

Tributes to language

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martyrs through various programmes.

In the first hour of the day, President Zillur Rahman led the nation in paying tributes to those who laid down their lives for recognition of Bangla as the state language on this day 60 years ago.

February 21 is also observed as International Mother Language Day worldwide.

President Zillur Rahman placed wreaths at the Central Shaheed Minar in the capital at 12:01am. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina followed him a few moments later.

They stood there in silence for a minute in honour of the language heroes.

Sheikh Hasina, also president of the ruling Awami League, placed wreaths along with her cabinet and party colleagues. She was followed by the deputy leader of the parliament and deputy speaker.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, leader of the

opposition in the House, and her party leaders placed wreaths at 12:21am.

After her, the chiefs of the three services, the attorney general, diplomats, Dhaka University Teachers' Association, Sector Commanders Forum, other political parties and their wings paid homage to the martyrs.

Thousands of people from all walks of life and ages walked barefoot to the Shaheed Minar to pay tribute to the Language Movement heroes. They sang the February 21 anthem: *Amar bhayer rokte rangano ekushey February*.

Many people were seen placing flowers at the graves of the martyrs at Azimpur graveyard.

The Central Shaheed Minar and its adjacent areas on Dhaka University campus wore a different look with street paintings and graffiti with Bangla alphabets on the walls.

On this day in 1952, students and people from all

strata of society took to the streets in Dhaka to protest the then Pakistan government's refusal to recognise Bangla as one of the state languages and its attempt to impose Urdu as the only official language of Pakistan.

Salam, Barkat, Rafiq, Shafiur, Jabbar and a few other brave sons of the soil sacrificed their lives to establish Bangla as a state language of the then Pakistan.

The day has been being observed as the Language Martyrs Day since a Unesco declaration on November 17, 1999.

Countries across the globe on this day vow to promote linguistic diversity and multilingual education and raise awareness of cultural traditions based on understanding, tolerance and dialogue.

The day is a public holiday. The national flag will fly at half-mast at all government, autonomous and private buildings.

Bank official shot dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Narsingdi

A bank official was shot dead allegedly by the night guard of the bank in Narsingdi Sadar upazila yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Mahfuzur Rahman, 36, an officer of Islami Bank Limited of Narsingdi branch, hailed from Bhola district.

Moniruzzaman Sarkar, acting branch manager of the bank said the incident occurred around 6:30pm when a bullet was fired accidentally from the gun of a night guard of the branch as soon as Mahfuzur came out from an ATM booth of the bank after loading cash there on, leaving him seriously injured.

Locals along with the other officials and staff of the bank rushed him to Narsingdi Sadar hospital where on-duty doctor declared him dead.

Another source said Mahfuzur might have been killed centring internal feud.

On information, Officer-in-Charge Md Asaduzzaman of Narsingdi Sadar Model police station visited the spot.

Police detained night guard Selim Reza, 35, in this connection.

A case was lodged with the police station.

Faiz Ahmed passes away

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tributes to the veteran journalist, writer, litterateur and leading cultural activist.

Faiz Ahmed, a freedom fighter and veteran member of Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), breathed his last at a city hospital yesterday. He was 84.

He had been suffering from old age complications, including heart ailments. He was taken to Birdem Hospital with chest pain where doctors pronounced him dead around 5:30am, said Rumi Noman, a nephew of Faiz.

In accordance with his wishes, his eyes were donated to the voluntary organisation Sandhani and the body to Bangladesh Medical College.

The body was taken to Dhanmondi's Shilpangan Art Gallery, of which he was founding chairman, around 9:00am for people to pay their last respects.

Later around 11:30am, the coffin, wrapped with the CPB flag, was taken to the Jatiya Press Club where ministers, political leaders, journalists, cultural activists and people of different walks of life paid homage to the noted litterateur after his namaz-e-janaza.

His body was then taken to Aparajeyo Bangla of Dhaka University, where political

leaders and cultural personalities stood in silence for a minute.

President Zillur Rahman and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina have expressed their deep shock at his death.

