangladesh's Membership to the UN Commemorative Event

Speech

By

HE Sheikh Hasina

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Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

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Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

The chair,
Dear colleagues,
Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Assalamu alaikum and a very good afternoon.

It gives me great pleasure to be here at this commemorative event marking the 40th anniversary of Bangladesh's membership to the United Nations (UN).

I pay my deep homage to the Greatest Bangalee of all time, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. I recall with deep gratitude 3 million martyrs and 2 lakh women who lost their innocence for liberating the country.

Bangladesh gained her independence in 1971 in a challenging geo-political backdrop. The Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman devoted himself entirely to rebuilding the war-ravaged country. He realized that to accomplish his Mission, it would be crucial to gain international recognition for the newly-independent Bangladesh. Obtaining membership of the UN General Assembly would be the ultimate recognition.

With a skeletal structure in the Foreign Office, Bangabandhu embarked himself on securing official recognition for Bangladesh from friendly countries and leaders of the day. His astute diplomatic skills paid off, and in two and a half years, Bangladesh gained admission into the UN as its 136th member.

In his inimitable speech at the UN General Assembly in September 1974, the Father of the Nation made a pledge for his people to uphold the UN Charter, and to live in peace and friendship with all nations of the world as enunciated in our Constitution.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Forty years since then, we are carrying on with Bangabandhu's legacy to redeem his pledge. This perhaps explains why Bangladesh remains an ardent proponent of a "Culture of Peace and non-violence" ever since our Government first tabled the UNGA Resolution in 1997. This is the compelling reason why we send so many of our men and women to difficult terrains around the globe to ensure peace and stability. This also explains the commitment we secured from the world to value linguistic diversity through the observance of the International Mother Language Day.

Indeed, Bangladesh's 40 years' eventful journey with the UN is lined with many high watermarks. It is perhaps no coincidence that whenever our Government assumes office,

there is resurgence in our engagement with the UN, which somehow marks a decline with the change of guards.

On this auspicious occasion, I wish to look to the future. In only ten years' time, we shall celebrate the 50th anniversary of our partnership with the UN. In the interim, we wish to chart a way forward that would take our relations with the UN to new depths and heights.

Our commitment to international peace and security will remain steadfast. We hope to work together with all member states to further enhance the UN's capacity to effectively respond to wars, conflicts and armed violence. We shall work towards promoting the humanitarian principles that are often violated during conflicts. We shall remain engaged in infusing a culture of peace in human minds since it is in the minds of men that wars begin. We shall continue to promote 'people's empowerment' for development that is all inclusive and leave no one behind.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bangladesh shall continue to maintain its lead in UN peacekeeping operations with priority given to safeguarding civilians in danger. We would contribute to peace building in post-conflict situations using our home-grown experiences in nation building. We shall also enhance our engagement with mediation and arbitration as potential means for peacefully settling disputes.

We would firmly remain in the forefront of the UN's disarmament agenda. As new entrants, we shall further intensify our engagement in the areas of nuclear, maritime, space and cyber security.

We shall continue to pro-actively contribute to the global combat against terrorism and violent extremism. We shall work in tandem with UN in fighting the menaces of human, narcotics and wildlife trafficking and other transnational crimes. We shall remain vigilant against corruption.

In line with our political manifesto, we would attach the utmost priority to further strengthening our national human rights and governance regime. We wish to make constructive contributions to global norm setting on the human rights agenda. We shall continue to cooperate with the international accountability mechanism to make sure that there is no tolerance for human rights violation in our society.

Bangladesh will add its voice to the global momentum for prevention of genocides. We shall consciously take a lead in promoting the cause of global criminal justice to shatter the culture of impunity for crimes against humanity. We shall work towards diplomatically resolving the protracted refugee situation from Myanmar.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bangladesh is poised to enter boldly into the post-2015 era riding on its stellar performance with MDGs. Our national development policies will be harmonized with the UN's core development agenda.

We wish to build consensus on a set of measurable and achievable goals under the post-2015 development framework. In line with our emerging national priorities, we shall underscore the need for addressing climate change, international migration, rapid urbanisation, non-communicable diseases and sustainable use of maritime resources, among others. We would like to see that every human being on this planet has guaranteed access to food, clothing, housing, healthcare, literacy and a decent job.

We shall continue to urge for a meaningful partnership for development. We want to see the development dividends of international trade assured for LDCs in particular.

Bangladesh's strides in women's empowerment need to be further energized. We shall remain focused on tackling the challenges of violence against women, child marriage, and unskilled birth attendance.

We shall further expand our rights-based interventions for our children, including those with special needs. We shall not relent as long as we can ensure equal opportunities for our boys and girls in every sphere.

Our Government remains committed to making our youth the real agents of change. We wish to have the UN on our side in realizing our Vision for a 'Digital Bangladesh'. In our efforts to promote a knowledge-driven and creative economy, we would work towards creating an enabling legal and regulatory environment. Our children and youth should grow up to be truly global citizens proud of their cultural roots.

Distinguished guests,

Even before Bangladesh attained its membership, the UN reached out its hand of support to our people during the best and the worst of our times in 1971. The UN has since then firmly stood by us. The people of Bangladesh also kept their side of the bargain by producing impressive scorecards in human security and human development.

This mutuality and convergence of interests have remained the defining features of the Bangladesh-UN partnership. Our Government will make sustained efforts to add further impetus to this trend. We shall establish Bangladesh as the true "role model for the developing world" – the way the UN Secretary General Mr. Ban Ki-moon loves to brand us.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A significant portion of the world is currently strife-torn by war and conflict. Such war and conflict in no way can bring well-being of the humanity. None other than us have the bitter experience of the scourge of war. We lost 3 million lives and chastity of 2 lakh women in the unequal war in 1971.

Recently hundreds of people have been killed in Israeli assaults on the Palestinians. I strongly condemn the killing of innocent civilians, including women and children. I also reaffirm our unequivocal solidarity with the Palestinian people.

At this auspicious moment, I would like to urge the world leaders to take effective steps to stop war and conflict across the world. Let us take measures to allow the UN play more significant role in stopping war. We don't want war, we want peace.

As I say this, I am reminded of the near prophetic words of the Father of the Nation at the UN General Assembly: "In a world marked by strife and human misery, the United Nations remains the focus of man's hope for the future. Despite the many difficulties and obstacles placed in its way, the United Nations has... significantly contributed to human progress in the political, economic, social and cultural fields. There are few countries in the world that have a better realization than Bangladesh of the concrete achievements and potential for good of the Organisation."

I thank you all.

Khoda Hafez.
Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu.
May Bangladesh Live Forever.