

DRAFT PROVIDED IN ADVANCE OF THE OPENING SESSION

**Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF)
15-16 February 2010**

**Speech by Sultan Hafeez Rahman
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1. Your Excellency Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Honorable Finance Minister, Honorable Ministers, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.
2. On behalf of the Asian Development Bank, it is indeed a privilege for me to participate in this Development Forum, the first such event in over four years. The Forum is all the more significant against the background of the historic political mandate that the Government has to move forward on its ambitious and broad-based development agenda. The BDF is taking place at a time when Bangladesh has been registering solid economic growth, despite the global economic downturn, while continuing to make progress in improving the country's human development indicators, including the MDGs. These are impressive achievements, but the poverty rate at 40% is still very high with significant disparities among regions, and the country needs to grow even more quickly and equitably if the Government's vision for Bangladesh to become a middle income country by 2021 is to be realized. Further, Bangladesh's poor remain highly vulnerable to a range of internal and external shocks.
3. The presence of the Honorable Prime Minister at this forum underscores the seriousness that the Government attaches to the country's development. Against this background, we welcome the approval of the Second National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction (NSAPR-II), which rightly focuses on faster agricultural growth, broad-based rural development, enhanced employment generation, and better delivery of social services as some of the major strategies for faster poverty reduction. Enhanced efforts are now needed to accelerate progress in reducing poverty and regional inequality, particularly in the country's lagging regions where poverty is the highest, building on the achievements that have been made over the last few decades.
4. The strategic priorities that need to be addressed for this to be a reality are well known. Higher private sector investment is crucial to achieving the Government's growth and poverty reduction objectives. To materialize such investment, a better enabling environment is essential, particularly in relation to economic policy, and infrastructure investment. The country's ports need to operate more efficiently, the key strategic highway corridors need to be improved, additional power generation is urgently needed, and a modern rail system needs to be put in place. In addition, governance, the law and order situation, and the functioning of the civil service must improve. The country's rapid urbanization, now among the fastest in the world, also poses a long-term structural challenge that must be met through increased infrastructure investment and better service delivery in urban areas if the quality of life is to be improved for the urban poor.
5. We are encouraged by the Government's initiative to launch a new public-private partnership (PPP) scheme for attracting greater private sector participation in infrastructure investment. We are also encouraged by the proactive steps the Government has taken to address the impacts of climate change and highly commend the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan. Delivery of this multi-sectoral action plan is now a top priority given the country's vulnerability, and significant assistance will be forthcoming from development partners to facilitate its implementation.

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6. To deliver tangible development results, the development partners also need to better harmonize their assistance and align support within the framework established by the NSAPR-II. The Joint Cooperation Strategy developed through extensive consultation among development partners and the Government will reinforce our partnership and a more harmonized approach in our collective efforts to help the country and its people prosper. As a long-standing regional development partner, ADB will also strengthen its partnership with the Government to improve the development effectiveness of our assistance. In the coming years, ADB will continue to play a major role in assisting the Government in the energy, transport, education, urban health, urban infrastructure, and urban water supply and sanitation sectors.

7. In other areas, such as agriculture, water resource management, and the financial sector, ADB will support initiatives led by other development partners. ADB is also very pleased to be a major partner supporting the construction of the Padma Multipurpose Bridge, which is among the highest priorities of the Government. ADB stands ready to support the other priorities of the Government, including in seizing the new opportunities for improved regional connectivity, in line with broader Pan-Asian initiatives, and is in a position to significantly increase its assistance to Bangladesh over the coming three years, to over \$1 billion annually, or roughly double the assistance provided during 2006-2008.

8. Honorable Prime Minister, Honorable Ministers, distinguished development partners, the path toward realization of the Vision 2021 will be both complex and demanding. Improving project implementation by following through on the measures identified in the FY2010 budget to improve annual development program implementation will be extremely critical for achieving the envisaged development results. Your development partners stand ready to work together with you to deliver on the Government's strategic priorities. Bangladesh has a proud history of responding to daunting challenges. I am confident that by working together to ensure the effective implementation of the Vision, Bangladesh will meet its ambitious development goals and objectives.

Thank you.