



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO BANGLADESH

WELCOME CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

International Airport of Dacca (Bangladesh), 19 November 1986

*Your Excellency the President of the Republic,
Dear Friends,*

1. I am indeed happy that the first stage of my present journey brings me today to Bangladesh. As an independent and sovereign nation Bangladesh is a young country. As a people you have a long history and ancient traditions which bind you in a common identity. I thank the Most High God for enabling me to make this visit as a brother: a brother in our common humanity; a brother in our adoration of the "one God, living and enduring, merciful and all-powerful, who has made heaven and earth, and has spoken to men"; a brother in human solidarity, listening to the voice of humanity crying out all over the world for dignity, justice and peace.

I am grateful to the President and Government of Bangladesh on the one hand, and to the Catholic Bishops on the other, for their kind invitation and their assistance in making this visit possible. Already in 1979 an invitation was extended to me and since then I have been looking forward to this moment.

As a young nation you are striving to consolidate your national identity, to make your country a land in which all citizens can feel equally at home and can enjoy a just opportunity to share in the task of building up the national community.

2. I come among you as a pilgrim to the "soul" of the Bangladeshi people. Your ancient culture reflects contacts with many religions, traditions, races and languages. You are rightly proud of a rich heritage in the arts, particularly in literature and music. Your people are sustained by a firm faith in God. In his Providence they seek the meaning of their lives and the strength to live in

harmony with each other and in respect for his will.

Many linguistic, cultural and religious groups live side by side. Hence among yourselves you are called to exemplify tolerance and openness. And the recent history of your nation's search for independence proves that all sectors of the population can fruitfully join in achieving the goals of a just and peaceful society.

3. My visit has, above all, a religious significance. I come as a religious pilgrim in a spirit of fraternal love and esteem for all.

I greet my brethren of the Islamic faith, aware of the bonds that unite us in obedience to the one, all powerful God and Creator, the Lord of our lives.

I cordially greet the followers of the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, and all men and women of good will.

May the spirit of our meeting be one of harmony, peace and brotherhood.

In fulfilling my responsibilities within the Catholic Church, I come as a witness to the Christian faith and as the guarantor of unity among my Catholic brothers and sisters. In particular it is my mission to confirm the faith of my brother bishops, and of the priests, religious and laity of the Catholic community. In the love of our Lord Jesus Christ I also greet the members of the other Christian communities. In the spirit of fellowship which the Gospel teaches, I encourage all to continue in joyful service of the nation and in responsible collaboration with their fellow citizens in the immense task of development.

4. Before all of you present here, and before the entire Bangladeshi people, I express the fervent hope and prayer that your country may go steadily forward:

- in respect for the dignity of every individual;
- in the health and happiness of your families;
- in the strengthening of the country's wholesome institutions and social structures;
- in the commitment of all its citizens to the common good;
- and in the worship of the all merciful God in spirit and in truth, in freedom and love.

May the Almighty and Merciful God bless Bangladesh!

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