

Ekushey: As We Would Like It to Be

A group of young men and women tells Navine Murshid what Ekushey means to them and how they would like to celebrate it.

This is what they said

It has been forty-seven years since the language movement, as we, the Bengalis, remain the only people in history to sacrifice our lives for our language. Ekushey February evokes many an emotion in the hearts of the older generation, but what does the young today feel?

The Daily Star approached the youngsters of today with two questions:

1. What is Ekushey February to you?

2. How do you think the occasion should be celebrated?

The response was varied as was the age range of the people who participated. While some showed signs of deep patriotism, others seemed rather indifferent. And there were a few who thought this was a big joke. Many could not make up their minds on what to say and ended up answering half the question. Here is what they voiced:

Individual choice

First, Ekushey February gave us our language. If the students of Dhaka University hadn't protested that day we would be speaking in some strange language. I love Bangla. It is my identity. I can't appreciate any other culture before I know and appreciate mine. As it goes "Ekushey February, ami ki bhulitey pari." Personally, I think one should celebrate it according to their wishes. I would have spent it by writing a poem or an article about it. I would try to increase awareness among our generation who is forgetting that Bangla is their mother tongue, not English.

Kazi Muinur Rahman (17)
IB candidate, Wales, England

A reminder

Ekushey February to me

the 21st of February. While these particular dates are extremely significant in our history, the wars weren't won in a day. The amount of sacrifice that went into giving us the precious freedom that we so carelessly enjoy today and the language some treat with such disrespect, deserve more than just a day of remembrance. I think that every time we speak Bangla, we should remember the lives that were lost to give us this right, and every time we speak Bangla, we should speak proudly, because no other language can be as beautiful or as precious to us as our own.

Quazi Pushpita Alam (17)
Maple Leaf School, Dhaka

It's Aatey Phalgon

In 1952, Ekushey February, our people fought so

it should be celebrated, on the other hand, I think that people firstly feel the significance, the thrill of Aatey Phalgon. That is the first and foremost achievement. Then he can do whatever he wants to do such as going to Shahid minar and etc. My concern is he or she should feel it first. Feel it with a good consciousness.

Reazul Chowdhury (23)
State University of Tennessee, USA

Reality and realisation

I think Ekushey should mean more to Bangladeshis than their independence. There are no other countries in this world who have fought for their mother tongue. I think this should be made the National Mourning Day. We should

Ekushey February to me is a reminder. And to be honest, I need to be reminded nowadays, of how precious this country and its people really is to all of us Bangladeshis. I need to be reminded that not everyone is a potential rapist, killer, hijacker or fraud and there is a lot more to our country than pollution, corruption, hartals and distress. It is a day to think back, think hard and appreciate our independence. It is not about celebrating, but remembering.

also pay tribute to the families of the people who have sacrificed their lives for this language. Secondly, take every student out of the English-medium schools and test their strength of speaking and writing Bengali. Those who fail should be punished severely.

Saad Rahim Chowdhury (18)
University of Texas, USA

Remembrance of heroes

Ekushey to me is the day when we remember those who have died to give us our language. It should be celebrated the way it is being celebrated, but our parents have to let us go out and see all the fun.

