

# Full text of Prime Minister's address to the nation

BSS, Dhaka

Following is the English translation of the Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's address to the nation over radio and television on Friday night.

*Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim*

Dear countrymen, brothers and sisters,

*Assalamu Alaikum*

I extend my sincere good wishes to you all. I pray for happiness, peace, prosperity and long life of you all. By the grace of Almighty Allah, the people of Bangladesh have once again successfully made yet another important step towards establishing democracy in the country. The elections to the 8<sup>th</sup> Jatiya Sangsad were held on October 1 in a festive atmosphere under a non-party and neutral Caretaker Government as per the country's constitutional provision. About three lakh polls observers from home and abroad as well as people of all classes and professions have described the elections as free, fair, neutral and peaceful.

Dear countrymen, brothers and sisters,

I am conveying my sincere gratitude to Almighty Allah for the peaceful completion of the 8<sup>th</sup> Jatiya Sangsad elections. By the Grace of the Almighty, the candidates of the Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Dal (BNP) and the four-party Alliance were elected by huge number of votes on the basis of people's participation in the elections. I have been honoured by the opportunity to come before my countrymen once again as the elected Prime Minister by His (Allah) unlimited mercy. To convey my gratitude to the Almighty and to seek divine blessings for all, the activities of your elected government, I went to Holy Makkah Sharif to perform Umrah immediately after taking oath.

During the elections this time the turnout of voters, especially of women and the youths, was higher than ever and incidents of polls-violence were much lower than in the past. It was a great achievement for the country towards its forward march to democracy.

This evening, at the outset, I want to convey my thanks for this extraordinary success.

**Thanks to voters, officials on polls duty**

I convey my sincere thanks to the honorable President, the Chief Advisor of the Caretaker Government, all other advisors, the Chief Election Commissioner, other commissioners, all officers and employees of the Election Commission, those who were on election duty all over the country, and those responsible for maintaining law and order, including members of the Armed Forces, BDR, Police and Ansars and others for holding a free and fair election in a proper and peaceful atmosphere.

I am also conveying my thanks to the development and donor agencies and members of diplomatic missions for their enthusiasm with regard to holding of a free, fair and neutral election. At the same time, I thank the local and foreign observers who were engaged in polls monitoring for their untiring work. I am conveying my sincere thanks to all the heads of state and government, heads of different organisations and well-wishers in Bangladesh for congratulating us on being elected in a successful and high standard of polling.

Now I convey my sincere gratitude and heartfelt thanks to all the voters who went to the polling centres defying fear, intimidation and natural calamities like rain as well as to those who made an honest contribution to democracy and keeping themselves above all temptation. I also thank those who queued for a long time in polling centres.

Dear countrymen, brothers and sisters,

You have made the election successful by exercising your right to vote peacefully.

Your democratic success has drawn the attention of the peoples of the world. The image of Bangladesh was tremendously enhanced to the outside world. The self-confidence of the people of the country has increased along with the consciousness of voters.

I am conveying my sincere felicitations to you all. Now I want to convey thanks on some specific subjects. I convey my thanks to those who came to the polling centres to cast their votes despite their old age or sickness. My Salaam to you all.

I thank those courageous women who came to vote. I know how worried a mother or a wife is for the safety of her son or husband. I know how worried you have been due to terrorism for the last five years. As a result, you came in droves to vote for us on October 1<sup>st</sup> to see an end to your miseries. We will try to alleviate your sufferings.

This time many young voters exercised their democratic right to vote for the first time in their lives. I am inspired by watching the enthusiasm of the new generation of voters. I thank the new generation for their zeal.

I thank the leaders and workers of BNP and the four-party Alliance who made whole-hearted efforts and worked tirelessly for making the Alliance victorious in the elections. I thank those leaders and workers of the BNP who, despite inhuman torture and harassment by unjust cases filed against them, maintained their allegiance to the party and worked for the country.

