

Independence Award 2019

Speech by

HE Sheikh Hasina

Prime Minister

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Bangabandhu International Conference Centre, Dhaka, Monday, 11 Chaitra 1425, 25 March 2019

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Respected Chair,
Dear Colleagues,
Recipients of the Independence Award,
Distinguished Guests.

Assalamu Alaikum.

I convey my greetings to all at the Independence Award 2019 giving ceremony. I remember with the deepest of respect the architect of Bangladesh's independence, the greatest Bangalee of all times, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

I respectfully remember the four national leaders, the 3 million martyrs and 200,000 dishonored women in the independence war. I convey my sympathies to the families of the martyrs and the wounded freedom fighters. I salute all freedom fighters.

I remember with great sadness those who were brutally assassinated on the dark night of 15th August 1975, including my mother Faziltun Nesa, three brothers and uncle. I pray to the Almighty for salvation of the departed souls.

I remember with gratitude various governments and people of the world who lent their helping hands during our liberation struggle.

Today is the 25th March. On this fateful night in 1971, the Pakistani occupation forces swooped on the innocent people with deadly weapons in the name of 'Operation Searchlight'. Thousands of innocent people were mercilessly massacred. The Pakistani forces created havoc at Rajarbagh Police Lines, the erstwhile EPR headquarters at Pilkhana, Dhaka University and old Dhaka, among others. The killings and brutality continued throughout the next nine months.

Distinguished guests,

The Independence Award is the highest national award conferred on those persons and organizations who have contributed to their respective fields, including the country's Independence and Liberation War, science and technology, medicine, education, literature, culture, sports, rural development, social welfare, public administration, research or any other field determined by the government.

The government is honouring 14 notable individuals and one organization for 2019 for contributions in their respective fields. I congratulate the individuals and organization who have been conferred on with the Independence Award. I pay my respect to the memories of those who have been awarded posthumously.

Distinguished guests,

Bangabandhu dreamt of building a *Sonar Bangla* free from hunger and poverty infused with the spirit of the Liberation War. But the nation's progress was halted in 1975 with the assassination of the Father of the Nation along with most of his family members.

The successive post-August 1975 governments had not only tried to erase the name of Bangabandhu, but also attempted to destroy the spirit and achievements of the Liberation War. The enemies of the Liberation War, including the Razakar, Al-Badr and Al-Shams members, were rehabilitated in the politics of Bangladesh. Ziaur Rahman and Khaleda Zia made identified collaborators and war criminals ministers of their cabinets, disrespecting the national flag. By promoting communal politics, the politics of division was reestablished. They were busy with their own fates rather than changing the fates of the people.

The Awami League got the opportunity to govern the country after 21 years in 1996. The period between 1996 and 2001 was a golden era of development of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh witnessed unprecedented progress in fields like agriculture, industries, commerce, among others.

By forming government in 2001, the BNP-Jamaat Government again put the country on a regressive path. The killed 21,000 activists and leaders of Awami League in a bid to wipe out the party. The people of Bangladesh became frustrated at the lack of good governance during this period.

Distinguished guests,

As a result of two successive terms in the government, we have been able to make the benefits of development visible. We achieved 7.86 percent economic growth in the 2017-18 fiscal. In the current fiscal year, provisional estimates suggest that we would achieve more than 8 percent growth. The per capita income would increase to USD 1,909 from the current USD 1,751.

In the last ten years, the country's export earnings have increased to USD 36.64 billion. Works are going on to establish 100 economic zones across Bangladesh. It is expected that these zones will attract additional investment of USD 40 billion. More than 10 million new jobs will also be created.

We have launched the Bangabandhu Satellite-1 into orbit. The construction of the 2,400 MW nuclear power project at Rooppur is also progressing fast. Our power generation capacity now stands at 20,775 MW with 92 percent people under electricity coverage. We are confident that every household in Bangladesh will have electricity by 2020.

We have given top priority to agricultural sector to ensure food security. Agricultural supports have been made readily available. Various initiatives have been undertaken for the welfare of the marginal farmers, including offering collateral free-loans.

Some 7.632 million families and individuals are receiving social security support under 130 programmes. The social security sector has been allocated TK 6,417.77 billion in the current fiscal year, which is more than 13 percent of the total budget.

In order to implement the National Education Policy, 2010, a time-based comprehensive plan of action is being formulated. From 2010, we are distributing free textbooks among students on the 1st January of every year. More than 26,000 registered schools have been nationalized so far. Mid-day meals are introduced for students in underdeveloped areas.

We are establishing at least one secondary school and one college in every Upazila which have no public secondary schools and colleges. The country's literacy rate has now reached to 73 percent.

The construction of the 6.15 KM Padma Bridge is progressing fast with our own finance. Seventy-four percent of the works have already been completed. We are constructing an elevated expressway and metro rail in Dhaka. The construction of the country's first tunnel under the Karnaphuli river has also started.

We are committed to achieving the 'Sustainable Development Goals' by 2030, build a developed Bangladesh by 2041 and implement the 'Delta Plan 2100'.

Once the pending projects are completed, Bangladesh will be transformed for the better.

Distinguished guests,

The Awami League government has formulated and implementing the 'Freedom Fighters Welfare Trust Act, 2018'.

Through this trust, wounded freedom fighters, families of the martyrs, families of the deceased freedom fighters are receiving ration at affordable prices. They are being provided with allowances for festivals, Victory Day, and treatment at home and abroad.

The construction of the 15-storey residential-cum commercial building with 2 basements for the welfare of the martyred and deceased freedom fighters has been completed. We have undertaken other initiatives such as constructing the Mujibnagar Liberation War Memorial Center, a monument at the historic Suhrawardy Udyan, a monument

for the Liberation War and the Liberation War Museum. We are also preserving the historic battle sites and providing housing for the landless and underprivileged freedom fighters. Additionally, the works on constructing Freedom Fighters' Complex at districts and sub-districts is nearing completion.

Distinguished guests,

The year 2020 is the 100th birth anniversary of the Father of the Nation. We have declared to celebrate it as 'Mujib Year'. 2021 will mark the golden anniversary of our independence. We would like to take Bangladesh to even greater heights marking these two upcoming landmark occasions.

We aim to change the socio-economic condition of the people of Bangladesh by using the talent and skills of all. Notwithstanding our differences, let us all unite to devote ourselves for the welfare of the country and its people.

Award winning distinguished persons and organizations,

Some 265 distinguished individuals and organizations have been conferred on with the Independence Award till 2018. You have been conferred on this highest national honour today for your contributions to your respective fields and dedication to upholding the spirit of our Liberation War.

Every inch of this land is drenched with the blood our martyrs. Hence, we can never repay our debt to them. Let us work together to try to repay the debt to the 3 million martyrs to some extent by expediting the socio-economic development of Bangladesh.

The fearless nation which has shed blood for its language, independence and democracy is capable of overcoming all obstacles to march forward on the path of progress and carve its space with dignity and honour on the world stage.

Let us all work together to realize the dream of Bangabandhu to build a *Sonar Bangla*.

Khoda Hafez.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever.

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