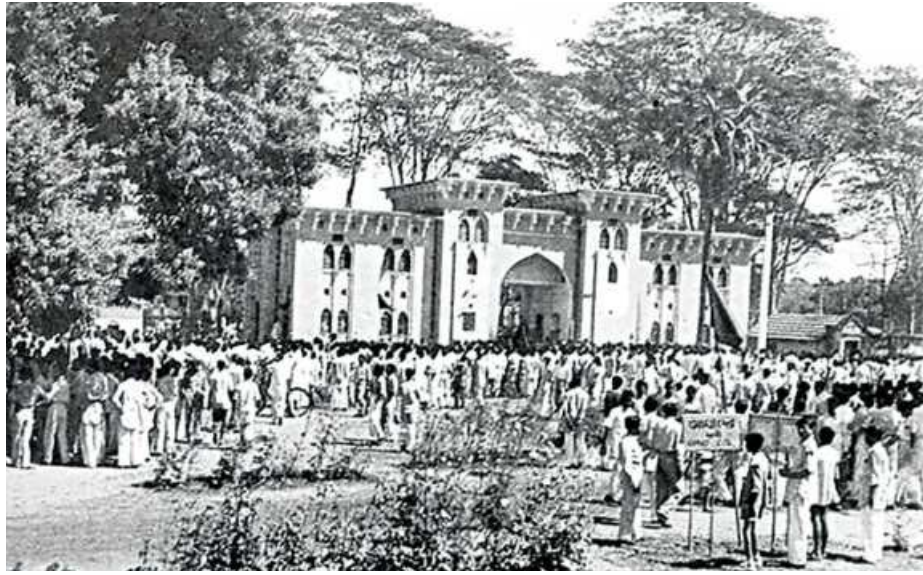


The unrecognisable epicentre of EKUSHEY



Left, the historic Amtala, where the Language Movement heroes defied Section 144 to demand Bangla as state language in 1952. Top right, this site near the emergency gate of DMCH remains occupied by vendors throughout the year. Bottom, like every year, the authorities concerned are sprucing up the area before Amar Ekushey. These photos were taken on February 21, 1952, Tuesday and yesterday respectively.



PHOTO: COLLECTED, ANISUR RAHMAN

HASAN MEER

Vendors encroaching footpaths, garbage lying around, self-promoting posters on the wall and haphazard parking -- residents of Dhaka are all too used to these sights, and to a large extent have accepted these nuisances and eyesores.

But what if such is the condition of a place that is of utmost importance, bearing testimony to a nation's struggle for establishing their right to speak and express emotions in mother tongue? That too in the month of February, when Language Movement martyrs laid down their lives for the recognition of Bangla as a state language on the 21st of this month -- 68 years ago.

AN EPICENTRE OF HISTORY
The historic Amtala, where Language Movement activists gathered on February 21, 1952 to defy a curfew and protest the then Pakistan government's refusal to recognise Bangla as one of the state languages of Pakistan, has become covered behind encroachers.

That day, protesters broke the

police barricade to march towards the assembly at Jagannath Hall.

Police swung into action firing teargas shells and beating up the protesters. The battle between them and law enforcers spilled out on to the streets. As they kept marching, shooting began, killing Salam, Barkat, Rafique, Jabbar, Shafiq and others.

Pakistan government was ultimately compelled to include an article in the country's constitution on February 29, 1956 that declared, "The state languages of Pakistan shall be Urdu and Bengali."
However, Ekushey did not end there; it rather planted the seed of freedom in the hearts of Bangalis and 19 years after the Language Movement, an independent country named Bangladesh was born.

In 1999, Unesco declared February 21 as International Mother Language Day, in recognition of the sacrifice of our language martyrs.

UNRECOGNISABLE THROUGHOUT THE YEAR
But throughout the year, it is impossible to be able to recognise the spot, unless one reads a signboard

hanging atop a Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) gate.

It is now crammed with hawkers with waste lying around and posters on the wall.

Every year, right before Amar Ekushey, authorities concerned conduct eviction drives in the area, and things go back to the same after a couple of days.

This year has been no different. This correspondent visited Amtala on February 16 and 17, and found the place barely noticeable. However, on February 19, the place was cleaned up of hawkers and garbage.

When asked, vendors at the spot said they were unaware of Amtala's significance. "We are trying to make a living here, that's all," said Mohammad Harun.

Laily Begum added, "On 21st [February], people come here and take some pictures then head back to Shaheed Minar."

"The authorities conduct eviction drives before special days," said Laily, who has been selling kitchenware in the area for over 10 years.

"Where will we go?" she asked

this correspondent when pointed out that they were damaging a historical site.

This newspaper also spoke to passersby in the area on February 17. Many were busy buying products from vendors, some were walking towards their destinations sidestepping all the nuisance, and only a handful paused to glance at the gate.

Mahtab Mahbub, a student of Dhaka University, said, "It's unfortunate that this historic place is in such a condition. The authorities must do something about it."

Asked about negligence of such a historical site, eminent historian Prof Muntassir Mamoon said, "It's the tradition of the country. Here, historical significance is not given its due value."

Expressing frustration over the government's indifference to such sites, the former professor of history at Dhaka University said they had been trying to protect such historical structures -- like Amtala -- for a long time, but the authorities did not pay heed.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

PM offers Nepal use of airport, seaport

BSS, Dhaka

As part of Dhaka's push for regional connectivity for common prosperity, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said she wants Nepal to avail Bangladesh's airport and seaport facilities.

The PM said this while speaking to visiting Nepalese Foreign Minister Pradip Kumar Gyawali, as he called upon the premier at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

"Bangladesh prioritises neighbours when it comes to cooperation," the premier's press secretary Ihsanul Karim quoted her as saying at a briefing after the meeting.

