

79th Session of the UN General Assembly

Address

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Chief Adviser

Government of Bangladesh

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Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Mr. President,

Good morning.

Let me congratulate you on your election as the President of the United Nations General Assembly. I would like to assure you of Bangladesh delegation's full cooperation throughout the Session.

I would also place on record our deep appreciation to the Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, for his unwavering commitment to deliver on the UN mandates and address the global challenges.

I particularly applaud his vision in convening the Summit of the Future.

The Pact for the Future and the Declaration on Future Generations could help in setting pathways beyond Agenda 2030. Bangladesh believes that the Summit's outcome will serve as a guiding framework in materializing our shared aspirations and re-thinking collaboration, for posterity.

I stand in this parliament of nations thanks to an epochal transformation that Bangladesh witnessed this July and August. The 'power of the ordinary people', in particular our youth, presented to our nation an opportunity to overhaul many of our systems and institutions.

The uprising led by the students and youth was initially aimed at ending discrimination. Progressively the movement evolved into a people's movement. The world eventually saw how people-at-large stood against autocracy, oppression, discrimination, injustice and corruption, both on the streets and online.

Our people, particularly youth, gained us independence from an autocratic and undemocratic regime with their exceptional resolve and capability. That collective resolve should define Bangladesh of the future and place our nation as a responsive and responsible State in the comity of nations.

This was indeed a movement that primarily brought together people who were long left in politics and development. Who asked 'prosperity' to be shared, to be inclusive. The people aspired for a just, inclusive and functioning democracy for which our new generations made supreme sacrifice.

We were moved by the wisdom, courage and conviction our youth showed. Even braving bullets, bare chest.

Young girls were fiercely vocal against the illegitimate State power.

School-going teenagers laid down their lives.

Hundreds lost their eyes, forever.

Mothers, day labourers and scores of people across cities lent their shoulders, for “their children”.

Defying sweat, rain and fear of death, they defeated all the evil designs and machinations of the few who manipulated the State machinery against truth and just aspirations of people for years.

The people’s movement left an estimated over eight hundred martyrs in the hands of the autocratic regime.

Bangladesh was born because of her people’s profound belief in liberalism, pluralism, secularism. Decades later, our ‘Generation Z’ is making us re-visit and re-imagine the very values that our people Bangladesh stood for back in 1971. As our people also did in 1952, to defend our mother language, *Bangla*.

We believe, the ‘monsoon revolution’ that the world witnessed in Bangladesh in the span of few weeks, may inspire many across communities and countries, to stand for freedom and justice. I would call upon the international community to engage with ‘new Bangladesh’ anew that aims to realize freedom and democracy, beyond letters, for everyone.

Mr. President,

Our youth and people together entrusted me and my colleagues in the Council with enormous responsibilities to re-construct a decaying State apparatus.

As we took to the office, to our utter shock and dismay, we discovered how endemic corruption a ‘functioning democracy’ was brought to farce, how key institutions were ruthlessly politicised, how public coffers were reduced to rubble, how oligarchs took over business, how ‘chosen few’ concentrated wealth in their hands and amassed and laundered wealth out of Bangladesh. In all, justice, ethics and morality, almost at every level, reached a low.

Under such circumstances, we were asked to re-build Bangladesh and give back the country to the people. To correct the ills of the past as also build a competitive and agile economy, and a just society.

In a drastically changed scenario, all political parties are now free to voice their views and opinions.

A key priority for us is also to make all in public positions and institutions to account for their decisions and actions.

We are committed to promote and protect the fundamental rights – for people to speak in freedom, to assemble without fear or inhibition, to vote whosoever they choose, to uphold the independence of the judiciary and freedom of press, including in the cyber domain.

In order to ensure that child of a farmer or worker can scale the highest in the society, we prioritise allocation in education and health sectors over grandiose infrastructure development.

We also aim at ensuring good governance, across all sectors.

I wish to assure that our government shall adhere to all international, regional and bilateral instruments that Bangladesh is party to. Bangladesh will continue to remain an active proponent of multilateralism, with the UN at the core.

