

Recalling the days of Language Movement

Chittagong, the scenic city, has a long history as a major contributor to so many fields, spanning from the anti-colonial revolution to politics, sports, culture, and democratic and progressive movements. Once known as the 'Porto Grande' of the country, Chittagong has also produced a number of noteworthy intellectuals, popular figures and widely respected personalities. And Chittagong was not far behind before and during 1952 when the Language Movement was shaping up to become a historic moment. The Daily Star tries to retrace the historical events that took place in this part of the country through interviews with two Language Movement veterans.

EZHARUL HOQUE: THE MOVEMENT ACTUALLY BEGAN IN 1948... SAIFUDDIN KHAN: MAHBUB'S POEM PLAYED A BIG ROLE...

SHAHIDUL ISLAM
He had little difficulty in picking up certain specific dates from the basket of history back in 1952, which give birth to one of the most precious and dear moments for each and every Bangalee.



Although now 74, Mohammad Ezaharul Hoque appears as emotion-charged as a sophomore when he was asked to reminisce about the historical events leading to the most successful Language Movement humankind has ever seen.

considered one of the architects of our language movement, and Solaiman Khan deliver inspirational speeches.

Ezaharul Hoque was general secretary of the Chittagong College Students Union when the language movements were shaping up and heading towards their desired destination.

"In 1950, I was then a 2nd year student, education minister Fazlur Rahman launched a propagation against Bangla and was trying to establish Urdu as the lone language of then Pakistan. A large section of people from the madrassas of East Pakistan also sent messages in favour of Urdu to Mohammad Ali Jinnah. We were astonished. One press owner (Alabia Press near the present General Post Office) had assisted the education minister in this evil conspiracy."

"The movements actually had their take-off from early 1948 and although there wasn't any organisational structure in Chittagong, the Tammuddin Majlis was on the forefront to lead and mobilise all the agitation here," he said during an interview at his Khulshi residence on Sunday night.

"We, the Tammuddin Majlis activists, took a stance against this plot and made public our attitude and emotion through the Weekly Sainik, which eventually added strength and gave us extra enthusiasm."

He cited the names of Mahbub-Ul Alam Chowdhury, Dr Mahfuzul Haque, Engineer Azizur Rahman, late Abdullah Al Mamun, late Jahur Ahmad Chowdhury, Solaiman Khan, advocate Khan Shahiful Mannan, Rafiqullah Chowdhury, Sadeque Nabi, Chowdhury Shahabuddin Khaled, Ahmad Farid, advocate Omar Hayat, Dr Maqsoodur Rahman, Dr Syedur Rahman, Dr Anwar Hossain, late Chowdhury Harunur Rashid, Amir Hossain Dobash, Mozaffar Ahmad, Habibullah, Mafizul Islam, S h a m s u d d i n A h m a d, Formanullah Khan and Kamal A Khan, among many others who played a tremendous role in gearing up the movements from 1948 up to 1952.

Ezaharul went on: "The entire East Pakistan and its people were stunned in 1951 when Governor Khwaja Nazimuddin at a Paltan rally in Dhaka arbitrarily declared that Urdu should be the only state language of Pakistan."

Ezaharul, now chairman of the CNC Group of Industries, recalled: "We used to sit in meetings on the front veranda of Kadam Mubarak Mosque in the city's Momin Road area, discussing our preparations for agitation or movement, and leaders like Professor Abul Kashem, who was

"We took the declaration as a matter of treachery from his part because when he was chief minister of East Pakistan he had agreed with the Rashtra Bhasha Sangram Parishad (RBSP) to recognise Bangla and Urdu as the state languages of Pakistan."

They started a vigorous campaign within no time," he said. He said, "We soon started mobilising people from our office at Anderkilla, where Chittagong south district Awami League is located now, and decided to enforce non-stop hartals, organise processions and rallies. We also called a rally at Laldighi Maidan on February 21. In the meantime, Mahbub-Ul Alam became ill and Azizur Rahman was given the charge of the RBSP convenor."

"The brutal incident instantly ignited the sentiment of the people and the movement like a volcanic eruption. People from all walks of life took to the streets in protest of the killing in Dhaka. And in an instant decision a protest rally was called at the Laldighi Maidan on February 23. "The brutal killing made Mahbub-Ul Alam so upset that he took no time to write down in a single sitting the historic poem, 'Kandte Asini, Fanshir Dabi Niye Esehchi.' I can't remember who actually recited the poem at Laldighi Maidan (probably it was Chowdhury Harun). Nevertheless, the poem left a terrific impact on the minds of people present there and the rest of the developments are now history."

poem is still so appealing to everybody. "On the other hand, the success of the language movement in fact gave us the stimulus and encouragement towards independence in 1971," he observed.

