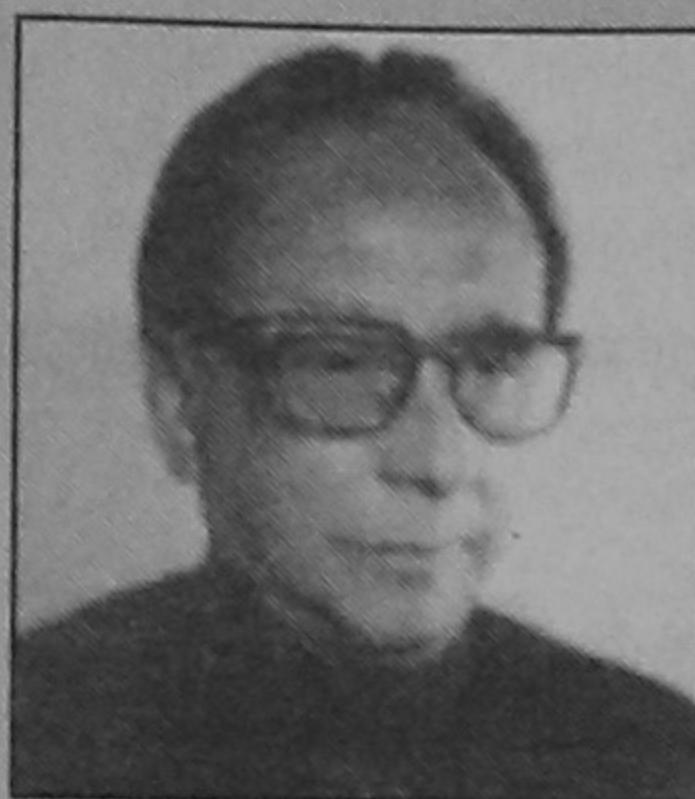


IMMORTAL EKUSHEY

GLORIOUS MARTYRS' DAY &
INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY 2009

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پیغمبر الحجۃ الرحمۃ

PRESIDENT
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF
BANGLADESH

Message

On the occasion of the great 'Shaheed Day' (Language Martyrs' Day), the 'International Mother Language Day' I pay my deep homage to the memory of the valiant sons of the soil who made supreme sacrifices on 21 February in 1952 to establish the right of Mother Tongue. I pray for the salvation of those departed souls.

The great Language Movement (Ekushey) is a significant day in the history of Bengalee nation and also a prime source of our aspiration. The spirit of nationalism that emanated from the historical Language Movement inspired the nation towards attaining self-sovereignty and thus we achieved our long-cherished Independence in 1971. The glaring spirit of the Language Movement arouses us to stand against all injustice and unfairness and helps to attain overall progress of the country.

The fortitude of Language Movement is now inspiring not only the advancement of our language, literature, culture and heritage but also the preservation and promotion of languages and cultures of other nations around the world. Therefore, the '21st February' is being observed as the 'International Mother Language Day' across the globe resounded with the spirit of upholding mother tongue of diverse nations. I hope the observance of the 'International Mother Language Day' would strengthen the bonds of unity and amity along with protecting the intrinsic value of different languages among the people of the world.

Sheikh Hasina, the Prime Minister and the daughter of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, has announced the 'Charter for Change' for beaming at the common mass. I hope, imbued with the spirit of 'Shaheed Day', every citizen of our country would be committed to build up a happy and prosperous Bangladesh and would contribute towards nation building process from their respective fields. I wish the great 'Ekushey' would consolidate our democratic advancement along with attaining desired development at all levels of our national life.

Khoda Hafez, May Bangladesh Live Forever.

Md. Zillur Rahman

21st February

International Mother Language Day

Rafiqul Islam

Bengalies spilled their blood on February 21, 1952 for recognition of Bangla as the state language, but they had to wait till the liberation of Bangladesh. Bangabandhu made the historic declaration while inaugurating the eternal Ekushey programme on February 15, 1971 at the Bangla Academy:

"I declare that Bangla shall be introduced at all levels from day one when we assume power. It cannot be that Bangla shall be introduced only after the language pundits have completed inventing Bangla synonyms for English words. The language pundits may continue their research, but we shall introduce Bangla as soon as we take power, even if the Bangla words coined till then were not entirely correct, for those would be corrected later."

Bangabandhu kept his word. The relevant provision of the constitution of Bangladesh incorporates 'Bangla is the state language of the Republic'. Furthermore, Bangabandhu raised Bangla to international level when he delivered the first-ever speech in Bangla at the General Assembly of the UN in 1974.

Following UNESCO's declaration of 21st February as the International Mother Language Day on November 17, 1999, 21st February is being observed as Mother Language Day in different countries each year.

It was after forty seven years since the Bengalies shed their blood on February 21, 1952 to protect the dignity of their mother-tongue Bangla that the UNESCO had declared that historic day as International Mother-Language Day. We feel greatly honoured that our cherished mother-language day 21st February that remained ignored since long is now recognized as International Mother-Language Day.

It is true that the Bengalies of Bangladesh shed their blood first on the streets of Dhaka to uphold the cause of their mother-tongue, Bangla, but Bengalies of Silchar and Karimganj of Assam in India also gave their blood for Bangla.

