

HASINA

The Statecraft



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C o n t e n t



Art work by Sayed Fida Hossain, 2022

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Under the leadership of PM Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh has been eliminating poverty at a record pace. The pace of interventions remains as quick to fulfill her vision of eradicating extreme poverty by 2030.

A leading light

Sheikh Hasina, a seasoned statesperson and a south Asian stalwart, is the world's longest-serving female head of government. She is also the longest serving prime minister of Bangladesh. She has led Bangladesh for nearly 20 years. Her political career spans over a period of 4 decades, half of which she led the government of Bangladesh. She is an avid policymaker where she adopted the principle of "leaving no one behind," similar to the motto behind UN's sustainable development agenda. Her policymaking is geared to turn Bangladesh into a secular progressive country with a strong social welfare system.

Since 2009, she changed the course of policymaking in Bangladesh by focusing on long-term planning. Her statecraft, ideological values

and policymaking are said to be inspired from Bangladesh's founding progressive values. Hasina's father, Bangladesh's first president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, popularly known as Bangabandhu, is said to be the budder of such a value-based governance agenda. Hasina's deft policymaking was best described by a 2018 New York Times and bdnews24.com co-launched publication as "the Iron Lady," subtly comparing her with India's long-serving prime minister Indira Gandhi of India.

The source of Hasina's confidence is her firm conviction in politics as a tool for public welfare. She has travelled to every corner of the country bonding with people from all walks of life. She understands more intimately the struggle of the masses, especially of the marginalized.

Hasina's few mention-worthy policies are Vision 2021, Digital Bangladesh, Delta Plan, Vision 2041 and Social Security Strategy. These people-centric long-term crosscutting policies were instrumental in ensuring inclusive growth and social justice in the 2010s. In 2009, Vision 2021 was formulated to lift Bangladesh to a mid-income-level, but it was twined with across-the-board digitalization of an archaic governance system and e-connectivity of largely rural economy. Similarly, the Vision 2041, has a sole agenda of making Bangladesh an advanced high-income economy.



Sheikh Hasina addressing the National Parliament

Sheikh Hasina has already demonstrated the country's strong economic base by venturing into the biggest ever infrastructure, Padma Bridge construction without any foreign assistance.

Padma Multipurpose Bridge
in November, 2021



Since 2009, Bangladesh witnessed an economic turnaround guided by Hasina's prudent macro-economic policy and fiscal management. The growth momentum has made Bangladesh one of the five fastest-growing economies in the world. Bangladesh is firmly poised to reach its full potential of becoming a developed country. Sheikh Hasina has already demonstrated the country's strong economic base by venturing into the biggest ever infrastructure, Padma Bridge construction without any foreign assistance.

Under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh has been eliminating poverty at a record pace. The pace of interventions remains as quick to fulfill the PM's vision of eradicating extreme poverty by 2030. Her policies have turned around lives of millions. In 2015, Bangladesh became a lower-middle income (LMC) country from being a low-income country, according to the World Bank's classification. In 2021, Bangladesh was set to graduate from a least developed country (LDC) to a developing country stipulated under the United Nations' criteria.



50,000-tonne grain silo at Joymoni by the Pashur river, Mongla, Bangladesh

Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) is an agricultural research institute in Bangladesh, located in Gazipur



Green revolution in Bangladesh



Agriculture has been a success under her leadership. Hunger or a shortfall in food supplies and production are things of the past, which again are results of Hasina's pragmatic policies in terms of agricultural subsidies and other incentives her government has been implementing in the last 14 years. The country has achieved near self-sufficiency in food production for its 170 million population. The agricultural sector recorded massive growth in terms of food-grain, fish, poultry, and meat production.

Guided by Hasina's vision to improve the health sector, focus is being brought to health service delivery from the tertiary hospitals to the community clinic level. Her government also focused on smart health sector policy making. The country has become a role model of "good health at low cost." Life expectancy now reached 73 against the target of 70. Her administration has embraced a Universal Healthcare pledge for the country.

Under her prudent leadership, Bangladesh has been a successful example of tackling the covid-19 pandemic. How Bangladesh dealt with the challenges was reflected in December 2020 Bloomberg ranking, the country was ranked as one of the top 20 countries which fared well in tackling the challenges of the pandemic. Her government has been implementing a series of policy actions, special directives and multi-sectoral fiscal measures to tackle the health and economic challenges. The country launched a vaccination program earlier than most developing countries.

