



Ministry of External Affairs

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Speech by External Affairs Minister at Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (June 26, 2014)

June 26, 2014

Thank you for your warm words of welcome. I am honoured to be invited to speak to this august gathering. I bring to you the greetings of the people and Government of India.

My last visit to your beautiful country was sixteen years ago in 1998, when I had come as Minister for Information and Broadcasting to attend SAARC Information Ministers meeting. In the past few years, as Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha and as Member of Parliament, I have had the opportunity to meet several distinguished Bangladeshi leaders and personalities. I am delighted to be able to renew acquaintance with you now as the External Affairs Minister of India. Given the closeness of our relationship, the bonds of history and culture that unite us and the importance that we attach to building a strong and enduring bilateral relationship, it is but fitting that I am on my first standalone visit abroad, as External Affairs Minister of India, to Bangladesh.

Distinguished Guests and Dear Friends,

When we talk of India-Bangladesh relations and the great people of Bengal we cannot but recall the names of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerji and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Gurudev Tagore's compassion, humanism and belief in the oneness of humankind were an important guiding force of our freedom struggle. Swami Vivekananda was a great exponent of universal brotherhood and exhorted humanity to rise above petty differences. Bangladesh's national poet Kazi Nazul Islam espoused enlightenment and spiritual rebellion against the oppressors. His epochal poem 'Bidrohi', (The Rebel), inspired countless men and women to assert their individual human capacity for heroic action and human unity. Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerji was a great Indian patriot, legal luminary and freedom fighter. Of course, we cannot forget Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who was the architect of Bangladesh.

I come to Bangladesh with a message of friendship and goodwill from the newly elected Government in India. I come with the goal of enhancing our relationship and mutual understanding. I come with the belief that the potential of our partnership is vast. I come with the faith that the people of both our countries desire and deserve closer relations and concrete results.

Today marks the completion of exactly a month since our Government came to office on May 26th. On this special day, I feel fortunate to be in the midst of those with whom we shed blood together in 1971. India marvelled at your courage then, and we marvel at your achievements today. You can justly be proud of the progress your country has made since attaining independence. Your achievements in the areas of poverty alleviation, food production, education, health, women's empowerment, social inclusion and deepening the

economic base of the country, to name but a few, are worthy of emulation. You have set an example of how a nation devastated by war and suffering can rise to become one of the fastest growing economies of Asia. You have lived up to the faith that your founding father, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, had in his people and in the righteousness of his cause. You have justified the sacrifices that were made by millions of other martyrs under his inspiring leadership.

I am aware that the Indian general elections in April and May this year were followed closely in Bangladesh. I thank you for all the good wishes that we received. These elections were not just the largest democratic exercise in the world. They mark a turning point in the evolution of India's democratic polity. They were an election of Hope. I stand before you as the representative of a Government that has come to power through an election process, in which, after a gap of nearly 30 years, the people of India have given a clear verdict in favour of a single political party.

My Government is committed to pursuing new approaches and fresh thinking and will be guided by the core values of our civilisation. We will strive to shift our model from youth development to youth-led development. My Government's foreign policy will be based on the principles of developing peaceful and friendly relations with all countries, anchored in enlightened national self-interest. It will combine the strength of our values with pragmatism, leading to a doctrine of mutually beneficial relationships.

We will pursue a policy of active engagement with our neighbours with the aim of ensuring security, stability and prosperity for all. In a unique and bold signal of our commitment to this policy, we invited leaders of all South Asian countries for the swearing in ceremony of our new Government on May 26. This was the first time in independent India that such a gesture was made. We are honoured that our invitation was accepted. The presence of all the South Asian leaders, including the Hon'ble Speaker of Bangladesh Her Excellency Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, on this occasion was suggestive of the commonality of our hopes and aspirations and of our desire to join hands to overcome the challenges that face us.

We are convinced that India's development cannot be complete and sustainable unless we succeed in building productive partnerships with our immediate neighbours. We will, therefore, devote our energy to working much more closely with our neighbours in pursuit of our development goals. We will walk the extra mile to create opportunities and to build virtuous cycles of prosperity in the region. We will pursue the goal of economic integration and interconnectedness through trade, investment, transportation, capacity building, environment friendly practices and means that promote equitable development in the region.

Building a comprehensive and equitable partnership with Bangladesh is essential for the realization of our vision of a stable, secure and prosperous South Asia. History and geography have destined us to live together. How we do so is within our hands, and our hands alone.

We know from experience that democracy requires building strong institutions and promoting a culture of tolerance, inclusion and respect for differences. The strength of democracy lies in its ability to manage differences and resolve them through peaceful means. We all espouse same universal values where there can be no place for violence. We will be glad to share our experiences and best practices, if asked to do so.

It is well known that a great deal has been accomplished in the India-Bangladesh relationship in the last few years. Progress has been made towards settling long-pending issues. Fresh ground has been broken in the areas of security, economic development, sub-regional cooperation, opening of the Indian market to Bangladeshi goods, border infrastructure, energy and people-to-people exchanges. There is forward movement on accessing the hydel energy potential of our North East by Bangladesh. The first step in building an energy corridor has been taken with the commissioning of the Behrampur-Bheramara power

interconnection, supplying 500 MW to Bangladesh. We will be working to promote more interconnections to facilitate supply of 100 MW power to Bangladesh from the Palatana project and to enable mutually beneficial cooperation in tapping the vast power potential in North Eastern India. Recognising the need for us to catalyse sub-regional cooperation, India and Bangladesh have taken the lead to initiate talks at the sub-regional level on power, water, trade and connectivity. India is prepared to host the next meetings of the sub regional groups in the last week of July, subject to the agreement of all our partners. We will build upon this, and promote the establishment of telecommunications, diesel and LNG highways.

