

Ekushey, the day that sustains us

The spirit should be utilised more widely

WE return to our core values today. Not as a ritual but to take a vow to imbibe them. Our national consciousness was embodied by the language movement six decades ago. It then came into a crescendo of a glorified series of achievements through our distinctive cultural assertion, famous 21-point programme of Jukta Front in 1954, anti-Martial Law struggle, 11-point programme of students, 6-point struggle for autonomy in the late sixties, and finally the Liberation War leading to the birth of a free Bangladesh.

It is through the pathway laid by the Ekushey that over the last four decades we have reached a watershed. This is as much our moment for pride in the richness of our heritage as it is of deriving strength and inspiration from the indomitable spirit of Ekushey. This we need to press into service for building the nation on a stronger and versatile footing to take our place with the advancing world around us.

Culture as understood and applied in its many and varied facets is a powerful deriving force for intellectual and material developments based on forward looking ethos.

Bangla language has been reasonably enriched over the years through contributions of the Bangla Academy and those of the literati. Given the adaptability of our language, a room for further enrichment exists. This brings us to the issue of using Bangla widely and more intensely. It can be employed as a vehicle for literacy expansion, in imparting higher education including explaining scientific and technical concepts and in taking administration and social awareness campaigns to the doorsteps of people.

The real prosperity and dynamism of a living language is embodied in its literature. We should have literary festivals to showcase and benefit from literary works of different countries, not just our own. We need to open up to the world with the best in our literature as well as embrace that which is the best in other literatures. The principal vehicle for such intellectual give-and-take is translation - of our works into other major languages and their works into our own language.

In the past, Ekushey Padak and Shadhinata Padak had been somewhat tainted by the awards going to political favourites of one ruling party or the other. But this year, one notices a certain departure from that practice insofar as giving Ekushey Padak is concerned. This must be built up on to keep national awards above political consideration; for, by their very nature, these honours are required to be bestowed on persons of sheer excellence in their chosen fields of work.

The Big-2s softening of stance

Asliver of hope?

IT would not be an exaggeration to say that the entire nation is waiting with a feeling of apprehension about the likely outcome of 12 March. We are perturbed, to say the least, to hear the drums of clashes being beaten by both sides. We are filled with trepidation by the exchange of rhetoric and the rather acerbic comments being spewed by both sides. And all of a sudden Dhaka has become a coveted city which both parties want to 'capture' on the 12th of March.

However, in the midst of all these we see a glimpse of hope which creates some optimism that yet there may be a possibility that the worst fears of the general public may not come to pass after all. And our optimism stems from the shift, slight that may be, from the previously rigid stance, as one can make out from a report in this newspaper very recently, by both the AL and the BNP.

We notice happily that the BNP for its part seems no longer stuck up on the caretaker name and it is amply clear from statements emanating from the AL high ups that it would be amenable to any constructive suggestion from the opposition. Thanks for the good sense. It is a positive development opening up scope for dialogue between the two parties. And the chance must not be allowed to go by.

However, we would like to add that the realities on ground do nothing to vindicate our hopes, given the continuous exchange of invectives by the two parties. Our hopes are also clouded by not only aggressive posturing but also by conflicting statements on the issue from within the same party.

There is no alternative to substantive dialogue and we are certain that both are aware of the consequences of the impasse continuing much longer. So, move they must

Conservation of language

MOHAMMAD SHAHIDUL ISLAM

HERITAGE does not solely mean something concrete in structure, there are some intangible heritages and one of them is language. Language is the most powerful instrument of preserving and developing our tangible and intangible heritage.

It is important for all communities to preserve their languages for the growth of their culture and social progress. All moves to promote the dissemination of mother tongues shall serve not only to encourage linguistic diversity and multilingual education, but also to develop fuller awareness of linguistic and cultural traditions throughout the world and to inspire solidarity based on understanding, tolerance and dialogue.

There are more than 6,000 spoken languages in the world and most of them are under threat due to powerful languages like English, French, Spanish and German.

Languages are not only extremely adequate tools of communication; they also reflect a view of the world. Languages are vehicles of value systems and of cultural expressions. They also constitute a determining factor in the identity of groups and individuals.

