

BANGLADESH DEVELOPMENT FORUM 2015

Opening Session

Speech

by

HE Sheikh Hasina

Prime Minister

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Bangabandhu International Conference Centre, Dhaka

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Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

The Chair,
Colleagues,
Diplomats,
Representatives of Development Partners,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Assalumu Alaikum and a very good morning to you all.

I welcome you all in the opening session of Bangladesh Development Forum 2015. I sincerely believe that BDF 2015 will be able to contribute to provide joint strategies and recommendations needed to make a poverty- and hunger-free prosperous Bangladesh.

Since the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent state through a protracted struggle and a 9-month bloody war in 1971 under the leadership of Father of the Nation, Bangabadhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Bangladesh has been striving hard to ensure socio-economic at a sustainable level.

Bangladesh has been successful in many areas of economic and social development despite different challenges and constraints. The resilient people of this country are committed to ensuring Bangladesh a development miracle within near future.

Distinguished audience,

We have been working to implement the Vision 2021. At the heart of the Vision 2021 is to transform Bangladesh into a middle-income country. We have recently adopted the Seventh Five Year Plan. In this Forum, we want to share our future development goals and strategies with you.

We seek cooperation from our development partners, civil society organizations, intelligentsia, private sector to implement the targets and programs set out in the plan.

The main objective of the 7th FYP is to ensure socio-economic development of the people through sustainable and inclusive growth.

Just few weeks ago, the international community endorsed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Building on our success achieved in the MDG regime, Bangladesh aims to realize the SDGs. I hope this Forum will reflect on how to achieve the SDGs by providing the government with prudent and effective recommendations.

The developed countries should come forward to support us in realizing the targets of SDGs. I also stress that in the face of climate change and other development challenges, the international community needs to revisit the current global trade system to remove the constraints to ensure that trade is contributing as a means for poverty reduction and employment opportunities.

Esteemed colleagues,

Bangladesh has been able to manage successfully its macroeconomic stability for the last few years successively. Policies and interventions adopted by the present government proved to be effective in accelerating growth, waning budget deficit, achieving high growth in exports and ensuring foreign currency reserve at a satisfactory level.

We have brought down poverty from 56.7% in 1991 to 22.4% today. We have been able to cut hardcore poverty significantly and now it stands at 7.9%. We set a target to reduce poverty below 14% by 2021.

Bangladesh has either already met, or is on track to meet most of the MDGs. During the last six years, our average GDP growth remained about 6.2%, and this year it was 6.51%. Our export earnings grew by more than 3 times; remittance flow increased nearly 3 times; and, foreign currency reserve jumped by 7.5 times to over US\$ 27 billion.

Implementation of SDGs will require more resources and here we underscore the importance of engagement in our development pursuits of the development partners, private sectors both of domestic and external. In order to garner foreign direct investment (FDI), the government is currently working to establish 100 designated economic zones in different parts of the country. In tandem, we are improving physical infrastructures and communication facilities and ensuring FDI friendly policy approaches.

It is evident that reliance on foreign assistance for implementing annual development program (ADP) is gradually decreasing. In FY2009-10 the size of ADP was Tk 285 billion while the size of ADP in FY2015-16 is Tk.1009.97 billion.

Currently, 23 line ministries are implementing 145 types of safety net programs. During the 2014-2015 FY Tk. 308 billion was spent implementing safety net programs that accounts for 13% of national budget and 2% of GDP.

The government has recently adopted the National Social Security Strategy as a policy and strategic response to ensure complementarity between programs and effectiveness of the safety net programs.

Recently, we settled the maritime and land boundary dispute and related issues with our neighbors, India and Myanmar.

At the stroke of midnight of 31 July 2015, we exchanged 162 enclaves whereby more than 50,000 'stateless' enclave residents have got their much cherished citizenship in their country of choice. This has brought a peaceful end to a longstanding humanitarian problem.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Labor migration has significant implication on Bangladesh's socio-economic development, especially in terms of providing job opportunities to a growing young population.

The Government of Bangladesh has adopted policies and measures aimed at maximizing the contribution of the migrant workers.

Bangladesh believes that developing and developed countries should work together to protect the interests and well-being of the migrant workers. There should be a global collective effort to set minimum wages for migrant workers with different skills and experience.

Migration has been recognized as a key enabler of development in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Cooperation is essential between the countries to harness full potential of migration. Development partners, non-government organizations, advocacy platforms can play important role in upscaling the skills and expertise of the workers and protecting them from deprivation while serving abroad.

Dear colleagues,

Bangladesh is one to the most vulnerable countries that suffer and will continue to suffer from global warming and climate change. Although Bangladesh does not have any contribution to the climate change, but we suffer the most.

Despite some strong efforts at the international level, climate financing is yet to reach its full potentials.

Stringent conditions within the global climate financing mechanism are becoming major barriers to use climate fund according to the needs and priorities of the country. We recommend a re-examine of the stringent conditions of the funds to allow the climate change vulnerable countries to take benefits of the fund. However, we have constituted 'Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund' with our own resources to protect our people from climate-induced losses.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are of the view that regional, sub regional and bilateral cooperation in the Asia-Pacific area are essential for balanced development and ensuring a win-win situation for all.

Bangladesh has taken lead in building regional cooperation processes such as SAARC, BIMSTEC and BCIM-EC. We have also taken initiatives to develop infrastructures to enhance trade and people-to-people contacts among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN). Our development partners can take a step to work on regional cooperation associations to collaborate in sectors like ICT, energy, power, agriculture, manufacturing trade and environment etc.

We have ensured visible results of women's economic and political empowerment through promoting their greater access to productive resources and representation at national and local levels.

Bangladesh has advanced well in providing the regulatory framework for protection of women's rights and privileges. The most important step has been the adoption of the National Policy for Women's Development (NPWD) in 2011.

According to the Gender Gap Report (GGR) of the World Economic Forum 2014, Bangladesh is ranked 10th out of 136 countries for women political empowerment.

We are hopeful of equally successful in implementing SDG targets like MDGs. We have given due importance to SDGs in the Seventh Five Year Plan for 2016-2020.

We are determined to ensure broad-based development of our people by ensuring effective use of resources. The current government is working with specific plans and programs to realize sustainable development goals.

We have full confidence in the international community that they will continue to support our development.

Bangladesh is a country of boundless potentials. It has everything to emerge as a vibrant economy. We are pursuing an inclusive growth strategy to become a middle-income country by 2021 and a developed one by 2041.

We will be happy if we get support from our development partners in our development pursuits. Our joint efforts are key to make this beautiful world free from poverty and hunger.

With these few words, I declare the Bangladesh Development Forum-2015 open. Thank you all again.

Khoda Hafez.
Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live Long.