SAVING LANGUAGES, PRESERVING KNOWLEDGE

The International Mother Language Institute in Bangladesh promises hope for endangered languages of the world

TAMANNA KHAN

With an area that is one tenth of Bangladesh and population less than that of Dhaka city, Vanuatu, the island nation located in the South Pacific Ocean, has 108 living languages. Such fascinating information can be found at the museum of the International Mother Language Institute (IMLI), at Segunbagicha, Dhaka. The architectural beauty of the three-storied building studded with colourful alphabets of different languages, comes in view as one crosses the Kakrail intersection.

Inaugurated in March 15, 2001, the IMLI is the institutional outcome of the International Mother Language Day, which is being celebrated on 21st February since November, 1999. The main purpose of the IMLI is to preserve and protect endangered languages of the world as well as to develop languages that have remained on the fringe of modern civilisation. Dr Jinnat Imtiaz Ali, Professor of linguistics, University of Dhaka, Director General of the IMLI talks about languages that are gradually becoming extinct and obsolete as the number of speakers is gradually diminishing and the languages are not being used in modern culture, science and technology.



The language museum at the International Mother Language Institute is now open to the public. PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Explaining the need for preserving languages, Dr Jinnat Imtiaz Ali, Professor of linguistics, University of Dhaka, Director General of the IMLI says, "The end of a language means forfeiting decades-old knowledge, philosophy and morale of the speakers of that language. These resources have been passed down orally through generations. Since there are no writing systems, the outer world has no knowledge about these valuable resources. If these become lost forever then on a