

## The spirit of Ekushey

*Let it be a constant part of our collective psyche*

TODAY is a day of renewed pledges, and as millions of Bangalees trek barefoot to the Central Shaheed Minar, the place hallowed by the blood of the martyrs of the Language Movement, to pay homage to them and renew their pledge, it would be well to be conscious of the very important fact that we are the only nation that shed blood for our mother tongue.

*Ekushey* was in many ways the rebirth not only of a distinct nationalism but also the beginning of the assertion of our nationhood, the precursor to the struggle for and achievement of a separate state. It must give us all a sense of contentment that the spirit of *Ekushey* has transcended our border, having been given international recognition with the UN declaring February 21 as International Mother Language Day.

This year's *Ekushey* is being celebrated under a democratic order and thus there are great expectations of the people from this government, expectation of a vigorous effort for the realisation of the dreams of the martyrs and all those that struggled to give Bangla its deserved standing in the comity of nations.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to the young men, some known but many unknown, whose lives were cut short at their prime in 1952 in defence of our culture, so that we would be able to laugh and cry and share our joys and sorrows in the very language that our mothers used to sing to us lullabies when we were children as did their mothers to them.

Every year this day brings us mixed feelings, a sense of achievement but not quite of fulfilment. And that is what demands deep introspection on our part so that we may evaluate objectively all that we should have, but not been able to achieve.

It is a time also for us as a nation to renew our pledge collectively towards building a prosperous nation. And a prosperous nation cannot be possible without the light of education touching the hearts of each and every citizen. Our special *Ekushey* supplement touches upon the need for the rejuvenation of Bangla and its application in all spheres of our life and through it making the country not only more educated but also bringing more and more people under the pale of education.

It is our hope that the spirit of the day will be a constant part of our collective psyche and not something which will be restricted to remembrances and lectures and sermons in a yearly ritual.

It is our hope too that just as much as we honour Bangla, and no sacrifice would be too great for us to defend its glory, let us also accord due importance and support to the use and development of the language of the many indigenous groups in Bangladesh, for their fulfilment, in equal measure.

## High incidence of small arms smuggling

*Border security forces on both sides need to mount vigil*

AN investigative report in this paper on Thursday brought to light a rising trend in smuggling of firearms of variegated types in the country's southwestern region. The extent to which the clandestine activities are taking place is quite worrying. Arms traffickers are said to be active in at least 29 points in six border districts such as Kushtia, Meherpur, Chuadanga, Jhenidah, Jessore and Sathkhira.

There is no gainsaying that the points through which the arms infiltrate are known and so are the operators. The law enforcement personnel on both sides are supposed to remain aware of the clandestine activities. So, their determined efforts to combat trafficking through effective vigil and action are the first prerequisite to containing the menace that has security implications, particularly for the country at the receiving end.

Serious watchers of the scenario point out that in order to escape detection, the smugglers avoid trafficking in bulk; usually this is done in piecemeal. Some of the arms perhaps infiltrate in knocked down conditions. These are put together in the interior before being dispatched to sale points. So, there are quite a few stages involved in the exercise including the arms or ammunition changing hands allowing for effective vigilance and eventual detection of the acts of crimes.

Ammunition is something that cannot be manufactured through any improvisation; this has to originate from standard manufacturers bearing distinct labels. A great deal of sophistication is required in their manufacture. If, therefore, smuggling of ammunition can be stopped, the small arms themselves will be of no use. We have to be keenly watchful of any intrusion of bomb making material or explosive accessories because these can endanger internal security a great deal.

It is obvious that the situation calls for more than routine border surveillance by the BDR and the BSE. On the specific issue of containing small arms smuggling, there should be intelligence sharing and cooperation between both sides, especially along the border districts. Arms infiltration can be effectively dealt with if it is addressed as cross-border crime.

## Savouring our Bangalee ethos

Some non-resident Bangladeshis, especially those, resident in Europe, Canada and USA or in Malaysia or Japan, felt that the availability of translated works could have enabled them to take some publications back home as presents for their foreign friends. Bangla Academy could possibly constitute a special board to examine this. They could also seek the support of banks and other corporate institutions for this purpose, as part of their corporate social responsibility.

MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

FOR any Bangalee, the months of February and March are sources of joy and inspiration. February initiates spring and also symbolizes the re-affirmation of our rich cultural tapestry associated with our mother tongue. March on the other hand, stands not only as an emblem of the great sacrifices made by the people, but also as the validation of our emergence as an independent nation.

