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Morning Session
UNGA Hall

The 66th 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

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Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Mr. President,

Assalamu Alaikum and Good Afternoon to you all.

I am confident that your able and dynamic stewardship of the 66th UNGA will achieve our aspired goals. I thank the President of the 65th UNGA, H.E. Mr. Joseph Deiss, for the success of the 65th UNGA. I also thank Secretary General Mr. Ban Ki Moon for his wise selection of the theme “Mediation in the peaceful settlement of international disputes’ for this year’s general debate. I take this opportunity to welcome South Sudan as the 193rd member of the United Nations and warmly congratulate the people of the newest state on attaining their freedom and independence.

Mr. President,

I believe peace is the basis for development. I also believe peace prevails when justice prevails. Therefore, justice at home and abroad, is important for ensuring peaceful mediation and settlement of disputes. My father and the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who espoused “Friendship towards all, malice towards none” and “peaceful settlement of disputes” also believed in this, and declared the same from this podium 37 years ago.

Thus, justice for peace found its place in my government’s domestic and foreign policy contributing to strengthening Bangladesh’s secular, democratic and progressive ideals. Strong foundations in the rule of law has also helped the peaceful settlement of our disputes with neighbors, and formed the basis of our participation in UN peacekeeping operations. Emphasis on peaceful negotiations has also enabled Bangladesh maintain an annual GDP growth rate of 6 %; create thousands of jobs, reduce

poverty, expand social safety net schemes to the poor, disadvantaged, elderly as well as deprived women.

Mr. President,

Since its establishment, the UN's role has changed. The maintenance of international peace and security now includes the new challenges of intrastate ethnic strife, terrorism, cross boundary crimes, climate change, poverty, energy and water security, as well as the widening gap between the rich and the poor. However, UN's successes have reinforced the belief that it is still the most legitimate, universally accepted international body in the 21st century, with the ability to harness global collective will for the peaceful settlement of disputes through mediation.

Bangladesh, therefore, laud Mr. Ban Ki Moon's report on, "Enhancing Mediation and support activities" for better use of UN's mediation mandate, and co-sponsored the GA resolution on, "strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes". To demonstrate our strong commitment to conflict resolution, Bangladesh has partnered in many of UN's endeavors for peace, democracy and development. Our contribution to UN peacekeeping has so far been 102, 294 peacekeepers in 52 missions and 36 countries. This included the sad loss of life of 103 brave Bangladeshis. Our involvement also includes UN's first ever all women police unit in Haiti.

In UN Peace Building Commission, as NAM Coordinator, Bangladesh is always advocating peace building, development and preventive diplomacy in post conflict societies. Sadly, we remain woefully under represented at planning and strategy levels of the DPKO, an issue calling for a speedy resolution. As member of UN Human Rights Council and the ECOSOC, we consciously promote democracy; secularism; justice and rule of law; equal rights of women, children, minorities, and other vulnerable groups. As

Executive Body member of UNDP/UNFPA, UNICEF, UNESCO, and FAO, we are committed to setting global norms and standards in development practices.

Mr. President,

Since I believe justice brings peace, during my last term as Prime Minister, in 1997, I mediated the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord for the marginalized communities from the Hill Tracts region. The Accord signed through intense discussions ended a 20 year conflict that cost over 20,000 lives. During the same term, I mediated the signing of the 30 Year Ganges Water Sharing Treaty with neighboring India. During my current tenure, only this month, we have mediated and signed an MoU with India on border demarcation, an issue that had been pending for the last 64 years obstructing the everyday life of my people. I am committed to settling all our problems with neighboring India through peaceful mediation.

During this tenure, soon after forming the government, one of the most dangerous challenges that I have faced was the mutiny of our border forces that took 72 lives. Yet this time also, I chose a mediated settlement, thereby avoiding possible further loss of life. As a result, we have developed our national capacity for mediation with a pool of retired chief justices and legal experts, including women, who can act as arbitrators and mediators.

Since there can be no peace without justice, we have established an independent International Crimes Tribunal to try those responsible for war crimes committed during our liberation war in 1971. Their eventual punishment will strengthen our democracy, demonstrating that the state is capable of just retribution. As a state party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) we believe in the Statute's provision of

bringing perpetrators to justice. It is the only way to healing the wrongs of the past, and bring national reconciliation.

I am fully committed to battling terrorism in all its forms, having personally suffered from acts of terror. Here I recall with profound sadness, the brutal assassination of my father, the first President of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and eighteen of my immediate family members, including my mother and three brothers, on August 15, 1975. I also recall the grenade attack on me and my followers at a rally in August 21, 2004, that left 22 dead and nearly 500 injured. I escaped miraculously but with permanent loss of hearing. I often think of all the victims of terrorism, especially those of the 9/11 attacks in New York and elsewhere around the world. Indeed, if peace is to prevail, these terrorists must be brought to justice.

Our government has a “zero tolerance policy” towards terrorism. Our aim is to break the nexus between terrorism, extremism, and radicalization and eliminate them all from Bangladesh, a state party to all UN counterterrorism conventions. At the same time, we are strengthening our democratic institutions like the Commissions for Election, Anti-Corruption, Human Rights, Information, as well as the Judiciary, Legislature and law enforcement agencies as they are the tools for eliminating terrorism and extremism.

Since justice begets peace and peace is vital for development, our policies are tuned to ensuring peoples’ rights. In pursuing the Millennium Development Goals, we are also fulfilling our people’s aspirations. The UN Award for MDG -4 on reducing child mortality which I received last year is a case in point. We are also on track on MDG -1 on poverty alleviation, MDG -2 on universal primary education, MDG -3 on gender equality and MDG -5 on reducing maternal mortality. Our Poverty Reduction Strategy is in

tandem with the MDGs and intends to raise 12 million people out of poverty by 2015.

