

Text of prime minister's address to nation

Following is the text of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's address to the nation on radio and television yesterday marking the end of the tenure of the four-party alliance government

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

My Dear Countrymen, Assalamu Alaikum. The joyful times of Eid-ul-Fitr is still hanging in the air throughout the country. I extend my Eid wishes to you all in this lovely evening of autumn. As you know, the tenure of the 4-party alliance government is nearing completion. Time has now arrived for our government to hand over power. You may recall that you pronounced an unprecedented but highly positive, amazing but constructive verdict by expressing unflinching support for us in the 2001 general election. That verdict now occupies a place in the political history of Bangladesh as a historic event. Through that verdict, you made the 4-party alliance victorious with over two-thirds majority and passed on to us the responsibility of running the state. We have striven during the past five years to discharge that responsibility with utmost dedication and complete sincerity. You also extended your hands of cooperation in running the government and implementing its programmes. We have no words to thank you for that sympathy and support. Even then, I would like to say that our government is deeply indebted and forever grateful to you for your gesture. I thank you all. And I thank Almighty Allah Rabbul Alamin for allowing us to run the state for five years. My Dear Brothers and Sisters, You may ask us, how far have we been successful in running the statecraft during the previous five years? I feel the urge to say something regarding the work-output of the 4-party alliance government as an exercise in accountability by an outgoing Prime Minister. I would first request you to look back a little and turn back the clock slightly. I shall take you to the period before 2001 in Bangladesh. You must be remembering those horrific five years. Those who were at the helm of affairs at that time placed personal, group and party interests above everything else.

Consequently, television was then a place of pilgrimage for worshipping individuals. The administration was a seat of patronising coteries.

The government was meant to serve mere party interests. As an inevitable consequence, the social arena had then witnessed limitless terrorism and disorder. And there was terrible indiscipline and pauperization in the economic arena. It is not possible for you to forget those days of social insecurity and economic gloom. My Dear Brothers and Sisters, Now, I want to bring the clock to the present times. You can now see our successes in changing that dismal situation. Peace, discipline and rule of law provide basic security to human beings. If this security prevails, then it is possible to build development infrastructures of the country on its edifice. We have therefore established peace, discipline and rule of law. We have ensured overall safety of peoples' lives and property. Our task was a huge challenge. Your support for us served as a source of inspiration in facing and overcoming this challenge. I would like to briefly dwell on the works done by us during the past five years for the welfare of the country and the nation. Let us first dwell on the economy. When our government took over responsibility of the state, the foreign currency reserve in the country was only 1 billion US dollar. But this reserve has remained above 3 billion US dollar mark during the past five years. We have been successful in keeping the country's economy strong despite procuring petroleum from outside at a very high price. As a result, people's confidence in Bangladesh all over the world has increased. The flow of remittance has risen. Whereas, remittance was 1.88 billion US dollar in 2002, it rose to 4.2 billion US dollar in 2005. At the same time, our exports-receipts have increased manifold compared to the past. The export-oriented garments industry of Bangladesh did not suffer any loss due to measures taken by our government despite the abolition of worldwide quota system for the sector in 2005. Rather, Bangladesh's garments exports have increased in the quota-free world market. This success might have been unexpected for many. But I know that the success was quite an expected one for the energetic industrialists engaged in the garments sector, the entrepreneurial businessmen and the hardworking brothers and sisters in the workforce. They have produced and exported millions of garments. I send them billions of congratulations for their success. Around 50 lakh people found employment in the country during the past five years. Over 12 lakh Bangladeshis went abroad with overseas jobs during the same period. Employment of an additional 7 lakh workers is under process at home and abroad. I have travelled to foreign countries less frequently, but we have tried to send more of our workers abroad for employ-

ment. Besides, 50 lakh people have found self-employment after receiving credit and training. The continuously upward trend in our GDP reflects the progress achieved in various sectors of the economy. The rate of GDP growth in 2005-2006 fiscal year was 7 percent. This growth rate is the highest in the history of Bangladesh. Per capita national income has increased significantly during the past five years.