February 21 has particularly gained international cognizance and has been accorded the status of Mother Language Day for the whole world. This universal agreement was a step in the right direction.

This relationship with the rest of the world has, however, resulted in certain responsibilities. Most intellectuals believe that this has made it that much more incumbent on us to propagate the beauty of Bangla within our country and also abroad. It is probably this consciousness that has encouraged us towards the holding of the annual 'Boi-mela' (book fair) within the precincts of our Bangla Academy in Dhaka. Publishers as well as readers wait for this annual event and the literary end-products that reaffirm and celebrate the vibrancy of our legacy.

Like most, I also acknowledge the importance of this process. It is like touching base with our inner selves before venturing out again for the rest of the year. In a manner of speaking, it is like undertaking a pilgrimage into our soul and re-discovering ourselves.

Like every year, this year's observance of *Ekushey* has also been filled with poignance. There has been, as usual, the publication of thousands of new books and the emergence of new authors, especially poets. It ranged from juvenile literature to examples of drama and fiction. There have also biographies, novels, collection of essays and

research papers. It has been an interesting mix where established authors have shared the stage with first timers. This year, in particular, saw many lady authors. There were also publications that were poor in quality and smacked of commercialism. Some newspapers also reported the presence of several pirated editions (that raised serious questions about ethics and effective monitoring by the relevant authorities of the Bangla Academy).

I must admit that I was encouraged by the number of books aimed at the juvenile audience. It was good to see young students walking around stalls, leafing through publications that had captured their fancy and purchasing a few. This was hope at work.

Another important aspect caught my attention. It appears that this year there were more translations in Bangla of foreign authors. In the long term such exposure to foreign literature will create its own impact on our domestic audience. It will widen our sensitivities and expand our intellectual horizon.

The Boi-mela and the diverse cultural events (in the fields of literature, photography, painting and drama), as in the past, added 'joie de vivre' to the otherwise dull lives of our city dwellers. It provided an opportunity for families to share quality time and savour events together.

Nevertheless, I take this opportunity to highlight some aspects that need to be given attention by the requisite authorities.

The foremost is the need to recognize that the Boi-mela is no longer a small event that attracts just a few hundred visitors during its tenure. It attracts that many every day. It has grown -- and immensely. It is this and the insufficient availability of space that was most noteworthy this year. It transformed the book fair area into one of congestion, dust and frustration (for many with young children) and also affected considerations of

safety and security. The grounds of the Bangla Academy and its immediate surroundings no longer have the required space for such an event. Consequently, it might be advisable to hold this book fair in the more spacious Dhaka University playground, located very near the Academy. The cultural events could however continue in the grounds of the Academy. That would definitely make the Boi-mela more functional and enhance enjoyment potential.

The next point relates to making the Boi-mela more expatriate friendly, both for the resident diplomatic and foreign communities in Bangladesh and also for the non-resident Bangladeshis visiting Bangladesh at this time of the year on their holidays. Many of them visit the Boi-mela not only to savour the atmosphere but also look around for the possibility of purchasing books to add to their already existing collection. I have talked with some of them. There was one common complaint -- the absence of translated works in English or in any other foreign language -- of important Bangladeshi authors. They felt that this deficiency needed to be corrected given the fact that 21 February has now been accorded the status of International Mother Language Day.

Some non-resident Bangladeshis, especially those, resident in Europe, Canada and USA or in Malaysia or Japan, felt that the availability of such translated works could have enabled them to take some publications back home as presents for their foreign friends. I must admit that there is a lot of logic in their comment. Bangla Academy could possibly constitute a special board to

examine this. They could also seek the support of banks and other corporate institutions for this purpose, as part of their corporate social responsibility. Any support received in this regard could also be formally acknowledged within the book or on the rear book flap.

The third suggestion refers to the possibility of asking publishers to also have the text of new publications available on the CD format as is done in the western countries. Encryption of a special code could be used by the publisher to protect their intellectual property right. The availability in such a format, of a particular work, would then reduce space and weight, both important constraints, in today's air travel as well as in storage capacity, within apartments abroad. Such a possibility will also facilitate the spread of our literature to public libraries and foreign educational institutions. The Bangla Academy should be pro-active in this regard. I am sure that multilateral institutions would be happy to cooperate in such a venture as an example of soft power.