During the year of Rabindra Nath's hundredth birth anniversary in 1961, eleven Bengalies youths embraced martyrdom to protect the honour of Bangla on 19 May and beyond extending for ten days from 25th Boishakh at Silchar, in Kachchar, of the Barak valley among whom was the first Bangali woman in world history to sacrifice life for Bangla language. It does not end here. Again at Karimganj in Assam (India), one life on August 16, 1972 and two lives on July 21, 1986 were sacrificed to protect the cause of Bangla. No parallel example exists in world history in which lives were sacrificed to protect the honour of the same mother-tongue in more than one countries. Although Bangla was recognized in Barak valley in Assam at so much cost of bloods, it went ignored in Brahmaputra valley. In Bihar (India), it had been possible to maintain Bangla, but it was not so in Jharkhand even though Bengalies constituted forty seven percent of the total population. In Andaman islands the majority people are Bengalies yet Bangla is not officially recognized. In Dhaka, Bangladesh at least eight lives on February 21 and 22 in 1952, eleven lives at Silchar in eastern Indian state, Assam on May 19, 1961 and one life on August 16, 1972 and two lives at Karimganj (Assam) were lost on July 21, 1986. At least 22 lives were sacrificed for Bangla in the eastern region of South Asia during 1952 to 1986. In the twenty-first century of the new millennium, Bangla is faced with a tough competition posed by both English and Hindi languages in electronic media.

In such a context, the recognition of February 21 as International Mother-Language Day is quite significant. But as proverb goes, enemy within one's own home is dangerous. The Bengalies have to confront the enemies of Bangla in their own countries first. Unless we can defeat the Bengali Mirzafars who betray their own mother-tongue, Bangla, the future of Bangla in the new century and the millennium is bleak. We, however, are hopeful that the Bengalies emboldened by the spirit of the Ekushey, we shall be able to overcome all adversities and defeat the enemies of Bangla, both at home and outside and fly their victory flag gloriously in world arena. The international recognition of 21st February is indicative of that. The background of how Ekushey could get the recognition as International Mother-Language Day is no less thrilling. The multi-national non-government organization, Mother-Language Lovers of The World, headed by a Bangladeshi Canadian, Rafiqul Islam made a request to Kofi Anan, Secretary General of the UN to declare a day by the UN as the International Mother-language Day.

Kofi Anan advised him that such request has to be made

Mother-language is closely linked with the existence of a particular people. They face cultural and political death when their language ceases to exist, even if they exist in numbers. In fact, mother-tongue is the indicator of self-identity. If a nation's mother-tongue is recognised, its identity is also established. A comment on South Asia is quite relevant here. Morris Jones, a British Professor of English who is an expert on South-Asia said: 'Languages is perhaps the important mark of group identification and a delineator of group boundaries.'

But language has its own socio-cultural contexts too. The French social scientist, Gustave Le Bon says: What could be more complicated, more logical, more marvelous than a language? The most grammarian can do no more than note down the laws that govern languages; they would be rottenly incapable of creating them.' Such a remark indicates a separate and powerful process in the development of a language which cannot be influenced even by experts.

Obviously, language is not merely a vehicle to express human minds, it has a different dimension and role. But these find expression when language is politicised or politics is driven seriously by language issue and administration follows certain sudden and surprising guide-lines or adopts administrative steps. In South-Asian countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka, there are such instances. Pointedly, all these had happened in this region both during and after the colonial rule.

The politics of language influenced the political events, administration and constitution in all the four countries. In that angle, South Asia could be marked as a special region. As the direct outcome of language-based politics, language-based nationalism has emerged in South-Asia and Bangladesh's emergence as a nation-state is an eloquent testimony to that. Obviously, events linked with politics have changed the political map of the world along with the South-Asian countries. In independent India, administrative boundaries of many states had to be changed on ground of language. Further, the language-based politics has since long been the cause of the continuing racial enmity in Sri Lanka which, however, is now nearing its end, as is

21st February In Context of Language-based
Politics In South Asia
Dr. Syed Anwar Hussain

heard. Language-based politics has been playing a determining role in shaping events and organisations in South Asia. It is obvious that language issue is quite

important in the context of South-Asia. It however has to be remembered that in the context of Pakistan-Bangladesh, language movement had been the most crucial example in the realm of language-based politics. Its historical background is much deeper and long. Along with it, are the conflicting political events emanating from communal feelings of Hindu and Muslim communities of India of colonial era.

Generally, it is said that the history of the language movement of the Bengalees began from 1947-48. But this history has its root much deeper. As one explores the context of one related question, it then becomes so obvious. In July, 1947 Dr. Ziauddin, the then Vice-chancellor of Aligarh University, agreeing to the prevalent idea proposed Urdu as the state language of Pakistan and that triggered the politics of language in Pakistan. More to it, the movement to incorporate Bangla, the language of the majority people of Pakistan, in the constitution too became



inevitable. The question arises why Dr. Ziauddin had proposed Urdu as state language. It was surely in his knowledge that only two percent of Pakistani citizens spoke Urdu. Moreover, was he not aware that Bangla-speaking citizens would be in majority in Pakistan? Vice-chancellor Dr. Ziauddin was a scholar of great repute.

One may, therefore, logically infer that he was duly aware of these facts. Again, he, being not a politician, would not indulge in light rhetoric being swayed by emotion. Although not a politician Dr. Ziauddin was a politically conscious Muslim. But how could he remain aloof in his own world far removed from the political environs in which the Muslims of the then India lived. Moreover, Aligarh University was the holy centre of political consciousness of the Muslims of India.

Dr. Ziauddin's proposal had its root in the historical causes and political continuity that flowed from 1867. In that very year, the Hindu leadership of Benaras decided in

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