"By uniting the political leaders and cultural activists, he taught us how to remain united," said Nasiruddin Yusuf, noted cultural personality.

Faiz Ahmed was a devoted spirit in all popular struggles, starting from the language movement to the movement against the autocratic regime in the 1980s, said writer and journalist Shahriar Kabir.

Around 1:30pm, his body was taken before the CPB central office. CPB leaders were the first to place wreaths on his coffin, followed by other socio-political and cultural organisations and individuals, including language movement veterans Abdul Matin and Rawshan Ara Bacchu.

There he was accorded a guard of honour, his coffin draped in the national flag.

Faiz's niece Farhana Mithu said her uncle had always taught her to be a good human being and work for the welfare of the people.

A part from The Communist Manifesto, Faiz used to keep Rabindranath

Tagore's *Sanchayeeta* with him, she said, adding, "Just a few days ago, my uncle told me to keep The Communist Manifesto with me. From now on, I'll always keep it with me."

The Communist Manifesto, originally titled Manifesto of the Communist Party, is an 1848 publication written by the German Marxist political theorists Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

It has since been recognised as one of the world's most influential political manuscripts.

CPB President Manzurul Ahsan Khan said Faiz fought for people's welfare throughout his life. "We'll carry forward his movement."

His body was taken to Bangladesh Medical College around 3:45pm for donation.

Born at Basaidlog village in Munshiganj on May 2, 1928, Faiz took up writing early in his life. In 1944, when he was only 16, his first essay *Nam Bibhrat* was published in *Shishu Sawgat*, according to the *Gunjan*, one of the largest electronic journals of Bangladeshi eminent personalities.

Son of Golam Mostafa Chowdhury, Faiz was the fifth among nine siblings. He took up journalism in 1948. In the

years that followed, he became chief reporter of the Bangla dailies *Ittefaq*, *Azad* and *Purbadesh*.

He joined Radio Peking in 1966 to launch its Bangla programmes.

Faiz Ahmed's coverage of the proceedings of the Agartala Conspiracy Case between June 1968 and February 1969 are still regarded as some of the most incisive reports on the case.

He was also chief editor and managing director of the state-run news agency Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS).

Faiz was also involved with cultural activities. He was the founder of Sammilito Sangskritik Jote. He was elected syndicate member of Dhaka University and Jahangirnagar University for three years each.

In 1960, he became a member of the undivided Communist Party.

A popular writer of fiction and rhymes for children, he wrote more than 100 books. *Moddhorater Oshshorohi* (The midnight horse rider) is one of his famous books.

He received the Ekushey Padak, Bangla Academy Padak and Shishu Academy Award for his journalistic excellence and contributions to society and literature.

Four dead in two US avalanches

AFP, Los Angeles

Four people were killed in two avalanches that swept through an area near a ski resort in the northwestern US state of Washington, authorities said.

US media initially reported that at least eight others were missing in the incidents, which took place Sunday near Stevens Pass in the Cascade Mountains northeast of Seattle.

But King County Sheriff's Office spokeswoman Kathleen Larson said the eight had "managed to dig themselves out of the snow."

However, three skiers who were part of that group did not make it out alive, and efforts to revive them through CPR procedures had been unsuccessful.

Officials said the group was skiing in a restricted, avalanche-prone area that was marked by clear signs warning people of the danger.

Meanwhile, a second avalanche, near the ski resort of Alpentel, buried a snowboarder, officials said. The man was found a half-hour later but efforts to revive him were also unsuccessful.

The Northwest Weather and Avalanche Center on Sunday had issued a warning about "high avalanche danger" above 5,000 feet and a "considerable" danger below that elevation.

It was not immediately clear the elevation at which the avalanches occurred.

Three Italian soldiers killed

AFP, Rome

Three Italian soldiers were killed in Afghanistan yesterday when their armoured jeep overturned in a river in Herat province as it raced to the rescue of another unit, Italy's defence ministry said.

