

The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

Speech by HE Sheikh Hasina

Hon'ble Prime Minister

17 October 2016, Osmani Memorial Auditorium, Dhaka

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Dear Colleagues,
Representatives of Development Partners,
Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Assalamu alaikum and a very good afternoon to you all.

I welcome you all in this public event jointly organized by the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and the World Bank to mark the International Day for Poverty Eradication.

I would like to thank the World Bank for showcasing Bangladesh's success in rapid poverty reduction. This recognition will inspire us to further strengthen our efforts in this endeavor.

The measures undertaken by the World Bank to materialize the SDGs are important and those will be very helpful towards implementation of the SDGs.

Since the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent state through a 24-year long struggle and a 9-month bloody war in 1971 under the leadership of Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Bangladesh has been striving hard to ensure socio-economic development in a sustainable manner and improve the livelihoods of the people.

But, our journey had never been smooth. With a strong leadership coupled with resilience of our people, Bangladesh has been able to make the transition to become a Lower Middle Income Country (LMIC) and a model for others to imitate.

Distinguished Audience,

Bangladesh has been successful in different fronts of economic and social development despite many challenges and odds both nature-induced and manmade.

It has experienced a robust progress in poverty reduction from more than 70 percent in 1971, the year of independence, to 56.7 percent in 1991 to 22.4 percent today. Extreme poverty has come down to 7.9 percent. The steep reduction in poverty in Bangladesh has been made through pursuing a pro-poor and people-centered development policy by my government.

Our development has a human face and strives to protect and promote the livelihoods of poor and vulnerable groups. Social safety net programs accompanied by inclusive growth approach aiming to create employment opportunities played catalytic role in this regard.

Inequality is addressed by ensuring social security, decent work and financial inclusion approaches. Almost one-fourth of the families are now under the coverage of safety-net program which accounts for 13 percent of national budget and 2.3 percent of GDP.

The government has formulated a National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) with a view to strengthening the poverty impact of the public spending. Bangladesh in fact now aims to eliminate hunger and poverty from the country well ahead than the global target.

I acknowledge the contributions of all actors, national, regional and international to our development efforts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bangladesh has been quite successful in managing its macro-economy very prudently. While the average GDP growth rate for the last ten years was 6.4 percent, we have been successful in raising growth rate to 7.05 percent in Fiscal Year 2015-16.

We have already started the implementation of the 7th Five Year Plan (FY 2016-20). The major thrusts of this plan are to accelerate growth, reduce poverty, and empower the citizens. The average growth rate is projected at 7.4 percent over the Seventh Plan period with 8 percent growth at the terminal year.

Per capita income has increased to USD 1,466. Our progress in other economic indicators is also continuing to build a solid foundation for achieving an upper middle income country status and also to eradicate poverty in all forms.

Despite global economic slowdown, our export earnings, remittances and foreign direct investment all grew by almost 3 times over the last seven years. The foreign exchange reserve jumped from USD 3.5 billion to USD 31 billion during this time. Overall investment increased from 26 percent of GDP to 29.4 percent. In FY2009-10 the size of Annual Development Programme (ADP) was Tk 285 billion while the size of ADP in FY2016-17 is Tk.1233.45 billion.

Power generation capacity also increased by 3 times to 15,000 MW. Now, 78 percent people enjoy electricity. We have been able to contain inflation within 5.5 percent and ensure stability of exchange and interest rates.

We have ensured almost 100 percent enrollment at the primary level. Gender parity both at primary and secondary education levels has already been achieved. Significant progress has been made in tertiary education in terms of reducing gender gap.

We have established around 16,500 community and local health clinics all over the country to provide the health services at the doorsteps of the people. Maternal and infant mortality rates have fallen to 1.81 and 29 per thousand, respectively. Average life expectancy has gone up to 71 years from 66.5 years in 2005. According to Human Development Report 2015, Bangladesh ranked 142nd in 2014. The overall human development index has improved substantially.

Significant progress has also been made in establishing 'Digital Bangladesh'. There was a massive expansion of ICT sector in Bangladesh in recent times. Bangladesh has already reached the level of becoming a technology driven modern state. We are now exporting software and ICT services to about 30 countries including some advanced countries.

