

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT THE VICTORY DAY AND MUJIB BORSHO CELEBRATIONS**

December 16, 2021, Parliament Complex, Dhaka

Nomoshkar, Shubho Shondha and Assalaam-Alaikum

I convey my hearty greetings and best wishes to the citizens of the 'People's Republic of Bangladesh'.

On this historic 50th anniversary of the Liberation of Bangladesh, I bring you festive greetings from your 1.3 billion brothers and sisters in India. We celebrate with you this historic day: fifty years ago, the ideological map of South Asia changed irreversibly and the proud nation of Bangladesh was born. On this occasion, I pay tribute to the memory of the untold suffering of tens of millions of people of Bangladesh, especially the brutalized daughters, sisters and mothers. It is their sacrifice, and the righteousness of the cause of Bangladesh, that has transformed the region.

Indeed, seldom has humanity witnessed sacrifices on a scale so epic as during the 1971 War of Liberation. Your struggle for freedom has a special place in the hearts of every Indian, especially those of my generation. Visiting the solemn Memorial to the Million of Martyrs at Savar, and the Bongobondhu Museum yesterday, were deeply emotional experiences for me. I was especially inspired to hear extracts of his stirring March 7 speech. This is justly recognized by UNESCO in the Memory of World Register, as it always evokes the spirit of justice, freedom and democracy.

History also has few examples to equal the scale of empathy and grass-root-level support that your struggle evoked in India. People spontaneously opened their hearts and homes to offer all possible

support to the people of Bangladesh. It was our abiding honour and our solemn responsibility to help our brothers and sisters in their hour of need.

History will always bear witness to this unique foundation of our friendship, forged in the people's war that liberated Bangladesh. Veterans of that war – both from India and Bangladesh – some of whom are here in this audience, including the Hon'ble President of Bangladesh – are living testimony to the power of faith and friendship, which can move mountains.

Excellencies, friends in *Shonar Bangladesh*,

Your invitation for me to visit and participate in this celebration of 50 years of the Liberation War is a unique honour. It is also a true reflection of our very special friendship. Like Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, I am delighted that my first visit outside India since the outbreak of the COVID pandemic is to Bangladesh. I am also honoured to participate in the Mujib Borsho celebrations.

Excellencies,

A little over 50 years ago, the vision of an independent Bangladesh inspired millions. But it seemed a remote and impossible dream then to naysayers, skeptics and detractors. The international context, and *realpolitik* seemed to rule out the prospects of Liberation. Set against a brutal, determined and well-armed foe who would stop at nothing, the odds were very much against Bangladesh.

But the inspiring statesmanship of Bangabandhu; his clear-sighted moral conviction and his unflinching determination to seek justice for the people of East Pakistan were truly the game-changers. As a result, the world learnt a valuable lesson: that the will of the majority of people cannot be subjugated by any force, however brutal.

I remember that I was inspired, as a youth, by the moral courage of Bangabandhu. Like millions of others, I was electrified by his powerful voice, and the understanding that it carried the aspirations of 70 million

people of Bangladesh at that time. Like millions of Indians of my generation, we were elated by the victory of Bangladesh over an oppressive regime and were deeply inspired by the faith and courage of the people of Bangladesh.

The vision of Bangabandhu was of a Bangladesh that was not only free politically, but also of a nation that was equitable and inclusive. Sadly, his vision could not be realised in his lifetime. The anti-Liberation forces who brutally killed Bangabandhu and most of his family did not realize that bullets and violence cannot extinguish an idea that has captured the imagination of millions of the people. Above all, they did not count on the determination and resilience of Her Excellency Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who faced assassination attempts and dictatorships with remarkable courage. She has been driven by the strong conviction to realise the dream of Bangabandhu, and his spirit of the *Bidrohi* (or rebel), as set out in the famous poem by the great Kazi Nazrul Islam:

*“Weary of struggles, I, the great rebel
Shall rest in tranquility only when I find

The sky and air free from all the pitiful cries of
the oppressed,

Only when battlefields are free from the jingling
of blood-stained swords,

Shall I, weary of struggles, rest”*

Friends,

Today, these ideals of Bangabandhu are being realised by the hardworking and enterprising people of Bangladesh, guided by the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

We have witnessed the commendable economic growth achieved by Bangladesh in the last decade, which has also created opportunities for its citizens to realize their full potential. Your country's stellar economic performance complemented by geographical advantage can benefit the entire sub-region and the world. There is a growing recognition among

international experts about the fact that close sub-regional trade, economic cooperation and connectivity will help accelerate the process of achieving a *Shonar Bangla* in the shortest possible period of time.

India has always attached the highest priority to its friendship with Bangladesh. We remain committed to doing all we can, to help realize full potential of our friendship. In recent years, we have seen steady expansion of trade, economic cooperation, people-to-people ties, student exchanges and extensive engagements across multiple areas of activity. These are guarantees of a sustainable, deep friendship, based on mutual respect, sovereign equality and our respective long-term interests. I am glad that our recent efforts have been inspired by this vision.

Excellencies,

Bangladesh is a unique country of astonishing natural beauty, fertile land and majestic rivers. It is a land of poets, artists, scholars and thinkers. Historically, the people of this land have always deeply valued art and scholarship. You have always given primacy to the pursuits of the mind, culture and language, which are the dominant and unifying elements of your national identity. As a result, you already have the unique conditions for a coherent, harmonious and dynamic society.

Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

If the first 50 years of our partnership began by surmounting extraordinary challenges that forged a deep friendship between our people, perhaps the time has come to raise the bar even higher.

To achieve that, our businesses, our academics and especially our youth must be motivated to jointly create globally-pioneering initiatives in the world of ideas, creativity, commerce and technology.

Our innovators should be urged to find new solutions, based on locally-appropriate technologies, to address our common development challenges.

We must urge our thinkers to leverage the power of our own unique success stories, to find 'best-in-class' ideas that are relevant in our regional context. Together we can create opportunities for seamless flow of ideas and innovation as we enter a new era of inter-connectivity.

And our businesses should be encouraged to realize the vision of deeply-integrated supply chains of production and transport connectivity, enabling our sub-region to become one of the world's largest production centres, and the world's largest market for goods and services.

Friends,

As our nations develop and our friendship further deepens, let us continue to work together towards realizing the dreams of our peoples.

Jai Hind, joy Bangla, Bangladesh-Bharot moitree chironjeevi hok!

Thank you!