

# Immortal Ekushey

## Martyrs' Day and International Mother Language Day

Special Supplement

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



PRESIDENT  
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF  
BANGLADESH

### Message

Today is Amar Ekushey (immortal 21 February)-the great Language Martyrs' Day which commemorates the bloodstained memory of Language Movement in 1952. This day is being observed across the globe including Bangladesh as the International Mother Language Day with due respect and in a befitting manner. On this occasion, I extend my sincere thanks and felicitations to all the people of different languages of the world along with the Bangla-speaking people. At the same time, I pay my deep tribute to the unfading memories of the martyrs of the language movement.

The great language movement had been a historic and significant event in our national history. This movement was aimed at establishing the rights of our mother tongue as well as protecting self-identity and culture. Being a source of ceaseless inspiration, Amar Ekushey inspired us to a great extent to achieve the right to self-determination and sovereign state. In line with the spirit of language movement, we achieved our long cherished freedom through a nine-month long armed struggle under the charismatic leadership of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who proclaimed the country's independence on March 26, 1971. Today, I recall with deep reverence language martyrs namely Salam, Barkat, Rafiq, Jabbar, Shafiur and so many unknown and unsung heroes along with Dharendra Nath Dutta, the then Gonoparishad (Legislative) Member and all the language activists for their immense contributions. Their supreme sacrifices, unmatched valour, able organizing capacity and rapid steps facilitated the language movement to reach its culmination on February 21, 1952. Consequently, the Bangalis achieved their right to mother tongue.

It is, in fact, an unprecedented event in the world history to embrace martyrdom for the sake of mother tongue. The glorious history of Ekushey that was set by the Bangalis through shedding blood for protecting the right to mother tongue, is now being remembered not only in Bangladesh but also all over the world with due respect. It is a matter of pride that February 21 was recognized as the International Mother Language Day in 1999 by the UN with the spontaneous attachment and sincere endeavour of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina along with the primary efforts of some expatriate Bangla-loving Bangladeshis. In line with the Sustainable Development Goals this year the United Nations has set the theme of International Mother Language Day 2016 as "Quality education, language(s) of instruction and learning outcomes". It has laid emphasis on appropriate languages of instruction, usually mother tongues for the children in the early years of schooling. I believe that it is a significant initiative for developing and protecting own languages of multilingual people of the world.

We feel proud that transcending the boundary of our country, the spirit of Amar Ekushey is now inspiring the people of different languages of the globe to protect and preserve their own languages and cultures. Language Martyrs' Day is now an indomitable source of inspiration for protecting self-identity of people around the globe. Let the people of the globe of different languages be united, let the almost defunct languages of the world be revived in their communities and let the globe be coloured with diverse languages and cultures- this is my expectation on this great language day.

Let 'Language Martyrs' Day' and 'International Mother Language Day' be emerged as the symbol of unity and victory for preserving the respective languages and cultures of all people of the world.

Khoda Hafez, May Bangladesh Live Forever.

*Md. Abdul Hamid*  
Md. Abdul Hamid



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



PRIME MINISTER  
GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S  
REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH

### Message

I extend my good wishes to the Bangla-speaking people 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 Bangali. On this day in 1952, many valiant sons of the soil, including Rafiq, Shafiq, Salam, Jabbar and Barkat, 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 Bangali of all time, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who had steered the language movement from inside the jail, and all other language veterans.

In 1948, State Language Movement Council was constituted comprising Tamuddin Majlish, Student League and other student bodies as per a proposal of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The council called a general strike on 11 March 1948 to realise the demand for recognising Bangla as the state language. Bangabandhu along with a number of student leaders was arrested on the day from in front of the Secretariat. They were released on 15 March. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman chaired a public meeting at Amtola on the Dhaka University campus on 16 March. The movement spread all over the country.

On 11 September 1948, Bangabandhu was arrested from Faridpur. He was released on 21 January 1949. He was again detained on 19 April and released at the end of July. On 14 October, Bangabandhu was again arrested from Dhaka and confined to jail. His undaunted inspiration from inside the jail provided new impetus to the people's movement. In continuation of the movement, the language martyrs sacrificed their precious lives on 21 February 1952 while breaking Section 144 imposed by the rulers.

The resonance of the pride of Amar Ekushey is now resounded in the hearts of the people of 193 countries surpassing the boundary of Bangladesh.

The day has been reached to a new height when the UNESCO gave recognition to the 21 February as the International Mother Language Day on 17 November 1999 at the initiative of the then Awami League government and with the help of some expatriate Bangladeshis, including Salam and Rafiq. The International Mother Language Day is now a source of inspiration to all people of the world in establishing the truth and justice.