The Italian-made Lince vehicle "flipped over in the river, trapping the soldiers inside," read the statement. It said the accident happened some 20 kilometres (12 miles) southwest of Shindand in western Afghanistan.

The soldiers -- all of them based in Shindand -- had been trying to rescue another unit "blocked by particularly adverse weather conditions."

A fourth soldier was injured in the accident and "is being treated for hypothermia. He is conscious and his life is in danger," the ministry said.

In September 2011, three Italian soldiers involved in the training of Afghan forces were killed in a road accident that also occurred in Herat.

Healthcare cost

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total spending on healthcare comes from the private expenditure of the poor.

Bangladesh Health Watch (BHW), a civil society platform for monitoring the health sector, released its annual report of 2011 "Moving towards Universal Health Coverage" at Brac Centre in the capital yesterday.

Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen, Health Minister AFM Ruhul Haque and Finance Minister AMA Muhith were present at the ceremony, among others.

The government at present spends \$16 per capita a year where the minimum allocation recommended by the World Health Organisation is \$24.

Speaking as the guest of honour at the report unveiling ceremony, Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen said everyone is entitled to equal access to quality healthcare.

Referring to the efficient public healthcare system in Canada and Italy, he said there is much to learn from the European experience of delivering medical service with kindness, not for cash.

From 1979 to 2004, China moved from the policy of state ensuring universal healthcare, an act which dramatically affected the health sector by decreasing the life expectancy of Chinese people, said Sen, adding that the country then returned to public healthcare by the state.

Presenting the key findings of the report, BHW mem-

ber Syed Masud Ahmed said the government's fund allocation in public health service is inequitable need wise and in most of the cases rendered ineffective.

Currently, only 3.5 percent of GDP, which is much lower than most of the neighbouring countries, is spent for public healthcare, he said.

Health and Family Welfare Minister Prof AFM Ruhul Haque said dearth of resources is what mainly impeding the deliverance of universal healthcare.

However, according to Prof Rounaq Jahan, convener of the BHW advisory group, good governance is what matters the most to ensure proper public health service, not the resource.

The lack of fund should not be the only excuse, she said.

The health minister referred to a data that showed that each year two million -- almost 80 percent -- pregnant women get delivered by midwives at home. Of those, 11,000 mothers die while giving birth, he said, and it is not possible to get all the delivery done in hospitals with the existing capacity.

Finance Minister Muhith said apart from resource crunch, there are other reasons for the inadequate expenditure in the public healthcare sector. He also highlighted the success in family planning, immunisation and diarrhoeal diseases in his speech.

Yemen al-Qaeda confirms leader's death

AP, Cairo

Yemen's branch of al-Qaeda has confirmed the death of a senior leader, who officials said died in a bloody family feud.

A statement posted on a militant website by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula yesterday said that government agents "motivated by the hiring regime in Sanaa" were responsible for the death of its "emir", Tariq al-Dahab.

It did not comment beyond that on claims by officials and tribal leaders that al-Dahab had been slain Thursday at his home in southern Yemen by his half brother Hizam. Hizam and 15 others were then reported to have been killed by Dahab's followers.

The clashes came days before Feb. 21 elections to approve a new leader to replace President Ali Abdullah Saleh. A year-long uprising has sought to push Saleh from power.

Living

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The recently released Bangladesh Bank annual report (2010-11) observes, "Purchasing power of the poor people has been slower due to lower wage rates against high inflation."

This finding contradicts with the BBS chief's recent remark that while inflation has been on the rise, people's purchasing power has also gone up.

World Bank senior economist, Zahid Hussain, explained the decline in real wages.

"This happens when the labour supply growth exceeds labour demand growth. The labour supply has grown steadily at 3.6 percent per annum during 2006 and 2010. Domestic employment growth during the same period was 3.5 percent per annum. Nominal wages grew at double-digit rates in all sectors and far exceeded the inflation rates during fiscal years 2008 to 2010."

He wrote in an email, "This was a period of booming manpower exports which tightened labour supply in our internal labour markets leading to increase in real wages. Manpower exports slowed considerably in FY11 relative to the annual average number exported during FY08-10. Consequently, supply side pressure in the domestic labour market increased, thus lowering real wages."