Per capita national income stood at 482 US dollar in 2005-2006 financial year. And per capita GDP has risen to 456 US dollar. My Dear Countrymen, The huge strides made by Bangladesh in the field of industrialisation due to investment-friendly economic policies, tactics and strategies pursued by the alliance government during the past five years has attracted the attention of the whole world. Internationally acclaimed merchant-banker Goldman Sachs has listed Bangladesh as one of 11 fast-emerging countries in a well-circulated report. You will be happy to know that Brazil, Russia, India and China have been placed in the first row of the list, and Bangladesh immediately after them. Bangladesh has now progressed from ship-breaking to ship-building industry. This transition is quite symbolic. As a consequence, investors from all over the world are now flocking to Bangladesh to invest in various sectors including banking, mining and telecommunication. Numerous investment proposals from foreign lands have been forthcoming because of this completely transformed picture of Bangladesh. During the four and a half years period up to March 2006, around 9 thousand industrial projects worth 62 thousand crore taka have been registered with the Board of Investment, which was more than double compared to the previous five years. During the period, direct foreign investment amounted to 2.5 billion US dollar. Besides, many famous industrial and business establishments from countries all over the world including the USA, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, South Korea and India arrived here with investment proposals worth hundreds of crores of dollars. The economy of Bangladesh was strengthened by these investments were executed. But Bangladesh is basically an agrarian country. Agriculture plays a significant role in our national economy. Agriculture accounts for one-fourth of our national income. We have therefore attached priority to agricultural development. We have supplied 50 lakh marginalised farmers, affected by the 2004 floods, with seeds and fertiliser. We waived interest of Taka 5000 on agricultural loans after assuming office. This has benefited nearly 15 lakh farmers. Steps were taken to reach agricultural inputs to the farmers at a cheap rate and on time, provide 25 percent subsidy on electricity used by them for agricultural production and opportunities were created for raising investment in the agricultural sector. Whereas the previous government had given a subsidy of only Taka 100 crore to the agricultural sector, we increased the amount to Taka 1200 crore. At the same time, disbursement of loans in the agricultural sector has been enhanced. It totalled Taka 5000 crore last year. We are providing multifarious incentives with the goal of flourishing our agro-based industries. The rate of interest for agricultural loans has been reduced. High quality seeds have been distributed among the farmers. Sufficient quantities of fertiliser were supplied during the cultivation period. The irrigation facilities have been expanded and modernised. The farmers have been motivated to adopt modern methods of cultivation. Efforts were made to establish linkage between man and machine. As a result, our food production has increased. Last year's food-grain production stood at 30.5 million metric tons.

Because of these steps taken by our government for agricultural development, overall growth in the agricultural sector increased to 5 percent during the year 2005-2006. The farmers are now getting good price for their products including jute. My Dear Brothers and Sisters, I shall again return to the subject of industrial development. As you know, our population has increased - but our land is not increasing. Consequently, we have to generate additional employment opportunities for these extra people. This opportunity can be created both within and outside the country. We have therefore tried to develop the country as industrially self-reliant during the past five years. We have been successful in this respect to a large extent. As a result, the contribution of the industrial sector to GDP has now exceeded 17 percent. The growth rate in the industrial sector was above 10 percent during 2005-2006 fiscal year. Our government has been encouraging establishment of private sector industries and privatising government-owned enterprises in the light of Industrial Policy-2005 in order to face the challenges of globalisation. A total of 31 mills and factories have been handed over to the private sector during the

