

## Amar Ekushey

*Let's not deviate from its spirit*

**A**MAR Ekushey rekindles the memories of the Language Movement Martyrs, who further glorified our linguistic identity and strengthened the consciousness that gradually transformed into a collective yearning for political freedom too. We remember the Martyrs of 21 February 1952 with a sense of gratitude and pride.

Amar Ekushey has won international recognition, as it is observed as the International Mother Language Day the world over. What greater occasion could there be to dedicate the day to, than the supreme sacrifices made by some defiant young men? Bangalis showed to the world how they valued their language.

Ekushey in its broader connotation includes a whole range of issues like culture and education. Today, 54 years after the attempt to undermine our mother tongue was refuted with great courage and determination, there is a marked shift from the stand that the Language Movement activists had taken. While we have made significant progress in mass education, the standard of education in general has fallen. That is particularly true about the rural areas. There is an urban-rural divide today as we have failed to ensure a balanced growth of the education sector.

The best way to pay tributes to the Martyrs is to follow the ideals that they died for. We are yet to achieve goals like universal literacy and hundred per cent enrolment of children in primary schools and a large segment of society is still deprived of quality education. This is certainly not what the martyrs had dreamt of.

It seems while the day is observed ritualistically, few among us are really concerned about the deviations from the spirit of the Language Movement. We have not been able to project Bangla language and our culture to the international community as part of a sustained effort. Where are the literary giants who could elevate Bangla to much greater heights?

So, it should be the day of soul searching for the nation as a whole. We are not paying back the debts that we owe to the Martyrs who resisted the onslaught on our language.

## Don't push the Palestinians to the brink

*All concerned must shed old mindsets*

**N**OTHING can be more disquieting than to see a nation having to pay for exercising their democratic rights. That is what the Palestinians are faced with, a very real prospect of their choice being overturned because the Israeli and the US government would have nothing to do with a government that is dominated by Hamas. Even more disturbing is the report that plans may be afoot to destabilise the Palestinian Authority (PA) and make the Hamas led government fail. In pursuance of this policy the Israeli government has imposed sanctions on the new incumbent PA government led by Hamas.

There are several realities that the parties concerned must acknowledge. The fact that Hamas has been elected through a free and fair election should not be lost on anybody. Israel and the US must also understand that it is not a party that the US and Israel will be dealing with once the new government is formed, but the Palestinian Authority, that is recognised internationally. By the same token, Hamas must realise that it cannot expect Israel, a country whose right to exist it doesn't recognise, to deal with it unless it revokes that stand.

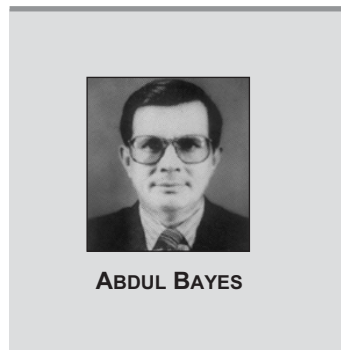
Election of Hamas has several positive factors that a hard-line attitude of the Americans and the Israelis is likely to nullify. Indeed Hamas had assumed so far a very hard-line towards Israel. But its new acquired position as representative of the Palestinians may compel it to soften its long-held position on Israel. It will also, we feel, make Hamas realise that perhaps under the present day circumstances, ground realities suggest that confrontationalist attitude against its most predominant neighbour may not help in attaining a Free Palestinian State; that a change of strategy, keeping those realities in focus, is called for. That is perhaps the most rational approach to the current imbroglio.

The Israeli and US position is fraught with risks. Given the time to make the choice, we hope that Hamas would go for the most sensible course. But an inflexible position and cutting off of aid may push it to assume more radical stance and go for alternate sources of funding for its survival. Under such a situation we cannot foresee any winner, but the Palestinians will be the sure losers.

# February comes before March

## BENEATH THE SURFACE

It is a shame on us that Bangladesh is dubbed as a country of terrorists and fundamentalists. The growth of fundamentalism goes against the spirit of our Liberation War of 1971 and that of the Language Movement in 1952. In fact, February 21 fuelled the march towards the month of March when we got independence. Considering February only as a month of the Language Movement would be erroneous. The martyrs shed blood for a total package that included language, social, economic and political considerations.



ABDUL BAYES

**T**ODAY is February 21, 2006. The month of February is a meaningful month for the people of Bangladesh. It is also a month of mourning. On this day, 54 years back, some worthy sons of the soil had to sacrifice their valuable lives for the sake of their mother tongue. By the sheer arithmetic of population and their language, Bengali should have become the state language of the then Pakistan. But Muhammad Ali Jinnah proposed Urdu as the state language.