For development, we have integrated women's education in our state policy. They say, "If you educate a boy, you educate a person, if you educate a girl you educate a family and a whole nation." Therefore, during our first term from 1996-2001, we adopted a National Women's Development Policy revised during this tenure to make it more relevant. The Policy provides for the empowerment of women, their participation in decision making and their protection and gender equality. Education for girls is free till class 12 and steps are on for their free tuition till graduation.

Following the 2008 general elections, women's participation in politics increased with their election to 12,828 reserved seats in local government and 64 members in the parliament. We also have five women cabinet ministers (in charge of Agriculture, Home, foreign Affairs, Women and Children Affairs, and Labor), a female Opposition Leader, the Deputy Leader, a female Whip, and of course, the Prime Minister is a woman. For the first time in our history, two women MPs have been made chairperson of Parliamentary Standing Committees. Women now occupy high positions in High and Supreme Courts, in civil, police and armed services and in UN Peacekeeping missions. Female business ventures also receive support from the Small and Medium Enterprise Foundation.

To achieve our election pledge of "Digital Bangladesh" and for Bangladesh to be a middle income country by 2021, the Golden Jubilee Year of our independence, we are expanding the reach of information and communications technology all over the country. The Head of UNDP, Mrs. Helen Clark, was with us this year to witness e-connectivity of our 4,500 Information and Service Centers providing internet access to millions of rural people. We also have in place an e-center for Rural Community connecting

8,500 post offices; a “High Tech park”; e-governance and e-infrastructure building process. Information is also delivered electronically in agriculture, education, healthcare, disaster early warning, social safety net payments, banking etc.

I believe in “Health for all”. It is an essential precondition for peace and development. Our success in reducing child mortality has already been recognized by the UN Award on MDG -4 last year. But we have also been successful in reducing the maternal mortality rate, with the Maternal Mortality Survey 2010 indicating a 66% drop. Primary health care services are being delivered through 11,000 community health centers (to be increased to 18,000), with each one providing services to 6,000 people in rural areas. My government has also recently started raising awareness about autism as well as developmental disorders in children. Last July, we launched the Global Autism Public Health Initiative in Dhaka to help those disadvantaged with these disorders.

However, to pursue these efforts and to develop socio-economic security, the Least Developed Countries like Bangladesh need international support. The support must come from granting us market access, removing trade barriers, fulfillment of Overseas Development Aid, combating climate change, as well as giving us equal voice in the Bretton Woods Institutions. The commitments made in Istanbul this May on agriculture, energy, infrastructure, water and migration would also strengthen the economic stability of LDCs. It is now time for the development partners to implement the commitments made in Monterrey, Paris and Brussels before the conclusion of the Doha Development Round. Support must continue to enable LDCs to fulfill their MDGs.

Such support is especially important for Bangladesh, under extra strain from climate change. A meter rise of the sea due to global warming would inundate a fifth of our land mass displacing over 30 million people. This would be the largest humanitarian

crisis in history. So as not to lose time, we have prepared a 134 – point adaptation and mitigation plan that includes river dredging, afforesting 20% of land, increasing food production with crop varieties attuned to climate change etc.

We have also established a Climate Change Trust Fund with US\$ 300 million of our own funds, and a Bangladesh Climate Change Resilience Fund with US\$ 110 million from the donors. Indeed, climate change is upon us and we cannot afford to waste time. In COP -17 in Durban this year, we must have a binding agreement on cuts of greenhouse gas emissions, burden sharing, relocation of climate migrants, free transfer of technologies, and real contribution to the internationally agreed “Climate Fund”.

In the last two sessions of the UNGA, I have called on all UN members to support our appeal to declare Bangla, spoken by over 300 million worldwide, as an official language of the United Nations. Once again, I appeal for you to bestow this request. I also seek your support for Bangladesh’s annual flagship resolution, “A Culture of Peace,” which I launched in 2000 when I was Prime Minister for the first time.

Mr. President,

Throughout my half a century in politics, I have always been a crusader of peace. I believe that peace is achievable with the removal of injustice, which includes repression and absence of rule of law, inequality and economic disparity, deprivation and poverty, suppression of self determination, denial of secularism and multi-ethnicity, negligence of equal rights for women and the marginalized, and the lack of transparency and accountability of governments. These types of injustices, according to the Uppsala Conflict Data program, have led to the loss of over 5 million lives from 1964 to 2011. I believe these deaths may be avoided by

strengthening the UN's mediation instruments, and by placing people at the center of peace and development.

In fact, my life experiences have inspired me to come up with a new peace model based on people's empowerment. It is a multi-dimensional one championing democracy and people's empowerment at the centre, with six mutually reinforcing peace multipliers: - (1) Eradication of poverty and hunger; (2) Reduction of inequality; (3) Mitigation of deprivation; (4) Inclusion of excluded people; (5) Acceleration of human development; and (6) Elimination of terrorism. I call it the "People's empowerment" model. It reaffirms that all people should be treated equally and emphasizes on the empowerment of people and enhancement of human capabilities for the realization of peace".

Prosperity is achievable with the removal of injustices and disempowerment in an environment of peace. This is possible by individual nations by sincere implementation of what is right, or sometimes under the guidance of the United Nations. Let us all try to test this model of 'people's empowerment' which I believe has the potential to transform our world of seven billion people into one where our future generations may prosper and live in happiness.

I thank you, Mr. President.

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