At this moment of triumph, with deep respect, I would like to remember those who laid down their lives for the cause of the BNP over the last five years.

The previous government started the first day of their occupation of power by killing BNP workers. Our leaders and workers passed sleepless nights and days amid fear of being attacked during the last five years. Many lakhs of them fled their home and could not return throughout this period. Hundreds of our leaders and workers were killed. Several thousand were crippled. Over one lakh of party organisers were jailed under false and conspiratorial cases. We shall always remember them for their contribution to the country and democracy. We shall stand beside their distressed families.

**Sympathy to victims of terrorism**

I pray for peace of the souls of those political leaders, workers, supporters, students, young men and women, business people, housewives and citizens who died prematurely during the past five years.

I extend my heartfelt sympathy to those who have been victims of various kinds of terrorism. I express deep sympathy to those women who had been victims of torture and harassment during the last five years. I express sympathy to those women who were violated and those who were victims of acid-throwing incidents during the last five years.

My special thanks to those voters, who with a hope to build a terrorism and corruption-free society, voted for the 'sheaf of paddy', the symbol of peace and progress. And to those who made BNP and the four-party Alliance victorious.

Dear brothers and sisters,

I congratulate those who won the elections and extend appreciation to all who participated in the polls to help us move one more step forward. I especially praise those defeated contenders, who refused to raise the issue of 'crude and subtle rigging' and have accepted the peoples' verdict and elevated the overall dignity of the democratic election system.

The victory, achieved by the grace of the Almighty, is in fact the victory of the peace-loving and democracy-loving people of the country.

This is a victory of the people, who are determined to replace misrule by good governance.

This is the victory of the politics of future progress and unity opposed to the politics of vengeance.

This is a victory of a huge majority against a few beneficiaries of state power through politicisation and nepotism.

Those victims of endless tyranny, corruption, torture and deprivation, who could not even voice their protest in fear of losing their life and livelihood, registered their protest through secret ballot this time. You have demonstrated a silent ballot revolution on October 1. I congratulate you all on this successful 'October vote revolution'.

**Devaluation of Taka & forex reserve**

Dear countrymen,

We have only been in power for nine days.

I know your expectations are high. We all want to build a happy, prosperous and peaceful country. My last government was proceeding toward achieving that in a planned approach. Bangladesh had gained prominence in the world as a potential country of economic prosperity. Bangladesh was known as an emerging economic tiger. The exchange rate of our currency against the dollar went down by only 5 Taka during our five-year rule, which averages to one Taka per year.

The value of the Taka was almost at par with the Rupee of our neighbouring India. At one stage, the national reserve had risen to 304 crore dollars.

But an all-pervasive political turmoil gripped the country in 1995-96 which checked the economic progress of Bangladesh. The country's industries, trade and commerce were seriously affected. Exports, including those of readymade garments and frozen food, were seriously hampered due to the marathon hartals at that time. Our foreign currency reserve started sliding downwards. As a result the reserve reduced to 204 crore dollars by the time we left power in 1996.

Not only had society and the economy become victims of indiscipline, the government officials and employees were pushed towards a party's political dais in the name of Bijoy Mancha. Division was created in the state machinery in a pre-planned way.

During the Awami League rule the reserves declined further due to economic mismanagement. The reserve was 115 crore dollars, the lowest in the last ten years, when they left power. The Taka/dollar rate went down by 15 Taka during their five-year tenure. The value of the Taka declined by three Taka a year against dollar on an average.

The Awami League devalued the Taka 18 times and discouraged imports to avoid a dollar crisis.

**Emerging tiger turned into sick cat**

They have increased L/C margin and duty on imported goods, which damaged import-dependent industry and trade. Revenue income from duty had also fallen. So Awami League government had to borrow Taka six thousand crore during its last fiscal year. Of the total borrowing, Taka three thousand crore was taken from the banking system and Taka three thousand crore from different savings sectors.

