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- WITAS's Eminent Persons Award 2021



Bangladesh: Journey of Growth with Resolute Steps

Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad

The Bangladesh economy was in crisis immediately after independence. Agriculture was stalled, industries were closed, infrastructures including communication network were devastated, the banks were without money and the foreign exchange reserve was empty. The state machinery was crippled and the number of countries according recognition to Bangladesh was only two (India and Bhutan). Besides, about 10 million refugees had returned from India and there were innumerable people inside the country who had witnessed the destruction of their family-based economy. All these destitute people were dependent on relief supplies for food intake. After returning to the country on 10 January 1972 and assuming responsibility of the state. He got only three and a half years for the purpose. But he was able to lay a foundation for advancing the nation within this short period. A famine-like situation was created in the country in 1974 due to excessive rains, repeated floods, resultant disruptions in



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina handed over the certificate progress of SDG

communication and hoarding of food by some greedy people. He overcame this disaster very swiftly and again concentrated on planning the path of the country's progress towards the end of 1974. Bangladesh announced a plan for building a cooperative-based state and accelerating national development at the start of 1975. He expressed the firm resolve to follow that path with the goal of building a golden Bangladesh in line with the spirit of independence. That is, he spoke about forging forward through fair inclusion of all, so that people could live with human dignity in a society free from exploitation and discrimination and enjoy all human rights in accordance with the proclamation of independence. The plan envisaged one cooperative in each village. Land and property belonging to any person could not be seized, but various economic activities would have to be run collectively by the villagers. The owners of land or other properties would get a fair share of the outputs and income. The cooperatives would get a share, and from that the workers would elicit their dues with a portion deposited in state treasury. Village development funds were envisaged under each village cooperative. A chunk of this fund would come from the cooperative itself, but needed funds would also be allocated from government budget. It was quite a progressive idea, where growth and inclusivity would have journeyed together. The government would have directly received the required wealth for building a poverty-free modern state.

Discrimination is now on the rise in market economies. The government extracts negligible amounts through taxation, especially from direct tax. Even after combining the direct and indirect taxes, the Tax-GDP ratio is less than 9 % in Bangladesh, whereas it is 18 % in neighbouring Nepal. After the announcement by Bangabandhu in 1975, the vested quarters saw that they would not be able to pile up their wealth and power if Bangabandhu's proposed development path was executed. I feel that these fortune-seekers also joined hands with the local and foreign conspirators to remove Bangabandhu quickly through conspiracy, and they were successful. After the brutal assassination of Bangabandhu, a process was started for running the economy in a different direction. The country started to walk on the path of market economy and capitalism. The progress achieved during the decade of 1980s was however negligible. Development could not be expedited even during the 1990s. But the Awami League government led by Sheikh Hasina took a laudable measure in the second half of that decade, which was to extend agricultural subsidies. The country was highly aid-dependent even at that juncture. The international aid agencies and the countries who were bilateral development partners strongly objected to that subsidy. But ignoring this, the then Sheikh Hasina government extended substantial amounts of subsidies, as a result of which Bangladesh became almost self-sufficient in food-grain production by 2000.

The average growth rate of the economy was 5.8% from 2000 to 2010, but it lacked continuity. Development could not be expedited in other sectors as well. Rather, there was a visible shakiness. Starting from the fiscal year 2010-11 up to 2019 fiscal year followed by the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, continuous and accelerated growth was achieved in both economic growth as well as some vital social indicators. The growth rate was over 6 per cent during the first five years. It was 7 per cent during the following three years, and it was 8.2 per cent in 2019. Not many countries of the world could witness this kind of sustained progress. Side by side, remittance receipts also increased very fast. It rose to 18.2 billion US dollar in 2019-20 from 9.6 billion US dollar in 2008-09. As a consequence, the per capita income also rose and reached 1909 US dollar in 2019. Besides, the export receipts, especially readymade garments export, rose significantly. Due to rapid rise in remittances and export receipts, the foreign currency reserve also piled up quickly. If we look at the social indicators, it is seen that life expectancy at birth has jumped to 73 years, which was only 46 years in 1972. The maternal and child mortality rates have declined notably, and Bangladesh now leads the South Asian countries in the area of women's empowerment. The literacy rate rose to 74 per cent in 2019, which was 47 per cent in 2007. There has been a massive construction drive in educational infrastructure sector, especially for buildings of educational institutions belonging to different levels across the country. Enrolment rate at the primary level has now reached almost 100 per cent. The drop-out rates at both primary and secondary levels have gone down noticeably.

Swift progress has been achieved in the rural economy in both farm and non-farm sectors. Both the sectors are receiving official supports. Especially, subsidies and credits have been significantly enhanced in the agriculture sector. The poverty rate came down to 20.5 per cent in 2019, which was 40 per cent in 2005. The hard-core poverty rate was about 11 per cent. Alongside agricultural development and other measures, food for works program, allowances for the aged, maternity allowance etc. under the social safety net program of the government, and other poverty alleviation endeavours have played a part in the reduction of poverty. About 2.6 per cent of GDP was spent in this sector during the fiscal year 2019-20.

