

Two years on the road to progress

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রাষ্ট্রপতি
গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ
ঢাকা
০৯ আষাঢ় ১৪০৫
২৩ জুন ১৯৯৮

বাণী

স্বাধীন বাংলাদেশে গণতান্ত্রিক অভিযাত্রা অগণতান্ত্রিক শক্তির হস্তক্ষেপে বার বার বাধাগ্রস্ত হয়েছে। ১৯৯১ সালের সাধারণ নির্বাচনের মাধ্যমে দেশে গণতান্ত্রিক প্রক্রিয়া পুনর্জীবিত হয় এবং ১৯৯৬ সালে অনুষ্ঠিত সাধারণ নির্বাচনের মাধ্যমে এই প্রক্রিয়া সুদৃঢ় হয়। এই নির্বাচনে সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠ আসন লাভ করে শেষ হাসিনার নেতৃত্বে বাংলাদেশ আওয়ামী লীগ সরকার গঠন করে এবং এই সরকারের আজ দুই বছর পূর্ণ হলো।

বাংলাদেশের মানুষ গণতন্ত্রকে ভালবাসে এবং গণতান্ত্রিক চিন্তা-চেতনার ধারাকে অব্যাহত রাখতে অগ্রহী। জনমতের এই লালিত বাসনার প্রতি আমাদের সবাইকে সম্মান প্রদর্শন করতে হবে এবং গণতান্ত্রিক ধ্যান-ধারণাকে বাস্তবে রূপায়িত করার জন্য গণতন্ত্রকে প্রতিষ্ঠানিক রূপ দিতে হবে। সকল দল, বিশেষ করে সংসদে প্রতিনিধিত্বকারী রাজনৈতিক দলের মধ্যে পারস্পরিক আস্থা ও সহমর্মিতার মনোভাবকে প্রসারিত করে জনগণের কল্যাণ ও জাতীয় স্বার্থে সবাইকে ঐক্যবদ্ধ হয়ে কাজ করার জন্য আমি রাজনৈতিক নেতৃবৃন্দের প্রতি আহবান জানাই।

জাতীয় অঙ্গপতিতে আমি বর্তমান সরকারের সর্বস্বীর্ণ সাফল্য কামনা করি।

বিচারপতি সাহাবুদ্দীন আহমদ

produced in 1996-1997. In 1997-98 due to production shortage in the Aman crop total foodgrain harvest has been 191.40 lakh tonnes. The success in growing agricultural production has been due to this government's success in keeping the price of fertilizers stable and making sure that they reach the peasants at the time of their need through effective management and overcoming the crisis created by the corruption in fertilizers distribution by the previous government. High yielding variety of seeds and use of modern equipment also contributed toward this success.

The government has succeeded in bringing the foreign exchange reserve to a stable position as a result of which on June 1, 1998 the FER stood at \$1,680 billion. Moreover, commercial banks have an additional \$500 million dollars in their coffers. Domestic savings over the two years have increased to 7.51 per cent of gross domestic products.

Investment has increased to 17.37 per cent. The domestic resources component of the ADP has increased to 48.9 and 47.0 per cent respectively over the last two years. This year inflation rate was 6.28 per cent excluding the food sector. The government is trying its best to continue with the economic stability by keeping inflation under control.

In last two years foreign investment has increased to \$846.8 million. The figure could have been much higher had the opposition restrained itself from calling mindless political programmes aimed at disrupting the economy. Because of decrease in foodgrains import by 67.9 per cent last year, the growth in import fell by 3.5 per cent. The total cost of import in the first

population has created a Housing Fund, an Employment Bank and introduced a family savings scheme. This government has also introduced Securities and Exchange Commission Act 1993, Bank Company Act, amendment of Artho Rin Adalat Act and Bankruptcy Act 1997. It has formed a Banks Reform Committee, undertaken a Financial Sector Development Programme

While tackling terrorism, the government has taken stern measures against woman and child trafficking and atrocities against women and children. Meanwhile special courts have been established in ten districts. Initiatives have been taken to add stricter clauses to the Woman and Child Repression Act 1995 with provision for stricter punishments. BDR and police patrol has

has decided to put in place 21 more checkpoints and buy ships fitted with modern equipment.

