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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Nutrition, Education Top Priorities of PM Sheikh Hasina: Amb Ziauddin tells Yale University**

Bangladesh Ambassador to USA Mohammad Ziauddin has said nutrition and education are the two topmost issues on the priority list of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to build a healthy and educated nation.

Speaking at an international conference on 'Child Right and Sight' at the Yale University in Connecticut, he said malnutrition is the largest single contributor to physical and mental underdevelopment and diseases, including blindness.

He said a billion hungry and undernourished children go to bed every night while 3.5 million die annually worldwide and one in four suffer from stunted growth. He deplored that South Asia has the highest child malnutrition in the world.

The Ambassador said nutrition means access to food to which every child has an inherent right. A child's right to nutrition means that the nation must be food secured. He said Bangladesh achieved the status of food security, which was recognized by FAO in 1998 with its prestigious Ceres Award. The nutrition intake has also increased with women's equal participation in nation building, own earnings and empowerment.

Ziauddin said increased nutrition intake has been helped by other measures like delaying girl marriages to 18 years, care of babies for the first 1000 days of life, breast feeding of infants till six months, polio elimination; availability of vitamin A to deter blindness, iron, folic acid supplements and salt iodization to reduce iodine deficiency. These are made available through 16,500 community clinics across Bangladesh, he added.

The Ambassador told the conference that these measures of the government have reduced infant mortality to 33 per 1000 which earned Bangladesh the UN MDG Award for Infant Mortality. As for child immunization, he said Bangladesh has outperformed most developing countries, the rate of immunization being 97 percent. Besides, he said the rate of malnutrition among children in Bangladesh is now down to 16 percent from a staggering 34 percent in 1971.

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: 2 :

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, he said, has also placed education as a lead 'agent of change' in Bangladesh's overall development agenda as she feels that children must be educated to face the challenges of climate change, extremism, poverty and unemployment.

He said Bangladesh achieved education successes that include 100 percent enrollments at primary schools, gender parity in primary and secondary schools, School Feeding Program to keep poor children at school, Prime Minister's Trust Fund for supporting poor but meritorious students and bringing madrasas within the fold of modern education.

Ziauddin said these and other measures have helped increase literacy rate from 44 percent in 2006 to 70 percent in 2014, and cut down poverty level from 45.5 percent to 24 percent by 2014.

Distressed Children & Infants International (DCI), a non-profit organization, organized its 5th international conference on Saturday on 'Rights and Sight' to raise awareness on child rights, including child labor and diseases that affect vision.

Ambassadors, representatives of international organizations, scientists, scholars and academics attended and spoke at the day-long conference. DCI president Dr. DeBroff of the Yale School of Medicine chaired and moderated the conference.

DCI's flagship program is the "Sun Child Sponsorship" program, which currently supports over 1100 children in Bangladesh. The organization also sponsors other programs through their Blindness Prevention Program, Health for the Underprivileged Program, Orphan Support Program, and Disaster Relief Program.

The envoy hoped DCI would continue its good work in supporting the universal vision of a world with not a single child left deprived—where all children would enjoy equal opportunities to be healthy and educated.

