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BANGLADESH

Message

February 21 is the great "Shaheed Day" as well as "International Mother Language Day". On this day, I recall with profound reverence the unfading memories of the language martyrs namely Barkat, Rafiq, Salam, Jabbar, Shafique and many unknown others who made supreme sacrifices in 1952. I pray to the Almighty for the salvation of those departed souls. I also extend my sincere thanks and felicitations to the multi-linguistic people around the world.

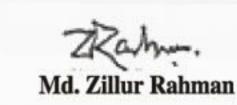
The great language movement is a historical and significant event in our national history. This movement not only achieved the demand of mother tongue but also revealed the sense of Bangalee nationalism and inspired tremendously to achieve independence. This spirit of Bangalee nationalism paved the way for the long-cherished independent in 1971. Today, I recall with deep respect Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the then member of Gonoparishad (Legislative Assembly) Sree Dhirendra Nath Dutta along with language martyrs and language heroes whose undaunted courage and indomitable inspiration helped reach the movement of the highest culmination and at last the Bangalee achieved the right of mother tongue. Language movement inspires us to protect and bring up our own language and heritage as well as revives us to oppose all the injustice and unfairness.

No nation's sacrifice goes in vain. We feel proud that 21st February is now turned into 'International Mother Language Day'. The intrinsic value and significance of our great language movement is now resounded around the world through the observance of the International Mother Language Day. Therefore, the 21st February is not only inspiring the advancement of our own language, literature and culture but also encouraging preserving and promoting the language and cultures of various nations around the world. Really, the great language day has united the people of various languages and made a bridge of unity and amity among the people of the world.

Language and culture go forward hand in hand. I believe the world people would contribute more to revive the flow of world's varied languages and cultures as well as to protect the world's most defunct languages.

May the language and heritage of all the ethnic groups of the globe be protected and peace prevail on earth. It is my expectation on this great 'Shaheed Day' as well as 'International Mother Language Day'.

Khoda Hafez, May Bangladesh Live Forever



The Language Movement

In Quest of the Self identity of Bengali

Bazlur Rahman

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs organized a training course to familiarize their fresh recruits with our history, tradition, art, culture, democracy and struggles for the self-governance. A total of 130 distinguished personalities were invited to speak in phases at different sessions of the course. I was one of the 130 persons to have the opportunity to share my ideas with the fresh BCS Foreign service cadre officers. I chose the War of Liberation and Newspaper as my topic for the discussion. I touched upon issues that dated further back. It covered the period preceding the War of Liberation as well as the period beginning before the 1950s and up to the year of 1971. I discussed the role played by the newspapers during these periods and how it made the public aware of the liberation war.

Any discussion on liberation war has to begin with the language movement as it marks the starting point of searching our self-identity as well as the struggle for establishing our national rights. There is no denying the fact that Pakistan was founded mainly by the votes of the Bengali Muslims. Muslim League could not win from any of the provinces other than the Bengal. They could not return in the election in the provinces of Punjab, Sindh, and Baluchistan or in Frontier. Naturally the question evolved - why the Bengali Muslims who had voted for the creation of Pakistan became so disgusted with Pakistan within a few years? I put the same question to the fresh trainee officers. It seemed the matter had deeply moved them.

If we look back at a time sixty years back we will see that a widespread movement was triggered on the issue of language at the very initial days of Pakistan, from that very '48, culminating in the year '52. The issue of language was very complicated. Though Pakistan was founded on the basis of the two-nation theory - on the concept that the Muslim is a different nation; but the aspiration of the majority Muslim in Bengal for the self-development had also worked behind it. They thought



that they would be able to develop and establish themselves if Pakistan were established. But they were soon disillusioned. They soon realized that they had no place for themselves in Pakistan. Mr. Zinnah appointed Khwaza Nazimuddin as the Chief Minister of East Pakistan (East Bengal) brushing aside the contemporary popular leaders of Bengalis like Shere-e-Bangla A.K Fazlul Huq and Hossain Shahid Suhrawardi. The Chief Minister of Bengal Khwaza Nazimuddin did not know Bengali. The non-Bengalis indomitably reigned in the domains of Civil Service, Armed forces, trade and commerce. The jobs of the central government in the East Pakistan were kept reserved for the Biharis who took asylum and immigrant status in the newly independent Pakistan. There was no opening for the Bengali Muslims. Still the Bengali Muslims began to show signs of their progress in the academic and cultural fields of the country. The political consciousness also began to grow among them. They started raising their voice to press home self-rights, self-development and self-establishment. More importantly, the continued assault on the language made it clear to the Bengalis that this had been a conspiracy to enslave them permanently. They vehemently protested the moment Mr. Zinnah had declared that Urdu and only Urdu should be the state language of Pakistan. The Bengalis here, specially the rising educated middle class, soon realized that if Bangla was not the state language, or at least did not gain status as one of the state languages beside Urdu, then their future in this Pakistan would be bleak. They would fall behind in all the fields including jobs, trade and commerce.

The language movement had in fact initiated from this point. Another fundamental issue was added to this - which was the fact that though there was a common identity in religious belief, there was no similarity between the majority Bengali community and any community of people in providences of Pakistan. There were no similarity in respects of language, life-style, behavioral pattern, tradition and culture. There was a geographical gap of one thousand mile between the two the parts of the country. Therefore, a question began to origin afresh if a nation could be founded on the basis of religious belief alone, and a new search for Bengali's self-identity had commenced on the basis of language. A new quest for the real national identity came at the forefront – it became an issue for the Bengalis Muslims to identify themselves correctly. Should they be identified first as Muslims, or rather as Bengalis or Pakistanis? The reference to Muslims is specially drawn because the Muslims were majority in this province and they voted massively in favour of Pakistan. Therefore, it is necessary to read accurately the matter of evolution in their mindsets. This very search for the selfidentity as well as the aspirations and struggle for the self-establishment was the root of language movement, and later the main basis of our liberation struggle.

