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Bangladesh has been playing an important role in UN peace keeping operations. On 31 December 1999 Bangladesh got recognition as the second largest country in the field of peace keeping. Bangladesh security personnel are now engaged in peace keeping operations in 10 out of 17 trouble-torn countries of the World. These achievements and success of Bangladesh UN peace-keepers earned prestigious position for the country.

Bangladesh India Friendship Treaty not renewed:

Awami League was committed not to renew the Indo-Bangladesh Friendship treaty. In 1972 this treaty was necessary for ensuring security and protecting independence and sovereignty of the country. False and twisted interpretation of the treaty was given. But no past government uttered a single word in favour of repealing the treaty. After being ousted from power BNP started misleading propaganda. Awami League replied to the criticism by not renewing the friendship treaty.

UNESCO Peace Prize

The basic objective of Bangladesh foreign policy is establishment of peace. Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman told the UN General Assembly on 25 September 1974 that Bangladesh was fighting for the cause of peace and justice. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina after assuming power pledged full support to the UN peace keeping role. In continuity of past policy the Prime Minister succeeded in signing the historic CHT Peace treaty on 2 December 1997. This treaty ended the decades-old enmity and tension in the region. In recognition of Sheikh Hasina's contribution in bringing about peace, UNESCO peace prize was awarded to her in 1998. This is a memorable achievement for the country and for the government. The Prize was handed over to the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris on 24 September, 1998.

CHT Peace Treaty:

The cases of violence and bloodshed in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) were increasing due to wrong policies pursued by the post-1975 governments. As a result the people of the country were being deprived of the benefits of the huge natural and mineral resources of the area. In this backdrop, the present government after assumption of office took effective steps to solve the crisis. With this end in view a 12 member national committee comprising Parliament members from both the treasury and opposition benches was constituted headed by the Chief Whip Abul Hasnat Abdullah. The national committee after long dialogue with the PCJS signed the long cherished peace treaty on December 1997 for the permanent solution of the problem. The treaty signed within the purview of the constitution affirmed full faith and confidence in the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Bangladesh and aimed at ensuring the political, social, cultural, industrial and economic rights of all the inhabitants of the CHT, accelerating socio-economic development of the region and upholding the rights of the people. Under the treaty, Shantabani first surrendered arms on 10 February 1998. The government has undertaken a Tk 2200 crore project for development of CHT. A new ministry of CHT affairs has been formed. The Regional Council started functioning under the leadership of Shantu Larma.

Water Sharing Treaty:

The BNP government tried but failed to bring the legitimate share of the Ganges water. Bangabandhu through dialogue with India managed 44,000 cusecs of water for Bangladesh. Ziaur Rahman could bring 34,000 cusecs and Gen Ershad could manage only 20,000 cusecs. During the period of Khaleda Zia it came down to only 9,000 cusecs.

Bangladesh Awami League through bilateral dialogue with India signed the Water Sharing treaty and reached a just solution of the problem. The historic 30-year treaty was signed on 12 December, 1996 after fruitful talks between the Prime Ministers of Bangladesh and India. In the backdrop of the treaty, the ministerial level Joint River Commission has been reactivated. In the 32nd meeting of the commission, it was decided to set up links between the dams within respective boundary of India and Bangladesh in lean period. These links would save the people living in west bank of the Teesta from recurring floods.

The Policy of National Consensus

As stated in the election manifesto, steps have been taken to implement the policy of national consensus for development and reconstruction. Though emerged as the majority party in election, Awami league did not form a single party government. Offer was given to BNP for joining the government but it did not.

Constitution of Parliamentary Committees

Government in the National and International Level

The present Government has been striving to institutionalize democracy and make parliament the centre of all nation building activities. The government has provided for parliamentary standing committees to be headed by MPs instead of ministers. Even an opposition MP may now heads a committee. Parliamentary debates are now broadcast over radio and TV to give the people an access to the debates. The Prime Minister's question-answer time has been introduced in parliament for the first time in our history to ensure accountability.