And then roared up Bengalis in revolt and negated the verdict. A

movement started -- popularly called the Language Movement -- but beneath the surface, a movement against the Pakistani colonial hegemony. Lives were lost -- our martyrs -- when police opened fire on the protestors. Bengalis are the only nation in the world who shed blood to establish their mother tongue as state language. We are proud that in subsequent period, Unesco declared February 21 as the International Mother Language Day. Every year, the day is celebrated with due solemnity throughout the world. In fact, the recognition to our cause came during the tenure of the last government when Unesco accepted the proposal.

In fact February 21, 1952 was the beginning of the end of the state called Pakistan. The then East Pakistanis were exploited -- socially, politically and economically -- by the erstwhile West Pakistanis. The disparity widened so much as to fuel a call for a six-point demand for autonomy of the then East Pakistan. The Education Movement was also

launched to go for an exploitation-free education system. By and large, the spirit of February 21 taught the lesson that Bangalis should fight for their emancipation.

Then came the Liberation War. The then Pakistani rulers declined to yield to the popular verdict that came through the general election held in 1970 and through which Awami League got the mandate to rule the then Pakistan. Instead of transferring power to the people's representative, the rulers chose to subdue movements at gunpoint. At the call of the Great Leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, on March 7, people of this part of Pakistan waged a war against the one of most sophisticated armies of the world. After a bloody war for nine months, Bangladesh got freedom from the clutches of the Pakistani colonisers.

It is, therefore, arguable that the seeds of independence were sown in February 21, 1952 and the harvest was home in March 26, 1971. But an assessment of our perfor-

mance -- as of today with regard to socio-economic and political uplift of the people of Bangladesh -- could hardly console us. Bangladesh is still one of the poorest countries of the world with almost half of the population groaning under poverty. Infant and maternal mortality -- although declining over time -- continue to be among the highest in the world. The political system is yet to get a definite direction. There is no doubt that we witness national elections every five years but democratic norms and institutions are yet to be firmly rooted in every layer of the society. The local government institutions did not grow as expected, hindering local level development. Frustratingly, corruption crossed all-time records when Bangladesh topped the list of corrupt countries for five consecutive years. The society continues to be gripped by massive corruption and terrorism. The freedom of the people in real sense of the term could never be ensured, thus, militating against the motto of the martyrs.

Thus, on February 21, 2006, we should look back to our promises that we made while fighting for a free land. Geographical independence was attained but, barring few marginal achievements here and there, socio-economic and political independence has remained a forlorn hope. It is not because our resources do not permit us to be on the development path, but it is anti-

productive politics that stands on the way towards achieving our development goals.

Towards the end of attaining the goals of our beloved martyrs, we should commit to constitute a democratic society where people's representatives should lead the institutions. Election is the lynchpin -- and a fair and free election should on top of the agenda. We hope that all arrangements will be made to establish an Election Commission free from all government influences and independent in financial and other matters. It is conceivable that all parties sit together to select a Chief Election Commissioner. The EC needs also to adopt certain regulations and methods to deter the participation of black money holders and terrorists in the election. The second step is to revise the concept of the Caretaker Government system. There are a lot of holes in the system that need to be plugged very soon.

To ensure a level playing field for all parties there is no other substitute of reforming both EC and Caretaker Government system. It is very distressing that we have to demand these things after 36 years of our independence. Unless the election issue is resolved, other socio-economic parameters have to wait a long to show a positive sign.

We also need to uproot corruption from the society if we have any respect for the martyrs. Every year,

corruption alone costs roughly 2-3 per cent of our GDP. That means, in a zero corruption scenario, the GDP would grow at about 7-9 per cent per annum. The implication is that Bangladesh could become poverty-free within next 10 to 15 years if corruption could be wiped out from the society.

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The month of February is symbol of freedom to us. In this month, we should be promise-bound to continue the fight against all odds that bedevil our march towards total freedom. And freedom is the final word of February. Doing something to ensure that freedom would amount to doing something to respect the martyrs of the great Language Movement.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University.

# A short history of Bangla

With the establishment of Dhaka University in 1921, a trend of the new development was marked among the Bengali middle class people. They became aware of the language issue particularly in terms of their social and class interest. They were suspicious about the political activities of the Urdu speaking zamindars and nobility who regarded Bengali as the "language of the lower caste Hindus" and claimed Urdu as the "language of the nobility."