Foreign assistance also decreased during Awami League government. Even the annual Paris Aid Club meeting for consideration of our development demands was also postponed in the last year of Awami League government. Awami League government did not fulfill the conditionalities of the donors for administrative reform and institutional development.

Dear Countrymen,

I am speaking these words with a deep sense of grievance and sadness.

Bangladesh is not now an 'Emerging Tiger'. The potential prosperous 'Tiger' has turned into a sick cat during the last five years.

I want to inform you candidly the economic crisis and social plight under which situation our new government took power.

The government cannot be run or development efforts can be implemented without money as the treasury is almost empty now.

Internal borrowing of Bangladesh government was around Taka 14,000 crore during 24 years from 1972 to 1996. The amount of borrowing increased to Taka 38,000 crore in the last five-year rule. Awami League government alone borrowed Taka 24,000 crore during its five-year tenure while all post-independence governments together had borrowed a total of Taka 14,000 crore from internal sources.

The government had to pay interest of Taka 1080 crore on internal borrowing during the first fiscal year of the Awami League government in 2001-02. Now, interest of Taka 3,800 crore has to be paid in the fiscal year of 2001-02.

The Awami League government also borrowed several thousand crores Taka by misusing suppliers' credit systems from other countries and financial institutions. They took several hundred crores of Taka as commission for borrowing at high interest rate and paid over-the-top prices for the purchases. These agreements were against the national interest in most cases. I have to explain to you how grave the situation is.

You know that TV refrigerators and sewing machines can be purchased in installments. The remaining amount can be paid in several installments over months or years. The Awami League government has done this in much the same way. They have completed several projects through unnecessary borrowings and purchases. The nation has to repay a huge loan and the incurred interest for years

ahead.

The present government has started the journey carrying the burden of huge loans and its interests. The journey will be difficult. You all have to be prepared to address the problems of repayment of the loans and interests.

The nation has to bear the adverse effects of economic and institutional mismanagement during the last five years.

The total loss of state-owned enterprises during BNP government (1991-1996) was taka 2,973 crore. The loss increased to Taka 8,056 crore during the last five years of Awami League government due to unbridled corruption and mismanagement.

You can understand the magnitude of the problem by this example.

Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) had earned a profit of Taka 3,000 crore during our government from 1991 to 1996, while the Corporation incurred a loss of Taka 3,000 crore during the last five years.

Dear Countrymen,

We think that the genuine picture of the country should be provided with our countrymen. We have spelled out in our election manifesto the goals that we want to reach. But you now have some idea of the point from where we have started. The full picture of the situation will be evident after thorough examination and review of government documents and papers. Now we shall try to give an impartial view based on the reports published in various newspapers.

**Some instances of corruption**

First, some information on irregularities and corruption:

The government planning and economic discipline has been violated in constructing the Independence Monument at Suhrawardy Uddyan and Memorial Monument for the Martyred Intellectuals at Rayer Bazar.

The government incurred a loss of Taka 48 crore due to complicity in transferring the land to a private entrepreneur in the power sector at Meghna Ghat.

The agreements for setting up two power stations in Shambuganj, Mymensingh, and one each in Bhola and Fenchuganj have been approved at an exorbitant price.

A massive corruption took place in the telephone sector. Around Taka 700 crore has been over-spent in approving the establishment of a 63-digital exchange and 30 RSU project.

Bangladesh Biman has borrowed several thousand crore Taka due to corruption and mismanagement in the Civil Aviation. Biman flights may be cancelled at any time due to the pressure of creditors. There is allegation of mismanagement involving Taka 200 crore in the construction of Chittagong Airport.

**NAM conference**

A luxurious conference building has been built for the NAM conference through loans from abroad. In the name of the NAM conference 260 luxurious flats were secretly allotted before the construction work was completed. The entire nation will have to pay back loans of hundreds of crores of Taka for some years for the proposed conference that was to be held for only a few days. Taka one thousand crore was earmarked for this conference itself.