The Judiciary

The Government has been working for separation of judiciary from the executive with a view to ensuring full independence of judiciary. Under the present government headed by Sheikh Hasina, country's judiciary enjoys full independence. The parliament has repealed the infamous Indemnity Ordinance which was promulgated in 1975 in violation of fundamental and human rights.

This has made the trial of the killers of Bangabandhu, his family members and four national leaders killed in jail, possible. By repealing the Indemnity Ordinance, the sacred constitution achieved at the cost of the blood of 3 million martyrs, has been restored to its original glory. The judgement of Bangabandhu killing has been announced and an appeal against the judgement is pending before the higher court. The present government is not in favour of interfering with the judiciary. Trial of the killers of four national leaders in jail, killing of General Zia, and General Manjor is in progress.

The government has undertaken a three year project called "Judicial and legal capacity building" with the objective of improvement of socio-economic condition, reform of legal system, modernization and development of physical infrastructure of courts.

The government for the first time constituted Legal Aids Committee, headed by District Judges in 61 Districts to provide legal assistance to the poor and destitute. These district level committees have been working under the National Legal Aid Committee. The government is committed to protect human rights. In the meantime a neutral National Human Rights Commission has been formed. The government has set up the Judicial Administration Training Institute to enhance the skill of concern professional personnel. The government has formed a permanent Law Commission headed by a retired Chief Justice of Supreme Court to make the laws up to date through necessary reforms. This Commission has already undertaken measures to make some new laws and reframe the old ones. Considering the increasing number of pending cases in courts the government has decided to set up village courts for settling litigation's through negotiation and mutual understanding. The decision of setting up of village courts in line with local tradition, has been considered timely. The Public Safety Act has been passed for taking quick action against the persons creating violence and law and order situation. Special court has been set up for the trial of terrorists. In the meantime, the terrorists in the South West region have surrendered en masse and rehabilitation is in progress.

Administrative system

The government has established rule of law for ensuring transparency and accountability of the Government. Administration has been kept beyond party influence. Necessary laws have been made and in some cases applied to, for developing a skilled administrative system, free from corruption. An Administrative Reforms Commission has been formed. The Commission has already completed its report.

Local Government bodies election

Soon after assuming office, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina constituted a high-power local government commission to put forward recommendations on framing a welfare-oriented local government system. As per recommendations of the local government Commission the government has already taken steps to install a 4-tier local government structure. Local government would be installed at village, union, upazila and district levels. This recommendation has already been approved by the parliament and council of ministers. Parliament has passed the Village Council Act. Through amendment to the Union Council Act, for every three wards one seat has been kept reserved for women. The Union Parishad comprises of 9 wards. Besides the women are also allowed to contest for the general seats. This has opened up

a new avenue for women empowerment and flourishing women's leadership. The last election of the Union Parishad was free fair and peaceful. As per advice of the Election Commission no Government minister took part in the campaign. For strengthening the local government bodies necessary powers have been given to them through decentralization.

Anti-Terrorist Program

As per elections pledges of Awami League the government has taken all-out measures to restore rule of law and create a condition favorable to development. The anti-terrorism drive throughout the country has been strengthened in view of the unequivocal declaration of the Prime Minister, "Terrorists don't have any party, arrest them irrespective of their party affiliation." Notorious terrorists who used to operate with the blessings of the administration and influential quarters during the rule of previous government have been arrested from different parts of the country including Dhaka and Chittagong. Legal measures are being taken for giving them exemplary punishment. Even an MP of the government party has been arrested. In view of Prime Minister's stern warning the Home Minister has recently directed the authorities to arrest party workers and relatives of Ministers and MPs, if there is allegation against them.

FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION

There is no alternative to free flow of information for strengthening the base of democracy and ensuring freedom of speech. Bangladesh Awami League, imbued with the noble ideals of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and inspired by the glorious spirit of the war of liberation, after assuming power noticed that the mass media was on the verge of collapse. The post-1975 governments for twenty one years used the mass-media for their partisan interest and paid no attention for development of media. A stagnant situation was prevailing in creative institutions like Bateer and Television due to administrative indiscipline, corruption and politicization during those twenty one years. Attempts were made to misguide the public, specially the younger generation, by distorting the history of liberation. After the assumption of power by the present government headed by Sheikh Hasina different organization under the Ministry of Information have undertaken massive programs to restore the Bangali heritage, the ideals and of liberation war values of independence. Programmes are also being implemented for development of physical infrastructure.

The Chittagong station of BTV was inaugurated within 6 months of assumption of office by the present government. Four TV relay centers were opened in less than two years time at Patuakhali, Thakurgoan, Brahmanbaria and Jhenidah. TV relay centers are also being set up at Rajshahi, Ukhia and Rangamati.

For ensuring free flow of information and accountability of the administration, the government at the directive of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has taken initiative to allow channels of the electronic media under private sector and such permission has already been granted. This will create environment of healthy competition between government and private electronic media. This bold and timely step by the government would have favorable impact on democratic practice. At present, there is no newspaper under government ownership.

The present government has announced and implemented the 5th wage board award for the benefit of working journalists and press workers. Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman constituted the first wage board in 1974 and implemented its recommendations. The present government believes in full freedom of press. The newspapers publishing news and views in a fair and free atmosphere and enjoys full freedom. The government has increased the rate of advertisement and ensured fair distribution for flourishing newspaper industry.

Monument of Independence

The present govt. has taken various measures to protect and preserve the memorials of liberation war. Initiative has been taken by the government to build an independence square and a monument at Suhrawardy uddyan where Bangabandhu delivered his historic address on 7 March, 1971 and subsequently Pakistani Army surrendered on 16 December same year. The government has installed the "Eternal Flame" on the golden jubilee year of Independence and built a monument at Rayer Bazar

in memory of the Shaheed intellectuals.

Economic growth

The GDP growth rate is a dependable index of economic development. During 1999-2000 fiscal year growth rate was 5.5 percent (new index). The country's GDP growth achieved during the past four years surpassed all previous records. The election manifesto of Bangladesh Awami League in 1996 pledged to give subsidy in agriculture sector if necessary. As per this commitment Tk. 411 crore has been provided as subsidy. The previous government paid no subsidy for fertilizer and energy.

Agricultural Development

Revolutionary change has come in the field of extending agricultural loan. During 98-99 fiscal year Tk 2005 crore have been disbursed as agricultural loan. Never before in the history of Bangladesh such a big amount was granted as agricultural loan from banking sector.

Old Age Pension and Asrayan Project

A notable achievement of Sheikh Hasina's government is introduction of pension scheme for the distressed aged persons and widows. Over four Lac aged persons are now getting one



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Old Age Pension distribution function in Tungipara.

hundred taka per month under this scheme. From 1999-2000 fiscal year a scheme for giving allowance to the widows and women deserted by husband has been introduced. Under this scheme two Lac women are getting government allowance. For the rehabilitation of retarded persons the national foundation for the retarded has been set up with ten crore taka as initial grant. Santi Nibas, another center for aged persons has been set up at a cost of taka ten crore.

The Asrayan project has been under taken with personal initiative and guidance of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for rehabilitation of shelterless persons. In 1997-98 fiscal year a housing fund with a grant of Tk 58 crore has been formed. Tk 43.50 crore has been granted as house building loan from this fund through NGO's for building 22 thousand homestead spreading over 202 upazillas. The employment bank has been set-up in 1998 with capital of Tk 75 crore to create employment opportunity for the youths. Under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina "One house one farm" project has been undertaken. A fund has been formed with a grant of Tk 5 crore for the benefit of distressed women and children. In 1998-99 fiscal year food aid worth Tk 585 crore was extended to 42 Lac distressed families for 7 months. For VGF Programme the total expenditure during 99-2000 was Tk. 229 crore. For social security a total amount of Tk 1222 crore has been spent under these schemes.