We have taken initiative to make Bangla, spoken by 25 crore people of the world, as one of the official languages of the UN. I have already placed the demand before the United Nations General Assembly. We established International Mother Language Institute to preserve the languages of the world and carry out research on those.

The greatest Ekushey is the symbol of our democratic values, Bangali nationalism, spirit of liberation struggle and secularism. Our government has relentlessly been working to build a modern prosperous Bangladesh free from poverty, hunger, terrorism and communalism being imbued with the spirit of the great Ekushey. During the last seven years, our government achieved desired progress in all sectors. Bangladesh is now a role model for development in the world.

Let us arouse ourselves with the spirit of the immortal Ekushey sinking all petty differences. Let us vow to protect the dignity of our constitution and democratic journey. Let us take a fresh vow to work together for the uplift of lot of the common people.

I pray to the Almighty Allah for salvation of the departed souls of the language martyrs.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu  
May Bangladesh Live Forever.

*Sheikh Hasina*  
Sheikh Hasina

## Analyzing the Economic Context and Significance of Language Movement

Ahmad Rafiq

Although the language movement that took place in East Bengal during the Pakistani era apparently had a political and cultural character, its economic and social significance were also important for national life, both in terms of its context as well as its after-effects. Despite being a short-lived one, the language movement, especially that of February or 21 February 1952, had brought about an unimaginable turn-around in changing the literary-cultural and political character of East Bengal.

That positive transformation was reflected in literary creations, modernism in cultural practices and progressive outlook during the succeeding few years, which found expressions especially in literary and cultural conferences of the period; for example, the ones at Comilla (August 1952), Dhaka (1954) and Kagmari of Tangail (1957). Besides, those were visible on national occasions as well, such as observance of the Bangla New Year, Rabindra and Nazrul Jayanti (anniversary).

Similarly, the democratic spirit found manifestation in the political arena during the post-1952 general election in East Bengal, as a result of which the politics of Muslim League was almost eradicated. The one-sided victory of the United Front (Jukto-front) based on the 21-points formulated in 1953 and the formation of the Jukto-front cabinet in 1954 proves that. According to political analysts, the influence of the Ekushey spirit throughout the country was behind that all-devouring victory of the Jukto-front. It should be recalled that the seeds of linguistic nationalism was planted in the minds of the people due to the transformation of the language-based students' movement into a mass movement, which later germinated and flourished through different political events.

It has been repeatedly pronounced by our political leadership that the Bangali nationalistic political spirit had blossomed from the language movement; it culminated into the war-front of 1971 from the mass upsurge of 1969 and led to the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent state. The UNESCO declared Twenty-first of February – the Martyrs Day – as the 'International Mother Language Day' after considering the multi-dimensional significance of the Language Movement. The Ekushey or the Language Movement received international honour and recognition by being identified in history and through obtaining a historic stature.

### Two

Analysing the socio-economic, especially the economic context and relevance of such a movement at the national level is undoubtedly important. The views of economists and political scientists on this are not different. During the British era, the eastern region of undivided Bengal (now Bangladesh) was in a backward state in socio-economic terms, although agricultural production and the Bengal peasantry were the principal supportive forces in building the economic backbone of the province. That force got centralised in the capital Kolkata in different ways.

The Kolkata-based existence of the educated elite class, known as the inheritors of Macaulay during the British rule, as well as the landlord Zamindars, who were the offspring of permanent settlement, also controlled the economic character of Bengal. A large segment of the population of East Bengal belonged to the peasantry and technician class, and a majority of them were Muslims. The peasant revolts and movements, which occurred in East Bengal over a long period of time, demonstrated the intensity of economic conflict between the Zamindars-merchants and the peasantry.

Those incidents have been more or less recorded in history. The English rulers had to pay attention to these due to the pressures of these movements and revolts; however slightly, they had to consider the interests of their subjects. The Tenancy Act of 1885 was framed due to the initiative taken by the government; this law was continuously amended and rectified under sustained social and political pressures and led to the emergence and flourishing of 'people's politics' controlled by the Muslims. It occupied a special position in Muslim politics in the early part of the Twentieth Century.