Ezahar has expressed his frustration over the present socio-political scenario in the country and the violent enmity between the two major parties.

Yet, he now derives inspiration and hope for better days from the book, 'The Singapore Story' written by former prime minister and the architect of modern Singapore Lee Kwan Yew.

"This man (Lee Kwan) alone has changed a 224-sq km land to present Singapore and I believe strongly that Bangladesh has all those potentials," Ezaharul told The Daily Star.

Shaifuddin Khan, central president member and Chittagong district president of Gonoantri Party, is a committed and respected politician. During his long 54-year political career he always engaged himself in all the democratic movements from 1952 to 1971. And even though he is now 75, he still has no problem responding spontaneously to similar causes.

Born in October 9, 1930 in Chittagong, Saifuddin Khan had closely observed many tumultuous periods of the subcontinent's history, both as a student and as a political activist. The events before and after the 21st February in 1952 still live fresh in his mind, and he speaks with extra enthusiasm about them.



ZOBAER HOSSAIN SIDDIK

"I was a Class X student at Patiya Rahat Ali High School in 1948 when the question of national language was widely discussed in both parts of Pakistan," he started the journey back to the history.

"I then moved to the Chittagong city the same year after appearing in the matriculation examination, and was later admitted to Government Commerce College. Soon I noticed that most of my college friends were involved with Tammuddin Majlis. I was then still away from political activities. But the question that struck me most is how an organisation like Tammuddin Majlis was able to give birth to a fruitful movement."

Saifuddin went on: "Language veteran Mahbub-Ul Alam Chowdhury had been publishing a monthly literary newspaper titled 'Seemanta'. Its office was an all-important place for us, where we gathered and met regularly. Personalities like Professor Mafizul Islam, Sucharit Chowdhury, Parthosh Bhattacharya, Binoy Das Gupta, Ruhul Amin Nizami, ATM Shamsuddin and some railway officials visited the office frequently to inspire us towards the language movement. Processions and rallies were the main programmes in support of our demand."

"Our movement gathered its momentum when Mohammad Ali Jinnah announced that 'Urdu shall be the only state language of Pakistan', and people from all strata in Chittagong joined us. Each day we came out on the streets and chanted slogans against the announcement. Processions and rallies were then a regular phenomenon. We had never considered the size of the procession. Most of the time at least 50 people took part and sometimes we bothered to bring out a small procession with 5 to

on the night of February 21. But the Dhaka killing could not confine him. He wrote the historic poem of Amar Ekushey, 'Kandte Asini, Fanshir Dabi Niye Esehchi'. Another veteran, Kamaluddin Ahmed Khan of Muslim League, made immediate arrangements to publish the poem. And few hundred copies of the poem were printed from Kohinur Electric Press in Anderkilla.

"At the same time, we constructed a Shaheed Minar at the present location on February 23 and also enforced a strike in Chittagong on February 24 as well as a rally at the historical Laldighi ground in the afternoon. Hundreds of people, including ANM Nurun Nabi, Binod Das Gupta, Chowdhury Harunur Rashid, Professor Mafizul Islam, ATM Shamsuddin, Abdul Wadud Khandakar, Abdul Moktader Chowdhury, Abdul Gafur, Mir Jalal Ahmed, Fazlullah Khan, Dr Kamal A Khan and Professor Kabir Chowdhury, gathered at the Laldighi ground," said Saifuddin.

He said, "Chowdhury Harun on behalf of poet Mahbub-Ul-Alam recited the historic poem for the first time in public. And the poem generated an immense encouragement among everyone who attended the rally. It also angered the Pakistani administration, prompting them to conduct an abrupt raid at the Kohinur Electric Press. They seized all copies of the poem and banned it."

"But the regime, despite all its ill-effects, had to give in finally, recognising Bangla as state language and thus we won the long battle to uphold the dignity of our mother tongue," Saifuddin concluded the journey.



10 people only."

An interesting thing was that the police never tried to refrain us from those activities. Some of them even supported our cause by saying, "It is also a heartfelt demand of ours, so carry on but please don't break the discipline." This also gave us tremendous inspiration at the time, said Saifuddin, who was then an activist of the underground Communist Party.

"In the first week of February 1952, the Rashtra Bhasha Sangram Parishad (RBSP) was formed with Mahbub-Ul Alam as its convenor. Activities of the Parishad were conducted from the Awami League office in the city's Anderkilla area. Another professional body led by Kalim Sharafi was also active."