Bangladesh is open to nurture friendly relations with all countries based on mutual respect, upholding our dignity and pride and shared interests.

Mr. President,

In just seven weeks, the Government has initiated several actions.

At our request, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has dispatched a Fact-Finding Mission to investigate into the gross human rights violations during the people's movement and to suggest for sustainable course correction. That Mission has already started work on the ground in Bangladesh. I wish to register my deep appreciation to High Commissioner Volker Turk.

We have acceded to the International Convention for Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, within two weeks in office. The required national legislation is underway so that we can effectuate its early implementation. An Inquiry Commission has started investigating into all the cases of enforced disappearances reported during the past decade and a half.

In order to restore people's trust and confidence, and to ensure that the tragic past never recur in future Bangladesh, we have initiated reforms in certain prioritized sectors. In that direction, **we launched independent Commissions to reform electoral system, constitution, judicial system, civil administration, law and order sectors** . A few more Commissions are on the cards to reform other sectors, including press and media.

In order to create a conducive environment for business, we have rolled out extensive reforms in banking and financial sectors. We affirm not to let any foreign business interest to be affected.

Beyond rhetoric and numbers, we aim to establish effective safeguard mechanisms to ensure the sustainability of these reforms and create an enabling environment towards conduct of free, fair and participatory elections.

I would, therefore, call on the international community to continue and deepen engagements with Bangladesh in meeting our people's quest for democracy, rule of law, equality, prosperity, so that we can emerge as a just and inclusive democratic society.

Mr. President,

Bangladesh views that maintaining peace and addressing conflicts is central to peoples' progress. During the recent Revolution, our valiant armed forces have once again shown their commitment to peace by standing firmly with the people in fulfilling their aspirations for freedom during a most difficult time in our history.

This was possible thanks to our commitment to place human rights at the core of peacekeeping. Bangladesh remains equally committed to peace-building, from the inception of the UN Peace-building Commission. We look forward to promoting and enhancing Bangladesh's value-driven contributions to the UN peace-keeping operations.

As the third largest troop contributing country, our peacekeepers had served across 63 Missions in 43 countries, to date. 168 Bangladeshi peacekeepers had laid their lives, from Bosnia to Congo. We do hope that Bangladesh defense forces would continue to be called upon in the future UN peace operations, regardless of the challenges or circumstances.

Mr. President,

In our 'shared' world, many of the global priorities need to be set right.

Climate change poses existential threats to us all. The record-breaking heat wave this summer starkly reminded the world of the climate-induced changes.

What we need is climate justice – so that the irresponsible choices or, indifferent actions or, harms caused are accounted for. Long-term damages leave irreparable damages all-around: we are losing bio-diversity; changing pathogens leading to newer diseases; farming is under stress; shrinking water wealth threatening habitat; rising sea level and salinity decimating eco-systems. The damages in terms of rising intensity and frequency of cyclones or floods can hardly be ignored. The climatic risks are faced far deeper by our small farmers and artisanal livelihood-holders. As I speak, over five million people witnessed a most devastating flood in their living memory, in eastern Bangladesh.

Yet, Secretary General Guterres showed that under the “current trajectory”, the world is heading for a +2.7°C scenario. I would hence urge for channeling robust resources for climate adaptation in the climate-vulnerable countries like Bangladesh. It is moreover crucial to operationize Loss and Damage Fund by leveraging innovative solutions and additional finance.

We equally need access to technologies and increased capacity. To be specific, we need access to life-saving technologies, particularly in agriculture, water or public health, where trickle of modest solutions or innovations can save millions of vulnerable population.

Tackling climate crisis has to go hand in hand with getting global economy in order as well. The world is increasingly focussed on de-carbonisation. In order for such a shift to be beneficial to majority of global population, the transformative vision of a NetZero world has to redeem for countries like Bangladesh as well. Else, we risk falling short on our pledge to ‘shared prosperity’ through ‘shared responsibility’.

