Remarks by High Commissioner – Bijoya Sammilani 2019

➢ Your Excellencies, Hon’ble Ministers of the Government of Bangladesh,
➢ Your Excellencies, Members of Parliament,
➢ Political personalities,
➢ Businesspersons,
➢ Cultural and academic personalities,
➢ Media persons,

Shubho Bijoya and Shubho Sandhya,

May I extend my deepest gratitude to you all for being with us today and sharing the happiness that Shubho Bijoya brings – friendship, peace and prosperity for all.

2. Like other festivals, Shardiyo Utsob also provides us an opportunity to share our joy and happiness with our friends in Bangladesh. This year, I was fortunate to be part of Durga Puja celebrations in Bangladesh. I visited the historic Dhakeshwari temple for sindur khela, Ramakrishna Mission, Banani and the iconic Ramna Temple. However, between me and my colleagues, we can claim to have seen at least 50 pujas in Dhaka. I returned from India on Mahanavami, or else I would have loved to travel outside Dhaka. I will keep it for next time.
3. Friends, I was delighted to see Durga Puja being celebrated in all corners of Bangladesh by all sections of the society in true spirit of what Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said, “Dharmo jaar jaar-utsab shobaar”. Statistics tells us that there has been 31,398 puja mandaps across Bangladesh and this year there has been an increase of 483 more since last year. I would like to thank the government of Bangladesh for making good security arrangements during the festivals of all communities. Bangladesh government’s ‘zero tolerance’ to any kind of extremism and terrorism is important for the country and region’s peace and stability.

4. Under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s leadership, Bangladesh has witnessed a consistent growth of over 7% over the last few years, with self-sufficiency in food, improvement in road, rail and water connectivity, infrastructure, increase in power supply as well as marked progress in human development indicators particularly with respect to women. As a neighbour and friend, we take pride in your achievements. We have been privileged to be a part of your journey from 1971 till date.

5. Friends, you must be aware that the Hon’ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh had a very successful visit to India last week. Our leaders had productive and comprehensive discussions in Delhi in which they reviewed all aspects of the bilateral relations - security, business, connectivity, defence, development cooperation, energy, education, youth etc. We are happy that exports from Bangladesh to India crossed the one billion dollar mark in 2019 witnessing a year-on-year growth of 52% in the exports. The border-haats, a unique set-up between our countries have made it easier for the people living at the borders to trade with each other- in future we will have 12 more border haats.
6. During the visit, seven agreements were signed and both Prime Ministers also inaugurated three bilateral projects dedicated to the people of both countries – import of bulk LPG from Bangladesh in the energy sector, inauguration of Vivekananda Bhaban (students hostel) at Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka that will accommodate 100 students and research scholars. The Bangladesh-India Professional Skill Development Institute (BIPSDI) at the Institution of Diploma Engineers Bangladesh (IDEB), Khulna has the potential to generate employment for around 300 persons and generate USD 5 million business in Bangladesh. As our Prime Minister said about the purpose of the projects, it is to “to improve the lives of our citizens…. The basis of the India-Bangladesh partnership is that our friendship ensures the development of every citizen of ours”. We are also undertaking various High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs) in Bangladesh as grant-in-aid projects, as a contribution to taking socio-economic development to the grassroots of Bangladesh.

7. During the visit, the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on Chittagong and Mongla Port was also signed. This will generate jobs (e.g., more labour will be required at ports; insurance companies and shipping companies will get business). Since only Bangladeshi shipping lines are allowed, a completely new area of business will be available for Bangladeshi ship owners. This is a win-win for India and Bangladesh.
8. During the visit, MoU was signed between Dhaka University and Hyderabad University. MoU on Cooperation in Youth Affairs and Cultural Exchange Programme were also signed. An agreement regarding the setting up of office of Exim Bank was signed. You are aware, Bangladesh is our largest development partner and we have offered LoC of US$ 8 billion to Bangladesh. MoU on the Coastal Surveillance System signed between India and Bangladesh will help secure the maritime boundary of Bangladesh from non-traditional threats such as narcotics and human smuggling, terrorists, piracy etc. This will help Bangladesh proceed faster towards developing its Blue Economy. We have also simplified medical treatment and from now on, except for organ transplant, medical treatment is allowed on ordinary visa.

9. We want more of our friends from Bangladesh to visit India. In view of this, remaining restrictions on entry/exit from land ports in India for citizens of Bangladesh travelling on valid documents would be removed in a phased manner, beginning with checkpoints at Akhaura (Tripura) and Ghojadanga (West Bengal). The frequencies of Maitri and Bandhan trains have also been increased. We see our relationship as a model of good neighbourliness. Bangladesh will be opening a new Deputy High Commission in Chennai. This will greatly benefit the large number of people who visit Chennai for medical tourism.
10. We will also work together to commemorate the two important anniversary years: Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Birth Centenary in 2020; and 50 years of Bangladesh's War of Liberation, and the establishment of India-Bangladesh bilateral diplomatic ties in year 2021. To commemorate these two historic years, the cultural interactions between India and Bangladesh will be enhanced and to this the Cultural Exchange Programme was renewed.

11. All I just said was just a glimpse of where our relationship stands today- a relationship nurtured through not shared culture and heritage but also shared martyrdom. We would like to take our relationship, both diplomatic and otherwise, to newer heights- sonali adhyay and beyond. In conclusion, may I take this opportunity to thank you all once again for being part of our Bijoya Sammilani. Hope you will enjoy the ilish, pabda, chingri and kosha mangsho that we have catered for you.

Namaskaar!

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