

78th Session of the UNGA

Address by Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh

New York, 22 September 2023

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Mr. President,

Assalamu Alaikum and Good afternoon.

I would like to congratulate you on your election as the President of the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly. I assure you of Bangladesh delegation's full cooperation throughout the session. I also commend your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Csaba Kőrösi, for his successful steering of the 77th UNGA session.

I would also like to express my deep appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Antonio Guterres, for his strong commitment to strengthening multilateralism and for his efforts, bold statements, and his far-sighted and pragmatic steps toward making the UN deliver its mandates and stand up to the challenges of the current world.

The theme of this year's general debate has been set as *“Rebuilding trust and reigniting global solidarity: Accelerating action on the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals towards peace, prosperity, progress and sustainability for all”*.

I think, this year's theme is very much relevant in the context of the volatility and complexity the world is facing currently. People's trust in the effectiveness and legitimacy of the international organization is gradually being eroded. As a result, our overall progress towards a peaceful and prosperous common future is faced with threats. The impacts of the pandemic, the effects of an existential climate crisis, and the wide ramifications of the war in Ukraine affecting global food, financial, and energy securities have greatly impeded the achievement of SDGs in developing countries.

At this critical juncture, your call for rebuilding trust and reigniting global solidarity reminds me of the maiden speech by our Father of the Nation in this august Assembly. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman stated in his address to this Assembly in 1974, and I quote – *“The great economic upheavals' that have shaken the world should generate a sense of urgency for building a just economic order. ...Only a regeneration of the feeling of human solidarity and brotherhood and an acknowledgement of interdependence can bring about a rational solution and urgent action needed to avoid such catastrophe”*. Unquote.

In this connection, we deeply appreciate Secretary-General's initiative to convene the "Summit of the Future" next year. We hope that this process will amply complement our efforts to attain the 2030 Agenda.

We must make all efforts to collectively address the common challenges of humanity to secure a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable future for all. And, for that, we must choose unity, solidarity, and multilateralism over fragmentation, insularity and isolation. Our pursuit of peace and sustainable prosperity must follow the principles of fairness, justice, and equity guided by the 2030 agenda and the UN Charter.

Mr. President,

Since assuming office in 2009, we have invested heavily to build a human-centric, inclusive, modern democracy as envisioned by our Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Following his pathway, our tireless efforts, pragmatic policy interventions and forward-looking investments have transformed Bangladesh from a lower-middle income country to a middle-income country. We have reduced poverty rate from 41.5 percent in 2006 to 18.7 percent in 2022 and extreme poverty rate from 25.1 percent to 5.6 percent.

Building on our success in achieving MDGs, we have made sustained progress in achieving the SDGs. However, like other countries in the world, Bangladesh also faced serious challenges. COVID 19 pandemic, various man-made crises and natural disasters have intensified those challenges manifold.

Therefore, we welcome the successful holding of the SDG Summit this year and the adoption of its Political Declaration. We believe, despite some limitations, the Political Declaration will accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Mr. President,

For a timely achievement of SDGs, financing is one of the most critical factors. Unfortunately, however, the international financial infrastructure is barely aligned with the SDGs, nor can it respond to the financial needs of developing countries especially during crises.

Today, we urgently need an international financial architecture that will help developing countries receive concessional, low-cost, low-interest-rate funds, with minimum conditionalities. Besides, developing countries must also have equitable access to IMF's SDR

funds during emergencies and disasters. A special ‘disaster clause’ should be included in all lending instruments.

We thank the Secretary-General for proposing a 500 billion dollar SDGs stimulus package and demand its early operationalization.

Mr. President,

In Bangladesh, we have taken a set of tough fiscal and policy choices to ensure macroeconomic stability and to control inflation during and post pandemic period.

On the other hand, we have increased our investment in social safety net programs and provided targeted support for agriculture, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), and other vulnerable sectors. We have expanded the social safety net coverage to ensure social and financial security of destitute women, widows, the elderly, persons with disabilities, persons of third gender and other marginalized segments of the society. In the current fiscal year, a total of 12 billion US dollar has been allocated for the social safety net programmes. This year, we have introduced the Universal Pension Scheme through which any citizen aged between 18 and 50 years of age can avail of old age benefits.

Mr. President,

In our efforts to achieving SDGs, we have attached high importance to eliminate discrimination against women. Bangladesh is committed to ensure women empowerment and gender equality within a stipulated timeframe. We have given special attention to overall education including female literacy. We have been providing textbooks free of cost upto secondary level since 2010. Starting from the primary to higher education, about 23 million students are being provided with stipend, scholarship and one time grant. More than half of those recipients are female.

A total of 30% of our budget is allocated for women’s social and economic empowerment. We have ensured the political representation of women at all levels, from the top to the lowest tier of government. We aim at ensuring 50% participation of women in all sectors by 2030.

