



The 64th 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

The United Nations

New York

26 September 2009

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Mr. President,

I congratulate you warmly on your well deserved election as President of the 64th Session of the General Assembly. I am confident your wise and able leadership would surely guide the Assembly deliberations to a successful conclusion. I also express my deep appreciation to H. E. Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly, for his sound leadership in successfully steering its work during his tenure. I also pay tribute to Secretary General Ban Ki Moon for his tireless, dedicated efforts in reinvigorating the United Nations.

Mr. President,

1. Thirty five years ago, the Father of our Nation and my father, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in his first address to the United National General Assembly from this rostrum, expressed his gratitude to all who supported our struggle for independence, and declared his commitment to democracy, good governance, human rights and rule of law. It is also my proud privilege and a great honor to extend the same commitment here today on behalf of our country.

Mr. President,

2. As you may know for long years Bangladesh was ruled by dictators and quasi-dictators soon after the brutal assassination of Bangabandhu on 15 August 1975 and 18 members of our family by misguided armed mutineers. Aside for a period in the 90s, the country continued to suffer from unconstitutional rule, particularly in the immediate past years. Even I was sent on forced exile, but the will of the people of Bangladesh, and goodwill of the international community permitted my return home, and the holding of nationwide election on 29 December 2008.

3. Universally acclaimed as free, fair and credible under the supervision of UN and international observers, the elections heralded democracy to Bangladesh. The resounding victory of my party, the Awami League, reflected people's preference for democratic ideals, secularism; and outright denial of all forms of extremism. The election witnessed record high participation of young voters, and women. The huge mandate of the voters reposed on my government an equally huge responsibility for delivering people's expectations. Therefore, my government has already embarked on a Digital Bangladesh by implementing its Vision 2021 election manifesto. Our goal is to transform Bangladesh into "Sonar Bangla" or "Golden Bengal" as envisioned by Bangabandhu.

4. Despite all odds, Bangladesh is making great strides in socio-economic development. Education, particularly for girls, is a priority of our government receiving single largest share of our annual budget. Our government is pledge-bound to ensure 100 per cent student enrollment at primary level by 2010. Therefore, primary education has been made free with free books, and compulsory, for all children; provision made for free education for girls up to class 12; and, stipend for girls in rural secondary schools. As for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Bangladesh has been successful in removing gender disparity in net enrollment of boys and girls in primary and secondary schools. Our government is now planning to provide free tuition for girls up to degree level. Since children are our future, our government runs a Food-for-Education/Cash-for-Education Program providing food ration to poor primary school children in rural areas. Our aim is to achieve full literacy by 2014.

5. Health is another major sector where our government is striving to make progress. During our last tenure (1996-2001), we formulated a National Health Policy whose main thrust was to ensure basic health care without discrimination. A National Strategy for Maternal Health is also adopted providing quality services for safe motherhood. As for Infant Mortality Rate, our plan is reduce it to 15 from 54 per thousand live-births. Our plan is also to extend child immunization programs beyond

87.2% reached, to 100% during this tenure. During our last tenure, we initiated program to establish one community healthcare centre for every 6000 people to reach primary healthcare services to people's homes. Only 4,000 of the first phase of 18,000 could be completed during the last tenure till changeover of government, and the program was terminated. We are reactivating the program again.

6. Bangladesh is often cited for its social safety programs. A wide range of safety nets have been put in place like cash and food transfer programs; micro-credit and other special poverty alleviation programs; special programs for minorities, the marginalized, disabled, physically challenged and the underprivileged. In our earlier tenure, I had introduced old age pension; distressed women pension; Shanti Nibash or old people's homes; Karma Sangshthan Bank to provide earnings to unemployed youth through productive job creation; and Ashrayan or homes on government owned land for homeless people, along with sustainable jobs. An innovative program of my present government is to provide employment to at least one member of each family. Currently, over a half of our budgetary resource is allocated to reduce poverty level from 45% to 15% by 2021.

