

A decade's history hidden in plain sight

Rich documents of Language Movement at private museum deserve better care

HASAN MEER

The walls are stacked with rare photographs of the Language Movement, as are shelves with books; some have become a bit dusty, but no less significant for it.

It's a small room filled to the brim with documents, paper clippings and memorabilia, transporting anyone that walks in to a time defined by courage, patriotism and love for Bangla.

This place -- two rooms inside a house -- is a museum, called Bhasha Andolan Gabeshana Kendra O Jadughar (Language Movement research centre and museum).

This little-known museum sits at House 5 on Road 10 in Dhanmondi residential area.

Founded by late Kazi Golam Mahboob, a language hero and convener of Rashtr Bhasa Sangram Parishad, it was set up in 2006.

After his demise, his family has been maintaining it through a trust, chaired by Mahboob's wife Peari Mahboob.

This newspaper visited the museum earlier this week.

Walking through the two rooms, some 30 photographs -- donated mostly by language veterans like Mohammad Taquillah, Mohammad Amanul Haque and Prof Rafiqul Islam -- take one on a journey of the Language Movement spanning nearly a decade, from 1947 to 1956.

Visitors also get a chance to look at books, pamphlets, journals and newspaper clippings during the

movement, to relive the tumultuous times captured by Taquillah during February 21, 1952.

There is also a visual journey, through images captured by photojournalist Amanul Haque of protesters who brought out a procession near Dhaka Medical College, violating curfew on that fateful day.

These and many other pieces of footagewere donated by witnesses and participants of the movement to the museum, and constitute the history of the Language Movement that is fast fading from collective memory, said Lipi Mahboob, in charge of the museum.

"That's why it's important to preserve these," she said.

This museum and research centre used to be maintained by MR Mahboob, its director, who had collected many of the precious memorabilia from all across the country and had written numerous books on the Language Movement and its heroes, added Lipi. Since Mahboob passed away last year, his wife Lipi is looking after it.

She said they also have portraits and biographies of some thirty Language Movement veterans, political and student leaders, and intellectuals who played key roles in the movement.

Besides, this correspondent saw original copies of newspapers including Saptahik Sainik -- considered the voice of the movement at that time, rare unpublished photographs, pamphlets and manuscripts.

During his visit, this correspondent also met private university student



While walking through this small but significant private initiative, rare photographs, documents and other memorabilia take one on a journey of the Language Movement spanning nearly a decade, from 1947 to 1956. These photos were taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR



Moni Akter, who was writing a paper on Ekushey February, and her friend.

She said she was searching for museums or research centres on Ekushey and heard about it.

"As soon as I walked in I could tell this place is important. It should be preserved properly. We only remember Ekushey when February comes but we need to do more than

that," said the master's student.

One could tell this private initiative to preserve and spread the history of the Language Movement needs support, as it becomes evident while

talking to Peari Mahboob, widow of the language hero.

Age has taken its toll on her, but it could not diminish her will to carry on. The spirit of Ekushey continues to shine bright in her eyes.

Peari spoke extensively of how her husband wanted to preserve the memory of a generation that stood up for their rights, how he painstakingly collected the memorabilia or carried out the research work and most importantly the importance of continuing the good work.

A state-run, large-scale museum on the Language Movement, like the Liberation War Museum, is necessary for the new generation to learn more about the movement and to preserve these rare memorabilia that paint a vivid portrait of a remarkable generation, said Peari Mahboob and Lipi Mahboob in unison.

The spirit of Ekushey, like the spirit of the Liberation War is one of the finest and proudest moments in our history, when we came together as a people to stand firm for our beliefs.

In many ways, Language Movement was precursor to the War of Liberation and in that, we owe the martyrs respect and reverence for eternity.

As this correspondent left the museum premises and walked along the road, renamed after Kazi Golam Mahboob in 2006, he couldn't help but think that a large-scale museum for the Language Movement, like Peari Mahboob and Lipi Mahboob hoped for, could be an apt step towards that direction.

Somela Rahman: An unsung language hero

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Language movement veteran Somela Rahman is 84 now. Once quite the rambler, she now passes most of her time at her residence in Nilphamari's Hospital Road, bed-ridden with old age complications.