While doing so, we are also addressing social challenges like child marriage, violence against women & girls, trafficking of women and other crimes through enacting appropriate laws and their stringent implementation. We remain supportive to all international initiatives for advancement of women including through the UNGA Platform for Women Leaders.

Mr. President,

Despite contributing less than 0.47% of global emissions, Bangladesh is one of the most climatically-vulnerable countries in the world. The adverse effects of climate pose serious threats to the security and economic prosperity of our present and future generations. Urgent, bold and ambitious collective actions are needed to address these threats.

Bangladesh is committed to protecting and preserving the environment and biodiversity and pursuing a climate-resilient sustainable development path. In line with the long-term temperature goal set out in Article 2 of the Paris Agreement, Bangladesh is developing its national low-carbon emission strategy and mitigation actions through green initiatives including renewable energy.

We established the “Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund” back in 2009 to finance climate adaptation and allocated 480 million US dollars to this fund so far from our own resources.

Sea dykes, cyclone shelters are constructed; greenbelt and tree plantation initiatives are undertaken for climate adaptation and mitigation purpose. We are implementing the world’s biggest housing project for people displaced by the impacts of climate change in Cox’s Bazar by constructing 139 multi-storied buildings with all necessary amenities to shelter 4,409 climate change-affected families. Under the “*Ashrayan*” project, a landmark initiative of my government for the landless and homeless people, 5 million people from 8 hundred and 40 thousand families have been provided with houses free of costs.

Mr. President,

We are implementing the “Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100”. Its objective is to achieve a safe, climate-resilient and prosperous delta through coordinated delta management process. My government has undertaken “Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan”. We are working to ensure our gradual transition from climate vulnerability to climate resilience.

More than six million people are using solar home systems. We are also working for a more sustainable energy mix. We hope to have 40% of our energy from renewable sources by 2040.

We call upon the major emitters to submit and implement ambitious NDCs. The developed economies must fulfill their 100-billion dollars commitments.

The development needs of the climate-vulnerable countries must be considered. We also demand an urgent operationalization of loss & damage funds as agreed in COP27.

We call for a stronger global solidarity in sharing the burden of climate migrants induced by sea-level rise, salinity increase, river erosion, floods, and droughts.

Mr. President,

The interlinked crises of the past few years have pushed up prices of food, energy and commodities globally, weakening our efforts to recover from the pandemic. As an energy-and food-importing country, our import bills have shot up significantly, having negative impact on our foreign currency reserves.

Despite these challenges, we have ensured food for everyone. We are providing 10 million people in low-income bracket with rice and other commodities at affordable prices. We have taken different initiatives to keep inflation under control. I have called upon our people to grow their own food and leave no cultivable land uncultivated. Our scientists have now developed climate-resilient varieties including drought-and flood- and salinity-tolerant varieties of crops.

I thank the Secretary-General for forming the Global Crisis Response Group in 2022 and for the Group's continued advocacy and solutions in addressing the global food, energy and financial crises. As a Champion of this Group, I have always emphasized on sustainable solutions of the problems associated with food exports and its supply chain.

We are deeply concerned that the Black Sea Grain Initiative has become defunct and call upon all parties concerned for its early restoration. Besides, for the countries like ours, uninterrupted access to fertilizers must be ensured. Furthermore, we need global investment in cold chains to preserve the food we produce. I have proposed initiating the regional 'food banks' for emergency situations. We must collaborate in research and development of climate-resilient crops.

Mr. President,

As part of Vision 2041, my government is heavily investing in building a 'Smart Bangladesh' to transform the country into a high-income, poverty-free, developed nation, grounded in proper utilization of science and technology, and powered by innovation.

To that end, Bangladesh has updated its National Science and Technology Policy to ensure the application of science, technology, and innovation (ST&I) for achieving sustainable economic growth with due attention to employment generation, poverty alleviation, gender equity and environmental sustainability.

While digital technologies brought multiple benefits and enhanced inclusion across the globe, they also deepened inequalities and exclusion across and within countries. Equitable access to sustainable technology will be a great enabler for sustainable development.

We have a strong conviction that South-South and Triangular Cooperation can play a vital role in accelerating digitalization and ensuring equitable distribution of its benefits.

Mr. President,

In 2026, Bangladesh will officially graduate from the LDC category. I believe, the ongoing multiple global crises will not derail our graduation trajectory. Yet, we reiterate our call to the development partners and the advanced economies to continue to support us during our transition to ease the impact of our graduation. I also call upon WTO Members States to extend to us the existing differential treatment available to LDCs for a period appropriate to our development requirement.

The LDC5 Conference held in Doha, Qatar in March this year ushered in a renewed global commitment to enhance support to the LDCs and graduating LDCs. I call upon the United Nations and our development partners to ensure full and effective implementation of the Doha Programme of Action.