Linguistic experts estimate that 96% of the world's languages are spoken by 4% of the world's population. One language disappears every two weeks on average. At least 80% of the African languages have no orthographic. Bunuba, an Australian aboriginal language, has no more than 100 speakers left, most of whom are older people. The Bunuba elders try to pass on the ancestral language through telling stories, as was done in the past.

Ainu is a moribund language and has been endangered for at least the past few decades. Most of the 1, 50,000 ethnic Ainu in Japan speak only Japanese. In the town of Nibutani (part of Biratori, Hokkaido) where many of the



A.M.AHAD / DRINK NEWS

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remaining native speakers live, there are 100 speakers out of which only 15 used the language every day in the late 1980s. But due to positive intervention the language has been preserved in Japan.

Similarly, some languages have become moribund, especially in places where aboriginals still live -- Australia and New Zealand. Aka-Jeru (also known as Jeru, Yerawa) is a Great Andamanese language, but there is some dispute as to whether Jeru is extinct or not. But reports from different sources say that there are not more than 20 speakers of this language.

Chittagong Hill Tracts is also a rich area in the perspective of languages and dialects. There are many dialects in this district zone. Bandarabans, Rangamati, Khagrachari, Sylhet, Mymensingh have many dialects. In the whole of Bangladesh in fact, different languages or dialects have been used

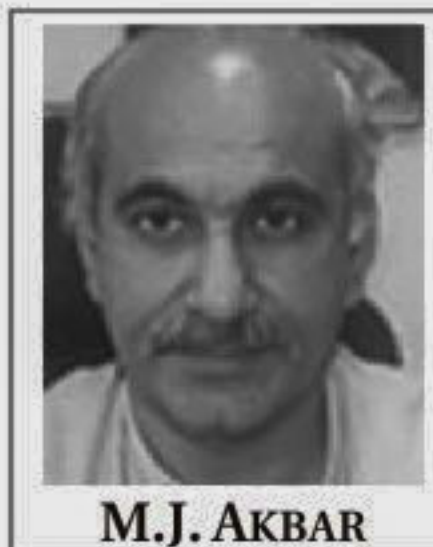
by native people.

Unesco has developed a Red Book on Endangered Languages of the World. Languages were originally divided into five categories; a sixth -- potentially endangered languages -- was added later. The categories are extinct language; early extinct language (with maximally tens of speakers, all elderly); seriously endangered language (with a more substantial number of speakers, but practically without children among them); endangered languages (with some children speakers at least in part of their range, but decreasing); potentially endangered language (with a large number of children speakers, but without an official or prestigious status); not endangered language (with safe transmission of language to new generations).

Some of the extinct languages in Europe are: Kemi Sámi, Southern Mansi, Polabian and Slovincian,

BYLINE

Power of love, and love of power



M.J. AKBAR

EVERY good election contributes something to folklore. Uttar Pradesh is the land of lore; and the turbulence of its

politicians is matched only by the sardonic wit of its voters. The culture of the sons of Awadh has many dimensions, but a principal inheritance is the nuance of language, both written and verbal. Awadhians can turn a conversation into a duel of scalpels, interspersed with the stiletto stab that penetrates just enough to puncture an ego without hurting the flesh. Cut and thrust are an art form, not a Westerner's duel at high noon. The sophisticated leaves invisible scars; he does not kill. That would be vulgar. The poet prefers to die a thousand deaths rather than injure a feckless or faithless lover; he might be tempted to ambush a rival but he would never waylay.

Lucknow is the nerve centre of this culture, but the neural tingle stretches across the hinterland, adjusting to local need or idiosyncrasy, but ever vibrant in a dialectical manoeuvre, making its point through askance analogy rather than a confrontational joust. Life, after all, must continue when scores are settled. Ganga plays and competes with Jumuna as both enter the domain of a hundred kingdoms, and the resonance of religion, history, gamble and war, lifted by human endeavour or sunk by its indolence. The two rivers

bear the weight of past and future lightly, and then embrace in Allahabad, where Uttar Pradesh ends, before wandering off towards the ocean.

