

# **Asian University for Women Campus - Foundation Stone Laying Ceremony**

Address by

**Sheikh Hasina**

Hon'ble Prime Minister  
Govt of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Chittagong, Tuesday, 13 Boishakh 1418, 26 April 2011

---

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Chancellor of the Asian University of Women, Mrs. Cherie Blair,  
Excellencies,  
Faculty members and students,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamu Alaikum and a very good morning to you all.

I am delighted to be here today. We shall soon be laying the foundation stone of the new campus of the Asian University for Women in Chittagong. This would lead to the emergence of a proper campus of a unique academic institution in our part of the world. It would provide an optimistic future for girl students from all over Asia. It would provide them with international standard education by a highly qualified faculty of teachers. It would provide an environment where the students would shuffle off all barriers of race and religion to become an integrated part of humanity.

Importantly, as the girl students pass out through the portals of this wonderful institution, they would emerge as matured women full of self confidence, self assurance, modern and progressive, and ready to face challenges of an ever changing complex world.

They would be able to contribute significantly to the development of their societies, countries and the welfare of their peoples. As those girls from Bangladesh would be merging in our society to help develop our country and our people, the others from abroad on reaching home would be doing the same.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have always believed that women's equal involvement is vital for national development. Therefore, I have devoted my entire life for the empowerment of women.

The Greatest Bangalee of all times, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's dream of Sonar Bangla cannot be fulfilled if half of our people are left behind.

The fundamental rights of our women have been enshrined in our Constitution adopted by the post-independence Bangabandhu government. The article 27 stipulates: All citizens are equal before law and entitled to equal protection of law. The article 28 (1) says: The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race caste, sex or place of birth; and the article 28(2) says Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the state and of public life.

At present, education, particularly for girls, is a priority of our government receiving single largest share of our budget. We have made education free for girls up to class 12 and offer stipends for girls in rural secondary schools.

Our efforts have been successful in removing gender disparity in primary and secondary schools. We are now planning to provide free tuition for girls up to degree level.

I firmly believe that politico-economic empowerment is prerequisite to empowering the women.

At present, beside the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, the Deputy Leader, and a Whip, there are 5 women cabinet ministers and 45 MPs against reserved seats. Moreover, 19 women MPs have been directly elected.

Women occupy 30% reserved seats in all local governments. They are encouraged to participate in politics and administration, and are recruited in all professions, including the armed services.

They are also serving in the United Nations Peacekeeping missions.

While education is most critical, it needs to be adequately supported also by favourable laws and policies. My government is fully committed to this goal. Enhancing of women empowerment and ensuring their rights are the key focuses in the new National Women Policy.

No religion, certainly not my religion Islam, asks for inequality between men and women.

But a certain quarter has been misleading people by misinterpreting the newly adopted Women Policy. It's my firm belief that the women folk as well as the conscious citizens of the country would thwart the evil design of the vested quarter.

Our government has adopted a new regulation that make the provision of six months of maternity leave mandatory in government offices. We have earned the UN MDG award for our outstanding success in reducing child and maternal mortality rate. The UN also recognized our success in having gender equity in primary education. I am hopeful that we will be able to make significant progress in reducing maternal deaths.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to observe that the Asian University for Women has been functioning well in terms of imparting excellent education. I am sure once the campus premises are completed the results would exceed all our expectation.

I feel happy that our government could help in acquiring 27 additional acres of land for the AUW campus. I am also happy that we could successfully redirect construction of a road that would have otherwise traversed the campus causing security threats. I am also happy that the World Bank too is considering extending support to the University under a regional platform.

It is of immense delight for me, and I am sure, to all present, that the Managing Director of the World Bank, Mrs. Ngozi Okonjo - Eweala, is with us here to show her support.

Indeed, the Asian University for Women captures the common desire of women of not only Asia but of all women worldwide to contribute to their nations and to humanity.

I thank my friend, Cherie Blair, for inviting me to this memorable event. Surely, today's foundation stone laying ceremony is the beginning of a cherished journey for the Asian University for Women, and all involved with this wonderful and laudable venture.

I thank you.

Khoda Hafez.

Joi Bangla! Joi Bangabandhu

May Bangladesh Live Forever

.....