### DR. M EMDADUL HAQ

**T**HE great pride that the Bengali people share today for their mother tongue has evolved through a long course of history. *Bangla* as it stands today emerged through running a race with many other languages of the Indian sub-continent and beyond. For its existence, Bengali had to compete and struggle with Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, English, Urdu, and so on. The date of the beginning of this struggle was not the late 1940s, but goes back to as early as the 13th century.

During the Gupta, Pala and Sena dynasties, Sanskrit was the language of royal courts and literary activities. Sanskrit enjoyed a respectable position amongst the elite, while Bengali was regarded as the language of the ordinary people. With the inception of Muslim rule in Bengal in 1206, Bengali received state patronization and replaced Sanskrit in all respects very soon. Sultan Nasiruddin Mohammed Shah, Alaaddin Husain Shah, Ilias Shah, etc were the pioneering figures who helped in the promotion of *Bengali* language in every sphere of life and at the state level.

Bengal fell at the hands of Emperor Akbar in 1576, hence Persian becoming the official language of the province. It continued as the language of the Bengali intelligentsia and officials till 1838. Under the Mughal rulers, Urdu, composed of letters and words mainly from Hindi, Persian, and

Arabic, emerged as an Army language. For ensuring unity and uniformity in the army, Urdu evolved as a common language of command in Akbar's army. With the formation of Muslim League in Dhaka in 1906 and the Lucknow Pact in 1916, Urdu revived again its former influence.

As a legacy of the colonial rule, English was used after independence in the civil-military establishments and educational institutions. Besides English, the government used Urdu in running the state of affairs in newborn Pakistan. The special treatment of Urdu and negligence to Bengali aroused discontent, especially among the Bengali intelligentsia, political leaders and students.

Aligarh University in UP was at the center of this debate in the beginning. In July 1947, the former VC of the university Dr. Ziauddin advocated in favour of Urdu as the state language of Pakistan. Instantly Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah, Professor of Bengali at Dhaka University, in a July 19 article in the *Daily Azad*: "The Language Problem of Pakistan" wrote that Bengali should become the medium of instruction as well as official language in East Pakistan. The demand took a formal shape with the formation of the *Gana Azadi League* in Dhaka during the same month.

Immediately after the birth of Pakistan in August 1947, the controversy over language issue topped

the list of priorities in the country as Bengali was spoken by 56.3 per cent, while about 7.3 per cent people spoke Urdu. The government maintained that being the language of none of the five provinces of Pakistan, Urdu would present equal advantage and disadvantage to all those who would be competing for central services.

On February 25, 1948, Dhirandra Nath Dutta, a member of the Pakistan Constituent Assembly from Congress background, strongly spoke in favour of Bengali language. He argued: "Out of sixty-nine million people in Pakistan, forty four million people speak Bengali... the state language should be the language which is used by the majority of the people of the state, and for that, I consider Bengali language is a lingua franca of our state."

Opposing his argument, Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan maintained that: "Pakistan has been created because of the demand of a hundred million Muslims in the subcontinent and the language of the hundred million Muslims is Urdu... Pakistan is a Muslim state and it must have as its lingua franca, the language of the Muslim nation."

*Tamaddun Majlish*, the group which took initiative to demand that Bengali should be the state language of Pakistan along with Urdu, led by physicist Abul Kashem emerged as one of the powerful groups on behalf of the Bengali language. Their demand gradually

gained popularity among the Dhaka University students. Students under the banner of the *Tamaddun Majlish* insisted the provincial Prime Minister Khwaja Nazimuddin adopt a resolution through the Assembly and send it to the central government recommending Bengali as one of the state languages of Pakistan. Fearing troubles from the students, just before Jinnah's arrival in East Pakistan, Nazimuddin signed an agreement with the students in line with their demands on language issue.

Nonetheless, being tempted by the statement of Dhirandra Nath Dutta, the then Governor General of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, on March 11, 1948 declared in unequivocal terms at Suhrawardy Uddan that "only Urdu will be the state language of Pakistan." Jinnah repeated his statement at the Dhaka University Convocation in Curzon Hall on March 24. The declaration aroused mass discontent, the students of Dhaka University being in the forefront. After the death of Liaquat Ali Khan in 1951, Khwaja Nazimuddin became the Prime Minister of Pakistan and opted in favor of Urdu, which was his first language. On January 26, 1952, he declared in Paltan Maidan that Urdu "shall be the only state language of Pakistan." The Dhaka students reacted because of his retreat from his earlier promise in 1948.