It could materialise mainly for two reasons. One was a favourable official policy framework and supports; the other has been the hard labour of all citizens in the surrounding environment. They included the farmers, the farm labourers, other workers, entrepreneurs ranging from very small to large ones, educationists, trainers, those who play advisory roles, and all other concerned people.

Programs are being consciously run for tackling the impacts of climate change. Climate change strategy paper and action plan have been formulated in Bangladesh. They provide guidelines about management, required actions, project concepts, setting of priorities and implementation

Another Year of Progress

7 January

Anniversary of the Government

- Transitioning to developing country from LDC.
- Forex reserve crosses US \$ 48.04 billion.
- Bangladesh in 5G

UNESCO-Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman International Award



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina presents the award to the delegation of Ugandan MoTIV Creations Limited. While Sheikh Rehana on the left

UNESCO has launched an International Award in the name of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, worth USD 50,000. This year's award went to Uganda based MoTIV Creations Limited.

Prime Minister's Six Points in the UN



The Prime Minister is addressing the 76th session of the UN General Assembly

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina delivered historic speech at the 76th session of the UN General Assembly on 24 September 2021. She presented Six proposals in her speech. The proposals are:

- Covid-19 Vaccine - Immediate transfer of vaccine technology to ensure that everyone receives a vaccine at a fair and affordable price.
- Climate-related reduction of carbon emissions to rich and industrialized countries, compensation for emissions and free transfer of financing and technology for sustainable adaptation.
- Education - Investing in digital equipment and services, access to the Internet and enhancing the skills of teachers, and ensuring the participation and resources of the United Nations.
- Assistance to Partners in Sustainable Development of Least Developed Countries - Increased support from development partners for the development of incentive-based transit frameworks to accelerate the sustainable transition of Least Developed Countries.
- Immigrant Rights - Immigrant-receiving countries must treat immigrants fairly and ensure their employment, health and well-being.
- The Rohingya Issue - Continue to work with the international community to find a lasting solution to the Rohingya crisis through sustainable and constructive initiatives.

Comparative pictures of development and success under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina

Achievement	2021	2006
Budget	6,03,681 crore taka	61,006 crore taka
GDP Growth	5.2%, Highest in Asia.	5.04%
Size of GDP	35,34,600 crore taka	4,82,337 crore taka
Per capita income	US \$ 2,554	US \$ 543
Remittance income	US \$ 24.80 billion	US \$ 4.8 billion
Foreign Currency reserves	US \$ 48.04 billion	US \$ 3.5 billion
Export Income	US \$ 45.5 billion	US \$ 10.52 billion
ICT Export	US \$ 1.3 billion	-
Ready-made Garment Export	Bangladesh ranks second, China first and Vietnam third	-
Self-sufficiency in food Acquisition	Bangladesh has achieved food self-sufficiency. Third in the world in rice and vegetable, second in fresh water fish and seventh in potato production	Known as a food shortages of the country
Poverty rate	The poverty rate came down to 20% before the end of the Corona period. Below the extreme poverty rate is 10%.	poverty rate was 41.5% & extreme poverty rate was 24.23%
Maritime Victory	Through settling maritime boundary disputes Bangladesh got 1,18,813 sq. Km.	No initiatives taken
Padma Bridge	The progress of Padma Bridge is more than 96%. The probable opening date has been set as 30 June 2022.	No initiatives taken
Metro Rail	Commercial operation will start from December this year.	No initiatives taken
Bir Nibash	Tk. 4,122 crore has been allocated for construction of 30,000 Bir Nibash for valiant freedom fighters.	No initiatives taken
Social Security program	Tk. 1,07,614 crore has been allocated under 143 programmes.	-
Land and houses for homeless	Land and houses have been distributed among 69,904 families.	No initiatives taken
Electricity	Nearly 100% of the total population of the country has access to electricity.	47% was benefited
Internet and Mobile User	13 crore (approximately) Internet SIM and 18 crore mobile SIM users.	35 Lac & 2 Core 18 Lac
Life expectancy	73.6 Years	65.4 Years
Model mosques & Islamic-Centres	A total of 560 model mosques-cum-Islamic Centres are being built in district/Upazila headquarters across the country.	No initiatives taken
Covid-19 stimulus package	In 23 packages Govt. incentives stands Tk 1,27,441 crore.	-
Covid-19 vaccination	1st dose 7,44,83,072, 2nd dose 5,28,43,355 (As on 02.01.2022)	-
Infant and Maternal Mortality rate	Infant mortality rate is 21% and maternal mortality rate is 1.69%	50% & 3.48%
Establishment of 100 Economic Zone	100 economic zone have been established across the country for local and foreign investors. Employment opportunity will be created these for roughly 10 million people.	No initiatives taken
My village My town	A mega plan have been formulated to upgrade villages to have range of civic amenities and growth centres around the country	No initiatives taken