past five years. A new EPZ has been set up on the compound of Adamjee Jute Mills after paying all outstanding dues of officers and employees of this loss-incurring enterprise. New industries are being set up there now. They would generate employment opportunities for 1 lakh people. My Dear Countrymen, There has been a revolution in infrastructure development of the country during the past five years. Innumerable roads-highways, regional highways, bridges, culverts, buildings have been constructed. A new era has commenced in our road communication system. Fifty-five thousand kilometres of new roads, 14,209 metre long bridges including 24 major bridges and 3409 metre long culverts have been erected during this period. At the same time, the communication network of Dhaka city has been improved to a great extent. Dhaka has been built up as a modern and beautiful city. The roads have been widened. Two flyovers have been constructed. Work on another flyover at Jatrabari has been started. Various initiatives have been taken including establishment of two multi-storied car-park in order to reduce traffic congestion. The construction of Dhaka Bypass road is also nearing completion. Side by side with road communication, we have also taken steps to develop the railway communication network. Direct train services have been introduced stretching from Rajshahi, Khulna and Lalmonirhat to Dhaka via Jamuna Bridge and Joydebpur. Around 90 percent of our foreign trade takes place via the sea-route. We have taken steps to develop Chittagong sea-port as a world-class entity. Besides, the construction of New Mooring Container Terminal with 5 lakh containers handling capacity and 1 thousand meter-berth is almost complete. We have taken numerous measures for environmental conservation. 20-year old buses and trucks have been withdrawn. CNG driven 4-stroke baby taxis have been introduced in place of 2-stroke ones.

Dhaka's air is today almost free of lead. Harmful polythene bags have been banned throughout the country. The problem of water-logging in Dhaka city has been solved to a large extent. Dhaka is now a beautiful capital city. My Dear Brothers and Sisters, The glorious war of independence war is our pride. We took extensive measures for the welfare of freedom fighters after forming the government. We have increased the number of beneficiaries as well as their allowances. We constituted the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs in accordance with our electoral pledge. Our main goal is to ameliorate the poverty of our people. We have implemented diverse programmes with this objective in mind. Effective measures were taken for implementing poverty alleviation programmes. A Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper has been formulated in line with the Millennium Development Goals as declared by the United Nations. We have gradually increased budgetary allocation for poverty alleviation programmes each year. Almost 54 percent of total budgetary resources were spent for the purpose during 2005-2006 financial year. It stands at 56 percent during the current financial year. The government has expanded social safety net programmes for direct poverty alleviation of hardcore and under-privileged people in the rural areas. Steps have been taken for reducing poverty through monetary and food assistance as well as micro-credit programmes for self-employment. A fund worth over Taka 50 crore has been created for generating employment opportunities in the country's Monga-infested northern region during the lean season. A Taka 500 crore Char Livelihood Programme is being implemented for improving the livelihood of poor people living in shacks. Because of these measures taken by our government, the poverty rate in the country has diminished by 9 percent during the past 5 years. We have taken innumerable measures for the welfare of backward and neglected segments of society. The monthly allowance received by widows and distressed women has been raised and their numbers increased. We have made arrangements for providing them with training and micro-credit, so that they can become self-reliant. The poor women of Bangladesh's rural areas have the capacity now to earn incomes through these programmes. We have increased the amount of old age allowance and the number of beneficiaries on the programme. We have provided residences to the landless and floating people. Thousands of distressed families have found shelter under these projects at various places of the country. We strove to make the people self-reliant during the past five years. The unemployed youths and young women have been provided with employment opportunities through micro-credit programmes. They can now stand on their own feet through investments in productive activities after taking loans from banks and other agencies. My Dear Brothers and



Sisters, It is said that education is the backbone of a nation. What does that imply? It means that just as spineless animals cannot stand on their own feet, similarly an ignorant nation cannot hold its head high. As in many other fields, our education system was also brought to the verge of ruination during 1996-2001. The students did not get textbooks on time. Environment of education was deliberately spoiled.