On January 30, Maulana Bhashani conducted a meeting of the socio-political groups: East Pakistan Awami Muslim League, *Khelafat-e-Rabbani*, *Tamaddun-e-Majlish*, State Language Movement Parishad, etc. at the Muktar Library to oppose Prime Minister Nazimuddin. On February 4, DU State Language Movement Parishad brought out a procession under the leadership of Gazil Haq

to protest Nazimuddin. On February 21, a protest move took the form of putting pressure on the provincial Assembly, then in session in the Jagannath Hall, to pass a resolution in support of Bengali as a state language. When the students moved towards the Assembly defying government orders, police opened fire and the February tragedy was underway.

It was quite logical to press a demand for the recognition of *Bangla* as one of the state languages because the majority people in Pakistan spoke it. Educated Bengali people, or at least a large part of them, although seeming to favour Urdu at the initial stage, gradually raised their voice for a number of reasons.

As a result of the long colonial heritage, the Bengali intelligentsia, political leaders and students were concerned about the economic welfare and well being of the eastern region. They perceived that the non-recognition of the Bengali language was nothing but a new design of colonial exploitation. They also perceived that with Urdu and English as state languages, the mass people in East Pakistan would be in a disadvantageous situation especially in getting jobs and economic activities. A barrier in the communication process would lead the Bengali nationals towards economic deprivation and backwardness.

With the establishment of Dhaka University in 1921, a trend of the new development was marked among the Bengali middle class people. They became aware of the language issue particularly in terms of their social and class interest. They were suspicious about the political activities of the Urdu speaking zamindars and nobility who regarded Bengali as the "language

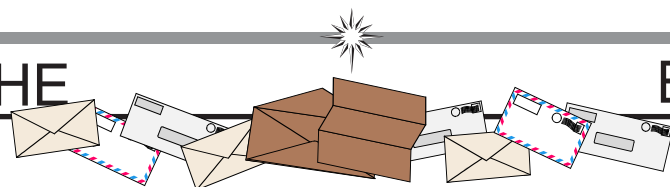
of the lower caste Hindus" and claimed Urdu as the "language of the nobility." Among these groups of people who favoured Urdu, Khwaja Nazimuddin and Akram Khan were prominent in Eastern Bengal. They came from conservative upper class background. In 1952, the declaration of Urdu as state language by Khwaja Nazimuddin, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, sparked mass discontent in East Pakistan.

From the beginning Pakistani rulers were concerned about the geographical separation of the country by hostile India and perceived the dominance of Bengali language in East Bengal as the number one barrier towards achieving political integration. Because of their hypersensitivity they failed to reach a logical solution of the language debate and resorted to force instead. Although the central government in 1956 incorporated *Bangla* as one of the state languages of Pakistan the decision came too late and couldn't address the fear and mistrust that had already been planted in the minds of the Bengali people.

Since 1952, February 21 has been observed every year to commemorate the martyrs of the Language Movement. This movement was the seed out of which grew up the tree of Bengali nationalism that helped create Bangladesh in 1971. With Unesco adopting a resolution on November 17, 1999 proclaiming February 21 as "International Mother Language Day" the Language Movement of Bangladesh has come to be honoured and recognised by the international community.

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## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



## EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

### Cartoon controversy

"I am offended by the Danish cartoons," says a visibly emotional 'Muslim' of the fundamentalist genre!

"Hell with free speech! Freedom of expression does not include the right to offend," he says as he prepares to launch an offensive diatribe about the evils of secular institutions and practices.

Consider the following examples:

\* If Copernicus was tentative about giving offence to the Catholic Order then we'd still believe that the sun circled the Earth.

\* Remember "Quit India?" I'll wager that it put off a few chaps during the afternoon tea and cucumber sandwiches.

\* Would you rather be breaking the Berlin wall or painting it? Or should the issue have been dropped altogether, lest the Communist dictators took offence?

\* If the Prophet (pbuh) worried about ruffling feathers then we'd be worshipping gods called Al-lat, Uzza, and Manaat.

Censorship cannot be imposed on opinion, but only on misinformation and disinformation.

As a practising Muslim, I was deeply offended by the cartoons. At one end, Muslims are accused of not integrating with Western society, yet if the values and personalities they hold dear are ridiculed so insensitively, can they really be blamed for developing a ghetto mentality?

I was equally distressed by the predictability of Muslim reaction all around the globe. Pathetic! The Prophet (pbuh) would weep at how far we have deviated from the true spirit of the religion. While Islam certainly does not espouse turning the other cheek, mercy, forgiveness, unity through diversity, and tolerance are enshrined in its basic tenets.