of programs. Sustained pressure is being exerted on the developed countries and developing nations undergoing rapid industrialisation for reducing Greenhouse Gas emissions swiftly and adequately. Similar pressure is also being exerted for extension of financial and technological assistance to low income countries by the developed nations. Besides, adaptation programs are being especially implemented for tackling the impact through own funding and management as well based on own capacity. Still, that is quite insufficient compared to real need. Foreign assistance is therefore urgently needed, but its receipt has been minimal till now. However, Bangladesh's adaptation programs are being lauded everywhere. In the final analysis, if the developed world does not reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions quickly, the situation would deteriorate very soon on a massive scale, which would be very difficult to tackle effectively by both developed and developing states. In any case, the situation in Bangladesh is already fragile. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh has been highlighting this situation on the global stage quite forcefully for a long time. She did the same during the COP-26 conference held in Glasgow recently.

I have briefly presented the achievements of Bangladesh that was lauded by the global community prior to the pandemic. I have also mentioned about climate change, which is hampering socioeconomic advancement, and I also pointed out the efforts for overcoming this challenge. Now, let us dwell on the other challenges. In this respect, the Covid-19 pandemic comes first. This pandemic has been striking Bangladesh in varying degrees since March 2020. But while many countries stumbled, Bangladesh led by Sheikh Hasina has shown lot of efficiency and success in both saving lives and ensuring livelihoods. Saving lives entailed testing for the novel corona virus, treatment of those infected, making arrangements for inoculation after procuring vaccines, making people aware about preventive measures against the virus, and extending assistance (food and financial) to those whose livelihoods have been threatened. Incentives have also been extended to entrepreneurs for sustaining their production and service ventures. Notable successes have been achieved in these areas, as a result of which rates of infections and deaths are under control. Many capable individuals and institutions have joined hands with the government for extending assistance to the socioeconomically devastated citizens. As a result, not much lamentation is observed.

Bangladesh has achieved enviable success in the area of economic growth during the pandemic times. Most of the countries in the world have recorded negative growth rates during 2020 and 2021. But Bangladesh has been among a few countries that could achieve positive growth. Not only that, Bangladesh is one of the handful-few who could achieve around 5 per cent growth rate during the episode. The per capita income has therefore risen to 2,554 US dollar towards the end of 2021. The growth rate is projected to rise further during the current year, as the economy has started to bounce back swiftly. If the pandemic does not worsen much, then Bangladesh would return to the path of accelerated growth after overcoming the crisis. But more emphasis should be placed in this recovery and rejuvenation process on those who have lagged behind - especially the micro and small entrepreneurs cum businesses as well as those whose poverty situation has exacerbated. Otherwise, discriminations in the country would rise, as a result of which the process of sustainable development would be seriously hindered. There is a need for paying special attention to this area.

Apart from the pandemic, a few other vitally important problems have also been identified. Many of those were mentioned in the election manifesto of the Awami League in 2018. Urgent steps should be taken for resolving these problems, especially for implementation of sustainable development goals and for building the country in the spirit of the liberation war. The identified problems in the manifesto were as follows:

Democratic values and spirit shall be upheld; there shall be unfettered scope for obtaining legal refuge and assistance for all citizens; the independence of the judiciary shall be preserved and upheld; proper arrangements shall be made for ensuring human rights of all, and any attempt to violate human rights shall be resisted; an efficient, corruption-free, just, service-oriented and accountable administrative system shall be built up; allocation of responsibilities at different tiers of local government shall be specified, and these would be made effective through trained manpower and funding; work shall continue for grooming people-friendly law enforcement agencies; 'zero tolerance' policy against corruption has been announced; stringent measures shall be taken for combating bribery, unearned incomes, black money, extortion, loan-defaults, tender-captures and muscle-power, and corruption cum criminality shall be eliminated; a resolute stand shall be taken for zero tolerance against militancy, communalism, terrorism and drugs; and plans and programs shall be strengthened alongside financial allocations for reinforcing these to remove discriminations. Identification of these problems demonstrates the farsightedness of the Awami League leadership, especially that of Sheikh Hasina.



Prime Minister of India hands over Gandhi Peace Prize 2020, being conferred upon Bangabandhu, to Sheikh Rehana

Identification of problems is in fact a precondition for their solution.

Bangladesh is advancing forward, and we seek to express the resolve that it will continue to do so. I want to have faith that we shall march ahead with resolute steps with the objective of implementing sustainable development goals by 2030, transforming the country into an inclusive higher middle-income country by 2031, and building a golden Bangla of Bangabandhu based on the spirit of liberation war under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina by solving newly-emerged problems, and through consolidation of our positive attributes. □

The writer is a freedom fighter, economist, social thinker, expert on environment and climate change, and winner of Independence Award and Ekushey Padak.

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10 mega projects initiated by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

