

Tribute to Martyrs' Day

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It was indeed a glorious day for all Bangladeshis when the United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization (Unesco) proclaimed February 21 as International Mother Language Day. This proclamation was no doubt a significant event because it not only honoured our mother language but also all mother languages round the globe.

Whatever language we use for our communication and business with other countries, we can never remain indifferent to our mother tongue because that is our identity, truly speaking our entity. We are Bengalees and our mother tongue is Bangla. We can proudly say that Bangla is a symbol of International Mother Language Day.

Language is the identity of a nation. As a matter of fact, the sacrifice of the martyrs on February 21 was not only for saving our language from being affronted but also, more significantly, for saving the identity of our nation. Perhaps we would not have been able to sustain our own culture and heritage so much in same way as today had February 21 not taken place, because the tyrant regime would have put all sorts of impediment before us. Hadn't February 21 occurred we may not have had the opportunity to fight for our freedom in 1971,

which drew inspiration from our language movement.

Language is what it is, not what we think it should be like. A language changes, and through changes it gradually becomes enriched. English, for example, owes much to Latin and French along with other languages as a result of Romanisation of England in the first century AD and the renaissance that took place in the middle ages in Europe. So it is apparent that a language intermingles with other cultures and peoples, resulting in new components coming into. This intermingling is more obvious in the current age of satellite channels.

Bangla is also changing under the influence of the present world, which has become a global village now. In the flow of inter-cultural affairs we cannot stop bad elements coming in, but we can ensure the use of standard form of Bangla among teachers, political leaders, media people, business people, programmes on radio, TV and so on. I have worked as English lecturer and found that many teachers do not use the standard spoken form of Bangla even in the classroom, which is very unfortunate for the learners who follow their teachers to learn their mother tongue properly.

It is pertinent here to mention that the acquisition of one's mother tongue properly through the standard variety is crucially



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important according to philologists, who say that he who does not know his mother tongue cannot successfully learn a foreign language. This fact is easily internal-

ised when we see many people around us speaking both Bangla and English eloquently. So to learn a foreign language, for example English, appropriately and effec-

tively we need to have a good command over our mother tongue. The above fact should be taken into consideration by the concerned authorities to encourage employ-

ees working for their organisations, especially at schools, colleges, universities and other educational institutes, to use standard spoken form of Bangla, not dialect form. I think, that Bangla Academy can play a vital role in motivating people to speak Bangla in its standard form in every walk of life as far as possible.

I also think it viable to include this quality in the ACR of a teacher as well as one of the criteria for their promotion. This, I believe, will have a positive effect on students at school and college level in particular, in learning to speak Bangla that is pleasant to hear.

Obviously, we will not be able to stop the changes that are taking place in Bangla as a consequence of the diversity of cultures incorporating with ours through satellite channels. Keeping this very fact in mind, we have to be conscious enough to sustain our original mother tongue through pragmatic functions so that it does not lose its true colour and principal characteristics.

In conclusion, it will be pertinent to say that we have to pay as much importance to our mother language as the United Nations has given to it by announcing February 21 as International Mother Language Day.

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International Mother Language Day

MAHUB HUSAIN KHAN

The new millennium opened with international recognition of our language martyrs' sacrifice and our movement for linguistic, cultural and national identity. With the designation of Ekushey February as International Mother Language Day, global recognition was given to our role in vindicating the importance of the mother tongue in the national context and in our private lives. The meaning of the term "mother tongue" is that all children learn their language on their mother's laps.

ble for the rest of the period under the Pakistan government. Yet, much of the students' political and cultural protest during the period 1958-71 were centred in and around Bangla Academy, and were philosophically encouraged and actually participated in by the management and employees of the Academy.

inculcate the sprit of Bengali nationalism and pride in our traditions in the generations born after 1971.

Rabindranath's *Naibadya*, Nazrul's *Samyabadi* and Shamsur Rahman's *Shwadinata Tumi* have been included in the UN Commemorative Publication of the Poetry of the Second Millennium.



The very building, which was originally Burdwan House, that had seen the hatching of conspiracies against the language movement of 1948 and unleashed the bloodbath of February 21, 1952, is now the symbol of Bangalee poets, Bangalee culture and Bangalee literary tradition and intellectualism.