Bangladesh is a member of the Non-Aligned Movement. We had full support for this organisation in the past, we have in the present and we will be there in the future too. But can Bangladesh afford to bear the huge cost of hosting an international conference of this organisation? When the government cannot provide arsenic-free drinking water for its countrymen, or support thousands of hungry children, provide shelter and food for the disabled old people, would it not be a huge waste of money to spend Taka one thousand crore for holding this international conference? What is the justification of holding such a conference by a poor country like us? What will the country derive by spending such a huge amount of money? I am requesting the countrymen to think about this. We have already taken steps to cancel this conference.

When Bangladesh has a lot of trouble paying its debts and interest for domestic and international loans, the holding of NAM conference can be termed not only as a luxury but it amounts to irresponsibility. Bangladesh can save several hundred crores of Taka by canceling the conference even at the last moment. This money can be spent on emergency development projects.

The Prime Minister of Awami League government spent approximately one working year travelling abroad. Relatives, friends and admirers also traveled abroad in large groups at the cost of the national exchequer. Many crores of Taka were spent on this account. As a result of such visits, employment opportunities did not expand, nor was the country benefited.

Although the foreign trips of the Prime Minister of the Awami League government was ensured, foreign travel and employment of the youths of this country became uncertain. Such huge expenditures on luxurious trips were aimed at meeting personal desire and were quite unnecessary for the country.

**Water sharing treaty & CHT peace accord**

The Awami League government signed two agreements, one at home and the other abroad named the Water Treaty and Peace Accord. Great publicity was given describing these agreements as successful. You know, during the rule of the former BNP government we had made efforts to solve the water problem but did not sign any treaty as there was no acceptable solution to sharing water. Under the agreement which the Awami League government signed soon after coming to power, water remained on paper and did not come to the rivers. We shall take effective measures so that water can be obtained for cultivation. Great unrest prevailed in the Chittagong Hill Tracts areas after the announcement of the Peace Accord there. Clashes and abductions have become day to day affair. Peace could not be restored to the hill tract region following the peace accord. We shall change this situation, *Insha Allah*.

**Share market, textbook scams**

The price index in the share market was 976 when the Awami League government came to power in 1996. This index rose to 3,649 within only five months due to steps taken by the government to protect the interests of greedy businessmen of the party. The index was raised artificially which made paupers of the ever-day investors. These businessmen have looted the entire life savings of the small saving holders and pensioners. At the end of three and a half years of their rule, the price index came down to the lowest position of 473. As a result, hundreds of people and families became poor and destitute.

Beginning with a complex matter like the share market to textbooks for school children. The main component of the children in their educational life is their textbooks. It is the fundamental right of all students to get textbooks in the first week of the year. This right was not only taken away, they were embroiled in corruption in the printing work of textbooks. A notorious company owned by a party businessman, who had no previous experience, was given the contract worth several hundred crore Taka for printing all the books. The company could not deliver the books to the students on time although it had won the contract following a huge illegal transaction of money. The books did not reach the students until the middle of the year. Irregularities, mismanagement and corruption regarding the textbooks reached such a level that there is a deep concern whether textbooks reached such a level that there is a deep concern whether textbooks for next year can be available on time after restoring rules and discipline. We shall make all efforts to meet the great challenge of delivering books to the students by the beginning of the year.

Dear countrymen, brothers and sisters,

Besides these incidents, in the last few months news about irregularities and corruption of the Awami League government appeared on the front pages of the country's newspapers. I want to recall a few of the headlines published during that period. 'Cables worth Taka four crore purchased at Taka seven crore without tender.' 'Corruption eats up four per cent of the GDP. Taka 12,000 crore misappropriated every year.' 'Directives to complete 250 projects of the local government ministry worth Taka three crore within five days.' 'Special allocation of wheat worth Taka 473 crore for rural infrastructure development keeping in mind the coming election.'