Sheikh Hasina told Gyawali that her government was developing Saidpur airport (in Nilphamari) as an international aviation facility, expecting it to be a centre for regional connectivity, the PMO spokesperson said.

"Nepal and Bhutan can use the Saidpur airport and Chattogram and Mongla ports for mutual benefits," the PM was quoted as saying.

Sheikh Hasina said she always advocates for transit facilities for Nepal as part of Dhaka's campaign for enhanced regional cooperation, particularly under The Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) Initiative, a sub-regional union of the eastern South Asian nations.

Hasina said joint hydroelectricity projects involving Dhaka, Kathmandu and New Delhi could be a good example of regional cooperation. While Nepal enjoys a special natural advantage to generate hydro power, Bangladesh already purchases electricity from India.

On the other hand, Bangladesh could export vegetables and fish to Nepal during the winter season, when the mountainous nation needs supplies from outside, Karim quoted the PM as saying.

Gyawali said Kathmandu expects its ties with Bangladesh to take a new turn against the backdrop of Bangladesh's fast socio-economic development.

'Stop asking us about bail of Khaleda'

Quader urges journos

BSS, Dhaka

Reiterating that the court will decide about the bail of Khaleda Zia, Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday asked journalists not to "embarrass" him by asking about the issue repeatedly.

Speaking at a special joint meeting of Awami League (AL) at the party's central office on Bangabandhu Avenue, he said the matter is not in the hands of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Presidents and secretaries of all organisational districts and city units of AL under the Dhaka division joined the meeting.

Directing the AL leaders to strengthen the party from the grassroots level, the general secretary asked leaders not to allow controversial people into the party to strengthen their own positions.

"The government can never be strong if the party remains weak organisationally, he said."

Five luminaries awarded 'Bishwa Bangali Puraskar'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Five eminent personalities from Bangladesh and India's West Bengal were awarded with "Bishwa Bangali Puraskar 2019" yesterday, for their extraordinary contributions in their respective fields.

They are: Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury, professor emeritus of Dhaka University; Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed, founder of Bishwo Shahitto Kendro; Subhas Chandra Mukhopadhyay, a noted historian of India; Parthasarathi Basu, a popular Indian poet; and Tapadhiri Bhattacharjee, former vice-chancellor of Assam University.

Bishwa Bangali Sangha (Bibas), a Dhaka-based social organisation, conferred the awards -- introduced for the first time this year -- at a ceremony held at Prof Muzaffar Ahmed Chowdhury Auditorium of DU.

Mozib Mohammad, coordinator of Bibas, said the luminaries have guided people of both Bengals towards excellence,

and their knowledge have enlightened the society.

"The award is a small effort to honour their vast contributions to the society and people," he added.

Sharing his feelings, Prof Serajul said cooperation and exchange of views among the people of both Bangladesh and West Bengal have to increase, for their own development.

"About 30 crore Bengalees live across the world, but all of them are not going through a good situation. Cooperation is a must to change their current status," said Prof Serajul.

In his speech, Subhas Chandra said youths will have to come forward to enrich and flourish Bangla language, and the main role in this regard has to be played by the people of Bangladesh.

A cultural programme, poetry recitation, music and dance, was also held on the occasion.



A girl points a smartphone camera at a dinosaur on a book; inset, a 3D model of the creature appears on the screen. The photo was taken yesterday at Bino's stall in Bangla Academy.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Getting more out of books

MATHEWS CHIRAN

In this era of connectivity, digital technology has a deep impact on book publishing and the way people read.

To keep pace with the change, a number of publishers are also providing readers with e-book facilities in this year's book fair.

These electronic books -- a publication made available in digital form -- can be read on computers or handheld devices.

Some organisations have also introduced apps for readers to avail their services. Many have taken help of IT firms in this regard. Most of the stalls are located on Bangla Academy premises.

"Sheibo" is one such app. "Anyone can use the app by downloading it from an online store. The app requires opening up an account," said Nafees Istiaque, a volunteer at the stall 103.

He said the app has more than 3,000 books in its collection and at least 500 books can be read for free. "Some of the books require purchasing through bKash or banking system."

"We also take permissions from authors and publishers for selling the books. They

also receive a percentage from the sales," said Shah Abdul Islam, a volunteer at "MuthoBoi".

They are offering 110 books for free out of 600 books, he said.

At stall-44, volunteers at "Boitoi" were helping people use it. The app has more than 600 books and one can read around 200 of them for free, said Afrina, a volunteer at the stall. "We are adding new books every day."

Price of the books range from Tk 12 to 100. "I use e-books when I travel. It's convenient to carry," said Dhaka University student Sazia Akhter.

Some booklovers, however, were a little skeptic about the usage of the apps. University student Arefin Orni said she does not like to read books in PDF format as she has to scroll down to read a book rather than turning pages.

The attendees at the stall assured her she can easily leaf through a book while reading in the app. Orni finally smiled and asked them to show her how to download the app in her phone.

Not just e-books, a publisher has introduced an interactive experience

ENROLLING EXTRA STUDENTS

SC fines City Univ Tk 10 lakh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday fined City University Tk 10 lakh for enrolling more than 50 students to the law department each semester, violating a UGC decision.

The university has been asked to pay the fine to Bangladesh Bar Council.

Students will be allowed to appear for the bar council enrollment test, if City University pays the fine, the apex court added.

A four-member bench of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain passed the order after disposing of a review petition filed by the bar council, seeking necessary order to this effect.

Earlier, the apex court fined Tk 10 lakh each to five private universities for the same reason.



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