Flood-Relief

The way the government tackled the devastating flood of 1998 under the dynamic leadership of Sheikh Hasina has been acclaimed throughout the world as an example of efficient disaster management. The total loss due to this flood was around 6 percent of the GDP but the government overcame this loss in 1998-99 fiscal year. As a result of flood the GDP growth rate came down to 3.19 percent. In the first seven months of fiscal year 1998-99 the rate of growth in industry sector was 2.3 percent while in 99-2000 the growth rate for first seven months was raised to 5.5 percent.

Poverty Alleviation

The present government has given top priority to poverty alleviation which was reflected in the budget allocations during the past four years. For poverty alleviation Tk. 5313.42 crore was allocated in ADP for year 99-2000.

In the proposed budget for year 2000-2001, ADP allocation has been raised to 6066.1 crore. The expenditure for poverty alleviation has been increased by 13 percent.

Tele-communication

The importance of Tele-communication is immense in the backdrop of globalization. After assuming office the present government has taken initiative to expand tele-communication network both under public and private sectors. At present Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board has 4.91 lakh telephone connection this number will be raised to 8 lakh by the end of coming fiscal year. In the meantime, five private sector companies have given 1.5 lakh new telephone connections. More private companies have been given licence for giving telephone connection. By the end of year 2001, number of telephone connections in public and private sector would be 12 Lac.

Youth Development

The recent achievement in the field of international sports is glorious Bangladesh won 21 gold, 9 silver and 6 bronze medals in special Olympic in July 1999 in America. Bangladesh became champion in youth cricket in July 1999 in Singapore. The Bangladesh cricket team is now

efforts of the whole nation any problem may be resolved, even if the problem is gigantic.

Now the nation is marching towards the 21st century under the able and dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. World leaders and donor countries are all-praise about the government of Sheikh Hasina indicating that Bangladesh has a bright and prosperous future.

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Prosperity for Bangladesh

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quantities of fruits, vegetables and other agro-based items.

Although the number of people below the poverty line is still very large it is decreasing, albeit slowly. In the last four years the incidence of poverty has declined from 47% to 44.7%. Social indicators have registered significant improvements:

- Adult literacy rate has increased from 44 percent in 1996 to 60 percent in 2000.
- Gross enrolment in primary Schools is 97 percent
- 65 percent of the enrolled primary School students successfully complete their education and the ratio is rising.
- Average life expectancy has increased from 58.9 years in 1996 to 60.8 years in 2000.
- Child mortality rate has declined from 67 per thousand to 57 in four years.
- Daily per capita calorie intake has increased from 2216 kilo calorie in 1996 to 2283 kilo calorie in April 1999.

In order to provide a safety net to those who are unable to join the mainstream of development, Sheikh Hasina's Government has introduced a scheme for providing an allowance to those who are both very old and very poor. Nearly half a million people have been getting this allowance since 1998. Another scheme has been introduced to provide an allowance to poor women with dependent children who are either widows or abandoned by their husbands. These are perhaps the first attempts in South Asia to build a social safety net for the poor and the old. A housing scheme for the homeless is being implemented under the direct supervision and patronage of the Prime Minister. A highly concessional housing loan program for the rural poor is being implemented by the government through NGOs. Over four million households benefited from a very successful "vulnerable group feeding" program in the rural areas of the country. The micro-credit program, implemented both by government agencies and non-governmental organizations, is also making a contribution in the nation's campaign against poverty.

In the 1999-2000 financial year, different government agencies disbursed Taka 20350 million as micro credit. The NGOs disbursed Taka 77350 million to a total of 8.70 million rural poor, mostly women. Bangladesh is not only a pioneer in micro-finance but a leader in using and refining these innovative credit programs.