'Plundering of money in the name of construction of rickshaw lanes to give financial benefits to selected contractors.'

'Routes flouted. Plundering of money in the name of purchase agreements. Approval of purchases worth Taka eight thousand crore in the last three months of Awami League government.'

'Last moment allocation -- 45 plots given to relatives.'

'Taka half a crore spent for the medical treatment of 18 former ministers.'

'Prime Minister visits foundation stone of Padma Bridge without funds.'

'Gulistan building -- Unequal agreement with the developer. Arrangements for mismanagement.'

'Of the total 72 plots of Chittagong Development Authority, the Works Minister demanded 50 plots for his men.'

These were some of the news headlines in the last few months of the Awami League government. But it is only a partial picture of the irregularities, corruption and plundering.

Dear countrymen-brothers and sisters,

We have become paupers. We have become poor. We owe loans amounting to thousands of crores of Taka. It will take many years to repay these loans. I want to know what sort of patriotism they had had when the entire country has become penniless? I want to ask what type of dream they had for building this country which resulted in a nightmare of the entire nation of debt repayments? I want to ask what type of feelings they had when the nation has to bear the burden of corruption that has penetrated our entire society? I want to ask what type of democracy they practiced where either relatives or a small section of party men have become wealthy? I want to know their replies. We want to know the entire story of irregularities, corruption and looting over the past five years. We shall bring out a white paper within the next three months which will give a preliminary description of the corruption of the Awami League government. Then we shall identify the offenders and arrange speedy punishments as per the verdicts. In this connection, I want to caution all MPs belonging to BNP and the four-party alliance that if any allegation is made against any one of them, I shall immediately take action. That action will be tough and exemplary. I want to remind you all that I pledged in public meetings and election speeches to wipe out the stigma in Bangladesh of being identified as the most corrupt nation on Earth. It is the joint responsibility of us all to fulfill this pledge.

We all have to realise that many of us have become accustomed to corruption because of its relentless, continuous practice for the last five years. Irregularity has become the norm. Therefore, the people have to free themselves from the practice of corruption. People have to be brought under into a system.

It is a difficult task. So, I am urging the nation to help us in establishing good governance. Help us in removing the appalling title of Bangladesh recently dubbed as the most corrupt nation in the world.

**Urgent task to root out terrorism**

Dear countrymen-brothers and sisters,

The most urgent task before us is to contain terrorism. In this area also the past



Awami League government has left us with a difficult task.

In the last six months of their rule, they issued licences for 5,000 fire arms. In the last one month, TCB in Chittagong sold 700 fire arms.

In awarding these licences, it has been found that in most cases, rules were not followed. Relationship with the Awami League was the main qualification for obtaining a licence for fire arms. The race to get fire arm licences was not confined to the Awami League ministers and MPs, but even their wives took part.

My question is: How on earth, could the Awami League with so many arms speak of freeing the nation of terrorism? Did the Awami League ever think of the consequences of having a huge market in the country for both legal and illegal arms?

Does any one know the number of illegal arms in the country? We have to find answers to these questions. These are imperative to free the country from terrorism.

I am hopeful that we shall receive active cooperation of people in identifying possessors of illegal arms.

In this regard I want to say something to the members of the police force: You have to take the great responsibility of freeing yourself from the bad name that the police force earned during the tenure of Awami League. I know you have been trying to shake free of this reputation during the tenure of the caretaker government. You have successfully fulfilled the task of holding free, fair and peaceful elections. Now is the time to restore law and order and I am confident that you will be successful in discharging your duties.