Hasina administration has vigorously promoted a policy of women's empowerment, as a result of which a greater number of women have been making their way to professions, including civil service as well as armed and security forces. The achievements in girl's education, financial inclusion, and political participation are noteworthy among South Asian countries. According to the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index 2021, Bangladesh is a top South Asian performer in narrowing gender disparities. Hasina has emphasized on the right to social security, which was rather new concept for Bangladesh. Her initiative of the "National Social Security Strategy" builds on the strong track record of Bangladesh in delivering diverse social



A farmer irrigates his floating bed in a farm, August 16, 2022.
REUTERS/Mohammad Ponir Hossain

safety net schemes. The extensive and foresighted social security scheme is an example for the rest of the developing countries to replicate. She has introduced "Ashrayan" scheme which has become world's largest public-funded housing program for homeless people.

One must also note the diverse ways in which internet connectivity has boosted the quality of life.

More than half the population, perhaps more, has access to the internet through a growing use of mobile phones. Such achievements are in line with the "Digital Bangladesh" vision which Hasina's government has been pursuing over the years. She has been relentless in making technology accessible to all, particularly the poor and the marginalized.

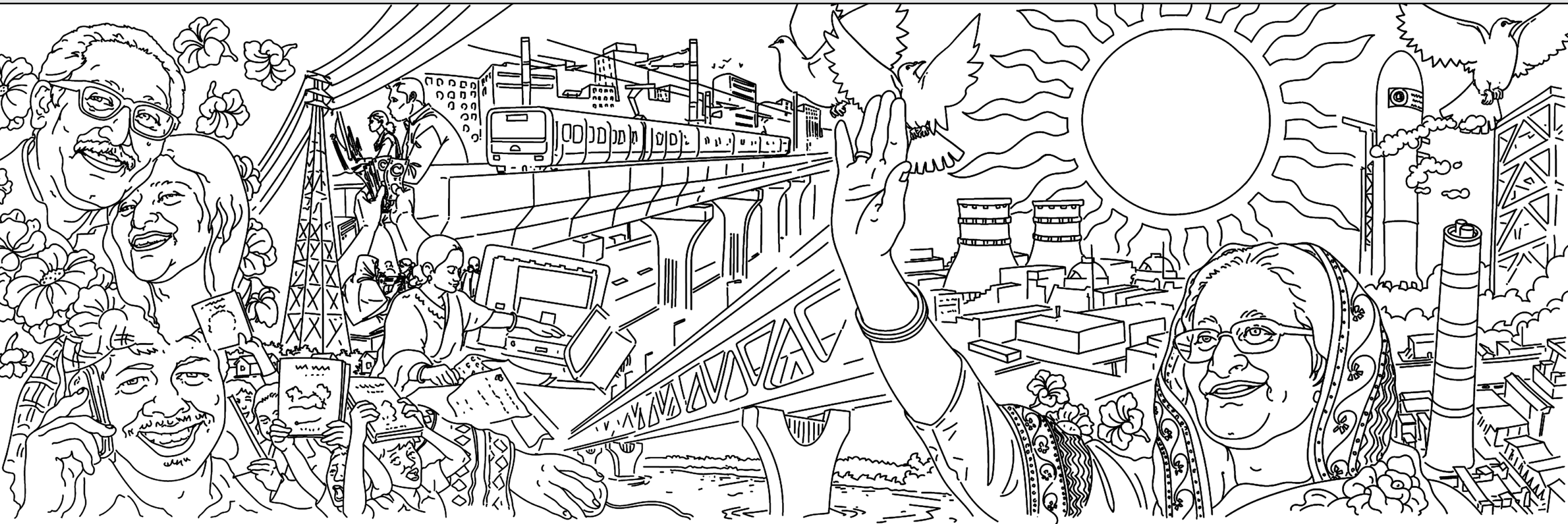
“Our experience shows that investment in people, especially the vulnerable, gives the most return.”

Sheikh Hasina
Prime Minister of Bangladesh



Local fishermen are searching for potential catch in the river at Sirajganj, Bangladesh, April, 2021

Bangladesh under Sheikh Hasina's leadership went from "being one of the poorest nations" at birth in 1971 to reaching "lower-middle income status" in 2015.