Sadia Naureen Hug (13)
Sunny Dale School, Dhaka

A lot of fun

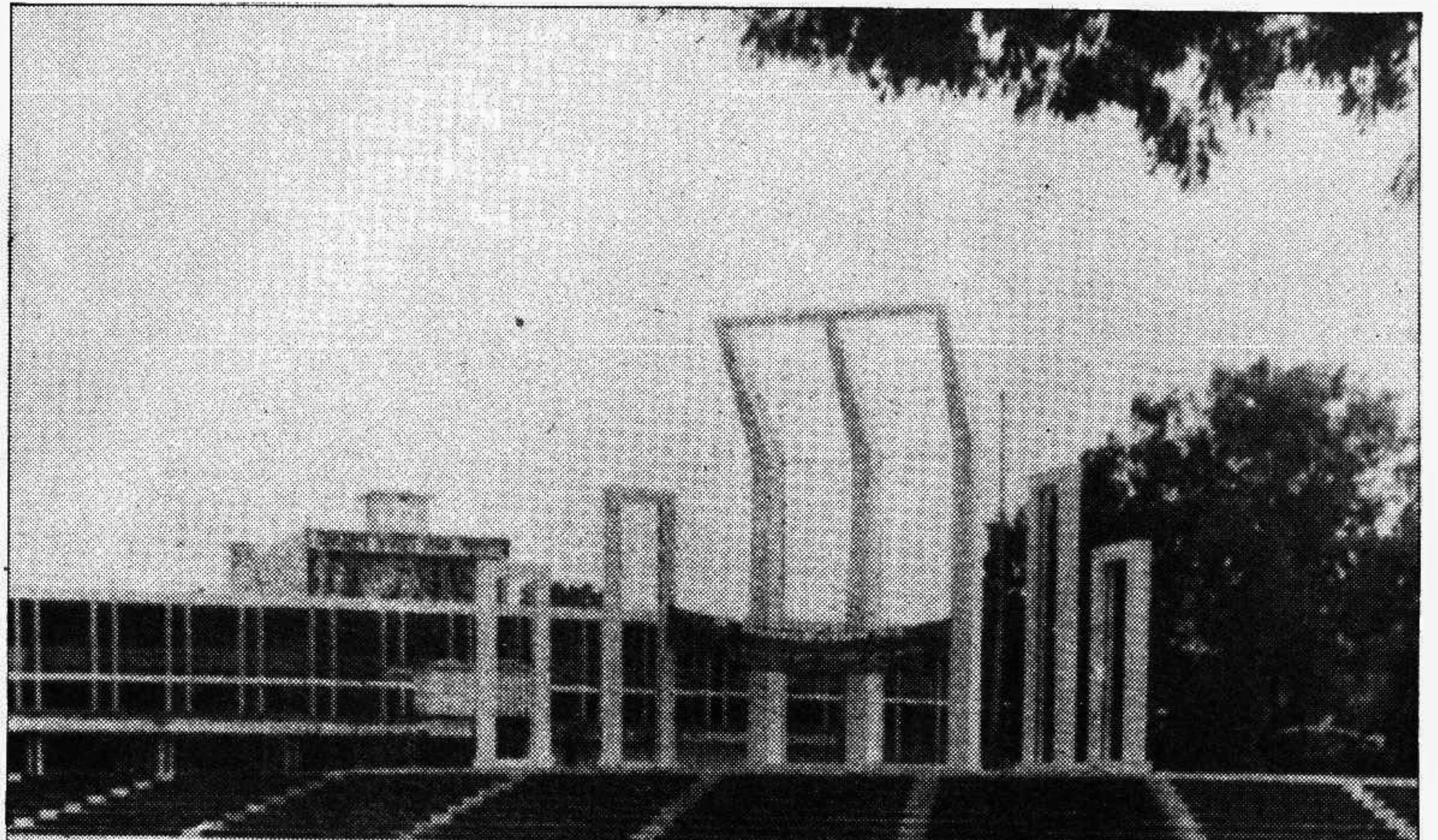
Ekushey means a lot to me because on that day we go to the Shaheed Minar, give flowers, pray for all the people who died and we have lots of fun.

Saiqua Shabnam Chowdhury (11)
South Breeze School, Dhaka

These are the people of the present generation. What they will feel or do in the future is indeterminate. Then, these people may not feel the way they do today, or they may...

Only time will tell if in twenty years time, Ekushey February will be just another ordinary day or not. Only time will tell if we will lose our culture or not. Only time will answer the many ifs.

