

77th Session of the UNGA

**Address by Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina,
Prime Minister of Bangladesh**

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Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Mr. President,

Assalamu Alaikum and Good afternoon.

I heartily congratulate you on your election as the President of the 77th session of the United Nations General Assembly. I assure you of my delegation's full cooperation throughout the session. I also commend your predecessor His Excellency Mr. Abdullah Shahid.

I would like to express my deep appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Antonio Guterres, for his strong commitment to making the United Nations more vibrant in its responsibilities.

The theme of this year's general debate is: "A watershed moment: transformative solutions to interlocking challenges".

Our planet Earth today is plagued by multiple complex and multi-dimensional challenges like climate change, violence and conflict, and the Covid-19 pandemic. This year's theme calls for united efforts to find ways to overcome these challenges and revitalize our economy to build a peaceful and sustainable world. And to achieve this goal we need to act collectively without any delay.

Mr. President,

As the world begins to recover from the devastating effects of the coronavirus pandemic over the past two and a half years, the recent Russia-Ukraine conflict has plunged the world further into a grave uncertainty. Escalating food insecurity, energy and economic crisis are affecting us all. Countries that are already in vulnerable situation needing support to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will now face even more challenges to achieve the SDGs.

Today we have reached a critical time and situation, when mutual solidarity must be shown more than ever. We need to prove that in times of crisis, the United Nations remains the cornerstone of the multilateral system. Therefore, in order to gain the trust and confidence of the people of all countries and all segments, the United Nations must lead from the forefront and work to fulfill the expectations of all of us.

We believe that antagonism like war or economic sanctions, counter-sanctions can never bring good to any nation. Mutual dialogue is the best way to resolve crises and disputes.

In this context, I thank the United Nations Secretary General for setting up the Global Crisis Response Group. As a champion of this group, I am working with other world leaders to determine a global solution commensurate with the gravity and depth of the current situation.

Mr. President,

The Father of the Nation of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, formulated our foreign policy dictum ‘friendship to all, malice towards none’. Bangladesh has been pursuing this principle of non-alignment since its independence.

In his maiden address to this great Assembly on 25 September 1974, he said - I quote ‘Our total commitment to peace is born of the realization that only an environment of peace would enable us to enjoy the fruits of our hard-won national independence and to mobilize and concentrate all our energies and resources in combating the scourges of poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy and unemployment. We therefore welcome every effort aimed at advancing the process of detente, relaxation of tension, limitation of armaments and the promotion of peaceful coexistence in every part of the world, whether in Asia, Africa, Europe or Latin America.’ - unquote.

This statement of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib is still equally relevant in the present global context. Bangabandhu believed that peace is the embodiment of the aspirations of all men and women in the world. As a result of war, human beings, especially women and children, suffer tremendously. Many people become refugees.

Mr. President,

Since the beginning of the pandemic in Bangladesh, we have taken strategies to contain this crisis mainly focusing on three aspects. First, we expanded national health care to prevent the transmission and spread of the infection; second, we have provided strategic fiscal stimulus to safeguard our economy; and thirdly, we have secured people's livelihood. These initiatives have helped reduce the number of deaths due to pandemic as well as reduce public sufferings.

Vaccination is the key to our safe transition from the pandemic. We thank the World Health Organization and its COVAX system and our partner countries for providing this vaccine. As of August 2022, 100 percent of the eligible population of Bangladesh have been vaccinated.

Mr. President,

We are working towards sustainable economic growth, creating equal opportunities for all and realizing an inclusive peaceful society and social harmony.

Bangladesh is now one of the five fastest growing economies in the world. We are 41st in terms of GDP. We have reduced the poverty rate from 41 percent to 20.5 percent in the last decade. Our per capita income has tripled to 2,824 US dollars in just a decade.

Before the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, our GDP growth rate in Fiscal Year 2018-19 was 8.15 percent. Earlier, we achieved GDP growth of over 7 percent for three consecutive years. Even in the midst of the pandemic, the economy of Bangladesh expanded by 6.94 percent in the fiscal year 2020-21.

However, as a result of the Russia-Ukraine war, economic sanctions and counter-sanctions there has been a supply chain disruption and exorbitant price hike of fuel, food and consumer goods. This has brought the economy like ours under tremendous pressure. Inflation has been increased. We are taking various initiatives to overcome this situation.

In 2026, Bangladesh is going to graduate from Least Developed Countries category to a developing country. We are working towards transforming Bangladesh into a knowledge-based developed country by 2041 and building a prosperous and climate-resilient delta by 2100.