The wage growth rate fell while general inflation grew by double digits over the last 11 months. In the last two months both food and non-food inflation were in the range of two digits.

March 12 left to BNP alone

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forming a non-party interim government for holding the next elections, his party would be ready to attend parliament to discuss the modalities of the formation of such a government.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, leader of the opposition in the House, earlier spoke in a similar vein.

Believing the BNP is looking for an alternative formula for the next parliamentary polls, senior figures in the ruling party have in principle agreed not to call any counter programme in the city on March 12.

AL insiders say the party high command has taken positively the latest position of the BNP and now wants the opposition to discuss in parliament the formation of the interim administration.

"The opposition leader has already spoken about the formation of an interim government. A solution to the existing crisis over the caretaker issue can be found following discussions in parliament," AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif told The Daily Star last night.

"So we urge the opposition to come to parliament and

discuss their proposal," he said.

"When a resolution is possible, why will we get involved in confrontation with the opposition? And what is the logic behind the March 12 rally after the opposition leader has proposed an interim administration?" said Hanif, who is also a special assistant to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

"If the opposition still holds the rally, we will consider that its leaders are doing it not to get back the caretaker government system but to disrupt the trials of war criminals and Khaleda Zia's two corrupt sons Tarique Rahman and Arafat Rahman Koko and also in the cases for the 10-truck arms smuggle-in and August 21 grenade attack."

He said neither his party nor the 14-party alliance had any plan to stage a counter programme on March 12.

The Dhaka city AL and some associate bodies have programmes from February to the end of March, but the central AL has yet no knowledge of those, he said.

After a meeting of the 14-party combine at the AL chief's political office in Dhanmondi yesterday morning, Workers Party President

Rashed Khan Menon and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haque Inu said they wanted Khaleda Zia to place a proposal on the interim government in parliament soon.

"I hope both sides -- Awami League and BNP -- can find common ground through discussions in the House," Menon said.

Briefing newsmen after the meeting, Mahbubul Alam Hanif said the 14-party alliance would resist any conspiracy to stop the war crimes trial. It will mobilise popular opinion for the trial.

He also said his party wanted the opposition's grand rally to be held peacefully.

The meeting, chaired by 14-party coordinator Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, decided that the allies would jointly stage rallies and other programmes in April in other divisional headquarters.

"We have no option but to complete the trial of the war criminals. If anyone tries to hinder the trial and a confrontation follows, we will fight such an evil force," 14-party leader Bimal Biswas told The Daily Star after the meeting.

Other 14-party leaders -- Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim,

Abdul Latif Siddiqui, AFM Bahauddin Nasim, Jahangir Kabir Nanok, Dilip Barua, Abdus Samad, Zakir Hossain and Mrinal Kanti Das, among others -- attended the meeting.

AL TO HOLD SEMINARS

To highlight the government's achievements in the last three years, the AL will hold a series of seminars in the capital with the participation of experts.

A seminar on the education sector will be held on Thursday and another on implementation of vision for Digital Bangladesh and revolution in ICT on Saturday at Cirdap auditorium, Dhaka.

Seminars on the agriculture sector will be held on February 29, power sector on March 3, health on March 10, environment on March 13, good governance on March 20, war crimes trial and rule of law on March 23, mass media and right to information on March 29 and socio-economic crisis on March 31 at the National Museum's Begum Sufia Kamal Auditorium.

Experts and eminent citizens will be present as keynote speakers at the seminars, which will be attended by ministers, senior AL leaders and professionals.

Bangla earned

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announced the previous day, was in force. The government had decreed a ban on public gatherings in the city, despite the fact that there had been no provocation, no hint of violence from the students.

It was a democratic movement through which the students and politicians and with them the Bangalee nation as a whole planned to ask for the democratic and moral right of Bangla to be recognised as the state language of Pakistan. An uncaring state, beginning with Mohammad Ali Jinnah and then coming to a moment of heat with Khwaja Nazimuddin, would have none of it.