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PRIME MINISTER **GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S** REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH



Message

I extend my best wishes to the Bangla-speaking people at home and abroad, and people of all languages and cultures across the world on the occasion of the glorious Martyrs and International Mother Language Day.

The greatest Ekushey is the symbol of grief, strength and glory in the life of every Bangalee. On this day in 1952 many valiant sons of the soil, including Rafiq, Jabber, Barkat, Shafiur and Salam, sacrificed their lives for protecting the dignity of the mother tongue.

I pay my deep homage to the memories of the martyrs. I also pay my deep respect to the greatest Bangalee of all time, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who had steered the language movement. I also recall with great respect the contributions of all other language veterans.

In 1948, State Language Action Council comprising Chhatra League, Tamddun Majlish and other student organisations was constituted. The council called a hartal on 11th March 1948 to press home for making Bangla as the state language. Bangabandhu along with many other student leaders were arrested from in front of the Secretariate on that day. They were freed on March 15. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman presided over a meeting on Dhaka University campus on March 16. The language movement had spread allover the country.

Bangabandhu was again arrested from Faridpur on 11 September 1948. He was freed on 21 January 1949. He was again detained on 19 April and freed at the end of July. On 14 October 1949, Bangabandhu was again imprisoned. Under his directives from behind the bar, the language movement had got momentum. In continuation of the vigorous movement, the language martyrs sacrificed their lives on the 21st February in 1952 while breaking Section 144 imposed by the rulers.

The blood-stained resonance of Amar Ekushey is now resounded in the hearts of the people of 193 countries surpassing the boundary of Bangladesh. The Unesco declared the day as International Mother language day on 17 November 1997 at the initiative and proposal of a number of Bangalees living in Canada and in cooperation with Awami League government.

The International Mother Language Day is now a source of inspiration for ail the people of the world to establish the truth and justice.

I have already placed the demand in the UNGA to make Bangla, spoken by 25 crore people of the world, as one of the official languages of the UN.

We have established Internalional Mother Language Institute for carrying out research on all languages of the world and preservirng those. The international Mother Language Institute Act has been enacted.

The greatest Ekushey is the symbol of our democratic values, Bangalee nationalism, spirit of liberation struggle and secularism. We have made a good progress in the pledges made to build a modem digital Bangladesh free atom hunger, poverty, terrorism, communalism and illiteracy in last three years' Journey of our government.

Let us take a fresh vow to worlk together to improve the lot of the people sinking all differences.

> Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu May Bangladesh Live forever

> > Zow Engran Sheikh Hasina

International Mother Language Day Jinat Imtiaz Ali

Mother languages are like mother's milk. It is not possible to groom, nurture or develop children without a mother. Human beings express almost all kinds of emotions and feelings - such as anger, hatred, rage, love - by means of their mother language. The mother languages are deeply intertwined with the national culture and heritage. If there is any assault on a language, nobody who speaks that language can accept that. That is because, it imperils their human existence.

The United Nations declared Twenty-first February as the 'International Mother Language Day' in 1999 and the day is being observed in different countries of the world through various programmes since 2000. The UNESCO – a principal associate organization of the United Nations – has been discharging related responsibilities including selection of themes, chalking out programmes and maintaining communications with the member countries. The recognition of Twenty-first February as the International Mother Language Day is undoubtedly significant. But this recognition was not achieved all of a sudden. This victory of the Bengalee people has a long history and background.

Although the language movement had started in 1948, it intensified and led to a conclusive outcome in 1952. The Bangla-speaking people of East Bengal faced a cruel assault and unimaginable plight during that year. It was clear that the Pakistani rulers were bent on imposing Urdu on the majority population of Pakistan, i.e. the Bengalees, by rejecting Bangla. Only one course of action was open in this situation - either to become non-existent by annihilating oneself, or to establish one's existence at any cost by overcoming all hindrances. The countrymen chose the latter option consciously. They understood that they would be the victims of a deep-

rooted and far-fetched conspiracy if Urdu was imposed on the Bengalees. Their offspring would not be able to learn their mother language. Their children would be deprived of the history, heritage, customs, traditions and beliefs which they had carried in their ethos and blood over the ages, generations after generations. Their might not be any opportunity to even receive primary education in Bangla by the Bengalee children. Nobody

wants to live in one's own land like an expatriate. Therefore, throwing away all hesitations and lethargy, they woke up with a steely resolve and unwavering solidarity. They came down onto the streets on 21st February 1952. Rabindranath had said, 'The unjust whom you fear is more scared/whenever you wake up, he will fly away'. It happens in real life also. The police deployed by the Pakistani rulers opened fire on the students and masses; many of our brothers including Salam, Rafiq, Jabbar and Barkat embraced martyrdom. They established their mother's right and the honour and prestige of mother language Bangla with the blood of their heart.

With the passage of time and in the light of changed realities, the immortal Twenty-first February got transformed into a symbol. A democratic and secular mentality and liberal and humanistic values have become assimilated with this spirit. The 'Ekushey February' urges everybody to become vocal against all kinds of misrule, mal-governance, exploitation and repression; it inspires us to establish whatever is true, realistic and beneficial. These values were the inner motivation behind the mass movements of 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. The Bengalees have

realized from their experience that their individuality would never be protected by the autocratic rulers of Pakistan. That is why the need for a separate homeland arose. Ultimately, this desire became a reality through the great liberation war of 1971; an independent and sovereign People's Republic of Bangladesh was finally established.

The International Mother Language Day is being observed since 2000 by