The rates of savings and investment in Bangladesh have been rising steadily. Domestic saving as a percentage of GDP has increased from 13.13 percent in 1995 to 17.78 percent in 1999. The rate of investment as a percentage of GDP increased from 19.12 percent in 1995 to 22.41 percent in 1999. The increase in saving and investment rate in reflected in both industrial production and exports. At the beginning of the decade Bangladesh exports amounted to \$1.52 billion; by 1998-99 the country's exports had risen to \$5.32 billion. Exports are currently growing at an annual rate of about 7 percent. Within a relatively short period of a decade and a half Bangladesh has become a major supplier of ready-made garments and knitwear to the North American and European markets. In addition to the incentives given to export industries, the Export Processing Zones in Dhaka and Chittagong have also been given special facilities to encourage both domestic and foreign exporters. The Industrial policy recently announced by the government guarantees foreign investors the right to repatriate their profits and capital. Foreign investors can fully own the industries they set up; they can also buy land to build their industries. Tax holidays and other generous tax incentives mark Bangladesh as one of the most attractive investment destinations in Asia. A private EPZ, sponsored by Korean entrepreneurs, is being developed near Chittagong. A major United States company has entered into contract with the authorities to build two power stations to supply 800 megawatts of electricity. Other foreign firms have joined the Bangladesh Power Development Board in meeting the growing power needs of the

country. Developments in the gas and oil sectors since Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina assumed power in June 1996 have been most dramatic. A number of large and highly productive gas fields have been discovered changing the outlook for the country's future prospects. Renowned international companies such as Shell, Chevron and Unocal are exploring for gas and oil in a number of blocks earmarked for them. Some companies have already started to sell gas to domestic buyers. Discussions are now in progress on the possibilities of gas exports. Decisions on this question can be taken once the authorities are able to firm up the estimates of reserves. Foreign investment in these and other sectors is increasing. According to a World Bank estimate, foreign investment in 1998-99 stood at \$800 million, a significant increase from the \$281 million of 1996. Human resources are the most important assets of Bangladesh. The phenomenal growth of the ready-made sector was possible largely due to the availability of a skillful and hardworking labour force. These individuals work equally hard when they go abroad, and have built up a reputation for competence, intelligence and dedication. Bangladesh receives a substantial sum in foreign exchange from expatriates living in the UK, USA and a number of Middle Eastern and South East Asian countries. In 1990 they sent home \$ 764 million, and by 1998-99 remittance receipts had grown to \$1.7 billion. The growth rate of remittances this year is about 12 percent. The Bangladesh government, in its recent budget for 2000-2001, has earmarked for education a sum of Taka 55960 million the highest allocation in the budget. Similarly, the allocation for health and family welfare as well that for rural infrastructure reflects the high priority attached by the government of Sheikh Hasina to the social sector. A series of steps have been taken by the government to encourage the rapid development of Information Technology in the country. The import of computers was made duty free in 1996. Facilities for computer education are being rapidly expanded in order to build the software export industry, which has already made in modest beginning.

The developments listed above have been achieved in a stable macroeconomic environment. Careful management of monetary and fiscal policies as well as a flexible exchange rate policy has kept the rate of inflation low. Currently, inflation on a point to point basis is 3.09 percent. Reserves of foreign exchange remain stable at about \$1.5 billion, which is roughly equal to two month's imports. Eschewing grandiose plans such as nuclear weapons development by India and Pakistan, Bangladesh has consistently followed a balanced and responsible foreign policy dedicated to regional and global peace. When India and Pakistan exploded nuclear weapons and regional peace and security were at risk, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina traveled to Delhi and Islamabad to counsel patience and restraint. The UNESCO peace prize awarded to Sheikh Hasina was a fitting tribute to a leader who has made significant contributions to promoting peace and stability both at home and abroad. The international community paid another tribute to Bangladesh when UNESCO declared 21 February as the International Mother Language Day. It was on this day in 1952 when Bangalee youths sacrificed their lives to uphold the dignity and status of their mother language, Bengali. Yet another laurel earned by Sheikh Hasina was the Ceres prize awarded by FAO for success in achieving outstanding success in the field of food production. Last year the international community expressed its confidence in Bangladesh when 172 member states of the United Nations unanimously voted to elect Bangladesh as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. Soldiers of the Bangladesh armed forces are serving with distinction in various UN Peacekeeping missions around the World.