Mr. President,

7. Food security has always been our government's prime concern. In our earlier tenure of government, our agricultural programs made Bangladesh self sufficient in food for which Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) presented us with their prestigious 'Ceres Award'. After changeover of government, Bangladesh again became food deficit. This time around our government has adopted a National Food Policy ensuring sustained food security for all; enhancing people's access to food, particularly children, women and the elderly; reducing price of food; increasing food production by reducing prices of fuel, fertilizer and irrigation, and ensuring supply of farm inputs.

8. On international level, in the World Summit on Food Security, due to be held in Rome this November, Bangladesh would be seeking a global agreement for development of agriculture, and attainment of food self sufficiency in developing countries, particularly LDCs. Substantial financial contributions from developed countries; agreement on sustainable agricultural policies; transfer of technology; equitable and fair trade rules for food and agricultural products with special preferential treatment for LDCs; removal of agricultural subsidies in the developed world; would also be sought to address the challenges faced in ensuring food security critical for advancing our development agenda.

Mr. President,

9. Climate change has for some time been adversely impacting our low lying, deltaic, monsoonal country. Though Bangladesh's contribution to climate change is negligible, it is one of its worst victims. Erratic floods, cyclones, droughts and earthquakes are interrupting our agriculture, and challenging our water resources, health, energy, urban planning, etc. Cyclones, battering the coastal areas, have particularly been taking countless lives, and sudden floods uprooting families in thousands, year around. River bank erosion, landslides, soil degradation and deforestation are causing millions of climate change refugees. They are already all over our thickly populated cities. What is alarming is that a meter rise in sea level would inundate 18% of our land mass, directly impacting 11% of our people. Scientific estimates indicate, of the billion people expected to be displaced worldwide by 2050 by climate change factors, one in every 45 people in the world, and one in every 7 people in Bangladesh, would be a victim.

10. Bangladesh has, therefore, decided to take some measures immediately. Dredging of all major rivers is top most agenda for adaptation to climate change. Capital dredging would keep rivers on natural course, deepen them to hold more water, restrict flooding, reduce flood damages, reclaim inundated arable lands, and keep them navigable.

Maintenance dredging would then ensure sustained regulated water flow of the rivers. The excavated silt would build, raise and fortify embankments with the rise of sea level, increase green belts, and help create elevated flat topped grounds for homes of the displaced, thereby discouraging them to move to cities. Meanwhile, 14,000 cyclone shelters have been constructed and more are on the way. These activities would obviously entail huge costs. A Climate Change Trust Fund has been established with our own resources; but to implement the projects, assistance of the international community is imperative.

11. Rapid, unplanned urbanization, occupational dislocations, food, water and land insecurity are some of the consequences of climate change. The affected communities would not only lose their homes, they would also stand to lose their identity, nationality, and their very existence, and in some cases, their countries. In December this year, we would gather in Copenhagen for COP 15, and it is critical, therefore, the outcome of the conference reflects commitment for assured, adequate, and easily accessible funding for adaptation; and affordable, eco-friendly technology transfer to developing countries, particularly to LDCs; as much as specific commitments for deeper cuts in greenhouse emissions. Bangladesh would, of course, make a strong call for climate migrants at COP 15 to consider a new legal regime under the UNFCCC Protocol ensuring social, cultural and economic rehabilitation of climate induced displaced migrants.

12. On this vital issue of climate change, the recent bold and courageous proposal by Prime Minister Gordon Brown of the United Kingdom has caught the imagination of the frontline states of climate change. The proposed Fund, among his other proposals, for supporting the adaptation and mitigation programs of climate change affected countries has particularly won our support. It could be the beginning of a systematic flow of funds towards ameliorating the adversely changing environmental conditions around the globe. The COP 15 would need to look at his proposal seriously. The Conference must also be mindful that climate change mitigation does not impose constraints on steps taken to alleviate

energy poverty. And, that the post 2012 agreement should incorporate predictable and legally binding commitments to address the adaptation needs of low lying coastal states, small island countries, and LDCs.