Dear countrymen-brothers and sisters

The first task of your government is to

improve the law and order situation. I know the people who suffered most will not believe our words unless we make some progress by containing terrorism to some extent. But I want to assure you this much that we shall not waste any time. Neither the state nor the government will provide shelter to any terrorist. We will take tough measures to ensure that terrorists cannot shelter behind politics. I hope by now you have got the proof of how sincere we are with our election pledges. We have warned our own ministers, MPs, leaders and workers that if either they or their relatives resort to terrorism or use force, they will not be spared. I have directed the police and other members of law-enforcing agencies to perform their duties as per the law, without any fear and in a non-partisan manner. No one will be spared if they are found to show any weakness for the terrorists. I am asking all levels of leaders and workers of BNP and the four-party alliance not to take up the law into their own hands under any pretext.

As a nation we earned a very bad name recently as killings, terrorism and anarchy prevailed with the patronisation of the last ruling party.

The US government report on law and order and human rights of this country have wounded our conscience.

If we fail to quickly improve the situation, our economic activities and production will continue to remain at a standstill. Expected foreign investment, too, will not come.

Everyone will have to step forward sincerely if we want to see a rapid improvement of the law and order situation. Social awareness and a public movement against terrorism can make our efforts a success. With this in mind I seek full support from the press and mass media.

**Shun apple polishing**

I have noticed that soon after the announcement of the poll results, efforts have started to turn different TV channels into BNP channels changing their tune.

I humbly request the television, radio and newspaper personnel please don't indulge in flattering individuals. Please step away from adoration of the dead and flattery of the living. This undermines the memory of those deceased and weakens the position of the living. At the same time, I request you to publish objective reports on the economic and social issues being faced by the new government.

Dear countrymen, brothers and sisters,

Bangladesh Nationalist Party believes in Bangladeshi nationalism. We are firmly committed to ensuring civil rights of everyone.

Each and every citizen of the country has the full rights to practice his or her religious faith and promote their ethnic cultural identity. I want to clearly spell out that everyone in Bangladesh, belonging to any religion, colour or ethnic population are citizens of Bangladesh.

We have equal respect for all religions. The people of this country belong to all religions, and they are all, including Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians and all tribals, Bangladeshis.

I warn the countrymen against those who intentionally want to create a wall of division amongst us by using the word minority in this country of excellent religious harmony. I want to say that people belonging to all religions, caste and ethnic groups have the unequivocal support behind the huge victory of the BNP and the Four-party Alliance.

So, the claim of different religious communities as their vote bank has been proved wrong by the results of the last election.

We are honour-bound to ensure total freedom and necessary security to people who wish to practise their religious faith Bangladesh is a country of religious harmony free from communalism.

I urge the people of this country belonging to all religions, caste and ethnic groups to extend cooperation to us in serving the country. After only a few days, the biggest religious festival, of the Hindu community, Durga Puja, will be held.

On the occasion of the universal Durga Puja, I convey my congratulations and greetings to all members of the Hindu community. Around the middle of next month, Holy Ramadan, the month of restraint for the believers of Islam, will begin. The festival of Eid-ul-Fitr falls in the middle of December. After that the next festival of the Christian community, Christmas Day, will be observed on December 25. I consider it to be blessings and mercy of Almighty Allah that one after another of these three great festivals of three religions are going to take place in close succession at the beginning of a new government. I believe these festivals in close successions will increase the religious harmony in Bangladesh and make our relations more pleasant, decent and firm.

**Role of NGOs**

Dear Countrymen brothers and sisters,

Our stand on non-government organisations known as NGOs, are very clear. The NGOs activities of foreign assistance in Bangladesh began since the War of Liberation in 1971 and thereafter. With the increase of the age of the independent country, the NGO activities also expanded on a massive scale. The macro-credit programme of Grameen Bank is widely discussed as a new strategy to stamp out poverty globally. BRAC of Bangladesh, today, has emerged as the biggest NGO in the world. The combined successes of many NGOs like Asha, Gonoshasthya, RDRS, Caritas, SSS and Bachtye Shikha have introduced the struggle of survival of the down trodden section in society to the developed world. The NGOs are intrinsically involved in the development of the country. Their contributions in important fields, like tackling natural disasters, extending small credits, provisions of jobs for women and the expansion of mass-education, have earned appreciation from all quarters. During the last 30 (thirty) years, the NGOs worked hand in hand with the government in the relief, alleviation, removal of disparity, and social development. We want to maintain this course. But there has been widespread reaction in society regarding a handful of NGOs as they have involved themselves in party politics and viewpoints. Adverse and hostile attitude have been created among the common people. Using foreign aid for party activities is a serious crime. Proper investigations into the misdeeds of such NGOs will be made and action under the law of the land will be taken. No one should be allowed to do whatever they like whilst violating the laws of the Republic.