Her next vision is to transform Bangladesh into a poverty-free developed nation by 2041.

HASINA'S NEW BANGLADESH

Art work by Shishir Bhattacharjee, 2020

Lifting out of poverty

Poverty alleviation has been high on the Sheikh Hasina-led government's agenda. The major policy documents of her administration make the priority apparent. So far, Bangladesh has been an Asian example setter for poverty alleviation, and among the top ten performers in the world. The success in poverty reduction has been acclaimed by the international community; world leaders have praised her for role in attaining economic growth amid global recession, gaining millennium development goals, and reducing

poverty at rapid pace. During United Nations' SDG-formation period Hasina was instrumental in Bangladesh's rigorous participation, due to which the country's inputs were well inculcated into the goals. Because of Bangladesh's proactive role, it has already got a head start in the SDG attainment journey.

Hasina's government has implemented successive mid-term plans as part of the long-term plan. The country has advanced a lot in the 2010s moving ahead of other developing and regional countries in

Population living below the poverty line fell from 31.5% by 2010 to 20% by 2020.



A woman making bamboo baskets with strips of bamboo, in Chuadanga, Bangladesh, August 27, 2008



One of Sheikh Hasina's campaign promises was to stabilize the volatile macroeconomic situation which Bangladesh faced for nearly three decades.

many economic and social indicators. In 2020, she introduced Bangladesh third long-term plan - Perspective Plan 2021 - 2041 (PP2041) - to achieve upper-middle income country status by 2031 and high-income country status by 2041. This corresponds with the target to achieve the global development goals, the SDGs, before the deadline of 2030.

After taking charge in 2009, Hasina reintroduced mid-term cross-sectoral policy planning in form of "Five Year Plans." Between 2011 and 2020, Bangladesh adopted its Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Five Year Plans.

The Eighth Five Year Plan aims to attain two major development targets by 2030: the World Bank's upper-middle-income-country status and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. The plan had the strategic directions of reducing poverty and inequality. Population living below the poverty line fell from 31.5% by 2010 to 20% by 2020. The extreme poverty rate declined from 18% in 2010 to 10% in 2020.

One of Hasina's campaign promises was to stabilize the volatile macroeconomic situation which Bangladesh faced for nearly 3 decades.

She introduced reforms such as inclusive monetary policy and garner massive foreign investment in a country that has historically suffered from weak infrastructure and institutional inefficiency. A prescription of pro-growth policies, firm fiscal management, domestic and overseas job generation, and expansive social security programs, have brought certainty into the economy.

During her three successive tenures since 2009, education got the highest average sectoral fiscal spending. Increased investment in expanding

Satla is a village in Uzirpur upazila of Barisal in Bangladesh. Water lilies are cultivated in about 10,000 acres of wetlands of this village called Uttar Satla. 80% of the village people are involved in Water lilies cultivation and supply water lilies to different parts of the country. (Photo by: Muhammad Amdad Hossain)

Bangladesh's iconic Perspective Plan 2041 launched by Sheikh Hasina aims to address poverty, inequality and human development while setting a double-digit economic growth target. Its core agenda is to make growth inclusive. The prime vision is, by 2031 extreme poverty will be eliminated and by 2041 the incidence of poverty will be minimal (below 3%).



primary education, incentivizing girl's school enrollment, rural infrastructure development, heavy public investment in connectivity, and supporting agriculture sectors are the noteworthy interventions that paid off to steadily alleviate poverty.

The government led by Hasina recognizes that financial inclusion is an important driver of inclusive growth. Subsequently, the government stepped in with financial policies steering initiatives towards improving financial access to all. At the onset, Hasina administration introduced a pathbreaking grass-roots scheme of highly subsidized "Taka 10 (\$ 0.10) bank account," which accelerated its financial inclusion agenda. It paved the way for the introduction of digital financial services which allowed banks and financial institutions to reach the last-mile clients.

Bangladesh now offers a conducive environment for manufacturing firms to reach economies of scale and create a large number of jobs. Growth of manufacturing sectors such as textiles, food processing, pharmaceuticals, and leather are quite visible. Remittances play a major role in the economy, with Bangladeshi workers employed abroad transferring nearly \$22 billion in 2020.

Village woman making clay pottery in a traditional style, Khulna, Bangladesh, 2021.

