

UN Day 2009

Distinguished Chief Guest of today's function
Her Excellency Dr Dipu Moni, MP
The Foreign Minister of the Government of Bangladesh
Madam Renata Lok Dessallien
UN Resident Coordinator
Heads of UN agencies, Secretaries, Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of the UN system in Bangladesh we would like to register our deep appreciation and gratitude to H.E. the Foreign Minister for giving us time today.

While the United Nations marks the 64th anniversary of its founding, Bangladesh commemorates the 35th anniversary of its entry into the United Nations. Bangladesh was admitted in to the membership of the UN on 17 September 1974, as its 136th member country. Soon after that, in just over a week, on 25 September 1974, the then Prime Minister of Bangladesh Bangabandhu Sk Mijibur Rahman, addressing the UN General Assembly in vernacular Bengali observed that, "No greater challenge has been faced by the United Nations than that of marshalling the force of reason to bring about a just international economic order." Since then the relationship and cooperation between Bangladesh and the United Nations grew from strength to strength.

Though Bangladesh formally hoisted its flag in 1974, examples of UN cooperation and assistance can easily be traced back even during the formative years of Bangladesh's independence.

For instance, Bangladesh became members of WHO, ILO, IBRD and GATT -- all in 1972. It became members of FAO and ICAO in 73.

Even before that, during the war of liberation, when an estimate 10 million Bangalis fled to neighbouring India, to escape the hostilities and atrocities, the role of UNHCR was particularly significant in assisting these helpless people. In fact, the repatriation of those refugees was regarded as the fastest and biggest population movement in recent history.

Here at the national level, immediately after the victory of the people of this country, a three-member UN team headed by Mr Hagen arrived in January 1972, and discussed relief needs to support the nation building efforts of war-ravaged Bangladesh. It was followed by the visit in February of Mr Paul Mark Henry, Chief of UN Relief Team.

In March 72, a letter of understanding was signed between the Government of Bangladesh and the UN Relief Operations in Dhaka (UNROD) to use donated relief goods for the welfare of people of this country.

On 2 June 1972, the UN Secretary-General in a message to the Prime Minister assured the supply of **two million tons of food-grains**.

To support the nation building efforts, the approach to Chalna Port, which was devastated during the war of liberation, was cleared of the sunken vessels with the assistance of the

United Nations. UN also arranged a **chartered plane** to bring back the stranded Bangalis from Pakistan in July 1973.

The relationship further strengthened when the UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim visited Bangladesh on 9 February 1973 and met with the Prime Minister Sk Mujibur Rahman to discuss ways and means to rebuild the country. This alone indicates the degree of importance UN attached to the newly independent country -- Bangladesh.

In June 1973, UNICEF for the first time signed an 8.5 million dollar assistance agreement with Bangladesh to finance education and rehabilitation projects in the country.

And in June 1974, 30 million dollar UN aid was sanctioned for financing development programmes of Bangladesh during 1974-1975.

Bangladesh did not have to wait long to make its mark in the international diplomatic arena. During the last 35 years it was elected twice to the non-permanent seat of the UN Security Council and was once elected the President of UN General Assembly. Bangladesh has been and currently is member of most of the important UN bodies. It played the pioneering role in designating 21st February as the International Mother Language Day and the observance of 2005 as the International Year of Micro-credit. With more than 9849 peacekeepers working in 12 different parts of the planet, Bangladesh stands second largest troops contributor in the world.

To help increase economic activity, better communication and greater employment opportunities, UNDP provided technical assistance for conducting the Jamuna Bridge Feasibility Study. Sundarbans and some other historical sites were included in the World Heritage List due to UNESCO's efforts. In the fields of immunization, disease control, reproductive health care and disaster assistance -- UN's contribution during 80s and 90s deserve special attention.

Currently the United Nations system has a large presence in Bangladesh. More than 10 UN agencies/programmes are working side by side with the government and the people of Bangladesh for their development and prosperity. Their area of work includes economy, energy, environment, emergencies, education, disaster, food, gender, good governance, health, human rights, indigenous people, migration, nutrition, participation, population, poverty, refugees, urbanization, employment and livelihood.

UN support for free and fair national elections in 1996, 2001 and 2008 bear testimony of its commitment to development and democracy in Bangladesh. Visits by the UN Secretaries-General since 1971 -- Kurt Waldheim, Perez de Cuellar, Kofi Annan and Ban Ki-moon are all examples of existing warm relationships.

The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) brought the UN system together to respond jointly with the Government to the national development priorities.

UN agencies provided major policy support, resulting in promulgation of Acts and Ordinances in governance and human rights issues, and development of critical plan of actions and guidelines in health, education, environment and other economic and social sectors.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Unlike human beings, who mostly retire at their 60s, institutions become richer in experience and gain more confidence in performing their duties and obligations. In this regard, it is believed that the United Nations' 64 years of experience, combined with its renewal and reform process, will enhance its effectiveness in delivering services to this country and all over the world.

When the world is reeling under 4-Fs -- food, fuel, flue and financial crisis, people look to the United Nations to help defeat poverty and hunger, to be the defender of the defenceless. The UN is ready and fully committed to help its Member States, large and small, to face their development challenges and to cushion the blow of multiple shocks that has shaken the world in the 21st century.

Before I conclude, we would like to reiterate that the United Nations system here remains firmly committed to the people of Bangladesh to ensure a Better life in Larger freedom.

Many thanks ladies and Gentlemen for giving me a patient hearing.

Kazi Ali Reza
Officer-in-Charge, UNIC Dhaka
31 October 2009