**Democracy gets firm footing**

Dear brothers and sisters,

The election of October 1 has not only changed power at the state level, but also put democracy one step forward. You know, democracy in the country was not allowed to march smoothly. One of the greatest aims of our war of independence was democracy. But after only three years of independence, democracy was eviled by the proclamation of a one-party system. The consequences of it were painful and catastrophic. I am citing the incidents just for the sake of keeping those in mind and taking lessons from them. This is not aimed at undermining any individual or any party. In 1975 martial law replaced the one-party autocratic system, which was also patronised by Awami Leaguers.

Ziaur Rahman, the founder of BNP, had restored the multi-party democracy in the country, bringing an end to martial law regime. BNP was born in the process of that democratisation. BNP was not born silently in the cantonment area. BNP was born publicly and with support from the people. The other political parties were also born at that time. So, democracy is the main pillar of our political philosophy. It is we, who had to play the pioneering role every time in the struggle to restore democracy.

We succeeded in the struggles against the autocratic rule in the eighties. Democracy was brought back. We tried our best to give a firm footing to democracy, to institutionalise it in the early nineties. The parliamentary system of democracy was re-established by BNP at the very beginning of our effort. It was BNP, which had passed the bill of non-party caretaker government defying all odds in 1996. We had tried our best at that time to make Jatiya Sangsad the focal point of all activities of the state.

We had to struggle in the movement to protect the fundamental human rights of people during the last five years. By the grace of Almighty Allah, as well as support from you, we have succeeded in that struggle. Now we shall make all efforts to give democracy a firm footing. I seek cooperation from all to these ends.

The developing countries are facing difficult situations amid multifarious changes and equations across the globe at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These countries will go backward unless democracy marches ahead. Liberal democracy is absent from many third world countries.

But, from that point of view Bangladesh has great potential. Bangladesh remains at the forefront of the few Muslim countries that have a democratic system and change governments through elections. But, this is not enough. Our democracy has to flourish and the process of democratisation has to be introduced in every sphere. The balance of world politics changed forever after the September 11 terror attacks on Twin Towers in New York and Pentagon in Washington. Especially, the Muslim countries are facing an adverse situation. So, now opportunities have emerged to play a significant role of independence, democracy as a liberal Muslim democratic country. We have to avail ourselves of these opportunities.

The first and foremost objective is to make Jatiya Sangsad the focal point of all discussions of important issues of state as well as take decisions. I seek cooperation from all quarters to this end. The people of the country have cast their votes with great hopes. All the members of the 8<sup>th</sup> Jatiya Sangsad have to keep that in mind. So, the parliament has to play a historic role. Now, it is imperative to bring back political activities to the Jatiya Sangsad from the fields and streets. And for

this, we have to change our political attitude and language.

Efforts should be made to pursue policies of logic, excellence, and practice intelligence, which suits an independent country. It is possible to practice parliamentary politics without having patience, decency, politeness and courtesy. So, we want to introduce a contest of knowledge, merit, logic and tolerance of bilateral opinions in the parliament.

We all have to come out, forever, from the destructive political programmes of hartal, anarchic movement and street movements. General people as well as well wishers of Bangladesh outside the country want to see this.

So, I assure you all today that we shall ensure a conducive atmosphere to make the Sangsad meaningful and lively through effective participation of the