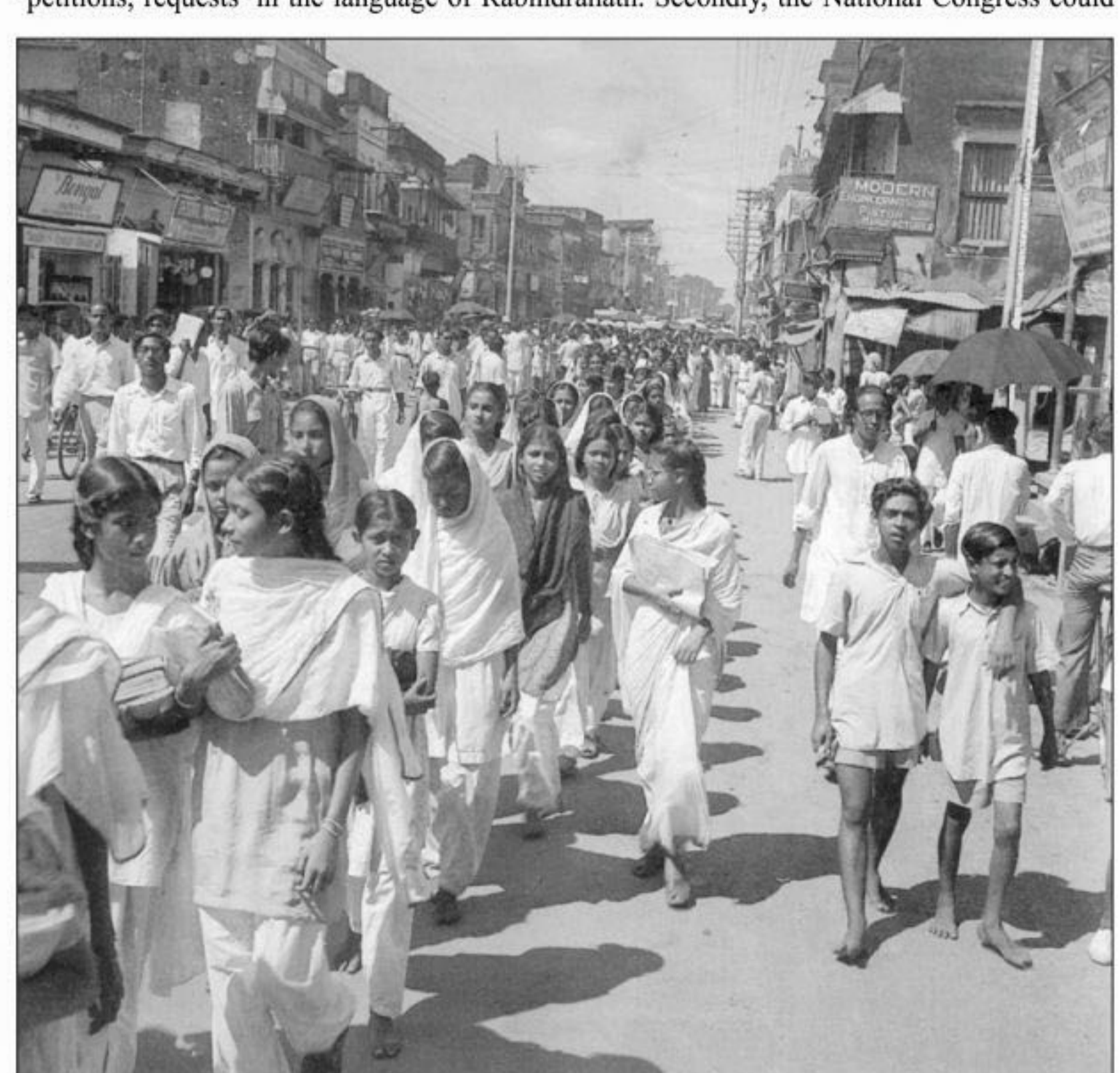
It should be remembered that the most fertile soil in British India lay in Punjab and Bengal,

especially in East Bengal. But the economic distress of peasant producers was proverbial due to the land tenure system introduced by the ruling class. In the words of Rabindranath, 'the peasants were exploited by the twin weight of the Zamindars-Merchants'. Once, the Muslim and cotton-fabrics earned worldwide fame due to the extraordinary height of handloom sector in East Bengal; but the English merchants cruelly destroyed those in order to establish their own textile market. All in all, maximum economic pressure of the English rule and exploitations fell on Bengal, or East Bengal.

For similar reasons, industrialisation in India under local and foreign ownership had taken place in the textile sector of Bombay and Gujarat. Although the jute industry, known as the 'golden fibre', had flourished on the river-bank near Kolkata, the money-power of Bengal was manifested not through industries, but through lazy and consumption-oriented Zamindari, exploitations and repression of subjects. The Bangali rich had only nominal interest in flourishing the industries on a national-scale.

The longstanding revolts by subjects occurred as a reaction to the cruelty of feudal landlords; at the same time, the influence of communalism could be felt due to this historical cause. As the religions of the exploiter Zamindars and the exploited subjects were different in most cases, the communal context became almost inevitable. The politics of subjects evolved for eliciting benefits and stopping tortures as a continuation of the influence and reaction of the peasant revolts. Between the decades of 1920s and 1930s, the birth and rise of people's politics materialised at the hands of land-related Muslim politicians.