Hasina's government offered one-time cash assistance of BDT 2,500 (approximately \$ 26) to 5 million families through mobile financial service providers, considering the plight of the working people during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Protecting the most vulnerable

Sheikh Hasina's initiative to form a social security system is a bold one for a resource-constrained country like Bangladesh. For her, social protection is a key to promote human development, inclusive growth and reduce inequalities.

Her government has been following a "leaving no-one behind" policy under its National Social Security Strategy of 2015. Vulnerable groups of the population particularly senior citizens, destitute women, at-risk children and persons with disabilities have been given priority under this strategy. The strategy is designed to be implemented gradually by addressing the lifecycle risks.

"The main goal of our development programs is improving the lives of at-risk people. Social security programs and inclusive growth are key drivers in achieving this goal."

Sheikh Hasina
Prime Minister of Bangladesh

Bangladeshi 'Third Gender' social worker Joya Shikder holds her national identity card at her house in dhaka on december 26, 2008.

A large number of marginal people across Bangladesh are getting benefits from the government's expanded safety net programs through the G2P (government to person) system. Around 120 safety net programs are being implemented across the country through various ministries under the social security net. Over 8.8 million people are leading a better life overcoming economic hardship as they now getting assistance under different schemes. The government has taken special program for improving the living standards of disadvantaged communities such as small ethnic groups, fishermen, transgender, Dalit, Harijan and Bede.



Bangladesh's National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) 2015 was formulated with the long-term aim of building a social welfare state.

One House One Farm project

'One House One Farm' is a poverty alleviation project through family farming which is one of 10 special initiatives by PM Hasina. The project expedites economic development in rural areas through providing financial support so that poor people can get involved in various income-generating activities, which eventually will help them come out of the cycle of poverty. Under the project, a total of 73,461 Village Development Samity (VDS) have been formed across the country, with 3,617,726 enrolled beneficiaries.

Ashrayan – a housing scheme for the homeless

'Ashrayan', is a fully public-funded housing scheme to address homelessness. Hasina came up with this simple solution to homelessness. A typical "Ashrayan house" is built on public lands in rural areas integrated in a community setting. The ownership of the house and land is transferred to the beneficiary. The scheme has rehabilitated 255,000 families till 2021.

NSSS 2015 focuses on the poor and vulnerable section of the population and expands into disadvantaged communities. It emphasizes on efficient use of resources to strengthen the delivery system.



Old Age Allowance

The 'Old Age Allowance' programme has a positive impact on the recipients, recipients' family and also on the society as a whole. The old people would no longer be the burden of the family. The total beneficiary of this is 5.7 million. Beneficiaries are getting BDT 500 monthly.

With the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic during early March 2020, the government immediately expanded its social safety net coverage. The prime minister decided to provide one-time cash assistance, considering the plight of the working people during the pandemic. Following this, her government offered one-time cash assistance of BDT 2,500 (approximately \$ 26) to 5 million families through mobile financial service providers. This one-time cash assistance was later extended to another 3.6 million families. Stimulus packages were launched targeting small entrepreneurs, returnee migrants and rural farmers.



PM Sheikh Hasina promised a universal pension scheme for elderly citizens under the social security framework. Her government has introduced a universal pension scheme. Implementation of the scheme will bring a large number of citizens from both the formal and informal sectors under safety net. The government has already approved a bill regarding the management of the scheme.



Sheikh Hasina has been awarded the prestigious Ceres Medal by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) for her efforts to combat hunger.

Freeing from hunger

Sheikh Hasina, from early career days, has consistently highlighted the importance of sustainable agriculture to fight poverty and hunger. She recognizes that Bangladesh, since its colonial days, has faced famines, but the country is an agrarian society with fertile lands. There is definitely a policy mismatch. Hence, she put agriculture and food security as the single most important item in her administration's policy agenda. Her policies worked, and Bangladesh achieved food security for the first time during her tenures.

Bangladesh has tripled its food production despite having lost one-third of arable land since 1971. She understands that for countries like Bangladesh, the only way to cope is to invest in climate-resistant agriculture. During her tenures, the agricultural sector has enjoyed prudent policy, supported by substantial public investments in farm-mechanization, rural

infrastructure and human capital. Food grains and animal proteins, all saw unprecedented increases during Hasina's consecutive tenures. Total food grain production rose by 66%, from 27 million metric tons in 2007 to 45 million metric tons in 2020. This is a significant accomplishment for a country facing challenges such as increasing population, shrinking cultivable land and adverse natural environment. This transformation widely contributed to poverty reduction and improved nutritional standard, along with food security.

