

Speech of Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, MP, Hon'ble Speaker, Bangladesh Parliament at the Inaugural Ceremony of the 136th Inter Parliamentary Union in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

April 01, 2017.

H.E. Sheikh Hasina, Hon'ble Prime Minister of the Govt. of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Hon'ble President of the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU), Mr. Saber Hossain Chowdhury, MP.

Secretary General of the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU), Mr. Martin Chungong.

Assistant Under Secretary General of UN

Hon'ble Speakers, Deputy Speakers, Members of Parliaments of IPU member parliaments.

Hon'ble Ministers, Advisors, Distinguished Delegates, Respected Guests, Media Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Assalamualaikum. Shuvo Shondha. Good evening to you all.

I am deeply honoured to welcome you all to the 136th Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly in Dhaka Bangladesh. Bangladesh Parliament, the heart/centerpiece of our democracy, takes great pride and joy in hosting this event of global parliamentarians. I thank the IPU for giving us the opportunity to organize this Assembly in Bangladesh. A member of the IPU since 1972, Bangladesh Parliament, has been an active partner in promoting democratic values. It is my distinct pleasure as the Speaker of Bangladesh Jatiyo Sangshad to extend a very warm welcome to you.

This is a special evening for all of us – parliamentarians from all around the globe have assembled at the South Plaza of our Parliament to express solidarity in building a prosperous today and shaping a better tomorrow. I express my heartfelt gratitude to our Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her valuable guidance and support. It is also a unique honour and matter of pride for us that the President of Inter Parliamentary Union Saber Hossain Chowdury is a member of Bangladesh Parliament. I congratulate the IPU President for his success and achievements. I thank my colleagues, Hon'ble members of Bangladesh Parliament, officials and staff of Parliament Secretariat for their cooperation. I also thank IPU for their cooperation and all concerned Ministries and the law enforcing agencies in Bangladesh for their support in organizing this Assembly. I congratulate the people of Bangladesh for their support.

Distinguished Participants

Bangladesh, a riverine country of six seasons, is laden in history and culture, folklore and melody of music. With the mangrove forests of Sundarban and the Bay of Bengal in the south the tea gardens, beauty of this land is majestic. The Royal Bengal tigers are a symbol of the Golden Bengal, amar sonar bangla, radiating hope, determination and resilience, where the mind is without fear and the head is held high. Dhaka, our capital, is a bustling metropolis, a microcosm of the country – Dhaka is a city of people and opportunities - people from Tetulia in the north and Teknaf in the south, come together with a dream and an ambition to achieve a better future. Dhaka city invokes the heritage of our old town, legacy of rich literature, poetry and art. The Dhaka University, hub of academia, is the source of vitality of the city and the focal point for some of the most important democratic movements in our history, led by our brave young students. The multitudes of restaurants, catering food of different varieties, food trucks and cafes around the corner are a mark of our entrepreneurial spirit and hospitality. We would love to entertain you with our delicacies of Hilsa fish cooked with mustard followed by our renowned sweet yogurt - shorshe elish aar mishit doi. Dhaka is a vast entity unto itself, that lives and breathes. I earnestly hope that you revel in the lively vibrant energy of this diverse city during your stay here.

Distinguished Guests,

Bangladesh was born as an independent sovereign country in 1971 through sacrifice of our freedom fighters, soaked in the blood of our martyrs, led by the Father of the Nation Banglabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Language movement in 1952 led to a long struggle for independence in 1971. Within less than fifty years of Independence Bangladesh has now become a lower middle income country, with a young and innovative population. We are the second largest producer of readymade garments in the world and prominent contributors to a variety of other industries worldwide, including pharmaceuticals and ship building. Bangladesh has made significant strides in the eradication of poverty, gender parity in education, women empowerment, reduction of maternal and infant mortality, disaster management, strengthening the rural economy, attainment of MDGs. Bangladesh has invested in access to power structures across the country as well as information communication technology, the ICT sector, in building a Digital Bangladesh. A consistent rise in GDP of 7%, Remittance, Reserve as well as the social and human development indicators demonstrate that Bangladesh is marching ahead to become a middle income country by 2021. Bangladesh has been recognized as leaders in many sectors of development. Hon'ble Prime Minister Shiekh Hasina has been awarded the Champion of the Earth Award, Planet 50:50 Award and many more.

Distinguished Delegates

Parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh nurtures the values of rule of law, fundamental freedoms and human rights. Article 7, the pole star of our Constitution, states that all power belongs to the people. It upholds the pledge to build an equitable and inclusive society, free from poverty and exploitation – where economic, social and political justice will be ensured for all –

as embedded in our Constitution – the dream of our Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The tenth Parliament, under the visionary leadership of Honble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is engaged in ensuring poverty eradication, health and education, gender equality and achieving SDGs to bring about substantive changes in the lives of our people.

Respected Guests

The surge of globalization presents us with critical challenges. The changing pace of globalization is creating a new order of emerging economies, technology and development. Issues relating to energy crisis, rapid evolution of technology, necessitating cyber security, climate change, economic recessions, peace and security, migration etc. transcend national boundaries. Climate change and rise of the sea level and desertification are issues that will impact us all, whether through failing crops, mass movement of people, climate refugees or rising conflict. Automation is likely to generate unemployment. Every society struggles with inequality. There still exist enormous gaps between the global north and south. These differences should not be ignored. Diversity of background and opinion should be celebrated. Challenges cannot be encountered in isolation.

Parliamentarians need to take account of the changing economic patterns deepening interdependence, prospect of creating greater opportunities for human developments, social inclusions and creating opportunities for the youth. As parliamentarians it is important for us to engage our youth in democratic processes. At a time of growing instability, conflicts and uncertainty around the world, parliaments can work together as a source of hope. This is where the true value of organizations like IPU comes in. IPU provides an exceptional forum for parliamentarians and change makers around the world to come together to discuss and deliberate on issues of global concern. Forum such as IPU can facilitate conversations that allow us to take forward our shared vision and harness our resources to maximize wellbeing of the people across nations. Democracy must deliver.

This Assembly gives us an excellent opportunity to have valuable dialogues and interactions in pursuing our common goals and strengthening parliamentary democracy. Let us embrace this opportune moment and turn it to our advantage. Let the voices of the people from around the globe resonate and dominate the discourse of democracy. It is only through our collective efforts that we can eliminate all forms of violence and give voice to the vulnerable who fear discrimination and oppression. Let it be our resolve to ensure every individual a life with dignity. The goals that we set for ourselves may seem ambitious, there may be mountains to climb and rivers to forge, but they are achievable.

As the sun sets in the horizon, let a new dawn emerge, unlike any we have seen before.

Let me conclude with an extract from the book Political Philosophy, by Steven B. Smith,

"Politics is a medium that takes place within language; it is a matter of providing people with linguistic and rhetorical abilities both to construct their past and imagine their future. It is a language that gives us a latitude, an ability to adapt to changing circumstances and create new ones. How we apply it to new circumstances and conditions will be entirely up to us."

What will be the language of our politics is for us to decide. Let the language of our politics be to build an equitable, inclusive and peaceful world.

Thank you.

May Bangladesh live forever.

Let me, once again, welcome you
all to Bangladesh.