Much earlier, the National Congress was established in 1885 in India with the support of an English bureaucrat; it was led by the mercantile and industrial class of Bombay-Gujarat region and some highly educated elites belonging to the Nationalist tradition of Bengal. It was a misfortune for the Indian and Bengal politics that the National Congress limited its activities to 'petitions, requests' in the language of Rabindranath. Secondly, the National Congress could



not become a secular nationalistic institution. Religious separateness occupied a major part of it; this separateness was seen in a more acute form in the Muslim League organization, which

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## The Language Movement and its Contemporary Political Background

Rafiqul Islam

The event of the Bangalis' sacrifice of lives for the sake of the Bangla language on 21 February 1952 was apparently a consequence of the struggle for the constitutional status of Bangla as one of the state languages of Pakistan but in its depth was the Bangalis' thousand-year history of deprivation. The Bangla-speaking eastern part of the subcontinent was governed at times in Sanskrit by the Brahmin Sen kings of Karnataka, and at other times by the Turkish, the Afghan and the Mughals in Persian. Then came the long British rule in English. In fine, from the tenth to the half of the twentieth century Bangla and Bangalis were ruled, exploited and deprived by different extraneous nations, languages and forces. Besides, Bangla was again and again plundered by the Portuguese pirates and Marathi Plunderers. The division of the country and establishment of Pakistan in 1947 was nothing but a new slavery for us. Right from the beginning of Pakistan we were victims of deceit and deprivation in the fields of politics, economy and culture. In the very reaction to the game which the Pakistanis began to play right from the beginning about the Bangla language, literature, alphabet and culture, the Bangalis had to struggle for the safeguard of their language and national spirit from 1948 to 1952 and 1952 to 1955. In order to suppress that struggle, the military rule emerged in Pakistan and the extreme communal oppression continued for two decades. The Bangalis stood against this terrible atrocity.

If one wants to destroy a nation and uproot their national spirit, one has to make them forget their mother tongue. For, it is the language which is the backbone of a nation. The Bangalis have never hesitated to make any utmost self-sacrifice for their language and culture. However, there is no denying that a class of people in the ancient and middle ages had some meanness among them about their mother tongue. That is why, the poet of the Middle Age Abdul Hakim regretfully wrote, "If anyone born in Bengal hates the Bangla language, their birth must be illegitimate. If anyone is not happy with the education in their native language, they must leave their own country and go abroad." In this context, we can also remember the poem "Bangovasha" (The Bangla Language) written by the poet of the Modern Age Michael Madhusudan Dutta. There he wrote with regret, "Oh Bengal, in your store, there are various gems/Being foolish, I have neglected them all/Being greedy of foreign treasure, abroad I stayed/And beggary I practiced."

The Bangalis got back their forgotten national spirit from the bloody struggle of the 21 February. So far, the Bangalis had a country but no motherland; they had a language but no mother language. "Ekush" (21 February) gave back to the Bangalis their mother, mother language and motherland. For this reason, the "Shaheed Minar" (The Martyrs' Monument) which commemorates the 21 February martyrs has the following significance: the column in the middle of the Shaheed Minar symbolises mother or motherland. Then the four columns (two on each of the two sides) represent the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the sake of their own native language. This Shaheed Minar is the symbol of the Bangalis' language, culture, tradition and national spirit. It is the inspiration for the Bangalis' struggle for freedom. That is why, the extraneous Pakistani rulers again and again demolished this Shaheed Minar. But this monument is the memorial tower of the Bangalis and it is the symbol of their national identity. So they could not destroy it. Since 1952 the Bangalis have been putting flowers at this place on every 21 February and at the time of various struggles. In different countries of the world the Bangalis have erected permanent or temporary Shaheed Minars and 21 February has attained the status of the International Mother Language Day. In fact, 21 February is not only a symbol of the pride of the Bangla language today but it is also a symbol of struggle for the protection of many endangered or nearly-to-be-extinct mother languages. Above all, our Shaheed Minar was the source of inspiration for the different stages of our country's liberation struggle. In the sixties and seventies of the 20th century, the Shaheed Minar became the monument of struggle as many times as the Bangalis shed their blood in the struggle to protect their political, economic and cultural rights. Shaheed Minar was the source of the spirit for struggle and uprising on the education day of 1962, in the movement of self-right of 1966, in the mass upsurge of 1969, in the election of 1970 and finally in the non-cooperation movement of 1971.

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