The public examinations were turned into festivals of copying grand concerts of deception. Tender-hearted students were pushed to the path of acquiring certificates instead of seeking knowledge. The future of the country was being ruined. We have brought about huge transformation in this area as well. Now, proper climate for education exists in the country. The students get textbooks in the beginning of the year. Copying in examinations has been stopped. The students have therefore become more attentive to their studies now. The pass rate in examinations has increased and there is now proper evaluation of merit. Special importance has been attached to primary education. Stipends have been introduced at primary level for ensuring education of under-privileged and poor children. As a consequence, just as drop-out rate has gone down, similarly school enrolment rate has risen. 'Reaching out of school children' project is being implemented at a cost of Taka 391 crore in order to bring under-privileged and dropped-out poor children under the purview of primary education. Five lakh children would get educational opportunity under this programme. Ninety-seven percent of school-aged children are now enrolled, which has been a major success in field of primary education during the past five years. We have taken extensive measures for promoting women's education. Education for girls has been made free up to class twelve. They are being given stipends. Nearly 2 crore girls receive this stipend now. There is now gender parity in the enrolment of boys and girls in schools. We intend to make girls' education free up to the degree level, if we get the opportunity in future by the grace of Allah. We have already established two new girls' cadet colleges at Joypurhat and Feni for expanding opportunities of quality education for girls in the country. Three new Polytechnic Institutes for women have also been set up. Side by side modernising the madrasa education, we have decided to recognise the 'Dawra' certificate of Quami madrasas and made Fazil-Kamil degrees equivalent to bachelors and master's degrees. Effective steps have also been taken for promoting vocational education. Existing vocational institutions have been upgraded to colleges and their number has now been raised to 64 from the previous 51. Side by side, we also undertook extensive measures for the spread of higher education. Many new private and public universities have been set up in the process. While dwelling on education, I would like to tell the students, you are the future of our country. This country belongs to you. You have to prepare yourselves from now on if you are to make this country happy, peaceful and prosperous in future. I therefore urge you to groom yourself up for building the country. Please pay more attention to your studies. My Dear Countrymen, The present government has implemented massive programmes to reach healthcare services and concomitant infrastructural facilities to the doorsteps of the common man. The number of beds has been raised to 50 from 31 in upazila hospitals, from 50 to 100 in hospitals of new district towns, and from 100 to 250 in hospitals of old district towns. Besides, some new medical colleges and hospitals have been or are being set up.

Bangladesh's successes in supplying pure drinking water and providing sanitation during the past five years have been lauded all over the world. Infant and maternal mortality rates have decreased in the country due to measures taken by our government. A recent UNICEF report says that the situation in Bangladesh in this area is better compared to neighbouring countries. Average life-expectancy of people has also increased. The rate of population growth has come down to 1.47 percent due to strengthening of our family planning

programme. My Dear Brothers and Sisters, The role of telecommunication is very important in today's competitive world. We have therefore attached much importance to the development of our telecommunication sector. The number of fixed telephones in the country when we assumed office was 6 lakh 85 thousand. Presently it stands at 12 lakh 20 thousand. The number of fixed-phone subscribers of private telephone operators has also crossed 150,000 mark, digital telephone exchanges have been set up in 64 districts of the country. 228 upazilas have been brought under digital telephone network. The rest of the upazilas would also be brought under digital telephone network in phases. At present the number of fixed and mobile telephone connections in the country is over one and a half crore. That means, the whole country has now come under the purview of telecommunication network. The telephone connection and call rate charges have been reduced drastically. 17 private companies have been given permission to provide fixed-phone services in order to make fixed telephones more accessible to the people. Side by side, government-owned Teletalk Bangladesh is also providing mobile phone services to the public. We have connected Bangladesh to the information super-highway through linkage with submarine cable. As a result, overseas communication, data exchange and internet connection have become speedier and easier. My Dear Brothers and Sisters, Half of our population are females. Consequently, national development is not possible without their participation. We have taken wide-ranging measures for women's empowerment and their development. Various programmes are being implemented for generating self-employment of rural women. Because of stringent measures against women and child trafficking, such crimes have now waned. Law against child and women repression has been formulated in order to ensure women's security. The youths are the life-blood of a nation. No nation can advance forward with a burden of unemployed youths on its head. We therefore took extensive measures for reducing the unemployment problem. The unemployed youths are being imparted training in order to transform them into human resources. They are given allowances during training and are made self-reliant through loans after training. Lakhs of unemployed youths got opportunities for self-employment in this process. My Dear Brothers and Sisters, People's demands and hopes rise alongside strides in development. A time comes when supply cannot keep pace with demand. That is exactly what happened in case of electricity in Bangladesh. The problem with electricity has continued for some time.

