

**ISESCO declared Dhaka,
Capital of Islamic Culture of the Asian Region**

Inaugural ceremony
Speech by

HE Sheikh Hasina

Prime Minister
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Dhaka, Saturday, 30 Ashar 1419, 14 July 2012

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Mr President,
Colleagues,
His Excellency the Director General of ISESCO
Diplomats,
Representatives of participating states,
Ladies and Gentlemen present,

Assalamu Alaikum and Very Good Morning to you all.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all marking this auspicious occasion of celebration of ISESCO's Programme of Islamic Culture Capitals.

I also like to extend my gratitude to the OIC member states through the Director General of ISESCO for nominating Dhaka as the Capital of Islamic Culture for the year 2012.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The messages of peace and fraternity enshrined in Islam were spread in this region through the Sufi Saints and dervishes. The peace-loving people of this soil easily adopted the liberal and humanitarian appeal of Islam in their lives.

The religion of peace, Islam, established its humane glory assimilating the unique natural and cultural distinctiveness of Bengal. And that is why we see people of Bengal are very religious-minded from the time immemorial but not bigots.

People of this region attaching the main throes of Islam extended their friendly and cooperative hands to the people irrespective of their religion, caste and creed. When different parts of the world see conflicts, riots or war, people of Bangladesh live in peace and harmony.

I pay my deep homage to the Sufi saints.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The greatest Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM) throughout his life spread the messages of peace. At the same time, he had spoken about waging war against unjust and untruth.

People of Bangladesh earned the independence of their motherland through a war in 1971 under the leadership of the greatest Bangalee of all time, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. People from all walks of life took part in the freedom struggle responding to his call and snatched away the country's freedom.

During his short tenure after the independence, Bangabandhu in one hand embarked on massive reconstruction works of the country, on the other, undertook various works for the development of Islam and welfare of Muslim Ummah.

Bangladesh had earned the membership of OIC owing to the visionary decision of Bangabandhu. He founded the Islamic Foundation to undertake research on Islamic knowledge, culture and values. He also introduced official celebration of Eid-e-Miladunnabi, reorganisation of Madrasha Board, allocation of land for Bishwa Ijtema at Tongi, government grant for performing the holly hajj and many other activities.

Bangabandhu had banned un-Islamic activities, use of liquor, gambling and horse-race. He sent the first Tablig Jamaat delegation to Russia. He laid the foundation of establishing diplomatic relations with the Muslim countries through attending the OIC summit in 1974.

The great leader had supported the struggle of the Palestinian people for their separate homeland making Jerusalem as its capital.

I pay my deep homage to Bangabandhu, who materialised the dream of the Muslim Sultans of establishing an independent Bengal.

Dear guests,

We celebrated the 400 years of Dhaka city a few years ago. The nearly half a millennium year old city is a unique place of Islamic traditions and cultures. The fame of Dhaka as a city of mosque is not unfounded. The devout Muslims have established numerous mosques at every para and mahalla. These mosques are not only the places of worships but also bear the testimony of cultural symbols.

The Islamic arts seen in Dhaka's mosques are in fact the resources of the world heritage. The architecture of Ahsan Manzil, Lalbagh Fort, Nawabkatara bear the high standard, and tastes and cultures of the Bengal's Muslim rulers and people as a whole.

Not only in knowledge and architecture, Dhaka has a long and rich tradition in food habit, one of the main elements of culture. There was a unique fusion of domestic traditional foods with the Mughal foods that have been satisfying the food-lovers at home and abroad for long.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You are aware of the glory of the Muslims of Dhaka. The Muslims made by the weavers of Dhaka once used to enhance the aristocracy of the durbars of the kings worldwide. And today's garments workers with their hard labour and skill have been meeting the garments' need of the world.

The high regard of Dhaka in culture and literature is not unknown to anybody. I will cite a single example here which will testify the love of the people of Bangladesh for arts and literatures.

The famous epic 'Shahnama' of Persian poet Ferdoushi was translated into Bengali in several volumes by our Bangla Academy a few years ago. We are going to publish the new edition of the huge book soon.

When the translated version of this old epic is rare around the world, its reprinting is a proof that the desire for knowledge of this part of the world is not confined in the geographical boundary. That is why the Alif Laila of Arabian Nights is equally cherished by the people of Bangladesh as of Padmabati of Alaol.

We internalized Sheikh Sadi, Rumi, Hafiz and Lalon as identical inheritances. The heartrending stories of Karbala transformed into a new art form in Vishad Sindhu at the hands of Mir Mosharrif Hossain and people irrespective of their religion, caste and creed shed tears reading the tragedy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam in his writings repeatedly calls for forging unity in favour of equality and fraternity discarding envy and unjust. We also believe that there is no place of terrorism and destructive activities in Islam. We, therefore, show zero tolerance to terrorist activities in the name of Islam.

We like to urge from Dhaka, one of the great cities of Islamic culture, let us become vocal against all sorts of unjust acts. Let us strengthen the understanding among the Muslim nations and revive the tradition of the preliminary Islamic era when Muslims had ruled the whole world through their power of knowledge of science and technology.

I firmly believe that millions of Muslims in the world having diverse cultures and traditions stand in one confluence. And the identical place is the humanitarian and high moral values. Today's idea of globalization is implanted in the widespread idea of unity enshrined in Islam.

I urge from the capital of Islamic Culture, Dhaka, to build a peaceful and just society, and establish world peace. The greatest Prophet (SM) also spoke about such roadmap in his Medina Charter and Last Hajj speech. Establishing such a world will be the best example of Islamic culture to the world community.

I thank you again.

Khoda Hafez
Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever.

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