

**Remarks by Ambassador Syed Akbaruddin
Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations**

**At a commemorative event organised by the
Permanent Mission of Bangladesh**

“Remembering Bangabandhu – A Voice for the Oppressed”

Thank you Ambassador Masud Momen, fellow members on the podium, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen.

2. It is a privilege today to join in observing the 44th Anniversary of the untimely death of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman here at the UN. For India, 15th August 1975 has special meaning because we started that day early in the morning observing our day of Independence, as India got independence on 15th August 1947. And, as you would understand that observance of such national occasions are joyous occasions. But that joy very quickly turned into grief when we heard the news of the brutal assassination of Bangabandhu and members of his family.

3. Unlike Ambassador Chowdhury, I was not witness to history, I was a footnote, very far away from the events. I remember that I was a small child, but what happened then still remains an indelible memory because we just couldn't believe that such a thing could happen to such a leader who was so revered in India. So, I must say, I am grateful to the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh for organizing this event for the first time at the UN to share these memories.

4. We heard a brilliant articulation and, I think, anything that follows what Ambassador Chowdhury said is going to pale into insignificance because he was witness to history. We are only footnotes. But, I think, there are some things that we need to take away at the UN from and what he had said. Perhaps, the one thing that comes out in the documentary, as well as what he said, is Bangabandhu's journey was an unwavering belief in democracy; a passion for social justice; an emphasis on cultural inclusivity and identity that led to the liberation of Bangladesh. Now, these are all values that we at the UN cherish and nourish. Today, we have an opportunity to link these with somebody who had contributed so much to history. This is a memorable occasion, even though we are late in observing this here.

5. As Ambassador Chowdhury mentioned, 21st February actually, which is known as Ekushey February, which in 1999 was designated by the UN as the International Mother Language Day to promote awareness of linguistic and

cultural diversity would not have come, but for the experiences that Bangabandhu went through 40-50 years before that. And he obviously saw what none saw at that time and that is the strategic implications of language, in terms of identity; in terms of importance of language for communication; for social integration; for development; and for education.

6. It took UNESCO and all of us 40 years to start thinking of that. But, he thought of this much earlier in terms of how it impacts on all our lives. Thank you very much Bangladesh for bringing back to the UN the longstanding linkage between what Bangabandhu thought and what we all cherish here at the UN. His speech of 1971 is in the pantheon of memory of world register at the UNESCO.

7. But, it also reverberated way beyond the borders of Bangladesh. As children, we always heard this cry of 'Joy Bangla'. It was symbol of a cry of a nation, which wants its identity.

8. As you are aware, the ties between India and Bangladesh are special in many ways. We are bound by a common cultural and linguistic heritage of a language. The national anthems of India and Bangladesh are written by the same poet Nobel Laureate Rabindra Nath Tagore. Bangladesh's 'Amar Sonar Bangla' and India's 'Jan Gana Mana' are visible bonds that indicate how two countries have owed their heritage to one common culture. Our ties are also forged in common aspirations and sacrifices. I understand there are some Mukti Jodhas who I would like to pay tribute to because they contributed specially to our ties. We always are appreciative of the services they rendered in strengthening the ties between Bangladesh and India.

9. As we work towards the 2021, we are working towards honoring them in various ways, including popularising their contributions because generations forget what they have been through. History requires us to keep repeating for our benefit that never again should things that have happened and which are not proper should be allowed to happen again and the Mukti Jodhas are those living symbols of the ability to withstand difficult situations.

10. Our ties with Bangladesh today are perhaps better than ever and this is a tribute to Bangabandhu's legacy. As Ambassador Chowdhury put it, this is manifested in his daughter's leadership of Bangladesh. Sheikh Hasina is a true inheritor of Bangabandhu's belief that ties between neighbours should be exemplary and we are happy that our ties have just grown from strength to strength. These are, of course, small manifestations of ties beyond the borders.

11. What is perhaps the lasting legacy of Bangabandhu is his vision of development in Bangladesh. Frankly, very soon after Bangabandhu's death, Bangladesh ran into difficult situations as was just mentioned and there were people who said Bangladesh is an international basket case. Today, it is a transformation that I don't know, who said it, but if he was around, he should be eating his words. Because today, Bangladesh is an example of how a country should be approaching its development and growth, whether it is in terms of economic development, education, social indicators, technology, banking, rural development and women's empowerment. It is for all of us in the developing world an example to emulate. And perhaps that is the greatest tribute that the present leadership of Bangladesh is implementing Bangabandhu's vision of what he wanted for Bangladesh and that is the lasting tribute that all of us look at with admiration.

12. I understand that Bangladesh will be celebrating 100th anniversary of Bangabandhu's birth. We hope we can help in any manner because it is important to recall struggles and achievements of the rich legacy of heroes of our past and the UN is the right place to do it. If we can be of any help, we, at the Indian Mission, will be willing to help them in any manner.

13. I once again thank Ambassador Masud for providing this opportunity to share common values to strengthen our bonds and to nourish global goals as espoused in the life and legacy of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Thank you very much.