The demand for power has also increased substantially due to infrastructural development, modernisation of our lifestyle and rapid proliferation of mills and factories. We have remained conscious about this issue. With rise in demand, we also took measures for raising power generation. A network of 89 thousand kilometres of new transmission lines have been installed for supplying electricity throughout the country. As a result, we shall be able to reach power supply to everybody's doorsteps by increasing electricity production if we get that opportunity by the grace of Allah in future. I would like to express my regret to those people who are suffering because of dearth of electricity. I give you my word; we shall attach highest priority to development of the power sector if we get the support of countrymen in future. The number of electricity subscribers during the past five years has increased by 76 percent and crossed the 97 lakh mark. Because of our stringent measures, system loss in the sector has been reduced to 22 percent from the previous 28 percent. It has been possible to bring almost 50 thousand villages under the rural electrification programme. My Dear Brothers and Sisters, Ensuring the safety of citizens' lives and property is the responsibility of the government. You know very well the state of law and order in the country when we took over the responsibility of the government. There was then no security of people's lives. The whole nation was held hostage by terrorists with direct and indirect patronisation of the then government. The law was helpless before the power of terrorists. The administration was run as per the directives of terrorist leaders and godfathers of the ruling party. The bomb terrorism was started during the tenure of that government. The Bangla new-year's celebration, public meeting, cultural programme, church and religious gathering were attacked with bombs. The then government did not try to go to the roots of bomb-terror. Rather, they attempted to use it for political purpose. The then government harassed our leaders and workers, but refrained from catching the bomb-terrorists. As a result, the network of bomb-terrorists thrived unhindered. We have succeeded in changing that

situation. It has been possible to subdue these terrorists through strong measures taken by the government. The country is free of terrorism today. The land is free of godfathers. The state is free of bombs. We have overpowered the terrorists successfully through Operation Clean Heart and subsequent formation of Rapid Action Battalion. In this regard, I would like to extend my thanks to those members of the law enforcing agencies including the police, the armed forces, BDR and Ansars, who have worked even by risking their lives. Another thing. It is unfortunate that the bomb terrorists attempted to disrupt the peace of citizens by using the name of sacred religion Islam. By the grace of Almighty Allah and with the help of you all, we have reined them in. They are being tried according to the prevailing law of the land and the verdicts will be executed in accordance with law. We have taken many more measures to establish rule of law in the country. We framed the speedy trial act and set up speedy trial tribunal for ensuring justice for the people and in order to eliminate crimes.

Because of these measures taken by us, social peace, security, communal harmony and amity have remained intact during the past five years. Religious festivals like Ramadan, Eid, Pujā, Bouddha Purnima and Christmas have been celebrated pompously in a peaceful environment. My Dear Brothers and Sisters, Transforming an agrarian poor country into a prosperous one based on industry-commerce-service is not an easy task. Many problems-crises and obstacles-threats appear during this transition. Outstanding among these problems is the appearance and proliferation of corruption. Corruption was present even in affluent nations of the West. It took them ages to reduce that corruption. And even now, corruption and especially corporate corruption exists in those countries. They are working in their own ways to tackle that vice. We are also working to curb corruption in our country. We have constituted an independent Anti-Corruption Commission to check the spread of corruption and eradicate the phenomenon. This Commission has already become operational. We hold the view that a realistic way to combat corruption is to spread education. I have said earlier that we took extensive measures for that purpose. If we can ensure jobs and honour the educated, then they would be the ones to act as shields against corruption. Before searching for honest and qualified candidates for the coming election, we paid more attention to grooming educated and respected people in the country. We have seen positive signs in this area during the past five years. The reports of Transparency International Bangladesh or TIB are often quoted while referring to corruption. Their report shows that corruption in the country amounted to Taka 17 thousand 192 crore in the year 2000 as evidenced from 3,293 scanned reports. You will be glad to know that this amount was Taka 526 crore in 2005. However, despite being much less compared to the figure during the previous government's tenure, this amount is still not acceptable. We have emerged successful by taking a firm stand against corruption. We have brought back peace, trust and relief in public mind. We have also been successful in reducing corruption to some extent. Our struggle against corruption would be geared up if we get the opportunity to do so again. In the meantime, we have tried to groom an honest, dynamic and efficient administration. With this objective, promotions have been given in government jobs on a regular basis. Top priority has been attached to merit, qualification and efficiency in matters of promotion. A new pay-scale for government officers and employees has also been implemented. My Dear Countrymen, I also need to tell you another thing today. Some people complain about rising prices of commodities. We have always remained fully aware about this matter. That is why, we tried to bring under control the prices of essentials for our fasting citizens during Ramadan. But, commodity prices in the world market have an impact in import-dependent economies like ours. The prices fluctuate as a result. Another reason for this high price is the manipulation by middlemen. We have tried to restrain that. But transport of commodities gets hindered due to negative programmes like hartals. The sufferings of the people increase further. Another principal cause of high commodity price is rising oil prices in the global market.