We have to remember that Bangladesh has a branding problem. I am confident that we can re-invent ourselves in the global network if we are able to use our options (arising out of the opportunities created by the months of February and March) carefully and wisely. We have a rich cultural heritage, woven with the strands of music, folk and modern art, drama and poetry. This embroidered quilt needs to be nurtured and used to our best advantage.

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## Ekushey: Imbibing spirit of just cause

KAZI LIAKAT HOSSAIN

ON February 21, 1952 the valiant soldiers of the language movement shed their blood for the recognition of our mother tongue Bangla. Prior to that, in 1948 Nayeemuddin protested against the utterance of MA Jinnah who said in a meeting at Curzon Hall "Urdu, only Urdu shall be the state language of Pakistan". Nayeemuddin was not a leader or worker of any party, he protested on behalf of general mass and general students.

Language movement virtually started on 11 March, 1949. Congress leader Shaheed Dharendra Nath Datta (killed during the liberation war) placed the demand before the parliament. It was the first demand for Bengali to be the state language. Principal Abul Quasem and his organization "Tamaaddun Majlish" also played a vital role in initiation of the movement. On February 21, in 1952 rule 144 was promulgated. The

then General Secretary of Awami League Shamsul Huq showed some logical arguments not to break 144 at Amtala of DU. Yet events took their turn.

Now, it seems the language movement was a prelude to our struggle for sovereign and independent existence. The blood of martyrs of the language movement did not go in vain. *Ekushey* February always instills in us the determination to fight for the right cause.

The sublime sacrifices of those who laid down their lives for the cause of the mother tongue shall remain ever green in the hearts of the people. *Ekushey* February should not be observed only as a yearly ritual as we continue to do.

Why book fair on this Day only? Why seminars and meetings only in observance of the Day? Why not act for Bangla round the year? Why we can't start Bangla in the highest court of the country? To serve the cause of mother tongue we have to be above rituals. Those language martyrs

proved beyond doubt that only through sacrifice and dedication any goal can be attained.

The UNESCO has proclaimed February 21 as the International Mother Language Day in recognition of the sacrifices of our martyrs for establishing the rightful place of their mother tongue. The proclamation came in the form of a resolution unanimously adopted at the plenary of the UNESCO at its headquarters in Paris on November 17, 1999. It is a great tribute and glowing homage paid by the international community to the language martyrs of Bangladesh.

On this memorable day we must ask ourselves to what extent have we, come up to the expectations of the language martyrs?

*Ekushey* tells us to shun differences, give up partisan politics and unite for the just cause. On this day we can not ask our leaders, whether they are following the path shown by our language martyrs? Those

indefatigable martyrs did not hesitate the least in sacrificing their precious lives for the cause of Bangla language. Certainly we have drifted away from the path shown by them. Their memory should inspire us to serve the nation in an outright patriotic manner.

The martyrs of language movement were ruthlessly suppressed by the forces of oppression, but they remained steadfast to the cause. This is how selfless spirit yielded fruitful result.

Hence on this auspicious day, we must pledge to safeguard our hard-earned democracy, freedom, and sovereignty at all costs and help create an environment conducive to the flourishing of our mother tongue in all respects. Only then our tribute to valiant martyrs of the language movement will be meaningful.

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## Police obey political masters, not law

The BJP has come to believe that the Hindutva has begun to sell after the terrorist attack on Mumbai. The RSS and its parivar are said to have assessed public opinion and concluded that the Mumbai carnage and "Pakistan's attitude" have set into motion an anti-Muslim feeling which can be harnessed. The party's reaction to Islamabad's positive response has been that it is 'too little and too late'. It wants to keep the cauldron of antagonism boiling for its own purpose.

KULDIP NAYAR

A 15-YEAR-OLD girl committed suicide in Karnataka after being humiliated by the Bajrang Dal, the tirshul side of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), for having talked to a Muslim boy, riding with her in the same bus. The police refused to register a case against the Bajrang Dal men on the ground that if it were to do so, there would be communal riots.

This only shows how the police have come to be politicized in the state within a span of few months of the BJP rule. Some say that the state is rapidly becoming another Gujarat and Karnataka Chief Minister Yediyurappa is following the footsteps of Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi. The allegation has a ring of truth because before the advent of the BJP government, the different communities in Karnataka were living peacefully, without the communal elements polluting the atmosphere.