Although a gathering of book lovers and display of books took place at the Bangla Academy after liberation, the first formal *Boi Mela* started in 1981 with 14 stalls. This has now grown to over four hundred stalls this year. The Ekushey *Boi Mela*, a celebration of the Bengali way of life, is also a celebration of youth. It is also a way to

Bangla, the mother language of over 250 million people, has been given its true recognition in the pages of last millennium's history, and has been recognised in this century and millennium through the efforts of the poets, novelists and essayists writing in Bangla. Salam, Jabbar, Barkat and Rafique laid down their lives for cause of Bengali language and culture. They have become part of our life. And through establishing the International Mother Language Day on February 21, Bangladesh and its people have become a glorious part of the history of the world.

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Dictatorship in democracy

MATIUR RAHMAN

ONE definition of dictatorship, according to Webster's Dictionary, is "absolute power or authority" vested in one individual. So, if there is a government which gives -- officially or unofficially -- absolute power and control of all organs of government in the hands of one individual, it is by definition a dictatorship, even if the government is an elected one.

Dictatorship appears in different forms and characters in different societies. A dictator may be a monarch in one country, or an elected head of the government in another country. When it comes to kings and queens with absolute state power, there is no difficulty in identifying and characterising them as dictators, but recognising an elected head of the government as dictator is both tricky and controversial.

Take for example the case of Hosni Mubarak, the former Egyptian president. He had been elected to presidency numerous times over his nearly thirty-year rule in Egypt, the

elected government. The parties which led the governments in turn over the last twenty years are Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Awami League (AL), with the exception of two years of rule by the caretaker government from 2006 to 2008.

These two parties are headed by Sheikh Hasina (AL) and Khaleda Zia (BNP). They come from two iconic families of Bangladesh and therefore the party council sessions meant to elect office bearers of these two parties are arranged by their supporters and sycophants in a way that would guarantee these two ladies the party chair positions in their respective parties.

Furthermore, the party chairs of AL and BNP are authorised by their party men to select and fire at will other office bearers of their parties. So, Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia enjoy absolute power and authority

power and authority over the executive branch of the government, which fits truly into the concept and practice of dictatorship.

The leader of the Parliament -- the legislative branch of the government -- is another very important position, which has been held in turn by Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia whenever their parties got majority seats in the Parliament. Just because the party chair can sack at will or send to obscurity any member of the party, an MP never dares to say anything that would be disliked by their party chairs. In other words, Mrs. Hasina or Begum Khaleda Zia have absolute power and authority over the Parliament when their respective party is in majority.

Some politicians in AL and BNP tried to reduce the dictatorial power of their supreme leaders, but in vain. Moreover, the so-called reformists of both parties earned so much wrath

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last time being in 2005 by more than 85% votes. Egypt also has a 444-member parliament -- known as People's Assembly -- elected every five years by public vote, and a cabinet headed by a prime minister who is chosen by the president himself.

So, apparently, one can argue that Hosni Mubarak was a democratically elected president according to the constitution of Egypt. But it would be very naive to think that he, or rulers like him around the world, would let the government and the society run in true democratic spirit, upholding the rule of law and paying attention to the opinions and wishes of the people. Everyone in the world, except the hardcore supporters of Hosni Mubarak, knows what he was -- a dictator.

Now let us examine the case of our government and leaders. Since 1990, we have a parliamentary form of

in their respective political parties and have been exercising dictatorial authority for roughly thirty years now, contrary to the practices elsewhere in the democratic world.

According to our constitution, the prime minister is the chief executive of the government. The president appoints and fires the cabinet ministers upon recommendations from the prime minister. So, Ms. Sheikh Hasina and Begum Khaleda Zia, during their respective tenures, practically decide who will be in and out of the cabinet, and when.

Moreover, it is well known that no cabinet minister, out of fear for reprisal, dares to say or do anything that would displease Ms. Hasina or Khaleda Zia, even if it is of urgent national interest. In that sense, the two party bosses have absolute

from their bosses that they have been either minimised in power or expelled from the party altogether by their party chiefs with unqualified support from opportunists and sycophants in their parties. In the process, the party bosses seem to have consolidated their power and strengthened their authoritarian grip more than ever before.

None of the present leaders of our political parties have the credibility, vision or integrity of character to lead the necessary democratic movement in Bangladesh. New leaders have to rise from among the people, earning their positions by virtue of their work.

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