I am sure you realize that prices of most items increase if price of oil rises. And that is why I have always remained in touch with the petroleum policy of the government. I rushed to Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia to keep the price of oil as low as possible. They have helped us or pledged to do so. I would like to extend my heartiest gratitude to those friendly countries. Although price of oil increased in the world market, Bangladesh could keep it within tolerable limits compared to our

neighbouring countries. Although prices of commodities rose, we always strove to raise the purchasing power of our people. I should say one thing in this respect. We lack adequate laws in our country to check manipulation with prices of commodities. We have plans to reform old laws in the area, frame and apply new laws and regulate prices by constituting an organization for the purpose. You have seen that the image of the country has been brightened in the international arena during the past five years. The interests and optimism in the outside world have also increased manifold. During this period, Bangladesh has been elected to 13 UN bodies including the United Nations Human Rights Council, Peace Building Commission and ECOSOC. Besides, Bangladesh became a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum. Bangladesh is also discharging the responsibility of SAARC Chairperson at the present juncture. Bangladesh has been playing a crucial role by sending the highest number of troops to United Nations Peacekeeping Missions. My Dear Brothers and Sisters, We prepared a roadmap for development after assuming office. We have tried to advance the country on the path of development by following that roadmap. But planned hindrances were created on that path of advancement. Road-blocks were erected on our roadmap of development in the name of movement. Attempts were made to create anarchy in the country through numerous destructive programmes including strikes and sieges. Property of the state and its people were destroyed through vandalism and arson attacks. Not only property, even human beings were burnt. But there was no need for these acts. We could solve any problem through discussions. We wanted to make the Jatiya Sangsad the focal point of all our activities. But we did not get the cooperation of the main opposition party in this area. The role of the opposition is very important in a parliamentary democracy. The opposition party has to play a constructive role for making democracy meaningful. Though unfortunate, it is true that our main opposition party has failed to play that role. Although they got unfettered opportunities to speak in the Jatiya Sangsad, they obstructed the parliamentary proceedings by resorting to meaningless walkouts and unreasonable boycotts. These were very painful for the democracy-loving people of the country. Politics is for the people, and not vice versa. People cannot accept that politics which brings misery instead of welfare, destruction instead of advancement, and upholds individual and party interests ahead of the country's and the nation's. The presence of that perverted politics has been visible in the activities of our main opposition party during the past five years. They do not hesitate to trample greater national interest under their feet for the sake of their narrow partisan interest.

And that is why the country's masses have turned their faces away from the direction of their movements. As a result, they could not involve the people in their so-called movement despite repeated efforts during the past five years. They have failed despite innumerable attempts to create indiscipline and anarchy. This is the reality, this is the truth. Those who would resort to activities which go against the interests of the people would certainly be rejected by them. They should remember, the country is not a place for playing card-games. Therefore, trump cards are either ignored in the country's politics, or they are obsolete and bound to fail. Even then, I would like to thank all honourable members including the Leader of the Opposition for their role in the completion of tenure of 8th National Parliament. I also thank other political parties for their constructive role within and outside the parliament. In a democracy, there can be difference of opinion on any subject. But it is the duty and responsibility of a patriot to uphold democracy and Constitution by remaining respectful to the opinion of others. My Dear Brothers and Sisters, Please recall your experiences of the Eid market. Harassments of the past were gone and extortions were absent. The shoppers could return home safely with their purchases. And the sellers could return home safely with the money they earned through selling. Would it be too much if we ask for your empathy and support once again in the backdrop of this sense of security and the success of your government? You gave us the responsibility of running the statecraft for five years during the election of 2001. We have discharged that responsibility with the cooperation of you all. We leave it to you to judge how far we have been successful during the past five years. We are going to hand over power to the caretaker government in accordance with the Constitution. After that, the Jatiya Sangsad elections will be held under the caretaker government within next 90 days. The coming parliamentary election will be very important for our national life. That election will deter-