Somela has her name etched on the district's folklore, literally. Along with fellow revolutionaries, her name can be found on the plaque of Nilphamari Government College's Shaheed Minar.

But for the exceptional devotion she has shown for her language, its speakers aren't speaking back to her at her loneliest hours. Stuck in bed, a sense of agony sometimes overtakes her -- of not being remembered, of being forgotten. Other than a very few close relatives, almost nobody else comes to check on her anymore, especially none from the civil society that should be celebrating her.

As luck would have it, financial woes are part and parcel of her household too. Out of her five children, only one son lives with her and takes care of her, but his meagre income gets in the way of the household's stability. Even at her age, Somela still has to deal with financial anxiety.

"All my fellows from the Language Movement have gone one by one, many of them in miserable conditions. And the almighty yet keeps me alive to let me see the golden dawn when the Language Movement veterans would be properly evaluated not merely with words but materialistic support

to survive with honour," said Somela emotionally as this correspondent visited her recently.

Golam Mostofa, former head of the Bangla department at Nilphamari Government College, said when Somela Rahman and her fellows from Nilphamari Govt Girls School -- Fouzia Begum Baby, Halima Begum, Taiyeba Khanam, Zakia Sultana, Rezia Banu, Jaheda Begum, Jebunnahar and so on -- came forward to join the Language Movement, it not only helped that movement, but also the cause of women's liberation in a conservative society.

Somela Rahman, then only 15 and a student of class 10, said, "After Rafiq, Salam, Barkat, Shafiq, Jabbar and more were shot down in Dhaka in February 21, the situation turned volatile in Nilphamari too, and people brought out a protest procession the next day."

On February 23, the erstwhile East Pakistan govt arrested Khairat Hossain, a member in the then East Pakistan provincial assembly, as he along with opposition leader Maulana Abdur Rashid Tarkabagish walked out from the parliament session protesting the killings.

As the news of the arrests reached Nilphamari's sub-divisional town, people became enraged and held continuous protests on February 24, 25 and 26.

To suppress the people's voice -- loud and clear by this point -- the repressive government arrested sub-divisional Awami

Build a country free of graft in Ekushey spirit

TIB urges all

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has called for building a corruption-free and well-governed country in spirit of Ekushey.

The declaration of 'zero-tolerance against corruption' from the highest level of the government has only remained on paper, as it has not taken stern action against big shots apart from some petty corruption, said TIB executive director Dr Iftekharuzzaman yesterday, in a statement.

Bangladesh's almost-unchanged position in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for a decade and a second-lowest position in South Asia goes to prove it, he added.

Therefore, in addition to the declared promises, the adoption of all-out strict measures against corruption will be in line with the spirit of Ekushey, he said.

The TIB executive director also said it is a matter of great concern that there is a "denial syndrome" in the government and the administration. Attempts to deny all sorts of corruption, irregularities and allegations have been continuously questioning the political and state commitments against corruption.

According to him, it has also been creating a conducive environment for corruption.

Dr Iftekharuzzaman also said that Bangladesh stood up against repeated injustice and exploitation with the spirit of Ekushey and won independence. The Ekushey spirit should be a source of inspiration to prevent corruption, it added.

INT'L MOTHER LANGUAGE AWARD

PM to honour three individuals, one org

ASIFUR RAHMAN

Three individuals and an international organisation have been nominated for the International Mother Language Award, due to be handed over today in a virtual programme by the International Mother Language Institute (IMLI).

Prime minister Sheikh Hasina will present the awards around 3pm, officials of IMLI said.

This is the first iteration of the biennial award, which will recognise four recipients -- two national and two at the international level -- for their contributions towards the practise or preservation of mother tongue.

At the national level, the awardees are national professor Rafiqul Islam and Mathura Bikash Tripura, executive director of Khagrachhari's Jabarang Kalyan Samiti. Internationally, the recipients are Uzbekistani researcher Ismailov Gulom Mirzaevich and The Activismo Lenguan, a Bolivia-based organisation.