Judiciary

To expect and get justice is a basic human right and is guaranteed by the Constitution. But due to the complex nature and long drawn process in meting out justice, incompatibility of law with the present time and other reasons—a huge number of untried cases had stockpiled at various levels of the judiciary. The present government has undertaken a three-year-long Tk. 200 crore World Bank-financed Legal and Judicial Capacity Building Project with a view to quick and cheap disposal of cases and building up a modern and efficient judicial system. A permanent Law Reforms Committee has been established with a view to reforming the structure of existing laws of the country. A Legal Aid Committee has been formed to provide legal help of the poor and the distressed. The judiciary now works independently. A draft bill on separation of the judiciary from the executive branch of the government has been prepared. All these have widened the scope for the ordinary people to get justice.

Appointment of an Ombudsman is a constitutional commitment. There had been no progress in this regard. Recently the government has taken decision to appoint an Ombudsman. Rural Courts have been established for the benefit of rural people. The government is committed to upholding human rights and has announced the formation of a neutral National Human Rights Commission. It has established a Legal Administration Training Institute. With a view to quick



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina listening to a distressed aged woman at an old-age allowance distribution ceremony at Tunji Para



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Message

The government led by the Bangladesh Awami League completes two years in office today, the 23rd June 1998. On this auspicious day, I recall with deep gratitude the supreme sacrifices made by the people of the country in winning freedom and establishing democracy, and for the twenty one year arduous struggle to end the autocratic rule imposed by the usurpers of power following the martyrdom of the Father of the Nation. I convey my heartfelt congratulations to my dear countrymen.

We have been relentlessly working for improving the lot of the people through attaining economic progress. Despite the global economic recession, it is for the first time in the history of Bangladesh, the country has attained a high rate of economic growth for two successive years; 5.9% in 1996-97 and 5.6% in 1997-98. The growth rate in industrial sector this year is 10.1%. Remarkable progress in the agriculture sector has also been made. Successful completion of the Bangabandhu Bridge, the signing of the long-term Ganges Water Sharing Treaty, and the CHT Peace Accord have enhanced the image of Bangladesh in the international arena. The positive impact of our gracious investment policy and Economic Diplomacy have generated international competition to invest capital in Bangladesh. Bangladesh has also achieved remarkable success in expansion of International trade and promotion of regional cooperation.

The literacy rate of the country has risen to 51% during the last two years. In all the budgets presented by our government, we have been making the highest allocation in education sector. We have given priority to women development and female education. Women Development Policy has already been formulated, while formulation of national policies in other important sectors including education, industry, health are in progress. Decision has been taken to appoint an ombudsman in order to make the administration transparent and accountable. We have been implementing reasonable pay scale in phases for the government employees.

The National Parliament has been made the epicenter of all activities in the process of institutionalisation of democracy in the country. We have brought the country back to the mainstream of our cultural heritage by fighting out the trend of distorting the history of independence. The Indemnity Act has also been repealed for the establishment the rule of law. Steps have been taken to form a four-tier strong local government institutions. The historic importance of the already held UP election is enormous in relation to inclusion of women in the rural power structure.

We have been striving hard for the last two years to fulfill our electoral commitments. We remain committed to fulfill the remaining election pledges and for establishing people's rights to food and their welfare. I leave it to the people to judge the activities and performances of our government. People's confidence is the source of our inspiration.

On the occasion of completion of our government's two years in office we seek blessings of the Almighty Allah so that we can work for continued prosperity of the country and the nation.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever

Sheikh Hasina

By the turn of the year June the 23rd has again appeared before us. The Awami League has completed yet another year of running the government, and has successfully traversed some more difficult path. Only two years have passed since the breaking away from the vicious circle of 21 year long military and autocratic rule and establishment of a government of consensus through the nation's striving for a democratic system of government. Even within this short period our nation has begun to enjoy the benefits of the electoral commitments of the party in power.