Bangladesh today stands at the threshold of rapid economic and social development. Structural reforms achieved in the past four years have placed the economy in a sound position to benefit from the process of economic globalization. This stable, liberal and democratic country, free of domestic conflict or external tensions, certainly warrants a second look from potential foreign investors. The growing confidence and breadth of private domestic investment certainly provides some indication of the country's economic potential. Buoyed by the prospect of significant natural gas resources, and with a growing appreciation of the wealth of its human capital, Bangladesh looks to the new century with high expectations and confidence.

SOLVENCY AND HUMANITY

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is increasing. Measures are being undertaken to improve the standard of education. Work to establish 18 thousand community clinics throughout the country for extending medicare facilities to the poor people of rural area has already began. Many economists say, the average index of standard of living does not carry any sense. Because all the citizen of a country can't enjoy the benefit of development equally as disparity exists in the society. Here lies the role of the government and only the pro-people and welfare-oriented government can play active and positive role. Let us consider the fact of free distribution of food among 42 lakh distressed families following the devastating floodings of 1998. Over 2 crore members of these families received food worth Tk. 585 crore for seven months. It was found in surveys that 85 percent VGF cards went to the landless people. In the last year food worth Tk. 229 crore was also distributed in rural areas as many people could not be provided with any work.

There was no option in the past other than the relief and test relief programme after any severe natural calamities like cyclone-flood-drought in Bangladesh. Even, no one placed any other demand. A gignatic humanitarian relief operation through VGF cards became possible because of the efficiency of the management just after the most severe natural disaster of the century. There was every possibility of corruption and favouritism, but due to the proper supervision a minium number of complains were lodged.

It is Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who initiated some other programmes like this one for the poverty stricken people. These are: (1) Introduction of one hundred taka allowance per month for each of the over 4 lakh old men and women; (2) Introduction of allowance for 2 lakh distressed women, widow and wives abandoned by their husbands; (3) Establishment of 6 old homes at a cost of Tk. 10 crore; (4) Asrayan project for the homeless poor; (5) Setting up of the Karmasangsthan Bank to create job opportunities for the youth with a capital of Tk. 75 crore; (6) Introduction of stipend for 40 lakh female school students; (7) Introduction of a project for the training and self-employment of the youth; (8) Introduction of monthly allowance for distressed freedom fighters.

Some people say, these programmes, undertaken by the government are contrary to the concepts of market economy. Some of the donor countries and agencies also endorsed the same opinion. But, the government is extending all-out assistance for the growth of private entrepreneurship, although it strongly upholds the welfare-oriented programmes. Humanitarian programmes never make the people idle or dependent on relief. If the government could make the people understand that every body of this society would get a share of benefit of each development activity, then the participation of the people in development programmes will certainly increase. The great achievement of the government is to earn the peoples' confidence to that end during the last four years. Let us refer to an example during the flooding of 1998. A part of the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway went under water and the garments, produced by millions of flood affected workers at that time could not be sent to the Chittagong port for export. The government instantly took two decisions. It introduced special cargo flights between Dhaka and Chittagong and conducted special ferry services to carry the vehicles on the submerged highway to keep the export on.

Every entrepreneur, small or big, now realises that the government remains stand by with all sorts of help and assistance to keep the economic activities on even in the most crucial situation. The target of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to develop the country as a prosperous one by the year 2020 is not an imagination but a reality, and everybody admits that. The volume of development budget is being increased and dependency on others in implementing those projects is being reduced. The private sector investment, both local and foreign is also increasing.

We fought for the independence of our motherland to achieve prosperity, not to remain below poverty line. Our fight was to carry the benefit to every doorstep, not to share the poverty. To achieve the target still we have to go a long way and we are advancing towards that desired goal following the right track.