Hasina administration is drafting a National Food and Nutrition Security Policy with the aim to improve the food and nutrition security status to the level needed to achieve the Food and Nutrition Security (FNS)-relevant SDG targets by 2030.

Bangladesh initiated special programs to boost its food security agenda. To help low-income households, food grains are distributed under the public food distribution system. Subsidized distribution programs like Food Friendly Program, Food for Work, Test Relief, Vulnerable Group Feeding, Vulnerable Group Development and Gratuitous Relief, are vital to ensure food security at household-level. Assistance to the urban low-income families is provided through sale of essential food commodities through a highly-subsidized Open Market Sale program.

To reduce system-loss, Hasina administration issues smart cards to channel its food programs. Around 10 million families across the country have been receiving cards to purchase food at subsidized prices.



A women farmers group pick and inspect aubergines.
Photo: WFP/Sayed Asif Mahmud

Community Clinics have brought a silent revolution in the public health system in Bangladesh. The initiative launched in 1998 is said to be the brainchild of Sheikh Hasina.

Delivering last mile healthcare

Sheikh Hasina's government has been able to reach the doorsteps of grassroots people with health services in just a decade, a challenge which seemed unattainable for a resource-constrained country like Bangladesh. International community and researchers took note of this model.

Her government has implemented a parallel policy of setting up 'community clinics' at rural areas, while establishing specialized hospitals in big cities. The country has outperformed its many South Asian neighbours in health-indicators, defying the expert view that economic strength and abundant health resources are the key drivers of better population health.



Maternal and child health training. Photo: AusAID

Bangladesh has performed remarkably in attaining the public-health indicators of UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly in reducing the child mortality and under-five mortality rate. All these contributed to achieving a life expectancy of 73 years in 2019. The country demonstrated a steady improvement in child nutrition outcomes since 2000, particularly in recent years.

Bangladesh has one of the best health networks in the public sector. There are 47,678 domiciliary workers with over 18,000 community clinics at grassroots level, 4,646 localized health facilities, 424 rural health complexes, 59 nationwide multispecialty-hospitals, 18 medical colleges and 12 specialized institutes. Tele-medicine service has been launched

in 43 hospitals around the country. They are equipped to provide medical service at home round the clock. There are now 30,000 satellite clinics for child and maternal healthcare. A publicly-funded 24/7 health service call center was introduced in 2016.

A seismic change that Hasina brought to Bangladesh is to put mental health at the core of public health agenda. The mental health sector is rapidly expanding since there is policy to augment mental healthcare efforts across sectors. The government passed a new Mental Health Act in 2018 to inculcate mental healthcare across sectors.



Banladesh's key Policies to Address Vulnerabilities and Inclusion

Agenda

1. National Population Policy 2012
2. National Policy on Older Persons 2013
3. National Youth Policy 2017
4. Policy on Small Ethnic Communities 2012
5. National Child Policy 2011
6. National Early Childhood Care and Development Policy 2013
7. National Child Labor Elimination Policy 2010
8. Women's Development Policy 2011

Sheikh Hasina got the 'Peace Tree' award from UNESCO for her outstanding contribution to girls' education.

