

Full text of Prime Minister's speech at UNGA

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman today addressed the 81st Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) at the UN headquarters in New York.

Following is the full text of his speech:

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Mr. President,

I congratulate you on your election as President of the 81st session of the United Nations General Assembly. We assure you of our full support during your tenure as President. At the same time, I thank the outgoing President, Madam Annalena Baerbock, for her able leadership.

Let me begin by paying my deepest respects to all the martyred freedom fighters of Bangladesh. I respectfully recall the contributions of those who have sacrificed their lives in the struggle to establish democracy, justice and the rights of people in our country since independence. I also extend my sincere respect to all those who were martyred and injured in the mass uprising of the brave students and people in July-August 2024 against fascism.

Today, Bangladesh is free from fascism after more than one and a half decades of movements and struggles against fascist rule and exploitation.

In this Bangladesh, the people entrusted the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) with the responsibility of governing the state through the fair, free and impartial national election held on 12 February this year. I congratulate the democracy-loving people of the country. We believe that the

people are the source of all our political power.

Mr. President,

Standing before the United Nations General Assembly, I feel somewhat nostalgic. It was on this very platform that my father, Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman, the proclaimer of Bangladesh's independence, and my mother, former Prime Minister the late Khaleda Zia, addressed the world on behalf of our country and its people. In the same spirit, I stand here today to speak for the interests of my country and its people, and with the hope of a peaceful world community.

In this age of globalisation, whatever happens in any part of the world has, to varying degrees, a negative impact on every state. Human-made conflicts have created unrest in many countries. Large numbers of people are becoming displaced. Humanitarian crises are emerging. The world economy is facing severe pressure because of wars and conflicts. Energy security crises, disruptions in the global energy supply system and rising inflation are worsening the economic situation.

We believe that any conflict should be resolved through dialogue, diplomatic processes and mutual cooperation.

Equality, fairness, protection of mutual interests and respect, and dignity should form the basis of bilateral or multilateral relations among states in conflict. We aspire to a peaceful world, a humane global community where, rather than lethal weapons, reason and debate, diplomacy, education and humanity become the instruments of change.

Bangladesh sees the United Nations as the centre of efforts to establish an understanding-based global community that respects the independence and sovereignty of one another.

The tendency to divert development budgets towards military expenditure in various countries of the world is an obstacle to world peace. As a peace-loving nation, Bangladesh remains

committed to the goal of complete and general disarmament, preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and arms control.

Today, I reaffirm Bangladesh's support for any initiative of the United Nations aimed at establishing global humanity and world peace. The people of Bangladesh, who cherish democracy, are deeply concerned about the suffering of the freedom-seeking Palestinian people. Bangladesh reaffirms its unwavering support for their legitimate demands, including their right to self-determination and their right to establish an independent State of Palestine.

Mr. President,

In the prevailing global situation, the theme of the 81st session of the United Nations General Assembly, "Restoring Trust, Managing Transformation: A United Nations that Delivers for All", is highly relevant and timely.

Bangladesh remains steadfast in its commitment to multilateralism in maintaining international peace and security. As Vice-Chair of the Peace-building Commission, Bangladesh continues to act as a strong voice for sustainable peace, conflict prevention and inclusive peace-building. As members of United Nations peacekeeping missions, Bangladeshi peacekeepers are engaged in serving humanity in different countries around the world.

Despite adverse circumstances, the courageous participation of Bangladeshi women in peacekeeping missions reflects Bangladesh's strong commitment to advancing the 'Women, Peace and Security' agenda. This year, Bangladesh is observing the 40th anniversary of the 'Declaration on the Right to Development' and the 25th anniversary of the 'Durban Declaration and Programme of Action'.

Migration is as old as human civilization. In many countries of the world, migrants are making important contributions to

the economies of both their countries of origin and their countries of destination. The government of Bangladesh is committed to ensuring regular, safe and orderly migration.

Bangladesh expects stronger global cooperation to ensure the rights, dignity and welfare of migrants.

Mr. President,

For more than nine years, Bangladesh has been providing shelter to more than 1.2 million forcibly displaced Rohingyas from Myanmar.

As a result, immense pressure has been placed on our resources, environment, security and local communities. Bangladesh, a densely populated country, believes that the source and origin of the Rohingya crisis lie in Myanmar; therefore, its solution also lies there. The only solution to this problem is the safe return of the displaced Rohingya population to their homeland, Myanmar.

Bangladesh expects firm and effective support from the United Nations and the international community for a lasting solution to this crisis.

At the same time, I call upon the United Nations and the international community to continue life-saving assistance programmes for the displaced Rohingya population until they are repatriated to their own country, Myanmar. If the international community fails to ensure justice for the displaced Rohingya population, this may turn into a humanitarian crisis in the near future.

Mr. President,

Bangladesh is one of the countries most vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change. Although Bangladesh has little contribution to global carbon emissions, it has to bear the adverse impacts of climate change. In these circumstances,

Bangladesh has chosen the path of building resilience to withstand and overcome these risks. Therefore, Bangladesh expects stronger global action at COP31 on climate justice, climate finance and adaptation support.

The government has strengthened its programmes to protect the environment in Bangladesh. As part of this, the government has launched a programme to plant 250 million trees across the country over the next five years. Emphasis has been placed on the use of clean energy and solar energy. To free the country from the scourge of floods and droughts, a programme to excavate 20,000 kilometres of canals across the country has been launched.

The government has also begun implementing the Teesta Master Plan and the 'Padma Barrage' project to increase the flow of freshwater into the world's largest mangrove forest, the Sundarbans, and to conserve water through large reservoirs. At the same time, while strengthening domestic measures for water conservation and pollution prevention, the government has reaffirmed its commitment to cooperation in trans-boundary water management by signing the 1992 'Water Convention'.