mine whether we would go forward, or step backward. That election will decide whether the present trend of a terrorism-free Bangladesh would continue, or Bangladesh would again become a restive habitat of terrorism. More time is needed for successful culmination of the development trend that we have set in motion. More time is needed for the programmes that we undertook to make Bangladesh happy, prosperous and self-reliant. And continuity of government is required if this trend of development and progress is to be sustained. I call upon you all again to remain united so that your outgoing government can once again work for your welfare in the future. I told you many times before, the key to development lies in your own hands. Your vote is that key. I believe that through proper application of that vote during the next general election, you shall keep open that door of good fortune for the country and nation. My Dear Countrymen, I thank you all once again for the cooperation you extended in the running of our statecraft. I thank the civil administration. I thank the armed forces and all members of the law-enforcement agencies, whose sincere and tireless efforts have freed the country from terrorism.

I thank the industrialists, businessmen and local and foreign investors, who have made significant contribution in strengthening our economy. I thank the expatriate Bangladeshi brothers and sisters, whose hard-earned foreign currency has contributed significantly to our foreign exchange reserve. I thank all citizens including the peasants-labourers-students-teachers, freedom fighters, women, journalists and intellectuals, who have lent support and cooperation to governmental efforts during the past five years. I would especially like to thank the Islamic clerics of the country, who extended timely cooperation in our effort to tackle terrorism and establish peace. I thank people belonging to all faiths for maintaining religious harmony and ensuring an amicable environment in the country. The history of Bangladesh's progress during the past five years has been attested by the merchant-bankers Goldman Sachs, UNICEF, Time Magazine - who did a cover-story on rebuilding Bangladesh and the Nobel Committee - who have awarded the Nobel Peace Prize to Dr. Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank. For the first time in our history, Bangladesh has received these recognitions. I extend my thanks and congratulations to all concerned. My Dear Brothers and Sisters, Our journey of running the country had started in 2001 amidst a fragile economy and an anarchic social scenario. We have now brought Bangladesh to the global road of development after crossing many ups and downs with your support and cooperation. Now, it is our turn to advance forward on that road. And we need your continued support and cooperation for that purpose. I have firm faith, you will continue to extend that support and cooperation in the coming days as well. The BNP-led alliance will sustain that trend of building a prosperous Bangladesh if we get your support. My Dear Peace-Loving Countrymen, As you know, there is a thousand year old saying in this Bangladesh of ours: peace is better than happiness. The people of Bangladesh are indeed peace-loving. That is why, the biggest task before our government was maintaining peace in the country. We have succeeded in upholding that peace and Constitutional process despite political unrest at different junctures. We want peace to prevail in the country - especially till the holding of next general election - after the departure of the alliance government from office. With that objective, a political dialogue took place between the BNP and the Awami League during the past few days. BNP's main goal for engaging in this dialogue has been to ensure peaceful holding of the next general election through a Constitutional process. It is a matter of great regret that the political dialogue could not bring desired results. But we should not be disheartened by that. Our sacred Constitution is the protector of this peace-loving yet courageous, struggling yet tolerant, conscious and responsible nation. If we all keep faith in that Constitution and move forward in the coming days as individuals, groups and parties, then peace will certainly prevail in the country and free and fair election would be held on time. I know that everybody is desirous of that at this juncture.

Everybody desires very fondly that at a time when a citizen and organization of Bangladesh received a Nobel prize for peace, let peace remain firmly rooted in Bangladesh and let that Bangladesh get more acclaim at home and abroad for holding another peaceful general election. Let peace prevail in the country. Let peace flourish in the country. Let peace persist in the country. I wish the well-being of you all. Please remain in good health and in peace.

Allah Hafez, Bangladesh Zindabad.....

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