

Newspaper report on Muhammad Ali Jinnah's speech about Pakistan's state language at Ramna Racecourse.

PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO



A gallery of the museum exhibiting newspaper pages covering the historic language movement.

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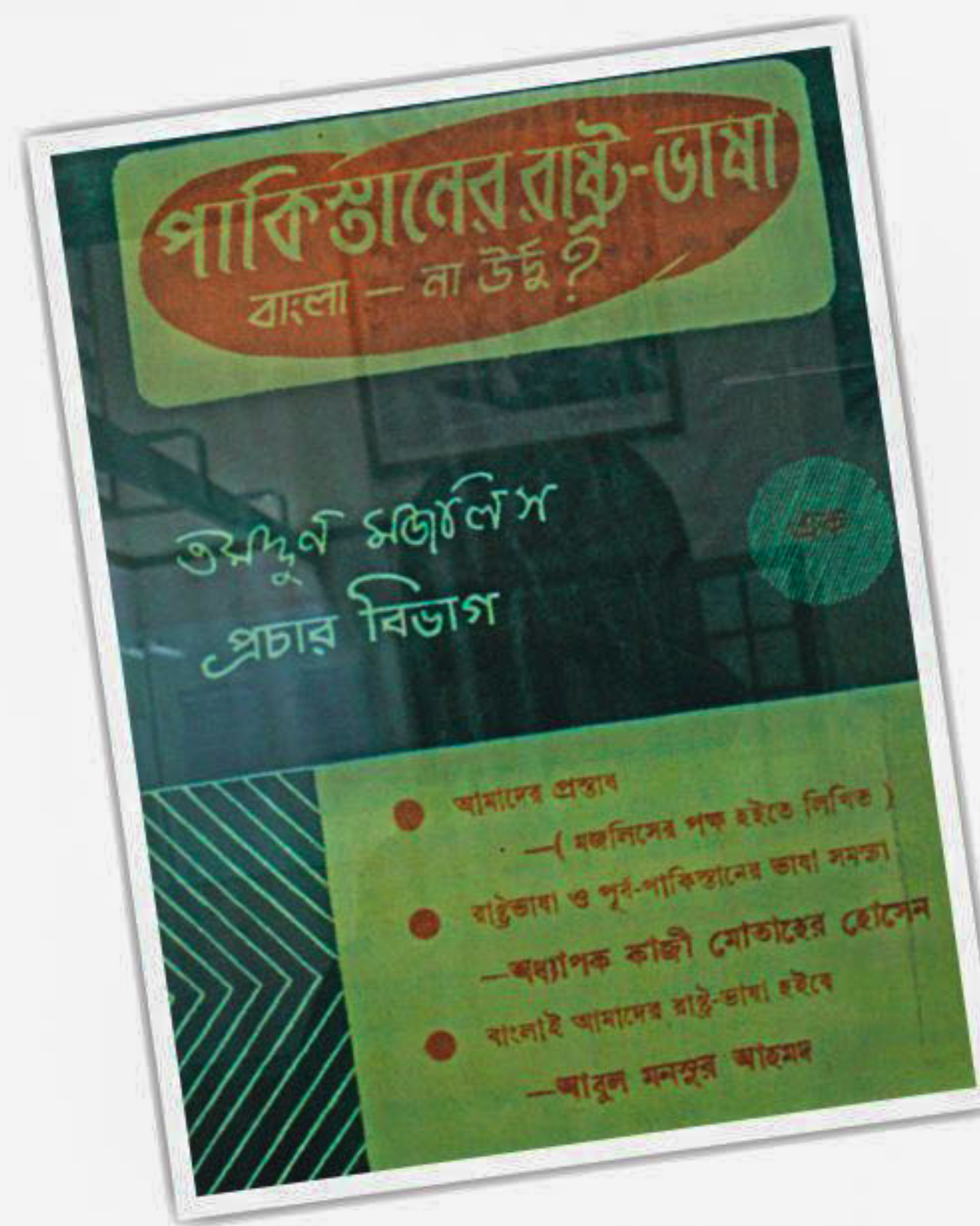
The Forgotten Museum of Language Movement

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

Visitors will not get any indication about its existence on visiting Bangla Academy premises unless they have researched prior hand. Nevertheless, the museum boasts a rich collection of artefacts of the language movement that can't be found anywhere else in Bangladesh.

It was around 4pm on February 14. The lawns and courtyards of the historic Burdwan House, the home of Bangla Academy, were crammed with visitors, a predominantly young crowd. A couple of journalists from a television channel were having a hard time finding any young person willing to visit the Language Movement Museum (Bhasha Andolon Jadughor)—located on the 1st floor of Burdwan House—and give interviews. Most of the youth were busy either taking selfies or panoramic Instagram-worthy shots. One of the journalists told me, "We have been waiting at this museum since 2:30pm. We could not find a single visitor in the last two hours. We want to do a positive documentary on this museum. This is why we are trying to find someone who would visit this museum or share his/her experience with us."

Every year, thousands of people gather at the Bangla Academy premises to visit the Ekushey Book fair. However, very few know that in a secluded part of Bangla



Academy, the relics of Bangladesh's language movement are preserved, mostly unguarded. On February 1, 2010, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated this museum to preserve the history of Bangladesh's language movement. Bengalis, if not the only, are

among the very few people in the world who sacrificed their lives to earn due recognition for their mother tongue. In this regard, the Language Movement Museum preserves artifacts of a very unique and significant historical event.

Unfortunately, on the entire premises of Bangla Academy, there is not a single signboard indicating the location of this museum. A visitor will not know about its existence on visiting Bangla Academy premises unless they have researched prior hand. Nevertheless, the museum boasts a rich collection of artefacts of the language movement that can't be found anywhere else in Bangladesh.

In four spacious galleries, the museum displays rare photographs, newspapers and magazines covering news and articles on the language movement, belongings of the language martyrs and valuable historic records and documents. There are scores of photos of processions from all over the country demanding Bengali as the state language of Pakistan and of police brutally subduing the procession by firing at unarmed protesters. There is a rare photo in the museum which shows Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman rescuing student leader Shaokat Ali and taking him to the hospital after sustaining severe injuries during a police attack. There is a photo of Muhammad Ali Jinnah speaking at the conference at the Ramna Racecourse (now Suhrawardy Udyan) where he stated that the state language of Pakistan is going to be Urdu.

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