On that morning, the crowd increased, both in numbers and in intensity, sending out the clear feeling that a showdown was on the way. Room for compromise was conspicuous by its absence. And yet no one could imagine that the state would shoot its own children. At 11:00 am, a students' gathering at Amtala, presided over by Gaziul Haq, went into the pros and cons of the emergent situation.

And then Shamsul Haq, armed with the decision of the State Language Action Committee, turned up -- to tell the students that Section 144 should not be violated. Not many among those students were ready to heed his call. The mood was fast turning militant. But Haq had his own friends too to boost him in an expression of his opinion. Abdul Matin and Ahmed Rafiq have recorded the day's

happenings for posterity. Shamsul Haq, in a sherwani and black Jinnah cap, urged restraint on the part of the students. It was followed by a loud roar of protest from the students. Haq was unable to finish his speech.

At this point, Abdul Matin, convener of the University State Language Action Committee, took charge. He flung a question at his audience: "Are we then to retreat because we are afraid of breaking Section 144?" The result? A resounding "No".

And then the students, restrained by Section 144 from marching to the legislative assembly premises in a body (to present lawmakers with a memorandum demanding a recognition of Bangla), decided on the stratagem of trying to break through the police cordon in groups of 10. And just as they put their plan into implementation, the police swooped on them. Truncheons were liberally applied on the students. Confusion and chaos set in. Even so, slogans rent the air -- Rashtra bhasha Bangla chai, cholo cholo assembly cholo. The battles between the students and the police spilled out to the streets.

The shootings began sometime around 3:00pm. Four young men fell before the fury of the state -- Abul Barkat, a student of MA at Dhaka University; Abdul Jabbar, a tailor who had come to Dhaka all the way from Gaffargaon to care for a relative in hospital; Rafiquddin Ahmed, a college student from Manikganj; and Abdus Salam, employed as a

peon in an office. Salam was to die of injuries a few days after February 21. There were others who died. The state made swift work of concealing their bodies.

The bodies of those killed, notes Badruddin Umar, were not given to their families. The security forces had them buried in the eerie silence of night descending on the province after a day of tragedy.

Bangalees would never be the same again.

Mamata

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Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee yesterday said she plans to meet Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in New Delhi tomorrow to discuss the matter.

"I have sought an appointment with the prime minister to discuss the issue arising out of excess flow of water to Bangladesh through the broken sluice gates of Farakka Barrage. I will discuss the issue with him on Wednesday. I will leave for Delhi tomorrow (Tuesday)," she told media persons in Kolkata.

Mamata had recently written a letter to Manmohan alleging that the Indian government had kept secret the fact about two damaged sluice gates of Farakka Barrage. This resulted in Bangladesh getting 82,801 cusecs of water as against 35,000 cusecs it is supposed to get during the dry season under the India-Bangladesh Ganges Water Treaty of 1996, the letter said.

HC pulls

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(Rajuk) and deputy commissioner of Dhaka to take necessary steps to preserve the national archaeological establishment and inform the court about the progress in four weeks.

Barrister Tanjib-ul-Alam and Associates lodged the petition on behalf Taimur Islam.

The 'Shankhanidhi Lodge' located at 38, Tipu Sultan Road -- a place of local feudal lord or Jamindar Lal Mohan Saha and his brother Bhajahari Saha of Wari -- had been constructed in 1920.

The archaeology department in 1989 declared four of the buildings the two brothers made on Tipu Sultan Road 'preserved sites'. However, all of those have been demolished due to inaction of the authorities concerned, a USG press release said.

The 'Radha-Krishna Temple' within the boundary of the lodge was important for its crafts and beautiful design.

The court also said under Bangladesh Antiquity Act 1968 and Bangladesh Urban Development Law 1953, the government might take legal actions against the grabber, Ashraf Ali, to realise compensation for destroying the structures.

According to the law, Dhaka district administration and Department of Archaeology are responsible for protection, preservation and management of the heritage sites, the release added.