



2015 is going to be a milestone in world history

by

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BANGLADESH | DHAKA: As we are stepping into the New Year, we need to have an image of 2015 and also beyond.

The future is not entirely unpredictable. The best way to predict our future is to create it ourselves. Our world in 2015 and post-2015 will be what we now dream it to be. How it will look will depend largely on what our actions are now. Our actions should therefore reflect our words and that is the only way we can predict and build a tangible future.

Our vision for the world beyond 2015 should focus on people – on the aspirations and hopes of the people – in a just and a fair world. This is largely steered by promoting a culture of peace, right to development, right for equal future, empowerment of people particularly women and the underprivileged, access to education for all, health and greater economic opportunities – thus

ensuring a secular, progressive and democratic human society. Realising these visions depends on every human being of this world, public and government alike.

Poverty and ignorance are the greatest impediments to development and therefore eradication of poverty and access to education should remain at the very heart of contemporary development debate of the Post-2015 Development Agenda. With 60 million children still remaining outside schools, 75% of them girls, and 1.3 billion people still living in extreme poverty, we can never really attain sustainable development unless we address these issues.

The Government of Bangladesh has integrated the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) into the national five-year plans and also in our 'Vision-2021'. This people-centric vision aspires to transform Bangladesh into a knowledge-based, technology-driven Middle Income Country by 2021. We have already met or are on track to meet MDG-1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. Poverty has been reduced from 57% in 1991 to below 25% today.

I also need to mention that although the MDGs have been the most successful global anti-poverty push in history, the progress is uneven and unequal within and among countries and regions. Over 1.3 billion people still live in utter poverty. As we reflect on the newer development challenges, poverty alleviation therefore, should be the cornerstone of the Post-2015 Agenda.

Acknowledging the fact that girls' right to education is mandatory to combat different forms of discriminatory and harmful practices against them that are still prevalent in many societies in our world, every policy of the Government of Bangladesh is targeted towards removing obstacles to girls' education and empowerment. We made education free for our girls up to Grade Twelve and have plans to take it to graduate levels. Stipends and free meals for female students from poorer families have helped achieve gender parity in primary and secondary schools. In 2014 out of the 12.8 million stipend recipients including from the Prime Minister's Education Trust Fund, 75% were girls. 60% positions in primary schools are reserved for female teachers. Non-formal education measures have enabled girls who have dropped out of school to continue education. Education receives the highest importance in our Women Development Policy that was formulated in 2011.

We have taken measures to set up six technical educational institutions only for girls. In addition to self-employment, skills training, collateral-free small loans are being offered to potential college-going women entrepreneurs. We have established in Chittagong the first Asian University for Women to promote higher education for girls from Asian countries. We have taken these measures keeping in mind our vision of the post-2015 world and our mission to play an active and equal role in the coming decade.

In Bangladesh, the percentage of women is rising fast in all professions including politics, civil service, judiciary, armed forces, technical profession, aviation (pilots), sports including cricket, football and even mountaineering, as our girls have conquered Mount Everest. Bangladesh today is perhaps the only country in the world that has to its credit a female prime minister, female speaker of the parliament, female leader of the opposition and a female leader and deputy leader of the parliament. Many western societies may not be able to match this. Our female work-force has risen from a 24 to 36% in the last three years contributing to our 6.2% growth rate. Bangladesh is the second largest exporter of Ready Made Garment in the world and 90% of that entire global sector is laboured by our young energetic female workforce.

We learn from our past experiences and at times from mistakes. Our past makes us stronger. Let us keep in mind the lessons taught by our past and build our future based on what we have learned. Let us keep in mind that all that is ever important is the “now” in which we live in and all that is going to be important is the “tomorrow” that we leave for our children.

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