Empowerment of the people by making constitutional provisions for the establishment of caretaker government to conduct general elections, realisation of Bangladesh's legitimate share of the waters of the Ganges, introduction of the epoch-making system of electing three women representatives at the Union Parishad with a view to empowering the women, signing of an historic peace accord to end the two-decade long hostility in one-tenth area of the country, construction of the dream-bridge the Bangabandhu Bridge, introduction of old-age pension for the alleviation of the age old sufferings of the hapless and distress, bumper agricultural production due to a right agricultural and fertilizer policy, stepping of Bangladesh into international cricket in the realm of sports—all have made these two years the years of achievement. This is no mean accomplishment in comparison with time. People are enjoying the benefits of the activities of a democratically elected government which believes in accountability to the people. There is no doubt that credit is due to the Awami League government which led the nation through the War of Liberation.

Sheikh Hasina, the worthy daughter of the greatest Bangalee of a millennium Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman—has established the people's right to vote after an arduous struggle by establishing the demand for holding of elections under caretaker government. The election held under the non-party neutral caretaker government was a great event for the democracy loving people of the world.

People of the world who have been suffering grievously under covert or overt autocracy in the name of democracy watched the historic polls with keen interest and attention. This election was a milestone in the political history of Bangladesh.

After getting the mandate of the people, the Awami League government initiated a new range of activities in the mainstream of the 'nation's life'. This has overcome all adversities in the last two years. The pro-liberation government is striving hard to build the 'prosperous and exploitation-free Golden Bengal' as envisaged by the Father of the Nation.

Despite non-cooperation from some political parties including the main opposition party, heaps of problems left behind by the previous governments and scarcity of resources, the government of national consensus under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina is doing everything it can by putting the highest emphasis on building up a transparent and accountable administration. The success of a government that has earned the mandate of the people for leading the country for five years can not be assessed in its first two years. Many policies and initiatives of the government may take five or ten years or even more. But that the present government does not lack in sincerity in fulfilling the aspirations of the people has been made very clear.

Economic Progress

The Father of the Nation dreamt of the economic emancipation of the downtrodden people. The present government has put the highest emphasis on alleviation of poverty with a view to attaining economic emancipation of the people. Eradication of Poverty has been taken up as a prime issue in the Fifth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002). In fact, low rate of economic growth hindered all efforts at alleviation of poverty in the past. The growth in domestic product has been fixed at 7 per cent. Taking annual population growth at an estimated 1.37 per cent along with the above mentioned rate of growth the annual per capita growth in income has been fixed at 5.5 per cent. In fact the growth rate of 5.7 per cent attained in the fiscal year 1996-97 has exceeded the plan period average of 5.5 per cent.

This has been the highest rate of growth in the decade of the nineties. As against an estimated growth rate of 6 per cent the actual growth rate for 1997-1998 is expected to be 5.6 per cent according to primary estimates.

The contribution of the agricultural sector is quite high in this success in growth. Because of the government's pro-peasant agricultural policy a record 208 lakh tonnes of foodgrains were

part of 1997-98 stood at \$3,437 million which was 2.6 per cent less than the corresponding period of the previous year. Export earnings received momentum with the present government's taking over of power. Export earning in various sectors increased to 16.75 per cent during the April-July period of the current fiscal year.

The government has introduced old age pension for the helpless senior citizens in the rural areas of the country. Under the old-age programme 10 very old and poor persons in each Ward will receive a monthly allowance of Tk. 100 amounting to Tk. 1,200 per year. At least five of the 10 in each Ward will be women. This is for the first time in the history of this country that a government has taken initiatives to establish the dignity of the poor senior citizens in society. Although the amount is a pittance compared to the need of the recipients the government may be acclaimed for introducing the programme. The government with a view to ensuring economic emancipation of the poor section of the

and taken stringent measures against bank defaulters. Above all, this government is implementing a phased wage commission award to benefit the employees of the republic keeping in consideration the requirement and economic condition of government officers and employees that would keep at par with the market price but at the same time would not put financial pressure on other sectors of the economy. These measures are expected to strengthen the financial sector and bring in macro-economic stability and success in near future.

