

Dhaka Apparel Summit-2017 Inaugural Ceremony

Speech by

HE Sheikh Hasina

Prime Minister

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Dhaka, Saturday, 13 Falgun 1423, 25 February 2017

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

The Chair,

Dear Colleagues,

ILO Deputy Director General Mr. Gilbert Hougbo,

BGMEA members,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Assalamu Alaikum and a very good morning to you all.

I welcome you all at the inaugural ceremony of the Dhaka Apparel Summit- 2017 organized by BGMEA for the second time.

In the month of Language Movement, I recall great gratitude the martyrs of the great language movement. I pay my homage to the memory of one of the pioneers of language movement, the greatest Bangalee of all time, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. I recall four national leaders, 3 million martyrs and 2-lakh women, who lost their innocence, in the war of liberation.

BGMEA this time organized the Summit with the theme 'Together for a better tomorrow'. I extend my thanks to the apex body of the apparel sector for organizing the event.

Dear Audience,

The Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had dreamt of an economically self-reliant Bangladesh. We declared our 'Vision 2021' to build a hunger- and poverty-free Bangladesh as dreamt by the Father of the Nation.

According to the Vision, the poverty rate would be brought down to below 15 percent by 2021 and Bangladesh would turn into a middle-income country by then. And for achieving this goal, massive industrialization would have to be done and employment opportunities created.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Readymade Garments is the main driving wheel of economic development of the country. Nearly 80 percent of our export income comes from RMG sector. It employs more than 4 million workers of whom 80 percent are women. Indirectly, nearly 40 million people are dependant on this sector.

BGMEA has been playing a pioneering role in the development and expansion of RMG, especially expansion of its global market. Alongside, our government has also been providing necessary policy support and incentives.

We have implemented the BGMEA's long-standing demand of issuing C.O. Final approval has been given to establish BGMEA University of Fashion and Technology for the interest of RMG sector. We have also constituted a Ministerial Committee on RGM to look after its affairs.

After assuming the office in 2014 for the third time, we have taken a number of measures for healthy growth of RMG sector. We reduced the advance income tax to 0.70% from 1.50% and corporate tax rate has been lowered to 20% from 35%. Import tax on fire-fighting equipment and raw materials of pre-fabricated buildings of export-oriented readymade garments has totally been withdrawn.

We have taken massive steps to improve employers-workers relation. Steps are underway to build a congenial relation between employers and workers, ensuring legal rights of the workers and workers' welfare-oriented programmes like formation of Labour Welfare Foundation and Welfare Fund for the workers in the export-oriented industries.

We have strengthened the Department of Inspection of Factories and Establishment for improving the environment of factories and ensuring their safety. Measures have also been taken to strengthen the Minimum Wage Commission apart from granting right to do union at Export Processing Zones, amendment of labour laws and issuance of labour rules for protecting workers rights. Industrial Police unit has been established to help ensure safety of industries, including RMG factories.

We have also taken required steps so that the RMG entrepreneurs can build dormitories for the workers taking loan with minimal 2% interest.

Bangladesh is now a role model in socio-economic development. We earned 7.1% GDP growth last year. Our foreign exchanged reserve exceeded USD 32 billion and export earning reached to USD 34.24 billion. Nearly 50 million people have been elevated to the middle class during last 8 years. Per capita income is now USD 1,466. Work on Metro-rail and BRT projects is underway. The Joydevpur-Mymensingh and Dhaka-Chittagong highways have been elevated to 4-lanes. The Padma Bridge will be opened in 2018.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

After the Rana Plaza accident, building a risk-free and compliant RMG sector had become a great challenge for us.

We have overcome the challenge with the help of all. The BGMEA, government, domestic and international organizations and development partners– all together are working towards building a safe and sustainable RMG sector. The Readymade Garments of Bangladesh is now a role model in the world.

We have been working to turn Bangladesh into a middle-income country by the year 2021. The RMG sector can play a vital role to achieve the goal. Although Bangladesh stands at the second position in the RMG export market, but the reality is that Bangladesh's share is only 5.1% in the sector.

We have to work on how to increase our share in the world market. We have to formulate short, medium and long-term plan in this regard.

Dear RMG Entrepreneurs,

I am happy to learn that you have set a target of earning USD 50 billion from RMG sector marking the Golden Jubilee of our independence. The government will provide necessary cooperation to achieve the target. We have already increased the power generation capacity to 15,300 Megawatt. We are going to produce 24 thousand megawatt of electricity by 2021. Initiatives have been taken to set up LNG terminal to meet increasing demand of gas.

Work is underway to establish Special Economic Zones across the country. Two such Economic Zones - one in Dhaka and other in Chittagong - will be earmarked for BGMEA. We have a plan to turn the Dhaka-Chittagong highway into 6-lanes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A number of measures have been taken up at international level to make the RMG sector safe. Under the initiative, 3,869 factories have been inspected. Among those, faults have been found in only 39 factories and they were closed down. The remaining factories are being renovated to improve their safety.

But it requires a huge fund for overhauling of the factories. Various brands and buyers can come forward to assist the factory owners. The government would continue to provide its support.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have to diversify our products and expand our market for boosting our export-earning. Alongside, we have to learn how to add value in our products. Our export-list is not long rather it is heavily RMG-dependant. Again, our export is also limited to a few countries of North America and West Europe.

Such a situation in export market is not healthy. There are many opportunities to increase our export basket and also to expand our export market. I would like to draw the attention of our exporters in this regard. The government will extend all out support to boost export earning.

I came to learn that a number of sessions will be held during the Dhaka Apparel Summit-2017. I hope that the recommendations of the dialogue will help us build a developed Bangladesh.

I would like to extend my sincere greetings to all BGMEA members, RMG workers, buyers and other concerned on the occasion. I wish all out success of the Dhaka Apparel Summit-2017.

With these few words, I declare the Dhaka Apparel Summit-2017 open. Thank you all.

Khoda Hafez.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever.

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