I believe, the world needs to engage on a shared vision of ‘three zeroes’ that we can materialize together, targeting zero poverty, zero unemployment, and, zero net carbon emissions. Where a young person anywhere in the world will have opportunities to grow not as a job seeker but as entrepreneur; where a young person can unleash his or her latent creativity despite all limitations; where an entrepreneur can optimally balance social benefits, economic profits and responsibility towards nature; where social business can help an individual transcend beyond consumerism and can ultimately catalyse in social and economic transformation.

Time demands new attitudes, new values, new compact(s), across communities and countries, across developed and developing countries alike, across all actors and stakeholders. If we are to realize such course correction, in full, the United Nations system, national and sub-national governments, non-governmental organizations, business, philanthropies have to walk together. If we accept and accommodate ‘social business’ within existing economic structures, we can bring meaningful changes in the lives of the bottom half of population, in every society. If we can realistically position social business, we can stem much of climate-insensitive distortions within the existing market economy. I would like to invite the attention of Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, on that score.

Mr. President,

In a world of poly-crisis, wars and conflicts are leading to erosion of rights and widespread abuses.

The genocide in Gaza continues unabated despite global concerns and condemnation. The situation in Palestine just does not concern the Arabs or Muslims at large rather the entire humanity. Palestinians are no expendable people. All those responsible for the crimes against humanity against the Palestinian people must be held accountable. Bangladesh calls for an immediate and complete ceasefire to protect the Palestinian people from the brutalities, particularly against the children and women. International community, including the UN, needs to act in earnest to implement the two-state solution that remains the only path to bring lasting peace in the Middle-East.

The two and half year long war in Ukraine has claimed far too many lives. The war has impacted far and wide, even lending deeper economic implications in Bangladesh. We would urge both sides to pursue dialogue to resolve the differences and end the war.

Mr. President,

Seven years on, Bangladesh has been hosting over 1.2 million Rohingyas on humanitarian ground, incurring significant social-economic-environmental costs. The protracted crisis in Myanmar also pose growing risks with national and regional security implications for Bangladesh, both traditional and non-traditional security challenges.

We remain committed to supporting the forcibly displaced Rohingyas from Myanmar in Bangladesh. We need continued support of the international community towards the Rohingyas in carrying out the humanitarian operations and their sustainable repatriation.

Equally important is to ensure justice for the grave human rights violations committed against the Rohingyas, through the ongoing accountability processes in the ICJ and the ICC.

We recognize and appreciate the efforts of the Secretary General and the United Nations system in creating a conducive environment for Rohingyas so that they can lead a free and dignified life. That requires creating pathways for the Rohingyas to return to their ancestral home in Rakhine State, with safety and rights. Looking at the evolving ground situation in Myanmar, Bangladesh is ready to work with the international community to create an environment for dignified and sustainable return of the Rohingyas to their homeland.

Mr. President,

Ensuring peace and security cannot succeed without political freedom and socio-economic emancipation of the people.

Around a decade back, the world unanimously adopted the Agenda 2030. We reposed our collective hope and trust in the universal set of goals. Yet, merely 17% of SDG targets are on track to be achieved by 2030. Clearly, many developing countries risk to be left behind.

Every year, developing countries face a significant SDG financing gap, estimated between 2.5 to 4 trillion US dollars. High debt burdens, shrinking fiscal space, and adverse impacts of climate change put countries like Bangladesh at greater risk. We look forward to the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development to deliver on addressing the complex and systemic challenges. The multilateral financing institutions have to be driven by a vision where wealth and opportunities can be accessed by all, that they rightfully place social business within respective programmes, that they duly address the circumstances in the low-income countries, that they promote entrepreneurship and encourage creativity of individuals, that they support the dispossessed.

In this regard, prevention of illicit financial flows and siphoning of resources from the developing countries merit greater attention. Increased international cooperation must re-channel the assets stolen from the developing countries. We look forward to early conclusion of an international tax Convention that can combat tax evasion.

Mr. President,

Migration and mobility is an inescapable reality in an inter-connected world. As a country of origin of migrants, over eleven million of our people live and work worldwide.

