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73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly

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

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Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Madam President,

As-Salamu Alaikum and good evening.

Let me congratulate you on your election as the fourth female President of the UN General Assembly during its 73 years' history. I assure you of my delegation's full support in upholding your commitment to the UN.

I also felicitate Mr. António Guterres, UN Secretary General for his firm and courageous leadership in promoting global peace, security and sustainable development.

Madam President,

The theme you have chosen for this year's session brings back some personal memories for me. Forty-four years ago, my father, the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman stood on this podium and said, *I quote,*

“Peace is an imperative for the survival of humanity. It represents the deepest aspirations of men and women throughout the world... The United Nations remains as the centre of hope for the future of the people in this world of sadness, misery and conflict.” *Unquote*

Madam President,

My father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman devoted his life for the socio-economic development of the people of Bangladesh. He had done so at a time when 90% of the population lived below the poverty line. Following 24 years of struggle culminating in the victory of our Liberation War, Bangladesh gained Independence under his leadership in 1971. During this long period of struggle, he spent his time in the prison for almost 14 years. There were plots to assassinate him again and again.

Following the Independence, Bangabandhu directed his strength to rebuild a war-ravaged country with a ruined economy. The people got back a sense of relief. Bangladesh set on its journey ahead as an LDC. Yet, what a misfortune for our people! Bangabandhu could lead the country only for three years and a half. He was brutally gunned down by assassins on 15 August 1975. Along with him, 18 members of my family - among them my mother Begum Fazilatunnesa, three brothers, the youngest only ten years of age, and two newly-wed sisters-in-law were also killed. My sister Sheikh Rehana and I happened to be abroad at the time and survived the mayhem. But, we were barred from getting back to the country. The military dictator who grabbed power at the time promulgated an Indemnity Ordinance and blocked the possibility for bringing the killers to justice. We were denied the right to seek justice for the gruesome murders.

Madam President,

I can feel the pain and suffering of countless people around the world, persecuted and expelled from their homes like the Rohingya. It is impossible to build peaceful, just and sustainable societies by ignoring such situations. The Myanmar situation repeatedly reminds us of the genocide committed by the Pakistan occupation forces against our people in 1971. During the nine months of our Liberation War, the Pakistanis had killed three million innocent Bengalis. Two hundred thousand women had to suffer heinous torture and abuse. Ten million people had to flee their homes and take refuge in India. My father was arrested and taken to Pakistan. I was also taken prisoner along with my mother, two younger brothers and a sister. I was expecting my first child at the time. He was born in captivity. We had to spend our days in a damp unhealthy environment.

We are appalled by what we have seen in UN Reports about atrocities against the Rohingya who have now taken shelter in Bangladesh, which are tantamount to genocide and crimes against humanity. We expect the international community, particularly the UN, to give due importance to the atrocities and injustice suffered by the Rohingya population in Myanmar.

Madam President,

As a fellow human, we can neither ignore nor remain silent about the plight of the Rohingya. When my father and family members had been killed, I was not allowed to return home for six years. My sister and I were compelled to live abroad as refugees. I can feel the misery of losing one's loved ones and of living in a different land as a refugee.

I, therefore, presented a five-point proposal at the UN General Assembly last year with a view to finding a durable and peaceful solution to the sufferings of the forcibly displaced and hapless Rohingya. We are disappointed that despite our earnest efforts we have not been able to begin Rohingya repatriation in a permanent and sustainable manner.

Myanmar is one of our neighbours. From the outset, we have been trying to find a peaceful solution to the Rohingya crisis through bilateral consultations. So far, three bilateral arrangements have been concluded between Bangladesh and Myanmar for Rohingya repatriation. Despite their verbal commitment to take back the Rohingya, in reality the Myanmar authorities are yet to accept them back.

The 1.1 million Rohingya hosted in Bangladesh are living in an uncertain situation. To the best of our ability, we have made arrangements for their food, clothing, healthcare, child-care and security. Many countries and organizations including the UN, the Commonwealth, and the OIC have shown solidarity with the Rohingya and extended support and assistance for them. I extend my appreciation and thanks to the international community.

So long the Rohingya are not able to return home, they should, as a temporary arrangement, be able to live in a good and healthy condition. With this in mind, we have started working on a new housing facility for them with all arrangements for their education, health care and other needs. I call upon international organizations to join hands with us in this initiative. I also seek their assistance to help relocate the Rohingya to the facility.

The Rohingya crisis has had its origin in Myanmar. As such, its solution has to be found in Myanmar. We also wish to see immediate and effective implementation of the agreement concluded between Myanmar and the UN. We want an early, peaceful solution to the Rohingya crisis.