Mr. President,

Bangladesh became free from fascism in 2024, bringing an end to more than one and a half decades of fascist rule and exploitation. Having freed itself from the scourges of enforced disappearances and killings, abductions, corruption, looting and money laundering that had become the norm under fascist rule, Bangladesh is now once again embarking on the path of democracy. To repair Bangladesh, which was ravaged by fascist rule and exploitation, the Government is pursuing a 3-R strategy – Recovery, Restoration and Reconstruction.

An immense horizon of possibilities is now open before Bangladesh. Taking advantage of the demographic dividend, the Government has begun implementing extensive programmes to

transform the country's working-age population into skilled human resources.

Detailed measures have been taken to create extensive employment opportunities and develop Bangladesh as a 'manufacturing hub'. In this endeavour, Bangladesh seeks the support of its development partners.

The government has allocated US\$ 50 Million in the current fiscal year to create opportunities for young entrepreneurs, researchers and innovators to implement start-up initiatives.

Mr. President,

More than half of the country's population are women. Therefore, women are at the forefront of all government plans for the country's socio-economic transformation. The government is giving priority to women's education, women's employment and the creation of women entrepreneurs. In particular, the government has expanded opportunities for cash financing for women, especially in the small and medium-sized industries sector, to support the creation of women entrepreneurs. Opportunities for free education for women up to the undergraduate level have been made available.

The government wants to ensure not only electoral democracy but also the democratization of the economy, so that the benefits of economic growth and prosperity reach every family and every citizen. To achieve this objective, the government has already introduced support programmes for economically disadvantaged people through various social protection programmes such as the Family Card, Farmers' Card, Sports Card and e-Health Card.

The government considers the 'Family Card', issued in the name of the female head of each household, to be a symbol of women's economic empowerment.

The government also plans to introduce a 'Universal Card' by

integrating the cards introduced to provide support in every sector.

Mr. President,

The government is implementing the 31-point programme presented to the people before the national election held on 12 February this year. At least 73 per cent of the activities under the government's 31-point programme have a direct alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals' theme of 'Leave No One Behind', while 27 per cent of the activities have an indirect alignment with it.

The government hopes that through the implementation of these programmes, development disparities between urban and rural areas will be reduced, while accountability in all areas of the 2030 Agenda and inclusive sustainable development will be advanced. The government of Bangladesh has given special importance to education, health and sports. For the first time in the country's history, the highest-ever budget allocation has been made for the education sector.

There are plans to gradually increase education spending to 5 per cent of GDP within the next five years. A curriculum has been developed with emphasis on technical and practical education to ensure an ethically sound and employment-oriented education system.

School bags and clothing, that is, school uniforms, as well as free midday meals, are being provided to primary school students from the first grade. The government hopes that this will increase school enrolment and improve the quality of education in schools. For the first time, 'sports' has also been included as a subject in the education curriculum with the aim of establishing sports as a profession. As part of this initiative, more than 2 million students participated in a month-long football tournament held across the country last June involving school students.

Mr. President,

Science and technology will shape the future of the world. We are entering a new era of artificial intelligence, biotechnology and science. Technology is advancing very rapidly, but its opportunities are not yet equally available to all. Bangladesh's large young population and growing digital capabilities have created new possibilities before us.

To harness this potential, we must bring access to advanced technology, knowledge and research within everyone's reach.

We do not want today's digital divide to become tomorrow's artificial intelligence divide. Bangladesh respects innovation and intellectual property. At the same time, it is essential to ensure technology transfer, skills development and affordable access to modern technologies for developing countries.

No country should be left behind in this advancement of science. Bangladesh is ready to work together to build a fair and prosperous future for all. It is now time for the United Nations to adopt an effective policy framework so that the benefits of the development and rapid expansion of artificial intelligence and social media can be used positively in countries around the world.

Mr. President,

Bangladesh is awaiting graduation from the list of 'Least Developed Countries'. To make this transition sustainable for Bangladesh as well as for all other countries, continued support in areas such as assured financing, greater market access, technology transfer and capacity building is essential.

In the current global system, every country is interdependent. Bangladesh believes that, particularly at the regional level, we can help one another achieve prosperity through trade

facilitation and expansion, effective connectivity and meaningful cooperation.

The COVID pandemic claimed the lives of millions of people around the world. However, it also delivered a message to the world that mutual assistance, empathy and cooperation are essential for the global community to survive. It is essential to ensure sustainable production of vaccines, medical supplies and diagnostic equipment in developing countries so that these become readily accessible to all.

Mr. President,

A state can never become strong by keeping its citizens powerless. By ensuring the political and economic empowerment of the people, we want to establish a prosperous, self-reliant, welfare-oriented democratic state where everyone, irrespective of political affiliation, religion or race, can live without anxiety and in safety, with equal rights, respect and dignity.

Mr. President,

Bangladesh's progress in the areas of democracy, human rights, good governance, accountability, political stability and the investment environment is continuing. The Government is working to establish a safe and stable Bangladesh with a business- and investment-friendly environment.

In the present democratic Bangladesh, we welcome partnership, innovation and both domestic and foreign investment.

We want to build a Bangladesh where young people can pursue their dreams without fear or hindrance, women can lead their lives with confidence, and every child can grow up with the opportunity to realise their full potential. Above all, the people will have the assurance of a safe and peaceful life. That is why we say, 'Bangladesh First: Bangladesh for All'.

I conclude my statement by once again expressing Bangladesh's unwavering support for all the principles and values of the United Nations in the cause of establishing world peace.

Mr. President,

Thank you,
Bangladesh Zindabad