

General Debate
74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

Address by
Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina
Hon'ble Prime Minister
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

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Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Mr. President,

I would like to congratulate you on your election as the President of the 74th Session of the General Assembly. I take this opportunity to appreciate Ms. Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garcés for her strong leadership over the past year. I extend my heartfelt thanks to Secretary-General Mr. António Guterres for his dynamic leadership.

Mr. President,

As I stand here in this august podium, I recall the architect of Bangladesh, our Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. In 1974, before this august assembly, he said, and I quote –**"In a world that is marked by strife and human misery, the United Nations remains the focus of Man's hope for the future. Despite many difficulties and obstacles placed in its way, the United Nations, during more than a quarter century of its existence, has significantly contributed towards human progress in the political, economic, social and cultural fields."** Quote ends. In fact, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman envisaged a leading role by the UN in pursuing development, peace and justice.

In Bangladesh, we are now preparing to celebrate the Birth Centenary of this great leader beginning in March 2020. Reflecting on his vision and aspirations, we wish to bring this celebration to the United Nations in the next year.

Mr. President,

Your call for *"Galvanizing Multilateral Efforts for Poverty Eradication, Quality Education, Climate Action and Inclusion"* could not have been more relevant. As the world's principal multilateral body, the General Assembly is best positioned to steer the actions that would promote international cooperation in achieving development, peace and security. The emphasis given to the specific SDGs, such as, poverty eradication, quality education, climate action and inclusion are critically important for our civilization.

Our commitment and shared aspirations to realize SDGs are reflected in the election manifesto of Awami League, which earned us the confidence of the people for the 3rd consecutive term in office. Our 21-point political commitment is dedicated to the wellbeing of people.

Mr. President,

Bangladesh has often been cited as a 'development miracle'. Despite turbulence in the rule-based international order, and apprehensions of gradual economic slowdown, Bangladesh continued to prosper over last 10 years. According to the Spectator Index 2019, Bangladesh recorded the highest economic growth among a list of 26 countries in the last 10 years, with

188% expansion of gross domestic product (GDP) at the current prices. Our GDP has grown from \$102 billion in 2009 to \$302 billion this year.

We continue to embark on a pragmatic programme for the rapid economic and social development. Poverty eradication, sustainable growth, protection of the environment and human-resources development are some of the key features of our development strategy. Over the past 10 years, we have been adopting progressive and timely policies and actions that have resulted in impressive development. Our exports grew 3 times from 2005-06 to reach US\$ 37 billion in 2017-18. Per capita income grew 3.5 times. Our GDP growth has now reached 8.13%. Between 2005-06 and 2018-19, our investment rose from 26% to 31.5% of GDP; private sector investment grew five times to US\$ 70.8 billion; foreign exchange reserve grew 9 times to US\$ 33 billion.

Mr. President,

Poverty and inequality are two major obstacles for development. Bangladesh has achieved one of the fastest poverty reduction rates in the world with poverty rate dropping from 41.5% in 2006 to 21.4% in 2018, extreme poverty from 24% to 11.3%. Extensive rural development, embedded in the concept of 'My Village My Town' and home-grown and pro-poor village projects like 'Ashrayan, 'Amar Bari Amar Khamar', have contributed to our inclusive development. Bangladesh has been ranked 34th in World Economic Forum's Inclusive Development Index leaving other South Asian countries way behind.

Mr. President,

A key development strategy in Bangladesh has been addressing inequality through social security, decent work and financial inclusion. Current safety net system gives special consideration for the vulnerable groups. Support comes in the form of cash, food, asset, wage-employment, training, savings and community support. These programmes are expanding, now covering nearly a quarter of the population and accounting for 2.58% of our GDP.

Having achieved the milestones of gender parity and cent percent enrollment, we are now focusing on enhancing the quality of education with emphasis on e-learning, and qualified teachers. Our school drop-out rate has gone down from 50% to 18%. In 2010, we started the free book distribution programme for all students up to Grade 10. Till date 2.96 billion textbooks have been distributed free of cost out of which about 352.20 million books were distributed in 2019 alone. 2.3 million students in primary and higher studies were awarded scholarships. 12.3 million mothers are receiving stipends through mobile phone.

Mr. President,

We have created an extensive network of 18,000 community clinics and Union Health Centers to bring the entire population under health coverage. These centers provide 30 different types of medicine free of cost and free primary health services to the rural people, 80% of whom are women and children. Maternal, infant and child mortalities, malnutrition, stunting, low weight, all are continuously reducing because of these actions.

We have put special emphasis for inclusion of persons with autism, disabilities and special needs in our development journey. Currently, 1.645 million people with such disabilities and needs are receiving allowances from the government.

Mr. President,

We are investing in human capital to create an inclusive society through equal access to technology. Country-wide 5800 digital centers are taking 600 e-public services to people's doorsteps. Number of internet users has crossed 90 million, tele-density has crossed 93%.

Bangabandhu Satellite-1, which we launched last year has eased the expansion of broadcast-based services in remote areas and improved communications for development.

'Blue Economy' is our new frontier of opportunities. We have developed a policy and a Plan of Action to tap our marine resources in the Bay of Bengal. We are contributing to UN's norm-setting exercises on protecting marine biological diversity in the areas within and beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ).

Mr. President

We are building our first ever nuclear power plant in Rooppur leveraging on the principle of peaceful use of nuclear energy. 93% of our population has already been brought under electricity coverage. Bangladesh is now the second largest user of solar home system in the world.

