

International Congress of Social Philosophy - Inaugural Ceremony

Address by

Prime Minister

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Dhaka, Friday, 18 Agrahayan 1418, 02 December 2011

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

The chair,
Learned panelists,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Assalamu Alaikum and Good Morning.

It is my great pleasure to be present in this International Congress on Social Philosophy organised by Jagannath University. I extend my greetings to guests and the participants.

December is the month of our victory. I recall with gratitude the 30 lakh martyrs of the liberation war and 2-lakh women who lost their innocence. I pay my deep respect to the memory of the greatest Banglee of all time, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the four national leaders. I extend my sympathy to the wounded freedom fighters and the family members of the martyred freedom fighters.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The theme of today's congress is: Democracy, Civil Society and Good Governance. In the present global context, democracy and good governance are mutually operational instruments. Democracy paves the ground for good governance. But, active participation of countrymen, especially the civil society, is required to give the democracy a firm footing.

As a matter of fact, civil society's role in bringing about good governance is an important dimension to the ongoing debates on democracy and good governance.

The essence of democracy lies in the opportunity to express collective views by the people.

But it is the misfortune for the people of Bangladesh that the country did not have democratic rule for long period after the brutal assassination of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman along with most of his family members on 15 August 1975. The countrymen did not have the opportunity to choice their representatives as there was no right to franchise.

As a result, the country and its people were deprived of desired development despite having immense prospects.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My party, Bangladesh Awami League, has always been vocal to realise people's rights since the beginning of 80s when the right to franchise and food was stripped. After a long struggle, the democratic rule returned to the country following the 90's mass upsurge. But still people did not take the taste of democratic rule. We had to take the street again to realise people's right to vote and food.

I think, during last two decades since 90s, people of Bangladesh have become enough conscious to protect their rights now.

The civil society can play a great role to advance the democracy and good governance. But unfortunately many do not want to compromise with the reality. With existence of a free and vibrant mass media, many often go beyond proportions. I would like to urge the civil society to give realistic suggestions. We would gladly accept any suggestion that is beneficial to the people. To us, the country and its people are more important than that of the individual and the party.

Democracy means people's rule. Bangladesh Awami League has been waging struggle to implement people's rule during its more than six and a half decade of existence since its formation. Whenever we got the opportunity to run the country, we have taken initiatives to strengthen democratic polity. We have taken steps to empower the disadvantaged section of the society like women and hapless.

I personally believe, without empowerment of people, democracy cannot be sustained and development ensured. From this point of view we have strengthened our local government bodies. Regular elections are being held to upazila, municipality, union parishad and city corporations. The independent Election Commission is conducting the polls without any external interference. We have ensured thirty percent seats for the women in the local government bodies.

Whether it is democracy or good governance, poverty alleviation lies at their core. Without democracy, there would be no good governance and without good governance poverty alleviation remains a far cry. However, it is a big challenge for the developing countries like us to ensure good governance.

People's participations, free mass media, rule of law, transparency and accountability, and an awoken society play an important role to overcome the challenge.

As a people's government, we are trying to utilise all the instruments to ensure good governance. Alongside, we have taken steps to reach the government services to the doorsteps of the people through bringing structural changes and extensive use of information communication technology.

We have already established e-centres in all districts and information and service centre at each union. We enacted Right to Information Act to make necessary information easily available to the people.

I think, the extensive use of ICT has increased transparency and accountability in one hand, and on the other people's sufferings reduced to a great extent in getting services. We have strengthened and made independent the Anti-Corruption Commission to reduce institutional corruption.

Ensuring human rights is another important element for a democratic society. We have constituted National Human Rights Commission to safeguard the rights of disadvantaged and backward section of the society. The National Legal Aid Services Organisation has been formed to cater legal aid to the poor people.

Democracy is essential for development. Similarly, improved lifestyle of people is necessary for a sustainable democracy. Without ensuring people's basic rights like food, clothes, shelter, education and healthcare, the democracy cannot be long lasting.

That is why; we have taken steps to ensure basic rights of the people. More resources are being channeled to rural areas. As a result, we achieved 6.7 percent GDP growth last year. The poverty rate decreased to 31.5 percent. Income of working class people increased substantially. The economic development achieved during our tenure braving the global meltdown attracted the attention of world leaders.

Let us come and work together to improve the lots of the common people strengthening our democratic values. Our united efforts, I believe, will surely make Bangladesh a happy, prosperous and peaceful country in the comity of nations.

I again thank you all and declare the congress open.

Khoda Hafez.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu.

May Bangladesh Live Forever.

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