

Be change makers: PM to Qatar University students

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Online Desk: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Tuesday called upon the Qatar University students to be the change-makers being remained focus on vision having the mentality to embrace the new and future. “Lead by example and be the change-maker,” she said while addressing a session with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for the students of Qatar University on theme titled “Bangladesh: a development model: Learning from Sheikh Hasina,” reports BSS

The Premier, who is now on a three-day official visit to Doha to attend the Qatar Economic Forum-2023, told the students, “To represent a value, remaining focused on your vision and make concrete plans to realize your vision.” She also said: “Trust your people and team. Invoke your maternal spirit, and embrace the new and the future.”

During her long speech, Sheikh Hasina gave a brief description of the struggle of achieving Bangladesh’s independence under the leadership of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and advancing the country towards transforming it into a developed, prosperous and Smart Bangladesh by 2041. “We want to build a knowledge-based, SMART Bangladesh. In SMART Bangladesh, there will be a smart government, a smart economy, a smart population, a smart society, and smart manpower,” she said.

The Prime Minister said the people will be made skilled in using digital devices so that they can contribute to the fourth industrial revolution. She went on saying that the purpose of Smart Bangladesh is to keep pace with the changing world and use digital devices in all areas of education, health, agriculture, industrial production, business, and trade.

“To achieve the goals, we are setting up digital labs in all educational institutions, from primary to higher education. Computer training and incubation centers and hi-tech parks are being established throughout the country,” Sheikh Hasina said.

Skilled manpower is being built through training in artificial intelligence, she said, adding that they have passed an act to establish a nanotechnology institution. The use of digital devices or technology has created vast employment opportunities for women in our society, the premier said.

“Today’s Bangladesh is a changed Bangladesh. It is dubbed as a role model for development. Hunger, poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy and etc are vanishing fast,” she said. The Prime Minister said their hard-earned development in the country is not a miracle. “It is the collective work of our men and women. I have only tried to guide them in the desired direction,” she continued.

Sheikh Hasina said, however, it was not an easy journey to reach today’s position as she have had to undergo huge ordeals and persecution throughout her life. “My father had to spend nearly one-fourth of his life in prison. We, the children, had been deprived of his love and affection. Within three and a half years of independence, the founder of the country, my father, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was assassinated along with 18 of our family members, including my mother, three brothers, two sisters-in-law, and an uncle,” she continued.

Sheikh Hasina said her youngest brother was only ten years old at the time. “My sister and I survived being abroad on that day. My sister and I had to lead a refugee life for six years,” she said. Sheikh Hasina said she returned home in 1981, when her party Awami League made her its president. “I came home with a pledge to materialize my father’s dream of a poverty-, hunger, and illiteracy-free, prosperous Bangladesh,” she said.

On return, Sheikh Hasina said she launched a movement for establishing the rights to food and vote. I was interned time and again. “At least 19 attempts were made on my life, the gravest one being in August 2004 when a dozen Arges grenades were hurled at me to kill me. I survived, but 22 of my party workers and leaders were killed and several hundred wounded,” she said. Braving all odds, Sheikh Hasina said she continued her struggle only to change the fates of her countrymen. “I shall continue to do so as long as I live, Insha’Allah. My dream is to turn our delta into a land of prosperity once again,” she pledged.

Following Bangabandhu’s assassination, she said Bangladesh went under military and quasi-military rule for the subsequent 21 years, and the fates of the people had not changed much. “My party, the Awami League, got elected to office in 1996 after a long struggle of 21 years, and I was made Prime Minister for the first time. In five years, we managed to build a solid foundation for Bangladesh’s socio-economic transformation,” she said.

The premier said they handed over power through peaceful means in 2001, and then followed another dark period of killings, terrorism, corruption, and military interventions. She said their party got re-elected to office in December 2008, and since then for two more consecutive terms. “In the last fourteen and a half years, we got Bangladesh ready for what my father had wished for—a happy and prosperous ‘Golden Bangladesh,’” she said.

In 2015, Sheikh Hasina said Bangladesh became a lower middle-income country, and they envision it becoming an upper-middle-income country by 2031 and a high-income one by 2041. “Meanwhile, we have been qualified to graduate to a developing country by 2026 from the LDC category,” she said. The Prime Minister said since she assumed office, their priority has been to alleviate the conditions of the poor and marginalized sections of society.

Bangladesh has made impressive progress in almost all socio-economic fields, she said. “Bangladesh is now the world’s 35th largest economy, with a GDP of USD 460.75 billion,” Sheikh Hasina said. The headcount poverty rate was 41.5 percent in 2005-06, while the current poverty rate has come down to 18.7 percent and the extreme poverty rate to 5.6 percent, she continued.

The premier said that Bangladesh’s economy grew at an average of 6.5 percent over the past one and a half decades, and before the pandemic struck, it grew at 8.15 percent in the 2018-19 fiscal year. “We have made impressive gains in food security, free and affordable housing, community healthcare, compulsory primary education, women’s empowerment, financial inclusion, digital services, access to electricity, disaster preparedness, and climate adaptation,” she said.

After a decade’s efforts that include making education free up to 12th grade by her government, she said, “We now rank the highest in South Asia in reducing gender disparity.” Due to her government’s initiatives, she said “We are among the world’s top ten nations for women’s political empowerment.” Bangladesh is perhaps the only country where the Prime Minister, Speaker of the National Parliament, Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, and Deputy Leader of the House are all women, she said. “We have 33 percent reserved seats for our women in the local government bodies,” Sheikh Hasina continued.

The Prime Minister said she has introduced a scheme named Ashrayan (Shelter) through which semi-pucca houses are being built and distributed among landless and homeless people at free of cost.

“The total number of landless and homeless families in the country is 885 thousand and 622. So far, we have built and distributed houses among 555 thousand and 228 families,” she said. Not only that, but arrangements for their livelihoods have been made through income-generating training and providing them with interest-free loans, she added. The villages of Bangladesh are being turned into towns by reaching urban facilities in every nook and cranny of the country, she said.