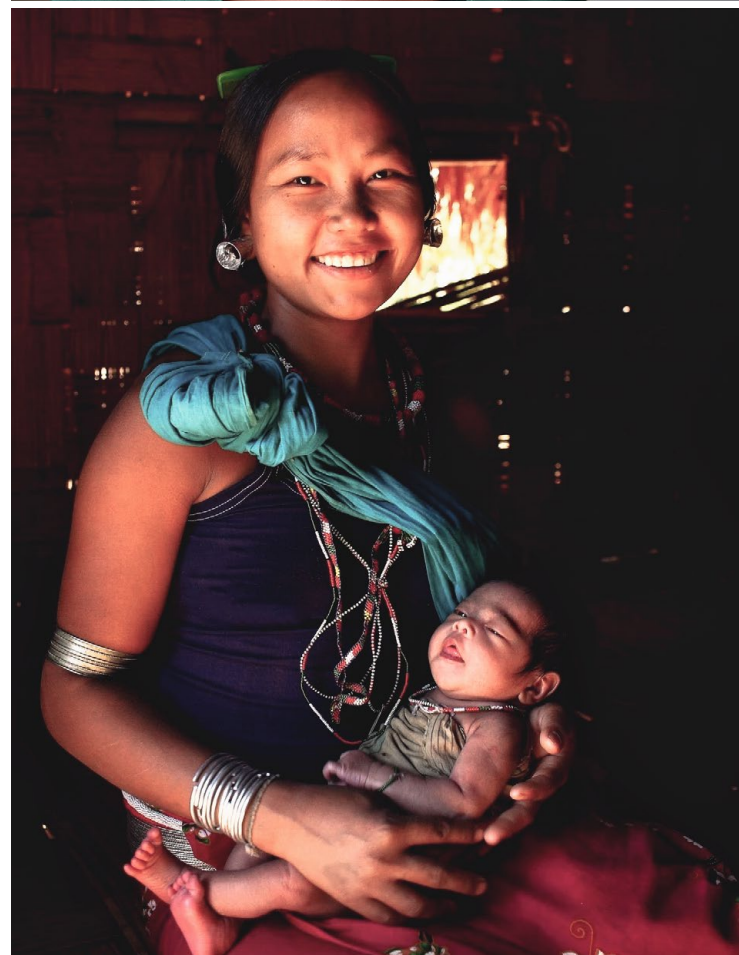
Enhancing gender parity

“Sheikh Hasina’s leadership in socio-economic development and ensuring gender equality is unmatched and also an example for the world to follow.”

David Cameron
Former British Prime Minister

Women’s empowerment is one of the top 10 agenda items of Sheikh Hasina’s premiership, the progress of which she oversees herself. Since 2009, she has been undertaking a number of far-reaching smart interventions. Focusing on girl child such as education stipends and exemption of tuition fees for girls in rural areas have yielded game-changing results, such as universal primary enrollment along with gender parity. Meanwhile, the fiscal spending on women’s empowerment has expanded during Hasina’s three successive tenures.

During Hasina’s successive tenures participation rate of women in the labour market increase significantly. Bangladeshi women’s role has been instrumental in the recent economic gains. More than 80% of the microfinance beneficiaries of



Bangladesh are women. A large number of women entrepreneurs have started their own business, creating employment opportunities for other women. Women’s participation has been increasing in many non-traditional and emerging sectors such as hospitality, transportation, tourism and food processing.

Women’s contribution in sectors such as politics, businesses, sports and defense has translated into the country’s progress in the first two decades of 21st century. Women will be at the forefront in the endeavor of becoming a progressive and developed Bangladesh by 2041.

Due to policy change, Bangladesh has now started recruiting women at all levels of the government, including as higher court judges and senior bureaucrats; senior police officers; an on-ground public servants; and at all segments of the defense forces. Because of affirmative action, it is now mandatory to elect women at all local government bodies. As a result, women are at the decision-making table for all development activities.

Bangladesh held the top position in South Asia in ensuring gender equality, for the seventh time in a row, according to the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report 2021. Bangladesh is already ahead of the curve in attaining SDG 5 which focuses on gender equality.



Sheikh Hasina-led government adopted Bangladesh's first women-focused policy, the National Women's Development Policy in 1997. The policy was updated again in 2011 to target the most critical issues: women's equal share in inheritance and fair opportunities in the labour market. The policy provides women with full control over their rights to land, earned property, health, inheritance and credit.

There are over 100 million internet subscribers in the country. Over 95% geographic area of Bangladesh has been brought under mobile telecommunications coverage.

Boosting digital inclusion

For the first time, Bangladesh has implemented a 10-years long cross-sectoral digitalization scheme, called Digital Bangladesh. Envisioned by Sheikh Hasina, the scheme leapfrogged the country to the digital era in a very short period. Hasina administration heavily focused in telecommunication infrastructure development. Currently, Bangladesh is connecting its remote parts with high-speed affordable internet connectivity.