Parochialism has become an order which the BJP ruled states are following with a vengeance. The party has the belief that it can get a majority in the coming parliamentary election by dividing the society on the basis of religion. The BJP is convinced that it will not get the vote of Muslims who constitute 12 to 15 per cent of the electorate. The party wants to wean

away the Hindu voters in the name of Hindutva.

However, the Karnataka police attitude indicates something more heinous. It is a reflection of what the force has reduced itself to: acting in the manner the ruling party expects it to do. The police job is to maintain law and order. It should register a case against the culprit without making distinction on the basis of religion, caste or gender. But the Karnataka incident has brought before the public a new face of police -- a force which keeps the "interest" or "philosophy" of its political bosses in mind before fulfilling the demands of law and order.

Over the years, such people have reached points of authority not because of merit but because of their proximity to political masters. This is not confined to Karnataka but has spread throughout India. The police make little effort to protect the rule of law. But there is an extra effort to ensure that the roughnecks in the ruling party are not touched, much less annoyed.

Things began slipping when Sardar Patel was the Home Minister. Ravages of partition contaminated the police. Still at that time a thana worked independently and there were no instances of interference from above to regulate it. The watershed was, however, the emergency (1975-77) when even blank warrants of arrest were

issued for the police to take action. The force became a willing tool for tyranny. There was hardly an officer who registered opposition to the rule sans law.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and her son, Sanjay Gandhi, flouted all norms and suspended even the fundamental rights. She converted police into a brute force to detain people without trial, to raid houses of critics or to demolish colonies which were considered hostile. The Shah Commission which went into the excesses during emergency named some officers. None was punished because Mrs Gandhi returned to power before any action could be taken. Election Commissioner Navin Chawla is one of them.

Unfortunately, the National Police Commission, appointed when Indira Gandhi was in the wilderness, gave its recommendation on how to make the force autonomous. She did not even look at the report. She rewarded the officers who had obeyed her wrong orders. The successive governments have done little to implement the Police Commission's recommendations. Even the Supreme Court's directive to that effect has not been carried out. It is a pity that the states would rather have their own rule than law and order.

The 15-year-old girl who was harassed is not an isolated incident. What poses danger to the country is that the RSS-blessed organizations like Ram Sene and Bajrang Dal and the Shiv Sena are trying to ape the Taliban. They have intimidated girls at Pune, Kanpur and Mangalore for wearing jeans or frequenting restaurants with boys. It is time that India wakes up and takes note of what has happened in Pakistan.

President Asif Ali Zardari has admitted that the governments in Pakistan failed to take action against the Taliban in time. The result was that they were trying to take over Pakistan. New Delhi should directly intervene if a state, in charge of law and order, did not take action against those who were trying to hijack an open, democratic society.

Meanwhile, the BJP has retrieved the

Ram temple from the debris of the demolished Babri masjid. The party did not touch the issue in the last 10 years because it found no response to the few attempts it made to stir up the temple controversy. All of a sudden, the party's National Executive meeting early this month at Nagpur, the headquarters of the RSS, brought to the fore not only the building of Ram temple on the site of demolished Babri Masjid but also revived the battle cry of Hindutva.

Why has the BJP done so only two months before the Parliamentary elections is not difficult to guess? The party has come to believe that the Hindutva has begun to sell after the terrorist attack on Mumbai. The RSS and its parivar are said to have assessed public opinion and concluded that the Mumbai carnage and "Pakistan's attitude" have set into motion an anti-Muslim feeling which can be harnessed. The party's reaction to Islamabad's positive response has been that it is 'too little and too late'. It wants to keep the cauldron of antagonism boiling for its own purpose.

But this has not been to the liking of the BJP's allies. The Janata Dal (United), one of the allies, has distanced itself from the BJP. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has said that he was opposed to the building of Ram temple. The Akalis have said many a time that they do not accept the Hindutva thesis. The ruling Biju Janata Dal in Orissa too has regretted the revival of temple-masjid controversy.

The BJP is the Hindus' Jammāt-e-Islami which wears religion on its sleeve. While the Jammāt has never done well in Pakistan and has been routed in Bangladesh in recent elections, the BJP has been gaining ground since the emergency. At that time, it got credibility because it offered the maximum number of arrests. No doubt, it is said that it is not the BJP which wins at polls, but it is the Congress that loses. Yet the fact remains that the BJP is in power in six states and it shares governments in three more states.

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