In order for migration to be beneficial for all, we have to create pathways for safe, orderly, regular, and responsible migration and mobility of people. The international community has to ensure full respect for human rights and the humane treatment of migrants, regardless of their migration status.

While Bangladesh remains committed to the full implementation of the Global Compact on Migration, our government is also committed to curbing unsafe migration.

Mr. President,

Every year, nearly two and half million Bangladeshis enter our labour market.

In a large population where nearly two-third is young, Bangladesh is challenged to make learning suited to meet the needs of today and tomorrow.

Yet, we see the world of work is changing where a younger person has to adapt constantly, re-skill, adopt newer attitudes. As Bangladesh is set to graduate as a Middle Income Country, we reckon the vital need to secure ourselves in terms of 'learning' and 'technology'.

We are particularly enthused with emergence of the Artificial Intelligence tools and applications. Our youth are excited with the prospect of fast unfolding generative AI. They aspire to walk and work as global citizens. The world needs to ensure that no youth in countries like Bangladesh get left behind in meaningfully reaping benefits out the AI-led transformation. The world simultaneously needs to ensure that the development of artificial intelligence does not diminish the scope or demand for human labour.

As the the scientific community and the world of technology keeps moving on developing 'autonomous intelligence' – artificial intelligence that propagates on its own without any human intervention – we all need to be cautious of possible impact on every human person or our societies, today and beyond. Many have reasons to believe that unless autonomous intelligence develops in a responsible manner, it can pose existential threats to human existence.

Mr. President,

We need newer forms of collaboration where global business and knowledge-holders connect to people's needs. International cooperation should create space for the developing countries in ways that can bring transformative applications or solutions for jobs, endemic socio-economic challenges, or livelihoods.

Uniting our efforts, capacities and resources is increasingly crucial for us to leverage collective strengths, innovate and foster growth. The challenges we face – in economic development, climate resilience, or social development – have to be addressed with common endeavours.

In that context, South-South and Triangular cooperation can help us given our unique social and economic circumstances.

It is also a growing necessity for the global South to make our voices heard. In shaping and steering the global agenda, the global South merits equal space and focus.

Mr. President,

The Covid times underlined before us the crucial importance of investing in public health.

In WHO, as Bangladesh leads the negotiations on a global Pandemic Treaty, we urge for convergence on the key provisions of adequate international cooperation, financing public health systems, technology transfer, research and development, diversification of production of medical diagnostics-vaccines-therapeutics. Also, to declare vaccines a 'global public good' that is free from the rigours of intellectual property.

These are also crucial for combatting the scourge of non-communicable diseases.

Mr. President,

This year, we celebrate the golden jubilee of Bangladesh's partnership with the United Nations.

It has been a shared journey, of mutual learning. In our modest ways, Bangladesh contributed towards promoting global peace and security, justice, equality, human rights, social progress and prosperity. And, indeed in building a rules-based international order.

For instance, I recall the Microcredit Resolution and the Friends of Microcredit that was formed in the UN General Assembly back in 1999, with exceeding spontaneity. The United Nations declared 2005 as the Year of Microcredit that resulted in global reach of microcredit. The annual General Assembly Resolution on Culture of Peace since 2001 or the Resolution 1325 in the Security Council on Women, Peace and Security may be worth recalling as well.

Mr. President,

As this great Hall reverberates with crying call for peace, security, justice, inclusivity and equitable distribution of wealth, as States, we need to reflect on how we embolden men and women today, create space for them to grow as entrepreneurs tomorrow.

The world has more than enough of capacity, resources and solutions. Let us redeem all the pledges we made, nationally or internationally. Let us work together to end all forms of inequality and discrimination, within and among nations, especially in advancing the proposition of social business in our economic interactions.

The youth in Bangladesh have showed that upholding freedom, dignity and rights of people regardless of distinction and status cannot just remain aspirational. It is just what everyone deserves.

In this assembly of nations, Bangladesh would assure that we would and continue to deliver our bit, at international, regional and national levels, in securing peace, prosperity and justice, for everyone.

I thank you for your attention.
