

Bangla in all spheres – a long way to go

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"Use Bangla in all spheres of life" has been a popular slogan since independence, but no organisations monitor ongoing programmes on the mother language and their results.

"We use this slogan only in February to save ourselves. But nobody knows who is responsible for translating the slogan into reality," an education ministry official said.

"As an emotion-driven nation, we can shed blood for our alphabet but cannot work to make the language rich," another official said.

Although education, cultural affairs and social welfare ministries run projects on introducing the language, there seems no coordination between them. Contacted for more information about the issue, officials of the three ministries asked Star City to talk to other ministries, departments, institutions and organisations.

The Language Movement of 1952 was crucial to advancing the nation on a secular path and steering Bangladesh to independence in 1971.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) declared February 21 International Mother Language Day on November 17, 1999, now globally

observed.

Bangla has been honoured internationally but is neglected at home.

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority asked vehicles to write numberplates in Bangla and Bangladesh Bank ordered all banks to write their signboards in both Bangla and English -- the instructions largely ignored.

Former president HM Ershad in 1984 issued an official order to carry out all administrative work in Bangla and government meetings, decisions, files, comments and office communications have since been done in mother language.

The government began translating old laws and rules into Bangla only recently. "The situation is almost the same as before. There was no headway in the last 10 years," a government official told Star City, asking not to be named.

"We have done our file work in Bangla for the last two decades. A cell, Bangla Bhasha Bastobayan Kosh, was formed to translate old laws and rules," said an official at the secretariat.

Bangla is also neglected in banking and higher education.

A senior official of a nationalised bank said: "Many books were translated into Bangla. But they are now shelved."

Deputy Governor of Bangladesh Bank Allahmalik Kazimi

said there is no specific cell in the central bank to work on it, adding: "The work without relations with international banking is done in our language."

"If both Bangla and English are used, it will be a burden on the bank, as banking information system went online and it is difficult to work online in Bangla," he said.

A high official called for intervention in the education sector and said: "Curricula at primary and secondary levels are outdated. A massive reform is a must."

Aparesh Bandopadhyaya, an official in charge of textbooks of Bangla Academy, said the academy runs a department that publishes translated books on physical science, engineering, biological science, agriculture, medical science, arts and law for higher education.

"Many books on sciences published by the academy are now backdated. They have to go with the time," said a Bangladesh Unesco Commission official.

Experts say information and communication technology can be a great vehicle in introducing the mother language in all spheres. "We need tailor-made software in our language to work more quickly and catch up with the international community," one of them said.



Streetside signboards tell the tale of indifference to our mother tongue.

Curtain falls on Ekushey book fair today



On last days of the book fair.

This year's fair started a week late but saw around 12,00 new books. There were 457 stalls and 312 publishing houses. Publishers were demanding an extension to the February 29 closing deadline and they went on a signature campaign.

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Publishers have presented this year's Ekushey Book Fair with around 1,200 books according to the latest figures which is almost the same as last year.

Organisers of the traditional event Bangla Academy had hoped that the number of new titles would increase this time but publishers are claiming that the delay in starting the fair has prevented more books from being introduced. Publishers were demanding an extension to the February 29 closing deadline and they went on a signature campaign.

A source in the Publishers and Sellers Association said they were lobbying for extension of the fair's duration by at least one week and major publishers were in favour of that demand.

"This time the fair started seven days later because of the Eid-ul Azha holidays. So we have had less days than in previous years. Moreover, at the end of the month people generally do not have extra money to buy books. If we could add some more days publishers and readers both would have been benefited," said a publisher preferring anonymity.

Milon Nath of Anupom Prokashoni said that after 21st February, there has been a steady flow of real book lovers and the number of mere visitors decreased. That's why there was potential for more books to be sold if the deadline was extended.

However, poet and Member Secretary of the Book Fair Organising Committee of Bangla Academy Muhammad

Nurul Huda said that there was no chance of extension.

"The Ekushey fair is a programme for the month of February only and it should be over within the month of the Language Movement.

Otherwise the character of the book fair will be distorted," said Huda.

Some publishers like Ahmed Mahmudul Haque, owner of Mawla Brothers and Farid Ahmed of Shomoy Prokashoni echoed the same

sentiment.

The three-week book fair kicked off on February 7 at the Bangla Academy premises.

Visitors, writers and publishers have expressed mixed reaction about the fair's atmosphere. Most have complained that they have found it hard to walk around the stalls because of mismanagement and dust at the fair ground.

Nahar Begum, who came to the fair with her 12-year-old daughter, said it was hard for

the visitors to walk down the narrow passages in the evening amidst the huge crowd.

Moinul Ahsan Saber, a prominent writer said the fair got congested as many undesirable publishing houses somehow got space to set up stalls inside the Academy premises. A group of such stalls could be spotted near the main entrance. These were allegedly awarded to political activists of the ruling party and were hindering the beauty of

the fair.

A ban on smoking inside the fair was praised by the visitors. The authorities however got the flak for not leaving enough space for the writers where they could sit and interact themselves or with the readers. This year's fair had 457 stalls and 312 publishing houses appeared with books. In 2003 there were 403 stalls and 357 in 2002.

CHILDREN DRAW EKUSHEY

A children's art competition expressing importance and significance of Ekushey in their works was held at the Shilpakala Academy Friday. It was organised jointly by the Academy and Bangladesh National Commission for Unesco, marking the International Mother Language Day. Twenty-eight children won prizes. The selected works will be on display at the Academy till March 4.