I can't appreciate any other culture before I know and appreciate mine. As it goes "Ekushey February, ami ki bhulitey pari." Personally, I think one should celebrate it according to their wishes. I would have spent it by writing a poem or an article about it. I would try to increase awareness among our generation who is forgetting that Bangla is their mother tongue, not English.



It may be seasonal, but they do it with heart



Foreigners' flowers

More exposure to history

I've never really thought of the importance of the day to me personally but actually felt emotions through how others react to it.

I haven't exactly had a first hand experience at gatherings related to this auspicious day in Bengali history being of the rare few belonging to English medium background. I feel our schools should expose us more to the Bengali culture with a bit more enthusiasm.

Aniqah Khan (18)
Scholastica School, Dhaka

A global holiday

Ekushey means a lot to me. We should never forget Ekushey. I love Ekushey. I respect Ekushey. I think Ekushey should be a global holiday.

Enver T. Majid (18)
Maple Leaf School, Dhaka

Time to express gratitude

Every time Ekushey comes, it reminds me of all those people who gave their lives establishing our independent language. I highly respect and tribute them. I feel proud to know and speak in Bangla. It should be celebrated with gratitude and respect.

Iffat Mahmud (17)
A-level candidate, Dhaka

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Khadija Rehma (18)
North South University, Dhaka