Kaiser Kabir  
Banani, Dhaka

### Pertinent question

Thanks to Pinaki Roy for presenting a mass awareness article. Indeed it is true that the number of addicted women is going up day by day. Why is it happening? Is it their fate? I do not believe. Nowadays, we admit our sons and daughters to posh schools and colleges. That does not mean that they will do

whatever they like. As a guardian my request is to all parents, please find out who is the friend of your son and daughter. Yes, the present generation likes the liberty to act on their own. But there should be some limit. Please give them opportunity to exhibit their feelings but at the same time control them from going astray.

We should demonstrate that we are with them.  
Amena Khatun  
On e-mail

### Loadshedding

Loadshedding or power cut has become a common affair at Cox's Bazar.

It is usual that the supply of power fails in our town 3/4 times daily without any prior notice. Frequent power failure has become a menace during the hot summer days. Moreover, this causes a real problem to the students. They can't study at night. Power failure causes another great problem to the water pump which cannot be run without electricity. Moreover, industrial production comes to a halt.

The authorities concerned

should immediately look into the matter and take corrective steps.

Pabel Das  
Cox's Bazar

### Shopping centre locations

The growth of shopping centres in Dhaka seems to be skyrocketing. The improvements made in designing those shopping centres are quite significant and appreciable. The locations of shopping complexes in Dhaka are making a significant contribution to the traffic flow on the roads around them. The traffic congestion is deteriorating the living standard in and around the city. Allowing shop fronts everywhere, especially on the major roads, is reducing the effective use of the roads. Now, it is time for the city planners and the developers to step back and rethink to make an effective strategy for improving living conditions in the city and probably start introducing the concept of creating suburban shopping centres, which will contribute to distributing the traffic from a central shopping centre to many suburban shopping centres.

Currently, the locations of most of the shopping centres are quite different from the practice in the modern world. Definitely, the population density of Dhaka city cannot be compared to western cities, the volume of services that our existing shopping centres are providing to the market is unbelievable. At the moment, to meet customer demand, both sides of all the major roads are occupied by shop fronts, which are creating traffic havoc and to some extent, diminishing the beauty of the city. In order to minimise the shop fronts along the major roads, city planners need to emphasise massive vertical growth, rather than horizontal and the entrance of those has to be off the major roads, like the entrance of the shopping centres near Dhaka Cantonment gate.

If the city planners start approving massive vertical growth of shopping centres, that will gradually start taking lots of shops off the road. Unfortunately, this situation will create some financial pressure on many middle class families, solely depending on the income from those shops built in the front of their houses and in a non-welfare

country like Bangladesh, it will generate substantial political pressure on any democratic government. Unfortunately, in order to revive the beauty of the city and mobilise the city by improving the traffic condition, the relevant authorities will have to face those challenges and come up with some solutions to minimise the impact.

Development of Boshundhara city and few others provides a clear understanding that our property developers are well aware of the concept of shopping centre planning, which is a major shift from previous concept of shopping centre development. Few developers have already formulated a plan to develop shopping centres either in the front part of the residential estate (Lake city development by Concord) or at the lower floors of high rise residential buildings in many housing estates (Twin Tower), which is definitely a neater solution.

Currently, every suburb in Dhaka has a small market place on the main roads, which can be developed as a downtown/local city centre for those suburbs. A shopping centre, which need not to be an expensive

shopping centre like the few organised ones we see, should include some basic services like, cinema, shops like, fruits and vegetables, bakery, fish, meat, stationary, grocery, garments, books etc. with sufficient toilet facilities to encourage men and women to shop. To maintain the normal traffic flow around those shopping centres, access to those shopping centres has to be off the main road with own parking lot situated underground, overground or at roof. This will help planning the city and reorganising the suburbs.

Due to shortage of spaces, it is difficult to approve one shopping centre for each suburb at the moment, then one in the vicinity of few suburbs will help making the city neater. Also, the suburban rail stations (if ever developed), built with access to those shopping complexes will help the customers from surrounding suburbs to commute to and from those shopping complexes. These steps will not only make the city neater and reduce the traffic congestion significantly in major roads; it will encourage employment in service industries and attract more customers to

shopping. The process of implementing the suburban shopping centres will require initiative from both private and public sectors. The government, Planning Commission, BRTA and other relevant authorities along with all major builders, business community and local community leaders together should develop a strategy of initiating the process and slowly start implementing the policy of removing shop fronts initially along all major roads and junctions. In removing those shop fronts along the roadside, local government will have to closely work with local communities and their leaders and work towards the benefits of local communities.

A collective effort by the government, Planning Commission, BRTA, local government, local community and developers will encourage the development of suburban shopping centres and no doubt one day Dhaka city will be able to revive its beauty and dignity.

Ekrumulah Chowdhury  
On e-mail