Mr President,

Bangladesh has achieved significant progress in universal primary education, food security, reduction of maternal and child mortality, gender equality, women empowerment etc. Literacy rate has increased from 50 percent to 75 percent in the last decade. We have emphasized greatly on ensuring Information Technology-based education system.

Our infant mortality rate has declined to 21 per thousand and maternal mortality rate has reduced to 173 per hundred thousand live births. The average life expectancy of our people is now more than 73 years.

We have paid special attention to the most vulnerable people in the society so that no one is left behind. The coverage of the existing social safety net has been expanded to ensure social and financial security of

destitute women, widows, the elderly, persons with disabilities, third gender people, and other vulnerable segment of the society. Currently, about 10.7 million people are receiving direct benefits under the social safety net.

Improved physical infrastructure serves as the foundation for a strong economic structure. That is why we are building massive sustainable infrastructure, including under-water tunnels, elevated expressways and mass rapid transit systems. Recently we have added “Padma Multi-purpose Bridge”- a self-funded asset to our road communications system. It will facilitate Bangladesh's local and international trade and enhance regional connectivity. This will ensure at least 1.23 percent growth in our national income.

Mr. President,

The impact of climate change is one of the biggest threats for the humankind. In the past, we have seen a vicious cycle of promises being made and broken. We must now change this course.

In Bangladesh, we have led to many transformative measures to tackle perilous impacts of climate change consistent with implementing the Paris Agreement and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. During our Presidency of Climate Vulnerable Forum, we launched ‘Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan’, which aims to put Bangladesh on a sustainable trajectory from “one of vulnerability to resilience and climate prosperity”.

Our national plans and policies on climate change and natural disaster have been made gender responsive.

We are ready to support other vulnerable countries to develop their own prosperity plans. I call on world leaders to promote inclusive climate actions.

Mr. President,

Migrants continue to face precarious situations in their migration journeys, be denied of their rights. To overcome this situation, we must enhance global partnership and solidarity. The ‘Global Compact on Migration’ along with its ‘Progress Declaration’ gives us an excellent roadmap in this regard.

Today, the complex global crises have reversed decades of development gains of many developing countries. The realization of the 2030 Agenda appears to be a far-fetched dream for many of them at this moment. They need targeted support in areas that are severely impacted including health, education, decent job, and agriculture. There is no better way than harnessing the potentials of Science, Technology and Innovation.

We are witnessing how frontier technologies are rapidly changing the world. It is imperative that everyone, everywhere gets fair and equal access to these technologies. The burgeoning digital divide must be bridged.

Sixteen countries, including Bangladesh, are now on track to graduate from the list of Least Developed countries. However, the evolving global crises have posed serious challenges to our sustainable graduation. We urge the development partners for enhanced and tailored support. We welcome the Doha Programme of Action in this regard.

Mr. President,

After the peaceful settlement of maritime boundaries with the neighboring countries, the blue economy has opened new horizon for the development of Bangladesh.

We are committed to working with global partners for the sustainable use, conservation and management of our marine resources to accelerate our socio-economic development.

Effective implementation of the provisions of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea is imperative in harnessing sustainable utilization of ocean resources.

In this regard I also call upon the member States to work closely to bridge the gaps and conclude the much-needed international instrument on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, known as BBNJ.

Mr President,

We are fully committed to complete disarmament, including the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. We ratified the landmark Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in 2019.

We have consistently implemented our commitment to peacekeeping operations. As a reflection of our peace-centric foreign policy, we are contributing to the highest number of troops and police in the UN peacekeeping missions. They help maintain peace, support capacity building of national and local institutions, protect the civilians from harms, empower women and other vulnerable communities and build a sustainable society. While performing these duties, many of them sacrificed their lives.

We believe without addressing root causes of conflict, we cannot sustain peace. As the current Chair of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, we are doing our part by creating platform for multi-stakeholder engagements in support of the conflict affected countries.

We are committed to continue our efforts in strengthening the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda.

We have adopted a 'zero tolerance' policy on terrorism and violent extremism. We do not allow our territory to be used by any party to incite or cause terrorist acts or harm to others.

I also call upon Member States to work together for conclusion of an internationally binding instrument to tackle cyber-crimes and cyber-violence.

Mr. President,

As a responsible member state, Bangladesh is fully committed to protecting and promoting the human rights of its own people. We have adopted a holistic and inclusive approach to ensure the political, economic, cultural and social rights of the people.

For example, we have adopted legal provisions to ensure the rights and welfare of the people belonging to third gender.