Electronic Government Procurement (e-GP), digital centers at the local level, health services through mobile phones, digital laboratories and multi-media classrooms are a few examples of our ICT initiatives which is not only improving the transparency in the governance system, but also impacting the livelihoods of the people.

Distinguished Participants,

Ensuring equal right for both men and women in every sphere of social life is our commitment. The Women Development Policy 2011 was a bold step to this end. Our development plan, policies and budgetary allocation are made considering the women advancement as an integral part of our long term development strategy.

The women participation in the workforce has been gradually increasing. As per the 'Global Gender Gap Report', Bangladesh ranked 64th in 2015 among 145 countries. It has made continued progress in all four dimensions viz., economic participation, educational attainment, health and political empowerment.

Women's participation in the parliament increased from 12.7 percent in 1991 to 20.0 percent now. More than 12,500 elected women are representing in the local government bodies. Bangladesh was at the 8th position among 145 countries in 2015 in political empowerment. We are also trying our best to establish safe and secured work places for the garments workers where over 3.5 million women are working.

Dear Colleagues,

Climate change has been a major developmental challenge in our country. It subverts many of our development achievements. Though Bangladesh has been acclaimed internationally for good disaster management, it is still one of the most vulnerable countries that suffers and will continue to suffer from climate change issues.

We hope that the implementation of Paris Climate Agreement will ensure climate justice. We are also trying to build climate-resilient infrastructures and undertake other development interventions considering climate change issues. We have constituted 'Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund' with our own resources to protect ourselves from climate-induced losses.

International fund particularly, green climate fund was created with lots of expectations. But, procedural rigidities in the global climate financing mechanism obstruct the affected countries to use the fund. We urge to simplify the procedures to streamline the international fund flow.

Esteemed Colleagues,

Going forward, a number of challenges are ahead of us. Still a significant number of people live below the national poverty line. We need to reap the potential benefits of demographic dividend by creating more employment opportunity.

We are developing one hundred Special Economic Zones, a number of high-tech parks and software technology parks, and facilitating more private and foreign investment in this regard.

Bangladesh is cited as one of the success cases in MDGs implementation. Based on solid foundation of MDGs implementation, we have already started the SDGs implementation aligning the same with our national plans and strategies with a target to achieve most of the SDGs within 2030, as has been set by the World community.

A high-level supervisory body is coordinating and monitoring the activities related to SDGs implementation.

We have undertaken a number of transformative mega projects to take the growth trajectory to further higher level to meet the infrastructure challenges of becoming a middle-income country.

Well-nourished people are a key resource for national development. Though under-nutrition in Bangladesh has declined gradually since the 1990s, the pace of this decline is not commensurate with the rapid improvements in other development indicators.

To reduce prevalence of underweight, stunting and wasting among children under-5 years of age, the government investment has been increased towards improving the nutritional status of mothers and children. We have formulated the 'National Nutrition Policy 2015'. We intend to scale-up further nutrition interventions in future.

I mentioned in many forums at home and abroad that terrorism and violent extremism are two major challenges the world is now encountering. My government has adopted a 'zero tolerance' policy towards any kind of violent activities. We have been able to contain the so-called 'militancy' in the country and will further strengthen our drive to eliminate the scourge of extremism from the society.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bangladesh is a country with immense potentials. The Bangladeshi people are very brave, committed and hard-working. The resilient people of this country are firmly determined to change their future and build a better Bangladesh for the next generations.

We are already at the medium category of human development index and a lower middle-income country according to per capita income level. We are pursuing an inclusive growth strategy to come out from the LDC status shortly and become a developed nation by 2041 with a land of peace, prosperity and harmony.

We hope that the partnership with the world community will be further strengthened towards our development endeavors. All our development plans, 'Vision 2021' and upcoming 'Vision 2041' are towards realizing our Father of Nation's dream of building a hunger-, poverty-, illiteracy- and exploitation-free "Sonar Bangladesh".

World Bank is our one of the leading development partners. I hope, it would play more pro-active role in our endeavours.

Let us come and work closely to make this beautiful world free from poverty and hunger. Thank you all again.

Khoda Hafez.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu

May Bangladesh Live Long.

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