Mr. President,

As a proponent of the Global Compact for safe, orderly, and regular migration, we urge the international community to reinforce our commitment to ensure its full implementation. We put special emphasis on the full implementation of the outcome of the first International Migration Review Forum held last year.

Mr. President,

We appreciate the idea of setting some minimum benchmarks for health coverage globally. To achieve these targets, expanding international cooperation, including adequate financing and technology transfer as well as by sharing best practices need to be ensured.

In Bangladesh, we have achieved exemplary success in bringing primary healthcare services to the grassroots level through Community Clinics. Bangladesh's success has been recognized and appreciated by this august General Assembly. This model may be replicated in other developing countries of similar socio-economic situation.

Mr. President,

After peaceful settlements of maritime boundaries with our neighboring countries, the 'blue economy' has opened up a new horizon for development of Bangladesh. We believe, the provisions of UNCLOS need to be effectively implemented to ensure sustainable use of marine resources.

The day before yesterday, I signed the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (known as BBNJ Agreement). Bangladesh has also recently announced her "Indo-Pacific Outlook", emphasizing inclusive, sustainable and collaborative use of shipping routes and marine resources in the Indo-Pacific region.

Mr. President,

Bangladesh's commitment to the general and complete disarmament is unwavering. We are party to all major disarmament and non-proliferation treaties including the Treaty on the Prohibition of nuclear weapons (TPNW). We call for full implementation of the international disarmament and nonproliferation instruments without any delay.

Mr. President,

Our commitment to global peace and security is well manifested in our contribution to UN peacekeeping operations. As of now 188,000 men and women from Bangladesh have served in 55 peacekeeping missions in 40 countries. They have earned reputation for their professional excellence and impeccable performance.

Owing to our own experience, we are also actively contributing to the post-conflict reconstruction efforts through our leadership role in the UN Peacebuilding Commission. We strongly support the role of the Commission in strengthening the UN's prevention agenda.

Mr. President,

We remain concerned at the continued prevalence of terrorist threats which are now taking new shapes due to misuse of information and communication technology. My government maintains a 'zero tolerance' policy against terrorism and violent extremism. We do not allow our territory to be used by any party to incite terrorist acts or harm others.

We also remain concerned at the misuse of information technology for instigating violence and spreading hate speech and inflammatory rhetoric. The recent incident of burning copies of the Holy Quran has shaken our conscience. Such acts of perversion not only hurt religious sentiments of the Muslims, they instigate violence and harm peaceful co-existence of people of various faiths and beliefs.

Mr. President,

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). On this auspicious occasion, we must reinforce our commitment to our common humanity and take collective action to advance equality, justice and freedom for all human beings. At the same time, it is to be ensured that human rights are not politicized to put pressure on developing countries.

Bangladesh's Constitution guarantees fundamental human rights for all. Over the last decade, significant reforms have been made to our legal system to ensure equal legal protection and access to justice for everyone. As a responsible State, Bangladesh is fully committed to protecting and promoting the human rights.

As an elected member of the Human Rights Council, we are working with the fellow Members States towards safeguarding all human rights of people around the world.

In this Session today, I would like to unequivocally reiterate that Bangladesh will continue to promote democracy, rule of law and freedom of expression in line with Bangladesh's constitution.

Mr. President,

This year also marks the 75th anniversary of Nakba – the catastrophe inflicted upon the people of Palestine. It is deeply troubling that the legitimate rights of Palestinian people have remained unmet. We will continue our efforts to realize the rights of the people of Palestine. Bangladesh will stand by Palestine.

Mr. President,

I shall now seek your attention to the forcibly displaced Rohingya people from Myanmar. Last month we witnessed the completion of six years of the mass displacement of the Rohingyas. Out of humanitarian concern, we have given shelter to those who fled their homes for safety.

However, the situation has really turned unbearable for us now. The 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. 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 displaced Rohingyas want to return to their own country, Myanmar and live a peaceful life there. Let's bring those destitute people hope of a brighter future in their own land and thereby foster safety and stability in the region.

Mr. President,

On 15 August 1975, my father, Father of our Nation and the incumbent President of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was brutally assassinated. A total of eighteen members of my family were killed on that day including my mother, my three younger brothers, two sisters-in-law and parental uncles.

Only my younger sister and myself survived the brutality as we were abroad at that time. Before that, in 1971, three million of our countrymen were killed during our great War of Liberation while two hundred thousand women were heinously tortured and abused. As a victim of and witness to brutalities of war and assassination, I can feel the pain and agony that people endure due to the horrors of wars, killings, *coup d'etats* and conflicts. Therefore, my appeal today is to all of you - to the leaders of the world, to shun the path of war and confrontation, and to work collectively for enduring peace, welfare for humankind and economic prosperity for our people and future generations.

Thank you all.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu;
May Bangladesh Live Forever.