We have been implementing a project namely 'Ashrayan' to provide free housing to all homeless and landless families of the country. Since 1997, during the tenure of my government for 18 years, we have provided housing to more than 3.5 million people.

We believe, continued democratic polity and norms can ensure people's socio-economic emancipation.

Mr. President,

We will continue to extend our support to the Palestinian people. I reiterate Bangladesh's unequivocal support for the two-state solution based on pre-1967 borders and the establishment of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. President,

I shall now seek your attention to the forcibly displaced Rohingya peoples from Myanmar. Last month we witnessed the five years of the 2017 mass exodus of the Rohingyas to Bangladesh from their home country.

Despite our bilateral engagements with Myanmar, discussions with partners in trilateral format and engagements with the UN and other partners, not a single Rohingya was repatriated to their ancestral homes in Myanmar. The ongoing political turmoil and armed conflicts in the country has made the repatriation of the displaced Rohingyas even more difficult. I hope, the United Nations will play an effective role in this regard.

Prolonged presence of the Rohingyas in Bangladesh has caused serious ramifications on the economy, environment, security, and socio-political stability in Bangladesh. Uncertainty over repatriation has led to widespread frustration. Cross border organized crimes including human and drug trafficking are on the rise.

This situation can potentially fuel radicalization. If the problem persists further, it may affect the security and stability of the entire region, and beyond.

Mr. President,

The greatest lesson we learnt from the Covid-19 pandemic is that ‘no one is safe until everyone is safe’. We must use the hard-earned lessons to stimulate critical and much needed reforms of our institutions, including of the United Nations, to better prepare for such calamities in the future.

We are interested in looking for transformative solutions to poverty alleviation, mitigating adverse effects climate change, preventing conflicts and economic, energy and fuel crises that the world is grappling with now. However, we need to understand the fact that socio-economic development cannot be achieved without ensuring peace and stability.

We want the end of Russia-Ukraine war. Due to sanctions, and counter-sanctions, not a single country, rather the entire mankind including women and children is punished. Its impact does not remain confined to one country, rather puts the lives and livelihoods of the people of all nations in greater risk, and infringes their human rights. People are deprived of food, shelter, healthcare and education. Children suffer the most in particular. Their future sinks into darkness.

My urge to the conscience of the world - stop the arms race, stop the war and sanctions. Ensure food, education, healthcare and security of the children. Establish peace.

We want to see a peaceful world with enhanced cooperation and solidarity, shared prosperity and collective actions. We share one planet, and we owe it to our future generations to leave it in a better shape.

Mr. President,

I would like to talk about a cruel tragedy.

On 15 August 1975, my father, Father of the Nation, the incumbent President of Bangladesh Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was brutally assassinated, along with my mother Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib, my three younger brothers- Freedom Fighter Captain Sheikh Kamal, and his newly married wife Sultana, Freedom Fighter Lieutenant Sheikh Jamal, his newly married wife Parveen Rosy, my 10-year old brother Sheikh Russell.

Total 18 of my family members were killed including my paternal uncle Freedom Fighter Sheikh Abu Naser, paternal uncle Abdur Rab Serniabat, his 13-year-old daughter Baby Serniabat, 10-year old son Arif Serniabat, and 4-year old son Shukanto, my paternal cousin Freedom Fighter Sheikh Mani and his pregnant wife Arzu Mani, Brigadier Jamil, Police Officer Siddiquir Rahman. May their soul rest in peace.

Only my younger sister, Sheikh Rehana and myself survived the brutality as we were in Germany at that time. After that, we spent 6 years abroad as refugees.

In 1971, Pakistan occupation forces killed three million innocent Bengalis. Two hundred thousand women were heinously tortured and abused. I recall their sacrifices with deep homage.

After my father was arrested in 1971, he was taken to an undisclosed location in Pakistan. In Dhaka, my mother, my younger brothers Sheikh Russell and Sheikh Jamal, younger sister Sheikh Rehana and I were arrested, and we were kept in a one-story damp house. My first child, Sajeeb Wazed Joy was born in that prison house. No furniture was provided to us. There was no provisions for medical facilities. Even getting daily food was uncertain.

So, myself as a sufferer, I can rightly realize the pain and agony that people endure due to the horrors of war, killings, coups and conflicts. Therefore, I do not want war, I want peace, I want welfare for the humankind. I want economic development for people. I want to ensure peaceful world, developed and prosperous life for future generations.

My earnest appeal to you, ‘stop war, stop arms race’. May the values of humanity be upheld.

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Let us join our hands together and build a better future leaving no one behind.

Thank you all.
Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu;
May Bangladesh Live Forever.