The daughters of Awadh are not to be underestimated. There is more fertility of imagination in a raised eyebrow, the toss of a henna-hair curl, than in an anthology of anecdotes from arid elsewhere. And while humour is so often the solace of misfortune,

whether the cause of ruin be the love of power or the power of love, nothing excites the genius of gentle laughter more than the innumerable frictions, and sometimes the bombastic fictions, of the troubled relationship between age and virility. It is particularly pleasing to the feminine sensibility that only men can be victims.

Virility is both the pride of man, and his desolate downfall, as inevitable as the passage of time, retribution for the plumed strut of youth, evidence that in the battle of sexes women have the staying power. When along comes that rare instance when a man can claim, with credible hints, that he has defeated time, there is jealous admiration from his peers and a bit of awed jollity among women.

The late artist M.F. Husain had the ability to sustain such an image, and it was sufficient, for the discretion of an audience prevents a peep into the bedroom. The hero of the present hour is clearly the octogenarian politician Narayan Dutt Tewari. There has been no story as remarkable in Indian politics as the resurrection of the wolf in khadi clothing.

Less than two years ago Tewari was shoved out of his grace-and-favour habitation in the palatial governor's residence in Andhra Pradesh because a caustic madam had photographed, on her mobile, women masaging parts of his body that tend to ache rather more than shoulders or the neck. He was jeered all the way into retirement in the Himalayas by a middle class that gets

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especially vindictive when it feels it has missed out. In Dehra Dun Tewari was, and is still being, chased by a man who wants his DNA sample to confirm that Tewari is his real dad. Tewari refuses to undergo this test of paternity.

The embarrassment of three Karnataka ministers who were caught, weeks ago, watching pornography on their phones while in the Assembly, is nothing compared

while some of the potentially endangered languages in Europe are Piedmontese, Ligurian, Lombard, Emilian and Corsican. More research is needed for documenting other endangered languages in other parts of the world.

Different initiatives have been started around the world to preserve the languages which are endangered. As linguistic and cultural diversity represents universal values that strengthen the unity and cohesion of societies, the 30th session of the General Conference of UNESCO in 1999 decided that the organisation would launch and observe an International Mother Language Day on February 21 every year throughout the world. The day has been observed every year since 2000.

How lucky and gifted we are that because of our language movement in 1952, which got us independence too, people across the world are now more aware of their mother tongues.

In the age of cyberspace and digitalisation it is important for people and communities to preserve their mother languages. A powerful language like English has dominated the education system, and children and young people try to learn it for a better career. There is no doubt that a good career is always important for all of us, but we need to know that preserving the mother language is also important, especially for communities which are rich in culture and tradition.

The celebration of mother language day plays a significant role internationally. From the perspective of linguistics, different initiatives should be taken across Bangladesh as this is a land of many language and dialects. It is important for the young people to learn and respect their own language; else there is every possibility that many languages or dialects spoken among Adivashi brothers and sisters shall become extinct some day.

The writer is a national tourism worker.

to what Tewari must have undergone. And yet today he is a star of the Congress campaign in Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh. According to reports, the public response of crowds is noteworthy, and the private response impressive. Men talk in hushed admiration of the One Who Defeated the Ancient Law of Sanyas.

The Indian has never confused the morality of public life with the stresses of private behaviour. He accepted Gandhi as a Mahatma despite confessions that would have destroyed a father-figure in another society. Gossip has swirled around most Indian prime ministers; that has meant absolutely nothing to the voter. Peccadilloes might invite the occasional laugh, but the Indian leaves punishment of infidelity to God. This does not mean that sexual vice is condoned. Absolutely not. No politician could survive a charge of molestation. But Indians do not enforce Victorian, or even contemporary American, codes of behaviour upon their leaders. Voters will judge Tewari at the hustings on the basis of his political arguments rather than his bedroom preferences.

It might be a sign of old age that you recover the gall that you lost in your middle age. Certainly Narayan Dutt Tewari has sufficient chutzpah to put a photographed past into the abyss of amnesia as he struts ahead to canvass for a party far older than him. He is the stuff of lore.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

February 21

1848 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels publish *The Communist Manifesto*.

1952 "ভাষা আন্দোলন", "Bengali Language Movement" occurred in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

2000 International Mother Language Day celebrated for the first time.