Mr. President,

13. The world is caught in an economic recession never seen since the great Depression of the 1930s. The economically vulnerable countries as the LDCs, not responsible for this crisis, have become its worst victims. Bangladesh is faced with sharp reduction in exports, falling prices of primary commodities, declining remittances, severe credit crunch, leading to contraction of our economic growth, rising unemployment and poverty. This crisis has been due to years of negligence to equity and justice, including basically an unfair international financial structure that never changed with the changing needs of time. The need of the hour is immediate restructuring of the global financial and economic system. The Brettonwoods institutions, that is, the World Bank and the IMF must accommodate stronger presence of developing countries, especially LDCs. Indeed, voting weight proportionate to share capital has proved unsuitable for the Brettonwoods.

14. Surely fiscal stimulus flows packages would help support global demand and aid recovery. However, it is liberal trade concessions by developed countries as duty free, quota free market access, trade capacity building to developing countries, particularly LDCs, which would rescue them from dire straits. The early conclusion of the Doha Development Round of WTO trade negotiations would be an important collective stimulus package for our economies. It is also the time for the OECD countries to fulfill their ODA commitment to developing countries of 0.7% of their Gross National Income, and 0.2% to LDCs by 2010, as reaffirmed in the Brussels Program of Action.

15. The economic turmoil has adversely affected employment at national level worldwide. Worst effected are the LDCs both domestically as well as with employment abroad. Remittances constitute a significant

part of their GDP. However, recent restrictions on new admissions of migrant workers, and even worse, their repatriation home have resulted in socio-economic instability in many countries. Therefore, recovery measures should be designed in such a manner so as not to adversely affect employment opportunities of immigrant workers from developing countries.

Mr. President,

16. Bangladesh is proud of its outstanding role as a major troop contributing country serving the United Nations in maintaining peace and security worldwide. Ever since 1988, Bangladesh has been involved in 32 UN peacekeeping operations in 24 different countries with approximately 83,000 personnel. Today, Bangladesh is ranked the second with 9,567 peacekeepers in various UN missions. Through the years, it is with pride I say that 84 of our valiant peacekeepers have laid down their lives for the cause of UN sponsored peace. Sadly, despite our contribution and sacrifice, Bangladesh does not have a proportionate representation in the Department of Peace Keeping Operations, nor does it have a say in the planning and strategies of peace keeping missions. Indeed, this situation calls for rectification, on the basis of proportional representation in all fairness. Bangladesh is also a founding member of Peace Building Commission and has since been contributing in its peace building activities in the strife torn parts of the world.

17. As a peaceful nation involved in UN peacekeeping efforts, Bangladesh is naturally opposed to terrorism. Bangladesh is a party to all terrorism related UN Conventions, a testament to our commitment to fighting this malaise. We categorically reject claims of those who cloak themselves in the rhetoric of Islam, or any other faith to justify violence. Nation-wise, we have taken stern measures against militant groups and their patrons. Firmly opposed to violence and terrorism, and instead promoting peace across the world, Bangladesh, in UNGA Sessions, spearheads the flagship resolution on "Culture of Peace." In last year's

UNGA Session, the resolution was cosponsored by 124 nations. It gained significance for its reference to International Mother Language Day.

18. The International Mother Language Day, at the initiative of Bangladesh, was adopted by UNESCO in recognition of 21st February, 1952, when language martyrs died for their mother tongue "Bangla." Now every year on that day, UNESCO celebrates all languages of the world. The language "Bangla" is spoken by over 250 million people worldwide, primarily in Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal. The Bangladesh Parliament, therefore, recently adopted a resolution requesting the United Nations to declare "Bangla" as one of its official languages. Given the rich heritage of "Bangla" language, and its singular place as a symbol of people's faith in the power of languages to sustain cultures, and indeed the identity of nations, I seek support of the membership of UNGA for its acceptance as an official language of the United Nations.

Mr. President,

19. At present we are witnessing a rapidly changing world whether be it in the form of climate change, economic turmoil, or terrorism. It is crystal clear to those who wish to open their eyes that we all belong to a global village where we must live and work together. Indeed, our lives and our world are intertwined. I, therefore, call upon all to discard shortsighted discords, and adopt a common resolve in facing today's grim challenges. Let us share each other's responsibility, burden and prosperity. After all, at stake is our common and shared future. In reaching out to one another, we will leave a harmonious world for our children, and future generations thereafter.

I thank you, Mr. President.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever
Long Live United Nations
Khoda Hafez