◀ Shaheed Minar left uncared for: Shaheed Minars were built as a tribute to those valiant sons who sacrificed their lives for the mother language in 1952. People from all strata pay homage to Salam, Rafique, Barkat, Jabbar and many other heroes on February 21. But the thing that hurts common people the most is that most memorials are left uncared for throughout the year. Although the Shaheed Minars receive a routine polishing on the eve of Ekushey February, neither the cultural activists and political parties nor the administration take proper care of them otherwise. This picture, taken from the city's Batali Road area, is a testimony to the reckless indifference.

Disorganised book fairs fail to draw crowds

ABDULLAH AL MAHMUD
Disorganised book fairs in Chittagong fail to attract book lovers in huge numbers.

Two main book fairs take place at Laldighi Maidan and DC Hill Park in February. A 10-day book fair, organised by Chittagong City Corporation (CCC), at Laldighi Moidan began on February 13. But like other occasions, the fair has so far failed to generate enthusiasm among the book connoisseurs.

The organisers of other main book fair at DC Hill Park are yet to announce their programme. This fair is generally held immediately after the International Mother Language Day on February 21. Despite having a literary group as its organisers, the book fair at DC Hill Park cannot achieve much success due to lack of logistic

support and patronisation by the administration concerned. The other two book fairs titled 'Swadhinat Boi Mela' and 'Shishu Boi Mela' are held at Chittagong Press Club. A group of young litterateurs of Chittagong Academy have been organising the six-day Swadhinat Boi Mela since 2003. It is held from March 21 to 26. The academy also started organising a two-day Shishu Boi Mela last year. It is held in October.

Institute premises in 1993. Some renowned literary personalities like Dr Anupam Sen, Auran Chandra Banik and Nasir Uddin Chowdhury were in the helm of the organisers. The book fair in the vicinity of Ekush Mela was held regularly until it faced a setback when Chittagong City Corporation took up the responsibility of holding it at Laldighi Moidan in 1999, concerned circles said.



Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury presents some books to Dr Anupam Sen, a noted academic and social scientist, at a stall at the Ekushey Book Fair at Laldighi Maidan after inaugurating the fair on February 13. The Chittagong City Corporation organised the fair on the occasion of Amar Ekushey.

Book fairs are being held in Chittagong in some disorganised and detached manner since independence. Much to the disappointment of the local people, none of them emerged as a successful book fair which could be a meeting place for litterateurs, book lovers and cultural personalities.

Chittagong people still get nostalgic about a book fair held here in 1987. The fair was organised by Chittagong Divisional Public Library under the patronisation of the district administration.

"That was a book fair in true sense where stalls spreading over all the three floors of divisional public library building were arrayed with books of famous writers and publishers," said Rashed Rauf proprietor of Shaily Prakashani (publications). After an interval of five years, Chittagong Youth Coir, organised an 'Ekush Mela' keeping a portion of the fair venue reserved for a few bookstalls on the Muslim Hall

Later, a group of literary personalities under the banner of 'Ekush Mela Parishad' started organising the 'Ekush Mela' at a shifted venue of DC Hill Park in 2003. Emerged in a new appearance this fair is now well-known as 'Book Fair at DC Hill Park'.

However, the book fairs here are yet to inspire the writers and publishers. At present only two publications, Shaily Prakashani and Balaka, are publishing some books while the renowned publishers like Boighar and Dolan are not much active in this regard.

the week that was

The winners of Unilever Close-Up photo contest pose with the guests at the prize giving ceremony at Chittagong Theatre Institute on February 13 (left). Visitors at the exhibition of photographs (right).

Annual sports of Scholastica

The annual sports and prize giving ceremony of Saint Scholastica Girls' High School was held at the school compound in the city on Tuesday.

HR Council executives

A 15-member executive committee of the Human Rights Council, Chittagong unit, was formed at a simple ceremony on Wednesday.

Gold smuggler jailed for 10 yr

A Chittagong court sentenced one person to 10 years' rigorous imprisonment and fined him Tk 10,000 for smuggling gold.

Protest against ban on Jatra

Members of the civil society formed a human chain in front of the Chittagong Press Club on Friday in protest against the ban on Jatra (indigenous theatre) and the attacks on journalists, intellectuals, litterateurs and politicians.

Annual sports of Scholastica

According to the prosecution, customs official detained Nurul Absar, an expatriate, at the Chittagong International Airport on August 10 in 1999 for carrying illegal gold. They found huge quantity of gold weighing over three kg during the scanning of his luggage.

HR Council executives

Salim Ullah and Chairman of the school governing committee Phillip De Rozario attended the programme as chief guest and special guest.

Gold smuggler jailed for 10 yr

The chief guest gave away prizes among the winners of different events of the competition.

Protest against ban on Jatra

Avant Garde, a drama and cultural organisation, organised the human chain.