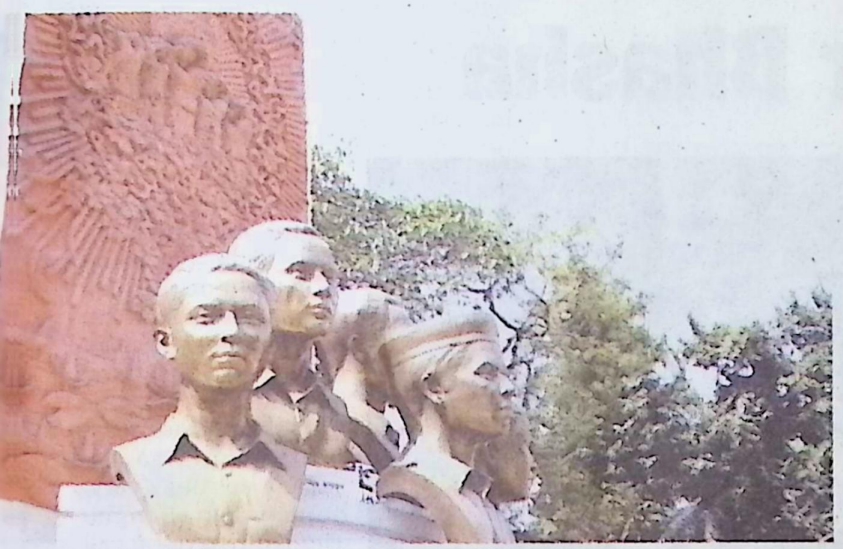
cultural functions organised for Victory Day, Independence Day or Ekushey February. Daily lesson plans treat the language like any other subject, if not with even less emphasis on in-depth learning. Libraries lack resources, with little to encourage students to read Bangla books beyond class texts. In some schools, students are not even allowed to speak in Bangla, while some were even known to have fined pupils for doing so.

In the race to get top grades in board examinations in mathematics, science and commerce subjects, learning languages is not a priority for most students. The curriculum itself is designed by foreign boards which does not emphasise on languages as the mother tongue but as any other foreign language course for students. Thus, in most English-medium schools, Bangla is simply a language course they need to pass with minimum marks.



A tribute to the martyrs of the Language Movement.



Reading is important for the intellectual and creative growth of children.

"You cannot do this with the mother tongue," says Professor Sayeed. "It is the language in which a person thinks, in which their creativity develops. If a person does not know their own language properly, no matter how talented they are, they will not be able to get very far in life. They will not be good writers or politicians or entertainers or anything else. The creativity of a whole nation will be ruined if emphasis is not placed on their learning their mother tongue properly."

English medium schools can make the Bangla course worth 200 marks instead of the usual 100, suggests the professor. Most importantly, children must be encouraged to read, by which they will become enlightened and hopefully a snowball effect will occur in which they will enlighten those around them, he says. Biswa Sahitya Kendra plans to introduce a Bangla book-reading programme in English-medium schools.

People, especially children, need to be taught to appreciate their language and culture. In schools, special emphasis should be placed on Bangla language courses as the mother tongue and not just a course that needs to be gotten over with. Educational programmes in the media such as television show "Sisimpur" can teach children the basics about language -- the alphabets, names of fruits, animals, and a host of other things, in a way that makes learning fun. Children should also be encouraged, even given incentives, to read good books outside of the school syllabus, as this is important for their intellectual and creative growth. A love of language and culture and a thirst for knowledge should be instilled in them at a young and impressionable age, before they are exposed to the commercial values of the society.

The struggle for the preservation of language must be carried out on many fronts. While the media play a considerable role in setting standards and trends, the family and the education system still function as the first and most basic sources of learning. Speaking or studying in English or any other language is not a problem, but the lack of grounding in one's own language is, and this limitation affects people throughout their lives. Language will change and grow, new words acceptable to the majority will be added to it, but this is a natural process and cannot be forced or hurried or based on an artificial culture. A conscious effort must be made to respect and learn the standard language and enrich one's knowledge of it, for language is the most important tool of communication and means of creative expression. ■