Madam President,

In last 30 years, Bangladesh has made its contribution to international peace by deploying over 158,000 peacekeepers in 54 missions. 145 peacekeepers from Bangladesh have made their supreme sacrifice in the line of duty. Currently, more than 7,000 peacekeepers including 144 women are deployed in ten different missions. Our peacekeepers have been acclaimed for their professionalism, courage and success. We pledged 23 contingents under the “Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System”.

As the original proponent, Bangladesh expected to see a more robust and human rights centric Global Compact on Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration. In the contemporary global context, the Migration Compact should be considered a positive step and should serve as a living document for protecting the rights of migrants.

Bangladesh stands firm against terrorism and all organized crimes. We shall not allow our territory to be used for any terrorist acts against or any activity detrimental to the interest of our neighbours. Our ‘zero tolerance’ policy in countering terrorism will continue undiminished. Our ‘whole of society’ approach has served us well in preventing violent extremism, human trafficking and flow of illicit drugs. Bangladesh has aligned itself with the Global Call to Action on the World Drug Problem mooted by the United States.

Madam President,

Since 2009, we have been implementing inclusive and people-centric development policies. On our way to realizing *Shonar Bangla* as envisioned by our Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, we remain committed to fulfilling our people’s aspirations.

The World Bank recognized Bangladesh as a middle-income country in 2015. Bangladesh is the 43rd largest economy in the world in terms of nominal GDP. Our per capita income has increased from US\$ 543 in 2006 to US\$ 1,752 in 2018. We have achieved the average GDP growth rate of 7.86%. Inflation has decreased by 5.4%. Poverty rate has dropped from 41.5% in 2006 to 21.4% in 2018. During the same period, extreme poverty has decreased from 24% to 11.3%.

Our forex reserve was USD 7.5 billion in 2008-09 fiscal year. In 2018, it grew up to USD 32.2 billion. Public investment was at 4.3% of GDP in 2009. It rose to 8.2% in 2018.

Power generation capacity has gone up to 20,000 megawatts from 3000 megawatts in 2009. We are building coal-based super-critical power generation plants to ensure sustainable power supply. In remote areas without transmission lines, power supply is being ensured with the help of 5.5 million solar panels. 90% of our population has come under electricity coverage. With the launch of the work on the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, we have moved a step ahead in the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Bangladesh is now recognized as a global development model. We have commenced our journey from being an LDC to the status of a developing country. The pathway for graduation is inextricably linked with our SDG implementation strategy, which is integrated in our Seventh Five Year Plan. We remain fully committed to implementing the SDGs.

In the backdrop of our current economic growth, there are now immense and large-scale business opportunities in Bangladesh. Foreign investors are being offered various financial incentives like tax holiday, avoidance of double taxation and exemption of duties. We are setting up 100 Special Economic Zones that would help create 10 million job opportunities in Bangladesh.

Madam President,

To follow up on my role as a member, we remain committed to implement the outcome of the High-level Panel on Water, formed under the joint initiative of the UN Secretary General and the World Bank President. I urge world leaders to take urgent actions on proper appraisal, management and investment in water. We shall be held responsible to our future generations if we fail to do so.

My government remains committed to ensuring safe drinking water and sanitation for all through achieving SDG 6. As of now, 99% of our people have access to sanitation and 88% to safe drinking water.

Madam President,

Under our social safety-net programmes, 6.5 million elderly men and women, widows, destitute women and persons with disabilities are getting regular allowances.

Since 2010, students are receiving free textbooks from pre-primary to secondary levels in school. 354.92 million books have been distributed among 43.76 million students this year. Vision impaired students are receiving braille books. Children from ethnic minorities are being given books in their mother languages.

Around 20.03 million students from primary to graduate level are getting stipends. Stipend money for 14 million students is sent directly to their mothers through mobile phones. We have ensured 100% enrollment at the primary level. Literacy rate has increased from 45% to 72.9% in the last nine and half years.

Our home-grown, innovative socio-economic development models have gained widely popular acceptance. Micro-savings have been introduced for rural, marginalized communities through the 'One House, One Farm' (*Ekti Bari, Ekti Khamar*) project. The amount saved by beneficiaries on their individual accounts is equaled in deposit by the government. The 'Shelter Project' (*Ashrayon*) is being implemented with the aim of having no homeless person in Bangladesh. We are working towards reaching urban facilities to every one of our villages.

Madam President,

Women's empowerment and participation have been a major factor in Bangladesh's outstanding development. We have promoted women's empowerment through enhancing their education opportunities and facilitating their political and economic emancipation.

We have created opportunities for girls to pursue their education free of cost till twelfth grade in public educational institutions. At secondary level, the ratio of girls and boys is 53:47. In early 2009, it was 35:65.