The Daily Star spoke to both of the national awardees, who spoke of their relationship with their mother tongue, retelling both their hopes and their frustrations surrounding the languages.

National Professor Rafiqul Islam, former teacher of Dhaka University Bangla department and a prominent educationist, said, "Though constitutionally Bangla is our state language, we have not been able to establish it even after fifty years of our independence."

"We remember its importance only in February, and then forget to take care of it rest of the year."

Regarding the worrying state of education in the country, Prof Rafiqul said, "The Kudrat-i-Khuda Education Commission report is yet to be implemented. The report emphasised that Bangla

would have to be the teaching-learning medium from primary to higher level, while English or other languages could be taught as well."

"But we did the contrary as we have Bangla and English medium, English version of Bangla medium, Alia Madrasa, Qawmi Madrasa and many more language-based curricula. We need every language, but are we teaching students any of the language properly? In addition, are we teaching Bangla in a scientific way?" he asked.

The other local awardee, Mathura Bikash, has worked for the preservation, revival and development of his mother tongue and formulated educational activities in his own language, according to a letter issued by IMLI.

Mathura Bikash told The Daily Star, "We still have about 50 indigenous languages in our country. Most of these languages are still in use, but there is little writing on these languages because of the lack of patronage."

"I hope these languages will not be lost, because if a language is lost, then all the knowledge based on that language is also lost."

Ahead of the Indigenous Language Decade, to be celebrated all over the world from 2022 to 2032, Bikash said, "As the initiator of Mother Language Day, Bangladesh will definitely play a pioneering role in this regard, this is our expectation."

According to the IMLI, international awardee Uzbekistani Ismailov Gulom Mirzaevich has researched and practised to protect, promote, and revitalise the culture of his mother language Uzbek.

The lone organisational recipient of the award, "The Activismo Lenguan" (Language Activism) was selected for their initiative to promote indigenous languages on the Internet.



A day before International Mother Language Day, artists were busy drawing alpana on the road in front of Central Shaheed Minar in Barishal city. These intricate designs are part of the traditions for observing the special occasion.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

ATTACK ON BU STUDENTS BY TRANSPORT WORKERS

Barishal at standstill as both parties block roads

Connection to southern districts snapped

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

Barishal University students yesterday staged demonstrations and blocked roads in the city, demanding immediate arrest of all transport workers accused in a case filed for attacking their fellows.

Meanwhile, transport workers blockaded road in Rupatoli Chaumatha area around 12pm, seeking release of two of their fellow workers.

The blockades snapped road communications between Barishal and other southern districts including Jhalakathi, Pirojpur, Barguna, Patuakhali and Bhola all the day long.

Many passengers were seen walking to their destinations; many carrying their baggage and goods on their shoulders.

Students stayed on Barishal-Kuakata highway in front of the university around 9:30am, also demanding that the case be recorded as an attempted murder case.

Mahamudul Islam Tamal, an agitating student, told The Daily Star, "Transport workers snatched mobile phones and wallets from over 50 students... We want immediate recovery of those."

"Police have arrested two transport workers. But the main accused are still at large," Tamal said. "We will continue our movement until our demands are met."

The students withdrew their blockade around 6pm and postponed the agitation

till today, on the occasion of International Mother Language Day.

They would announce the next course of action later, said Tamal.

On the other hand, transport workers said police arrested their fellow workers unjustly. "We demand their release," said Khorshed Alam, a front liner of their agitation.

Transport workers also withdrew their blockade almost at the same time but transport operation did not begin till writing of this report at 7pm.

Police said they have arrested two transport workers in connection with it.

"We have kept raiding different spots to arrest other accused," said Md Nurul Islam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Kotwali Model Police Station in Barishal.

On February 16, two BU students and transport workers altercation at BRTC bus counter at the city's Rupatoli. At one stage, the workers stabbed a student.

When the news spread on the BU campus, students vandalised a BRTC bus counter and blocked Barishal-Kuakata regional highway for two hours.

The incident caused anger among transport workers who attacked student dorms of BU in Rupatoli on February 17, leaving at least 25 students injured.

On February 18, the university registrar filed a case against the unidentified miscreants with the police station.