I am aware that there are issues of concern to Bangladesh which remain unresolved, such as the sharing of the Teesta waters, implementation of the Land Boundary Agreement and its Protocol, and better border management. My Government is committed to addressing all these in a manner that improves the welfare & well being of both our people.

There is extensive high-level bilateral interaction between our leaders that is planned over the next few months - we hope that our Prime Ministers will meet soon. We have agreed to hold the next meeting of the Joint Consultative Commission in Delhi for which I have invited His Excellency the Foreign Minister Mr. Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali to visit India. Our Ministers and senior officials from a number of Ministries will be taking discussions forward. This includes the Joint Rivers Commission. We anticipate that all this will help us to break fresh ground in our relationship.

We are grateful for the cooperation we have received from Bangladesh in combating trans-boundary crime, insurgency and terrorism. Indeed, our cooperation in this regard is a model for others. We need to continue and further strengthen our cooperation so as to ensure a long-lasting safe, secure and peaceful neighbourhood. We know from experience that policies that seek to harm others only perpetuate a cycle of violence & underdevelopment that will undoubtedly boomerang on those who propagate them. Rather, we must dedicate our resources to channelling the energy of our youth into productive activities and development which can touch and benefit every single person in our region.

Fruitful and constructive interaction by way of promoting tourism, business, social linkages and the like between our people and countries holds the key not only to better understanding at the popular level but to economic and commercial opportunities beyond our imagination. We owe it to our people to put in place a legal and administrative regime which encourages adherence to rule of law and discourages illegal actions, be it smuggling, trafficking or illegal movement of people. Our objective must be to not only reduce incidents on the border but also enhance peace, stability and goodwill.

People to people and cultural exchanges are the bedrock of mutual understanding and mutual awareness about each other. We should especially focus on our youth and make them stakeholders in the relationship. We should bridge knowledge and information gap through greater exchanges and capacity building. In this context, we look forward to welcoming a 100 member youth delegation from Bangladesh in the second half of the year. We have also increased the number of training slots to 215 this year from 185 under our Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme. We will also facilitate the establishment of a Bangladesh Bhaban in Shanti Niketan, believing that activities of the Bhaban will help draw our people closer together.

As our countries grow economically, our priority must also be to create inter-linkages and to fill the gaps, both in policy and in infrastructure. We will expedite our border infrastructure projects. Simultaneously, we should work to decongest existing trading routes, largely roads, and encourage more trade through railways, waterways and coastal shipping. We should further expand our air links. In this context, I am happy to announce that we will augment the popular Maitree Express service by increasing the number of air conditioned coaches and by increasing the frequency of the service. We are also looking forward to starting a

Guwahati-Shillong-Dhaka Bus Service.

We will work with Bangladesh to move beyond the quota free duty free regime to facilitate trade and address the trade imbalance. Greater Indian investments will also help to augment Bangladesh's export basket and contribute to a reduction of the imbalance. There are a number of industries such as textiles, where Bangladesh has a comparative advantage. Our businessmen can join hands in this and other sectors, for mutual benefit and success. India stands ready to open more Border Haats and Land Customs Stations.

Bangladesh has ambitious plans to develop infrastructure and become a knowledge based and technology driven middle income country by 2021. India would like to be your partner of choice in this endeavour. Indian companies have today developed world class capabilities and are in a position to contribute to Bangladesh's economic expansion and modernisation. We are committed to supporting your development efforts within our resources for your success. In this context, I am extremely glad that out of the 15 projects agreed under the existing 800 million dollar Line of Credit, 7 have been completed, 4 are under execution and 4 are in the process of being tendered. I am happy to announce a grant of 60 crore Indian Rupees for implementation of various Small Development Projects in Bangladesh in the current financial year.

I would also like to congratulate the Government of Bangladesh for the opening of the BIMSTEC Secretariat in Dhaka, and for hosting the next BCIM Working Group meeting. India will work with all partners to carry these initiatives forward. India and Bangladesh share a contiguous coastline and a common maritime space. We would like to enhance our cooperation with Bangladesh in the maritime sector in general, and in the Bay of Bengal in particular.

Bangladesh & India should further intensify our dialogue and actions for the collective development of the South Asian region. We should diversify our cooperation to other areas and share best practices. We face similar challenges of providing quality education, health care, raising agricultural productivity, rapid urbanization, poverty reduction and inclusive growth. My Government is ready to work with other South Asian leaders to revitalise SAARC as an effective instrument for regional cooperation and as a united voice on these global issues.

I have spent a very productive day in Dhaka. In my meetings with the Bangladeshi leadership, I have found a strong desire to further strengthen relations with India. I have listened carefully & we have also shared our thoughts and priorities. I am optimistic about our relations and confident that we will not only continue but also build upon the momentum that has characterized our relations in the last few years.

Today when we are at the cusp of a new beginning, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's words, "At the dawn of a new age, Do not fritter away your time pondering the right time." from the poem, 'The Dawn of a New Age' inspire us. Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore was the first Asian poet to win the Nobel Prize in 1913 and the Poet who has penned our national anthem as also the national anthem of Bangladesh, Amar Sonar Bangla. This shared power of pen must write a new song of cooperation and progress. Our desire is that India and Bangladesh should flourish together as two equal partners. We share not just our past but also our future. We have a vision for the future development of our region. Our people have given us the mandate to make a difference in their lives. We are determined to fulfil that mandate.

I wish you all Ramadan Kareem.

Long live India-Bangladesh friendship.

Thank you.



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