Bangladesh is perhaps the world's only country, where in its National Parliament, the Speaker, the Leader of the House, the Deputy Leader of the House, and the Leader of the Opposition are all women. In the present Parliament, there are 72 elected female members. 33% seats are earmarked for women in local government bodies in order to promote women's political empowerment at the grassroots.

Around 20 million women are employed in agriculture, service and industrial sectors. Women constitute 80% of 4.5 million workers engaged in the largest export earning garments sector. Women entrepreneurs are offered collateral free bank loans with 5% service charge. 10% of Small Entrepreneurs' Fund and 10% of industrial plots are earmarked for women entrepreneurs.

Madam President,

Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. More than 160 million people now live in a land area of only 147,570 square km. Despite our resource constraints, we have made significant strides across a range of social indices.

The maternal mortality rate has decreased to 170 per 1000 and child mortality rate under the age of five has gone down to 28 per thousand. Life expectancy has increased to 72 years from 64 in 2009.

In the last fiscal year, we spent 5.9% of our national budget in the public health sector. This year, investment in health has been increased by 17%. With around 18,000 community health clinics and Union Health Centres operating, health care

been reached to our people's doorsteps. 30 different types of medicines are being distributed free of cost. Tuberculosis prevention and control efforts have been intensified to reach the 2030 SDG target. As a result, TB related deaths have reduced by 19% in the last two years.

Madam President,

Bangladesh has been playing a pioneering role in raising awareness about the needs of children affected by autism and other neuro-developmental disorders. In order to further consolidate our efforts in this regard, a specialized cell is being created in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. A National Steering Committee and a National Advisory Committee have already been set up. Saima Hossain Wazed, Chairperson of the Advisory Committee and a member of the World Health Organisation's (WHO) expert advisory panel on mental health, has been named a Goodwill Ambassador on this issue for South Asia.

Madam President,

We welcome the formation of the Secretary General's High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation. The underlying premise of our vision for a "Digital Bangladesh" is to promote people's well-being. Widespread introduction of Internet-based public service delivery has led to growth in job creation at the grass root level. The idea of a Digital Bangladesh has become real.

We have made our foray into the world of space technology by launching our own satellite, *Bangabandhu I*, being the 57th country in the world to have done so. It was in fact a dream of our Father of the Nation that we would one day reach the outer space. The launching of this satellite helped us realize the aspiration he had instilled in us by setting up the first satellite ground-station of the country on 14 June 1975.

Madam President,

Bangladesh is among the 10 most climate vulnerable countries in the world. Its topography coupled with high density of population has made the country particularly exposed to climate change risks.

Bangladesh remains committed to implement the Paris Agreement. We are spending over 1% of our GDP in addressing climate change impacts; we are also promoting climate-resilient agriculture. Initiatives have been taken to increase tree coverage from 22% to 24% in the next five years. A project worth 50 million US dollar is being implemented for the conservation of the *Sundarbans*, the world's largest mangrove forest and a UNESCO world heritage site.

We have integrated our development programmes and our efforts to build capacity for combating climate change into a mega project titled *Delta Plan 2100*. It is a water-centric, multi-sectoral, techno-economic plan with a long-term time frame. It has been developed in consideration of the local geo-morphology and of global climate change impact. Bangladesh is the only country in the world that has adopted such a long-term development plan spanning 82 years.

Madam President,

We are shocked by the continued violation of the rights of the brotherly people of Palestine. This must come to an end. As the Chair of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers, we shall continue to work with the international community for resolution of the Palestine question.

Madam President,

There are three elements that play the most critical part in advancing human civilization: Peace, humanity and development. For the well-being of human societies, we must continue to strive for humanity. Our main objective must be to serve the people and ensure their well-being. It is humanity and goodwill that would take us forward on the pathway to sustainable development.

In a world faced with myriad of challenges, our common interest, shared responsibility and sustainable partnership would be our best bet for preserving the human civilization.

Madam President,

All my life, I have been working selflessly to make a difference in the lives of my people. In the last nine years and a half, Bangladesh has achieved remarkable success in different socio-economic sectors. That Bangladesh the world knew as the land plagued by disasters, floods, droughts and hunger has done wonders in maintaining international peace, managing disasters, empowering women and consolidating development gains. Bangladesh has now surpassed its neighbours in South Asia on a number of indicators.

But, our journey has not reached its end. Our journey will continue till the day we can build a Bangladesh free of hunger, poverty, illiteracy and exploitation – the *Shonar Bangladesh* of our Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

I thank you.

Khoda Hafez
Joy Bangla, Joy Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live-forever