Progress in law and order and defence

Combating terrorism was the commitment and declared policy of the government as soon as it took power. Identified and notorious terrorists have been arrested because of the Prime Minister's rigid stand this issue and thanks to her categorical order that says, "Terrorists do not have any party, arrest them irrespective of which party they belong to."

been strengthened in the border areas. Measures have been taken to quell subversive crimes in sensitive and important areas by prior identification of criminals.

The government has taken steps to modernise the police force by building up community police to strengthen its drive to maintain law and order. Measures have been taken by the government to bolster the police force by increasing its strength by 5,000 new recruits. Moreover, arrangements have been made to import specially trained dogs to combat crime.

With a view to modernising the armed forces, the relentless and vigilant guardsmen of our independence and sovereignty, the government has increased the defense budget by Tk. 341 crore 91 lakh. In addition to this moves are underway to establish National Defence College, Military Institute of Science and Technology and Armed Forces Medical College to facilitate higher training needs. To combat smuggling and activities of coastal pirates the government

disposal of cases, the government has taken up plan to create a separate Prosecution Directorate and Metropolitan Sessions Court.

The government has repealed the notorious Indemnity Ordinance which was against the Constitution's provisions on human rights and thereby fulfilled the long standing popular demand for the trial of the Killers of the Father of the Nation and members of his family.

At present members of parliament are chairing various parliamentary Standing Committees instead of the minister thanks to the amendments made into the parliamentary Rules of Procedure. This has been appreciated both home and abroad as a revolutionary step towards making the parliament effective, institutionalising parliamentary democracy and introducing transparency and accountability of the ministries of the government.

Women's empowerment

Realising the necessity of women's development that was raised during the middle of the twentieth century the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had established the Bangladesh Women's Rehabilitation Board on February 18, 1972.

February 18, 1972. The demand for the rights of women has further strengthened in course of time. The present government kept in line with its electoral commitments and formulated the national women's development policy to empower women and integrate them with the mainstream of development and took up a national women's development programme in the light of this policy and the Beijing platform for action.

Working women's hostels have been established at divisional headquarters to enhance women's participation in economic activities. A saving scheme based on monthly payment of interest has been introduced to increase women's economic self-reliance.

With a view to empowering the

women the present government has made provisions for election of three women members in each Union Parishad of the country in the local government elections held in last December. As a result of this measure the issue of the women's empowerment took an institutional shape.

The new generation of our people has learnt a number of hitherto unknown facts of history due to the present government's strong policy of restoring and re-establishing the spirit of the war of independence. Various programmes of the radio and the television and the mass media are inspiring the masses in reviving the values of the War of Liberation, the traditional heritage of the Bengalees and the indelible spirit of liberation and independence.

Education Sector

In last two years the literacy rate has increased from 47 per cent to 51 per cent. The government has taken a number of measures to increase the rate of literacy to 80-85 per cent by the year 2003 and is committed to attain 100 per cent literacy by the year 2006.

The government has taken up education as the tool for human

resources development and poverty alleviation. That is why special emphasis has been given on engineering, science, technical and professional education side by side with primary and mass education. Women's education has been taken up in earnest and plans have been taken to increase the number of female teachers in educational institutions. Under the scope of the plan 7,000 new female teachers would be employed in various institutions. An education policy based on the Kudrat-e-Khuda Education Commission aiming at facing the challenges of the coming century has been formulated. Special importance has been given to development of physical infrastructure and other educational equipment.

Health Sector

The government is firmly resolved to ensure Health for All by the Year 2000 and is working on development of primary health care, population control, nationwide development of integrated preventive and curative disease control to improve the health of the poor masses. Meanwhile, the government has

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Visiting "Ashrayan" Project at Sapahar under Naogaon district. The houses were constructed for landless poor people at the personal initiative of Prime Minister