Hasina administration has brought 2,600 unions (micro-units of local government) out of total 4,554 unions under optical fiber connectivity. Expansion in ICT infrastructure and connectivity have transformed public service delivery. The government has already set up 5,286 digital centers in union offices to deliver



‘Digital Bangladesh’ scheme, launched in 2009, by PM Sheikh Hasina has instrumentalized inclusive growth in the country.

Bangladesh has the 7th largest data centre in the world, located in Bangabandhu Hi-tech City, Kaliakoir, Joydebpur.

basic services at the grassroots. Bangladesh has brought all essential services online. Digital services like Smart National ID, the biometric database of unique IDs, fingerprints and iris scans, have been successful in making citizen services smoother. A few other examples of available digital services are: registration for admission to academic institutions, publication of results of examinations, registration for jobs abroad, registration of pilgrimage, collection of official forms, online submission of tax returns, and online tendering.

There are over 100 million internet subscribers in the country. Over 95%

geographic area of Bangladesh has been brought under mobile telecommunications coverage. The number of mobile phone users has also risen exponentially in the last ten years. There are now more than 166 million mobile users.

Hasina led government endorsed the idea of mobile financial services immediately after her second term started in 2008. Today, more than 80 million people in the country are using mobile financial services (MFS). The increase in active MFS subscribers also pushed up business transactions through the mobile-

based digital payment system. Consumers have incrementally been moving towards cashless transactions.

The disbursement of various social security amounts, such as old-age allowances, through MFS has ensured transparency in the disbursement process alongside reducing hassles of the beneficiaries. Earlier the process was very difficult, whereby they had to go to banks, fill up forms and queued in long-line. These market expansion and service deliveries are big game changers for a preciously slow-moving system.

SHEIKH HASINA

Timeline

28 September

1947

Birth and family



Sheikh Hasina was born at Tungipara village under Gopalganj district in southwestern Bangladesh. She is the eldest of five children of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the first president of Bangladesh and Begum Fazilatunnesa.

1960s

Student politics



Sheikh Hasina was inspired by her father and become active in politics since student life. Hasina was elected vice president of the Students' Union of Eden Girls College, Dhaka, in 1966. She also became president of Eden Girls College Chatra League, the student body of the Awami League political party. She joined as a member of Chatra League of Dhaka University and was secretary of the Rokeya Hall Chatra League unit.

15 August

1975

Mujib assassination



Sheikh Hasina lost her parents, three brothers, two sister-in-laws and other family members in an assassination-coup. Her father was the sitting President at the time. She and her younger sister Sheikh Rehana were the only survivors as they were in West Germany at that time. The military ruler, who took charge after the assassination, barred Hasina from returning to Bangladesh. She had to spend six years in exile in New Delhi, India.

1981-1990

Struggle for restoring democracy



Sheikh Hasina formed a 15-party progressive alliance leading to a powerful movement against the then military government. Hasina faced the wrath of the rulers on her return as she launched movement to restore democracy in the country. She faced detention, house arrests, assassination attempts and sexist smear campaigns.

1991-1996

Leader of the opposition



In 1991, Sheikh Hasina became leader of the opposition in the country's Fifth Parliament. She played a significant role in forging a parliamentary consensus for reintroducing parliamentary system of government in the country. She formed a progressive platform with other opposition leaders against the conservative government.

23 June

1996

First term as Prime Minister



On 23 June 1996, Sheikh Hasina assumed the office of the prime minister of Bangladesh for the first time. Inspired by the motto of 'prosperity for all,' she ushered in a paradigm shift in governance that has led to inclusive, development-oriented and rights-based governance.

29 December

2008

Return to office



Sheikh Hasina becomes prime minister for the second time as the Awami League comes to power in a landslide victory.

5 January

2014

Development uninterrupted



Sheikh Hasina becomes prime minister for the third time after her party Awami League won the 10th general election. Bangladesh achieved most of the goals of Vision 2021, which was declared by Hasina in 2009. Per capita income, life expectancy, access to electricity, and digitalization are some of the major indicators that show the progress of Bangladesh's journey under Hasina administration.

2018-Present

Fourth premiership



Sheikh Hasina won her third consecutive term, her fourth overall, when Awami League wins 288 of the 300 parliamentary seats in the 11th general elections. In 2020, she has laid out the plan, called Vision 2041, to become a developed nation within the next 20 years. She earned the distinction of being the longest serving female leader in the world. With her success she has made her party the most successful in terms of electoral performance and governing tenures.



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