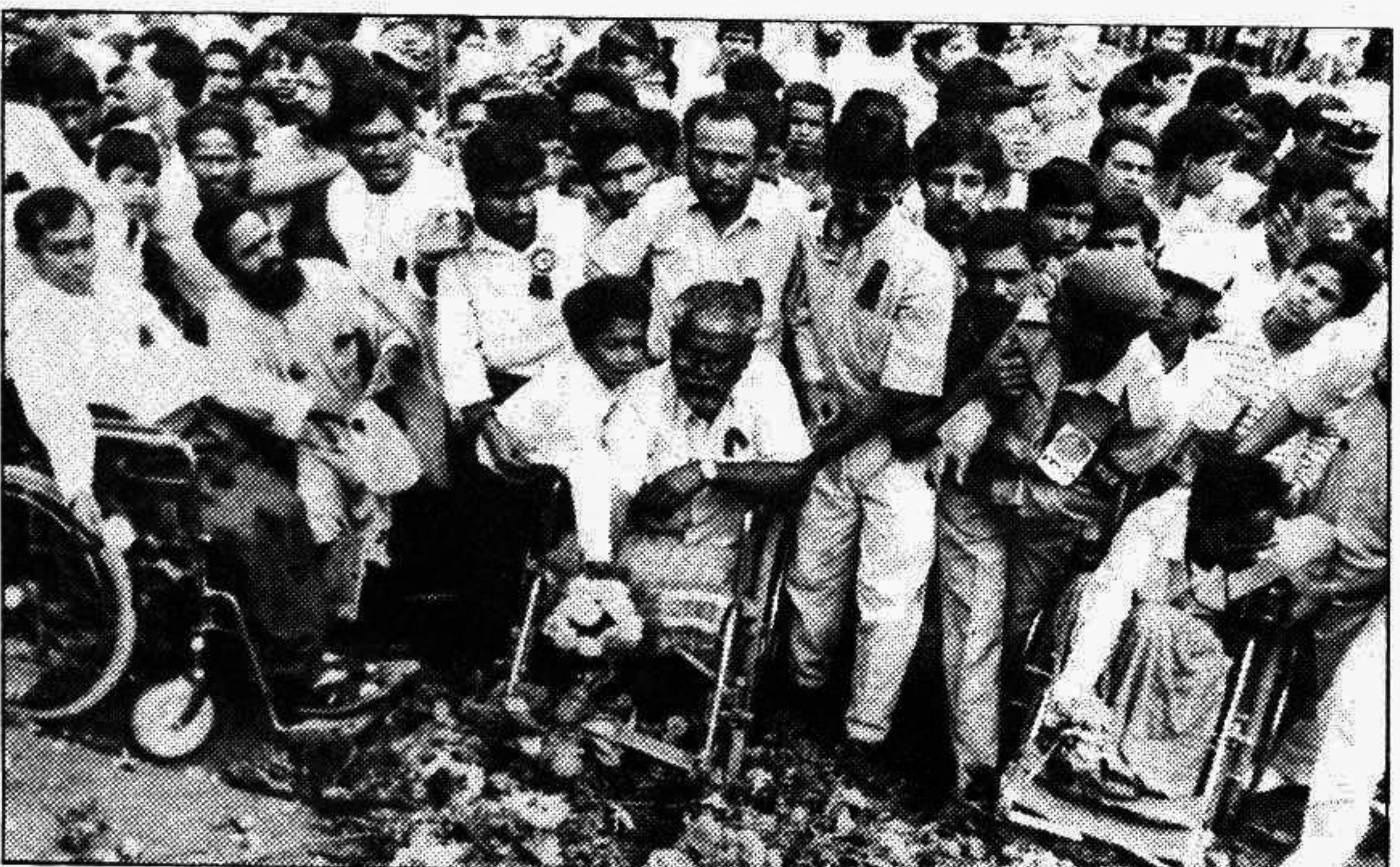
A big day

Ekushey to me is a big day because many died for our language. I feel bad because of the sacrifice the martyrs made for us and us not being able to value them, as they should be. We should celebrate this day by remembering them, praying for them, singing for them and wearing white sarees with red border and black badges.

Nadia Huq (16)
Mastermind School, Dhaka

Price for language

It's difficult to always keep in mind that what we now take for granted was earned at a very high price. Nowadays, the only time most people remember our country's struggle for freedom and for language, is on certain occasions, such as



Disabled freedom-fighters showing respect at the Minar

As We Would Like It to Be

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guage Movement" should be carried into the hearts of each and every Bangladeshis. We owe a lot to those who sacrificed their lives for the nation, and I think it's about time we lived up to their expectations and built a Bangladesh of which we truly can be proud of and say: "Yes, this is the country the martyrs sacrificed their lives for."

Saif Mohammad
"A" Levels
Maple Leaf International

No Alternative to Education

Ekushey February is a mourning day for us. We pay our homage to the martyrs of the Language Movement by placing flowers at the Shaheed Minar. Discussion programmes and seminars are held to mark the occasion. Special programmes are also aired on the television and the radio. That's practically all we do to observe the Amar Ekushey every year. And the spirit of the Ekushey is forgotten after the month of February.

I think we are not doing justice to cause for which Salam, Barkat and others gave their life. The martyrs must have fought for a exploitation-free democratic society. With remorse and shame I must admit that we failed in our task.

According to the official figures, the literacy rate is about 51 per cent, but frankly speaking only about a 15 per cent of our people can actually read a paragraph written in our language. We must ensure that by

providing more facilities to the education sector we'll be able to make the people to read and write.

On the Shaheed Day, the Shaheed Minar is usually overflowed with flowers, which perishes within a day or two costing a lot of money. I think offering flowers is a wonderful way of showing respect to the martyrs, yet there are other ways. We can form a fund and collect this money. This money can be used to impart education to the illiterate, and cultural programme on Ekushey can be arranged in the villages to raise awareness on education. We should also have more essay competitions on this issue all over the country so that our young generation is attracted to do some research work on the history of the Language Movement.

I think we can cancel the holiday on Ekushey February and work extra hours on that day for the prosperity and self-reliance of our nation. We can even donate the day's salary for educational purpose.

We also do not want the repetition of the shameful incident which took place at the Shaheed Minar last year. We condemn such act of barbarism.

The time has come to forget our petty differences: it's time to unite ourselves to realise the dreams of the martyrs. There is no other alternative but to educate our people and build a prosperous nation. Only then the souls of the martyrs will be able to rest in peace.

Reazur Rahman
A-Level student,
Dhanmondi Tutorial



Furnishing the Minar with delicate hands