Bangladesh's commitment to peaceful use of nuclear energy is fortified by its consistent position against nuclear armament. We have recently ratified the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Mr. President,

The global disposition for climate action generated by the just concluded Climate Action Summit would translate into real impetus for implementation of Paris Agreement in the broader context of 2030 Agenda. As a partner country in the Coalition on 'climate resilience and adaptation', we advocated for addressing the special challenges and vulnerabilities of countries like ours and have adopted transformative and innovative climate resilient technology and crops for reducing disaster risks.

Our long-term plan for adaptation and resilience is anchored in our Delta Plan 2100, a comprehensive and long-term techno-economic plan for the Bangladesh Delta. The Plan focuses on food security, water safety, climate change, environment sustainability, disaster management and sustained economic growth. Following the recent Dhaka Meeting of the Global Commission on Adaptation, we are working on setting up a 'Global Centre for Adaptation' in Dhaka.

Mr. President,

As the second largest troops and police contributing country Bangladesh continues to respond to the appeal for participation of troops for peacekeeping operations under the UN. We support Secretary-General's initiatives to make UN peace operations 'fit for future'. Responding to his call for implementation of the Action for Peacekeeping Agenda, we have joined as one of the 'champion' countries. We have also been playing an important role in the evolution of the conceptual framework of "sustaining peace".

We continue to promote the idea of 'Culture of Peace', which has now transcended time and become a dominant theme at the UN. Early this month in this Hall, we have celebrated the 20th anniversary of the declaration on 'Culture of Peace'.

Our stern actions against extremism, terrorism, drug trafficking and corruption has restored peace in the society and among people. We shall continue our actions.

Mr. President,

Bangladesh promotes safe, orderly and regular migration. After successful adoption of Global Compact on Migration, Bangladesh has spearheaded the development of implementation modalities for the Compact. At the national level, we are mainstreaming migration into national development strategies.

Irregular migration and human trafficking are global menaces rooted in complex nets of syndicates and criminal networks. To prevent and suppress human trafficking nationally and also

to foster international cooperation in tackling human trafficking we have recently acceded to the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons.

Mr. President,

The value of UN's role in maintaining international peace and security is enormous. During the 1971 war of liberation, 3 million innocent people were killed in a genocide orchestrated by the Pakistan Occupation forces and their local collaborators. Two hundred thousand women were violated.

Our painful experiences have emboldened us to continue to speak for the oppressed people. We stand firm in our support for our Palestinian brothers and sisters till their just and rightful struggle comes to a fruition.

Mr. President,

It is indeed unfortunate that I have to again raise this issue in this august body as the Rohingya crisis remains unresolved. We continue to host 1.1 million Rohingyas who were forced to leave Myanmar due to atrocities committed against them. The crisis is now lingering into the third year; yet not a single Rohingya could return to Myanmar due to absence of safety and security, freedom of movement and overall conducive environment in Rakhine State of Myanmar.

I would request the international community to understand the un-tenability of the situation. The crisis is now going beyond the camps. Despite our all efforts to contain it, the crisis is now becoming a regional threat. Moreover, increasing congestion and environmental degradation is challenging health and security in the area.

Mr. President,

We are bearing the burden of a crisis which is Myanmar's own making. It is an issue solely between Myanmar and its own people, the Rohingyas. They themselves have to resolve it. Voluntary return of the Rohingyas to their homes in the Rakhine state in safety, security and dignity is the only solution to the crisis. We will continue our engagement with Myanmar to make repatriation of the Rohingyas happen.

I have earlier in the 72nd UN General Assembly put forth a 5-point proposal to resolve the crisis which included full implementation of recommendations of Kofi Annan Commission, and establishment of civilian monitored safe zone in the Rakhine State. Today, I would like to reiterate some of the proposals:

1. Myanmar must manifest clear political will supported by concrete actions for sustainable return and reintegration of Rohingyas to Myanmar.
2. Myanmar must build trust among the Rohingyas by discarding discriminatory laws and practices and allowing "go and see" visit to the Northern Rakhine by the Rohingya representatives.
3. Myanmar must guarantee security and safety of the Rohingyas by deploying civilian monitors from international community in the Rakhine state.
4. International community must ensure that the root causes of Rohingya problem area addressed and the violation of human rights and other atrocity crimes committed against the Rohingyas are accounted for.

Mr. President,

We appreciate the reform initiatives of the Secretary General, particularly the UN Development System. With the new generation UN Country Team and reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system, we have high expectation that they would deliver better in line with national priorities and with greater accountability to the host country. We will continue to lend our support to the bold and constructive actions of the Secretary-General to make this prime organization 'fit-for-purpose' and strengthen people's trust in it.

In expression of our support to the reforms and to ensure effective functionality of new Resident Coordinator system, we are making a financial contribution to the Special Purpose Trust Fund.

Mr. President,

For us multilateralism remains as the strongest panacea for resolving the global problems and create global goods. UN is the symbol of hope for peace, stability and prosperity, as envisioned by the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the 1974 UN General Assembly.

Bangladesh will continue to support United Nations as a strong multilateral body, which would be fully equipped to deal with the tasks and responsibilities assigned to it under the Charter. With the 75th anniversary of the UN coming up next year, let us call for collective actions to build a stronger UN for our civilization to deal with emerging challenges for the next century.

I thank you.

Khoda Hafez.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live-forever.

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